

2 – Relationship between Indigenous People and the French: Jesuits and the Wendat

Champlain's Writings

<https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/pages/our-stories/exhibits/samuel-de-champlain/history/champlain-and-tadoussac-1603>

Champlain left behind a considerable body of writing, largely relating to his voyages. ... Champlain's works are the only written account of **New France** at the beginning of the 17th century. As a **geographer** and “artist” (as a factum states), he illustrated his accounts with numerous maps, of which the most important and the last was that of 1632. It includes a list of place names not found on the map as well as unpublished explanations. It presents everything known about North America at that time.

The Newcomers

https://www.communitystories.ca/v2/story-of_histoire-de-ste-marie-ii/story/huron-wendat-wendake-2/

Scholars of this period are fortunate to have a rich seventeenth-century documentary record of the lives of Northern Iroquoians. The record for the Wendat is especially extensive. The works of Samuel de Champlain, an experienced soldier and explorer, record his observations of Wendat and Tionontaté life. During the winter of 1615-1616, Champlain lived among the Wendat and wrote about their clothing, settlements, military aspects, and hunting tactics as well as their economy.

Also detailed is the account of Gabriel Sagard, a Récollet friar who spent the winter of 1623–1624 with the Wendat. Bruce Trigger, Canada's most renowned ethnohistorian and archaeologist, once noted that Sagard's account was one of the world's first substantial ethnographies. Sagard also compiled a phrasebook and comprehensive dictionary of the Wendat language.



Jesuit Astrolabe found on Christian Island. This is one of only three found thus far in Canada that date to the time of Champlain.

By far the most comprehensive records of Wendat life are the annual accounts of the Jesuit priests who lived among the Wendat from 1634 until 1650. These regular reports by those Jesuits who lived among the Wendat are filled with descriptions of Wendat life and society. Jesuit missions in North America began early in the seventeenth century. Christian proselytization was an important component of the Christian church at this time around the world. The North American Jesuit mission effort was paralleled by missions in South America and Asia, their Relations always representing a kind of ethnographic record and history of those places.

All of these sources must be employed with caution, however, as they were written by outsiders with their own agendas. Trigger wrote a historical analysis of the lives of the Wendat in his two volumes entitled *The Children of Aataentsic* (1976), which combines history, ethnography, and archaeology to give Wendat peoples their own voices in their interactions with their neighbours and the European colonial enterprise. In 1999, Georges Sioui, a noted Wendat scholar, added a contemporary Wendat voice to the history of his people with his book entitled *Huron-Wendat: Heritage of the Circle*.

It is my belief that the science of history is now aware of the need to integrate perspectives... It was this vision that inspired a group of people, who seven centuries ago, created in central-southern Ontario an embryo of what is to become the society of modern North America... a mingling of cultures united by differences and the respective constraints... animated by the desire to enlarge the Circle of exchange and communication to all peoples.

Excerpt of *Huron-Wendat: Heritage of the Circle* George E. Sioui pg. 88

Newcomers (Closed captions available in EN and FR) – [View this video with a transcript \(EN\)](https://www.communitystories.ca/v2/story-of_histoire-de-ste-marie-ii/gallery/newcomers-jesuits-across-world/)
https://www.communitystories.ca/v2/story-of_histoire-de-ste-marie-ii/gallery/newcomers-jesuits-across-world/

From the video: the Jesuits' writings about their experiences:

...were known as the Jesuit Relations. So the "Relations des Jésuites de la Nouvelle-France" and those texts were gathered together over the years that they were printed. Of course they were written as letters and sent to France, they were printed in text and read by a large audience. In those texts people were being exposed to not only the evangelical efforts of the missionaries but also their observations of the new world, of everything from its geography to its horticulture to its weather to the views it allows for the different astronomical events, and really also within the text, we find a very thought out, meticulous observation of the various native cultures that the Jesuits were interacting with, meeting, encountering. And these texts now form, really, a solid basis of how most historians would have access to early modern Canadian history, and also sadly form really the only principle corpus of its size for us to enter into an understanding of pre-colonial native culture as well.

SGT explanation: Jesuit Order founded in 1540s, Ignatius Loyola the founder met Francis Xavier when they were both studying at the University of Paris and they both became missionaries to spread the word. For example, Francis Xavier went to India and Japan. This was part of the Catholic countries' reaction to the spread of Protestantism (which England had

switched to in 1530s and which Puritans who came to New England in 1620s were). Note that the Jesuits also created settlements (different from the F.

Missions and Creation of *Réductions*



Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons: construction of the Jesuit mission, which was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, began in 1639. (courtesy Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons Historical Site)

ARTICLE

Ste Marie Among the Hurons

Article by [C.E. Heidenreich](#)

Published Online February 7, 2006

Last Edited March 4, 2015

Lalemant planned an agriculturally self-sufficient, fortified missionary centre, centrally located in Huronia, with easy access to the canoe route to Québec. It was to serve as a retreat for the priests and ultimately to become the nucleus of a Huron Christian community.

Ste Marie Among the Hurons

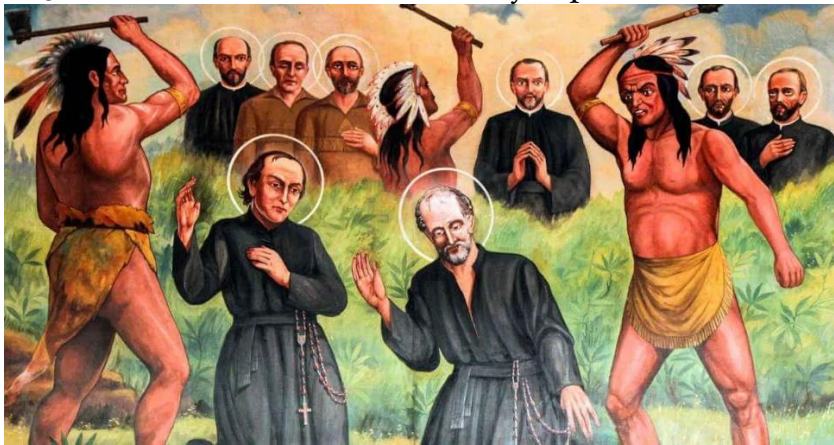
Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons was a Roman Catholic mission that worked among the [Huron](#). Begun in 1615 by the Récollets, it was renewed in 1634 by the Jesuits with the arrival of 3 priests led by Superior Jean de [Brébeuf](#) and assisted by 5 domestics. In 1638 Jérôme [Lalemant](#) arrived as the new superior; by 1639 there were 13 fathers active among the Huron and [Petun](#).

Construction began in 1639, 5 km southeast of present-day [Midland](#), Ont along the Wye River. The structure, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was named Sainte Marie, or Notre Dame de la Conception. At its busiest in 1648 it housed 19 priests, 4 lay brothers, 23 donnés, 4 boys, 7 domestics and 8 soldiers.

By the late 1640s, besides their missions to the Huron (St Joseph), the Jesuits at Sainte Marie also had missions to the Petun (Les Apôtres), the Nipissing (St Esprit), the [Ojibwa](#) and [Ottawa](#) (St Pierre) and some Algonquian bands along Georgian Bay (St Charles).

In 1648 the Iroquois began a series of devastating attacks on the Huron and a year later on the Petun (see [Iroquois Wars](#)). Five Jesuit fathers who worked out of the mission lost their lives. In the spring of 1649 (either May 15 or June 14) the mission was withdrawn, and Sainte Marie was burned by its occupants lest it fall into Iroquois hands and suffer desecration. A new Sainte Marie was built and occupied for one year on Christian Island in Georgian Bay. With further defeats of the Huron and Petun, and following a severe winter famine, the mission was removed to Québec on 10 June 1650.

St. Jean de Brébeuf – Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, britannica.com



St. Jean de Brébeuf (born March 25, 1593, Condé-sur-Vire, [Normandy](#), France—died March 16, 1649, Saint-Ignace, near Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons, Huronia, New France [near what is now [Midland](#), Ontario, Canada]; canonized 1930; feast day October 19) was a [Roman Catholic missionary](#) to [New France](#) and [martyr](#) who became one of the [patron saints](#) of [Canada](#).

Brébeuf entered the [Society of Jesus](#) in 1617, was [ordained](#) a priest in 1623, and arrived in New France in 1625. Noted for his facility with language, he was assigned to Christianize the [Huron](#) people between [Georgian Bay](#) and [Lake Huron](#) in 1626. The language proved challenging for him, but he is said to have eventually mastered the oratory style of the Hurons and diligently worked to record the language so that other missionaries could also gain proficiency. He lived a harsh life in danger of death until forced by the English to return to [France](#) in 1629.

Back again in Huronia in 1634, Brébeuf laboured for 15 years in unforgiving surroundings. In 1639 he and another French Jesuit priest, Jérôme Lalemant, established Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons, the first European settlement in what is now [Ontario](#). He was a veteran of 18 missions when, in 1647, peace was made between the French and the [Iroquois](#), who were competitors with the Hurons in the fur trade and their bitter enemies. The [Iroquois](#), determined to destroy the Huron [confederacy](#), continued their fierce war against the Hurons and in 1648–50 destroyed all villages and missions. When they raided the mission of Saint-Louis, they seized Brébeuf and his fellow missionary Gabriel Lalemant (nephew of Jérôme) and

ritually tortured the missionaries and [Native American](#) converts to death at the neighbouring village of Saint-Ignace. Brébeuf endured stoning, slashing with knives, a collar of red-hot tomahawks, a “baptism” of scalding water, and [burning at the stake](#). Because he showed no signs of pain, his heart was eaten by the Iroquois. He was [canonized](#) with Lalemant and six other Jesuits who were killed on various dates in the mid-1600s in New France (collectively called the Canadian [Martyrs](#) or North American Martyrs) in 1930.

Brébeuf’s writings, which are source materials for historians and ethnologists, include a Huron grammar and a translation of the [catechism](#) into Huron. His annual narratives are translated in R.G. Thwaites’s *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 vol. (1896–1901)

Brebeuf is also known for this beautiful Christmas carol:

[Hymn #144: 'Twas in the moon of wintertime](#)

1. 'Twas in the moon of wintertime,
when all the birds had fled,
that mighty Gitchi Manitou
sent angel choirs instead;
before their light the stars grew dim,
and wandering hunters heard the hymn:

Refrain:

Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born,
In excelsis gloria.

2. Within a lodge of broken bark
the tender Babe was found;
a ragged robe of rabbit skin
enwrapped his beauty round,
but, as the hunter braves drew nigh,
the angel song rang loud and high:

3. The earliest moon of wintertime
is not so round and fair
as was the ring of glory on
the helpless infant there.
The chiefs from far before him knelt
with gifts of fox and beaver pelt.

4. O children of the forest free,
the kin of Manitou,
the holy child of earth and heaven
is born today for you.
Come kneel before the radiant boy,
who brings you beauty, peace and joy.

Wendat

Their confederacy name was Wendat (Ouendat) meaning “island dwellers.” During the [fur trade](#), the Wendat were allies of the French and enemies of the [Haudenosaunee](#) (Iroquois). Following a series of 17th century armed conflicts, the Wendat were dispersed by the Haudenosaunee in 1650. However, the Wendat nation (Nation Huronne-Wendat) still remains, and is located in [Wendake, Quebec](#).



Wendat (Huron) Chiefs
The Wendat (Huron) chiefs Michel Tsioui, Teacheandale, Chief of Warriors (left), Stanislas Coska, Aharathaha, Second Chief of the Council (centre), and André Romain, Tsouhahissen, Chief of the Council (right). (courtesy J. Dickson/Wikimedia CC)

Territory and Population

Historically, the members of the Wendat confederacy were the Attinniaonten (“people of the [bear](#)”), Hatingeennonniyahak (“makers of cords for nets”), Arendaenronnon (“people of the lying rock”), Atahontaenrat (“two white ears,” i.e., “[deer](#) people”) and Ataronchronon (“people of the [bog](#)”). Each of these peoples were termed by the French as “nations.” This meant that they were separate political and territorial entities, with similar cultures, a common origin in the distant past and similar [languages](#). (*See also [Indigenous Territory](#).*)

The “Bear” and the “Cord Makers” were the original inhabitants of what is now northern [Simcoe County](#) in [Ontario](#). In the late 16th century, the other three nations migrated from the north shore of [Lake Ontario](#) and the Bay of Quinte area. They joined the Bear and Cord in a loose defensive alliance against their common enemy, the five [Haudenosaunee](#) nations south of the lake. At the time of the destruction of the Wendat homeland (sometimes known as [Huron](#)) by the Haudenosaunee, in 1649-1650, about 500 Wendat left [Georgian Bay](#) to seek refuge close to the French, in the [Quebec City](#) region.

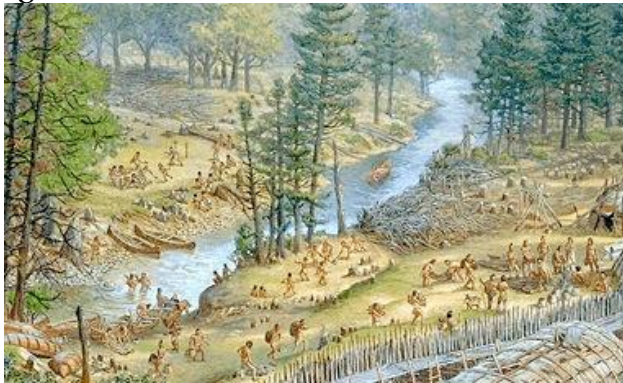
Prior to 1600, the Wendat numbered about 20,000 to 25,000 people, but between 1634 and 1642 they were reduced to about 9,000 by a series of [epidemics](#), particularly measles, [influenza](#) and [smallpox](#). Today, the Wendat nation in Wendake, [Quebec](#) numbers 4,056 registered members, as of July 2018. There are also populations that identify as Wyandot or Wyandotte (also Wendat peoples) in the United States.

Traditional Life

The Wendat lived in 18 to 25 villages, some with up to 3,500 people. Their subsistence economy was based on [corn](#), beans, [squash](#) and [fish](#). Hunting was of minor importance except

in the fall and late winter, and occurred well beyond the boundaries of occupied [territory](#). At the time of French contact in the early 17th century, these efficient farmers occupied a territory of about 880 km². It was referred to by the Wendat as Wendake, and it had an average population density of 23 people per km². Larger villages were well-fortified with palisades. Villages usually stood on a slight rise, adjacent to a permanent water supply and close to good farming [soils](#). Every 10 to 15 years, when soils and firewood were exhausted, the Wendat would relocate.

The Wendat had close trading, political and social relations with the [Tionontati](#) (Petun), [Neutral](#), [Odawa](#), Nipissing and the [Algonquin](#) nations of [Georgian Bay](#) and the Ottawa Valley. With these nations they exchanged surplus corn, beans and cord made of “[Indian hemp](#)” (*Apocynum cannabinum*), for [tobacco](#) and exotic items like native copper, catlinite, seashells and [wampum](#). In 1609, they joined the military and trading alliance that the [Innu](#) (also known as the Montagnais) and Algonquin had forged with the French by participating in a raid against the [Kanien'kehá:ka](#) (Mohawk), a member of the [Haudenosaunee](#) Confederacy.



Huronian Riverside activities (artwork by Lewis Parker)

Society and Culture

Traditionally, the Wendat traced descent and inheritance through the female line. As among all the [Iroquoian](#) nations, the fundamental socioeconomic group was the matrilineal-extended family. It was made up of a number of nuclear families whose female members traced common descent to a mother or grandmother. That woman would be in charge of daily affairs. The extended family lived in [longhouses](#), which were about 7 m wide and varied in length with the size of the family. Houses up to 90 m in length have been reported from [archaeological](#) work.

Wendat individuals belonged to one of eight matrilineal [clans](#). Clan members considered themselves to be descended from a common ancestor — Bear, Deer, Turtle, Beaver, Wolf, Loon/Sturgeon, Hawk or Fox — and were not permitted to marry within their clan. Some sources name Porcupine and Snake in place of Loon/Sturgeon and Fox. A child could not marry a member of their mother's clan but could marry a member of the clan of their father. The strength of the clan system was that members, no matter in what village or nation they lived, were obliged to help each other in time of need or war.

Village affairs were run by two councils, one in charge of civil affairs, and the other of war. All men over the age of 30 were members. In theory, matters were decided by consensus. In

reality, the old men and elected [chiefs](#) of large families tended to dominate because of their community standing and powers of oratory. Unlike the older female members of the Haudenosaunee, Wendat women had little or no say in councils.

Language

The Wendat language is part of the Iroquoian linguistic family. After years of dispersals and the subsequent colonization of the land that is now Canada, the Wendat language nearly went extinct. Still considered endangered, the language is being revitalized by Wendat peoples through a variety of educational programs and initiatives, including a dictionary. (*See also [Indigenous Languages in Canada](#).*)

Colonial History

The Wendat formed trade and military alliances with French explorers. In order to forge closer trade relations and obtain military aid from the French, the Wendat accepted [missionaries](#). The [Récollet](#) missionaries were sent in 1615, and were replaced by the [Jesuits](#) in 1625. In 1633 and 1635, the Wendat were asked by Champlain and Father [Paul Le Jeune](#) to consider intermarriage with the French. The Wendat rejected this request because they considered marriage a matter between two individuals and their families, and not subject to council decision.

By the mid-1630s, the Wendat had become one of the most important suppliers of furs to the French. About 500 men from various villages operated the Wendat [fur trade](#) network, meeting fur suppliers along the [canoe](#) route to the French posts on the [St. Lawrence](#), and later exchanging the fur for French goods.

When the [epidemics](#) ended in the early 1640s, all the [Great Lakes](#) Indigenous nations had suffered severely. Both Iroquoian and [Algonquian](#) groups saw their populations drop by over half, with the much less populous Algonquians — who also were affected by starvation — suffering the worst losses. Responses to the crisis varied. Among the Wendat, a divisive debate ensued whether to keep the missionaries and remain allied with the French, or to sever all ties. The majority felt they were too deeply committed and hoped eventually for French military aid.

Among the Haudenosaunee, the women's councils urged that [clan](#) members lost through the epidemics be replaced, or else their nation would be weakened and entire families would disappear. The logical method for replacement was through warfare against neighbouring groups with similar cultures. On a political level, the councils of warriors also saw this as an opportunity to fulfill their ancient ideal, to “extend the rafters of the [longhouse](#)” by absorbing their neighbours into one nation, thereby producing a universal peace. [Jesuit](#) missionary Father [Jogues](#) wrote from Kanyen'kehà:ka captivity in 1643, “the Iroquois plan is to take all the Hurons if possible, put to death the most important ones along with a large part of the others, and with the rest to make one country.” Their rallying cry to those they were about to attack was: “come and join us that we be one people in one land.”

Wendat Dispersals

Between 1642 and 1646, the Haudenosaunee dispersed the Algonquians from the Ottawa Valley and attacked the eastern Wendat villages. In 1648 and 1649, armed with Dutch firearms, they defeated and dispersed the Wendat; followed by the Tionontati in 1649–50, the [Neutral](#) by 1651 and the Erie by 1656. During these wars, about half the post-[epidemic](#) Wendat population was decimated.