

The Erasure of Indigenous Culture and History

HST 580

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The plaque that I chose was found in a park named after Etienne Brule that is located beside the Humber River. The plaque commemorates Samuel de Champlain and describes Samuel de Champlain as an “important explorer, cartographer, administrator and founder of New France”. The plaque explains how Samuel de Champlain arrived in Canada in 1603 and aided in the advancement of French and colonial interests and strengthened ties with the First Nations. While the information written on the plaque is historically factual, what the plaque fails to mention is how Samuel de Champlain’s expeditions were not without “violent confrontation, which led to increased aggression between Indigenous peoples along the Canadian frontier”.¹ The plaque is an homage to the efforts of “discovery” and “innovation” made by Samuel de Champlain but fails to pay any homage to the First Nations peoples - in fact the plaque doesn’t even name a single tribe that Samuel de Champlain had close relations with or who the land rightfully belongs to. The Humber River was also used as a portage route to Lake Simcoe by the Indigenous², but there is no mention of that. The following essay will discuss the historical context of this plaque and more about Samuel de Champlain’s travels and how it directly ties in to the erasure of Indigenous peoples culture and history, specifically in Toronto.

Samuel de Champlain made his first voyage into Canada in 1603 and regularly published the details of his voyages that was later compiled together in 1632 and published as *Voyages de la Nouvelle France*.³ The recounts of his voyages offer detailed descriptions of eastern Canada as well as First Nations culture and traditions that he met with. Samuel de Champlain sought to

¹ Gonthier, Ursula Haskins. "Postcolonial Perspectives on Early Modern Canada: Champlain's *Voyages de la Nouvelle France* (1632)." *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 66, no. 2 (2012): 145-162. muse.jhu.edu/article/472401.

² Freeman, Victoria. "'Toronto Has No History!': Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada's Largest City." *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21-35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 25.

³ Gonthier, Ursula Haskins. "Postcolonial Perspectives on Early Modern Canada: Champlain's *Voyages de la Nouvelle France* (1632)." *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 66, no. 2 (2012): 145-162. muse.jhu.edu/article/472401.

alter colonial policy and advocate the establishment of a permanent French settlement in Canada.⁴ Samuel de Champlain formed a close relationship with the Wendat Confederacy, which was a coalition of five separate nations (The Bear Nation or Attignawantan, The Nation of the Rock or Arendarhonon, The People of the Cord or Attigneenongnahac, The People of the Deer or Tahontaenrat and The People of the Marsh Ataronchronon).⁵ The Wendat Confederacy's territory was located around the Great Lakes region in Georgian Bay, Ontario, Canada.⁶ "They were culturally an Iroquoian people, speaking in Iroquoian dialect, living a predominantly sedentary and agricultural lifestyle, and organizing their social and political structures around a matricentric and matrilineal body-politique".⁷ According to Indigenous author George Sioui, Samuel de Champlain had no idea that the Wendat people of Wendake referred to themselves as such (despite having direct relations with them and living in New France for thirty years) and only referred to the Wendat peoples as "Huron".⁸

The plaque found in Etienne Brule park is a perfect example (whether intentional or not) of erasure and dismissal of Indigenous history and culture. "Public memory is fundamentally a 'discourse about power' which serves to 'legitimize states, ideologies, or political factions by offering imagined communities a sense of shared posterity and common descent'.

⁴ Gonthier, Ursula Haskins. "Postcolonial Perspectives on Early Modern Canada: Champlain's *Voyages de la Nouvelle France* (1632)." *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 66, no. 2 (2012): 145-162. muse.jhu.edu/article/472401.

⁵ Sioui, Georges E. and Kathryn Magee Labelle. 2014. "THE ALGONQUIAN-WENDAT ALLIANCE: A CASE STUDY OF CIRCULAR SOCIETIES." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 34 (1): 171-183. <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/algonquian-wendat-alliance-case-study-circular/docview/1626237949/se-2?accountid=13631>, 174.

⁶ Sioui, Georges E. and Kathryn Magee Labelle. 2014. "THE ALGONQUIAN-WENDAT ALLIANCE: A CASE STUDY OF CIRCULAR SOCIETIES." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 34 (1): 171-183. <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/algonquian-wendat-alliance-case-study-circular/docview/1626237949/se-2?accountid=13631>, 174.

⁷ Sioui, Georges E. and Kathryn Magee Labelle. 2014. "THE ALGONQUIAN-WENDAT ALLIANCE: A CASE STUDY OF CIRCULAR SOCIETIES." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 34 (1): 171-183. <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/algonquian-wendat-alliance-case-study-circular/docview/1626237949/se-2?accountid=13631>, 174.

⁸ Sioui, Georges E., and Jane Brierley. *Huron-Wendat: The Heritage of the Circle*. UBC Press, 1999, 4.

Commemoration constructs a narrative about the past in support of the present and its power relationships and a desired future”.⁹ Although I struggled to locate the physical plaque itself (my assumption is that it was taken down due to construction that was happening along the trail) the supposed location of it was within walking distance of an installment dedicated to the Three Sisters. Through further research, the Three Sisters is referred to as planting corn, beans, and squash together and originated with the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois).¹⁰ The planting of corn, beans, and squash together was to assist with drainage and avoiding water logging of plant roots (which was imperative in regions that received heavy rainfall).¹¹ The juxtaposition of the Three Sisters in relation to the plaque that cannot be found but is dedicated to Samuel de Champlain makes me wonder if that was done with purpose and is for what caused it to be actually removed. The Three Sisters should not have been put up by an anonymous volunteer, it should have been put in place by the city of Toronto with an appropriate plaque that reads of the meaning and importance behind it.

The city of Toronto has an expansive Indigenous history as well as shameful. For example, the Mississaugas once resided on the north shore of Lake Ontario until they were acquired by the British through various land surrenders and the 1787 Toronto Purchase agreement.¹² As if this wasn’t enough, the colonial government of Upper Canada at the time

⁹ Freeman, Victoria. “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City.” *Urban History Review / Revue d’histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 22.

¹⁰ Dyjack, David. 2020. "Three Sisters." *Journal of Environmental Health* 82 (9): 54. <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/three-sisters/docview/2400098188/se-2?accountid=13631>, 54.

¹¹ Dyjack, David. 2020. "Three Sisters." *Journal of Environmental Health* 82 (9): 54. <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/three-sisters/docview/2400098188/se-2?accountid=13631>, 54.

¹² Freeman, Victoria. “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City.” *Urban History Review / Revue d’histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 24.

forcibly made the Mississaugas financially dependent on the Crown “disrupting their political alliance with the Six Nations, and paying them a fraction of their land’s market value”.¹³ The presence of Indigenous peoples within and surrounding the city of Toronto began to dwindle, so much so that it was perceived as a phenomenon with an account from 1855 claiming that “Indians had vanished like the morning mist...and nothing remains to recall even their memory, but the well sounding name they invented for this locality - the sonorous Toronto”.¹⁴

Toronto has always had First Nations present, namely it has been home to the Wendats (Hurons), Tionnontati (Petuns), Senecas, and Mississaugas (Ojibwa, Chippewa, Anishinaabeg).¹⁵ The city of Toronto has one of the highest Indigenous populations amongst Canadian cities with approximately 70,000 Indigenous peoples.¹⁶ Perhaps the violent colonial history that took place before Toronto became an official city was much too uncivilized to take ownership of. In 1884, a week-long commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the city of Toronto took place. The celebrations revealed “the erasure of the area’s Indigenous past and the celebration of its European future”¹⁷ as well as “an idealized view of the past of Indigenous-settler partnership that ignores the role of local settlers in the dispossession of the Mississaugas”.¹⁸ Sir Daniel Wilson (the first professor to teach history and English at University of Toronto) gave a speech during

¹³ Freeman, Victoria. “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City.” *Urban History Review / Revue d’histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 24.

¹⁴ Freeman, Victoria. “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City.” *Urban History Review / Revue d’histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 24.

¹⁵ Freeman, Victoria. “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City.” *Urban History Review / Revue d’histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 24.

¹⁶ Doug Anderson; Alexandra Flynn, "Rethinking "Duty": The City of Toronto, a Stretch of the Humber River, and Indigenous-Municipal Relationships," *Alberta Law Review* 58, no. 1 (2020): 107-132, 113.

¹⁷ Freeman, Victoria. “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City.” *Urban History Review / Revue d’histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 24.

¹⁸ Freeman, Victoria. “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City.” *Urban History Review / Revue d’histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 24.

this celebration in which he stated that Torontonians lived in a city with “scarcely a past either for pride or for shame”.¹⁹ Chief Samson Green of the Bay of Quinte (Tyendinaga) Mohawks was invited to also give a speech during the celebration and the *Globe* had reported the celebration (including his speech) and stated that the “English people were kind to the Indians, and he found them so...Always the English had treated his people well since the earliest days”.²⁰ In many ways the words of Sir Daniel Wilson and Chief Samson Green can be seen as imperialist propaganda. If there is no mention of how poorly the First Nations were treated even by an Indigenous Chief himself (when in reality, Chief Samson Green was only allowed to speak because they likely knew he would not say anything radical or controversial) then it is no wonder why Torontonians would have no idea that there was any sort of violent colonial history when there has only been a pro-imperialist narrative pushed.

In present day Toronto, the city has come a long way in improving their relations with the First Nations. In the last decade, the city of Toronto has imposed countless measures of inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in its governance as a way to communicate with First Nations communities and begin building better relationships.²¹ This can be seen in 2008 with the Aboriginal Affairs Committee and in 2009 with the Urban Aboriginal Strategy - both of which were introduced to achieve “equitable outcomes”. The city also introduced several policy measures that recognized the historical and contemporary injustices infringed upon First Nations and how their societal contributions are important to the city.²² It is important to remember that

¹⁹ Freeman, Victoria. “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City.” *Urban History Review / Revue d’histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 24.

²⁰ Freeman, Victoria. “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City.” *Urban History Review / Revue d’histoire Urbaine* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43560271>, 29.

²¹ Doug Anderson; Alexandra Flynn, "Rethinking "Duty": The City of Toronto, a Stretch of the Humber River, and Indigenous-Municipal Relationships," *Alberta Law Review* 58, no. 1 (2020): 107-132, 121.

²² Doug Anderson; Alexandra Flynn, "Rethinking "Duty": The City of Toronto, a Stretch of the Humber River, and Indigenous-Municipal Relationships," *Alberta Law Review* 58, no. 1 (2020): 107-132, 122.

although these strides of recognition, reconciliation, and inclusion are thoughtful and impressive they are not always consistently implemented. For some urban First Nations that still live in the city, they have been attempting to find ways to hold Indigenous ceremonies throughout the city but are often dejected as to even attempt this they face “significant bureaucratic challenges that are not possible for most people to meet”.²³ For example, in 2013 Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee elders conducted various fire ceremonies in order to commemorate their elders, Indigenous remains, and cultural artifacts. They contacted the city of Toronto and informed them of their ceremonial fires and city officials stated that they should submit a formal request to continue doing so - this request was denied.²⁴

In contemporary society, Indigenous peoples want to feel like the concerns that they are voicing are being heard and subsequent action is being taken. One of the main concerns of many First Nations tribes is the overall well being of Mother Earth and animal species,²⁵ cooperation from and with colonizers, and maintaining their culture and identity.²⁶ Tadodaho of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and of the Onondaga Nation Sid Hill stated: “We are still here, whether we are recognized or not...we are a people, we have a language, we have our ways, we have our land...and it’s a human right to be able to identify ourselves as who they are. Our generation doesn’t know what our ancestors had gone through to maintain what we have today”.²⁷ The histories and perspective of the First Nations peoples are who should be commemorated on this plaque. The focus should not be on the colonizer and completely disregarding the violence and cultural genocide that simultaneously took place. While it is

²³ Doug Anderson; Alexandra Flynn, "Rethinking "Duty": The City of Toronto, a Stretch of the Humber River, and Indigenous-Municipal Relationships," *Alberta Law Review* 58, no. 1 (2020): 107-132, 144.

²⁴ Doug Anderson; Alexandra Flynn, "Rethinking "Duty": The City of Toronto, a Stretch of the Humber River, and Indigenous-Municipal Relationships," *Alberta Law Review* 58, no. 1 (2020): 107-132, 116.

²⁵ Tree Media. (2015). *Value Change for Survival*

²⁶ Tree Media. (2015). *We are the Haudenosaunee*.

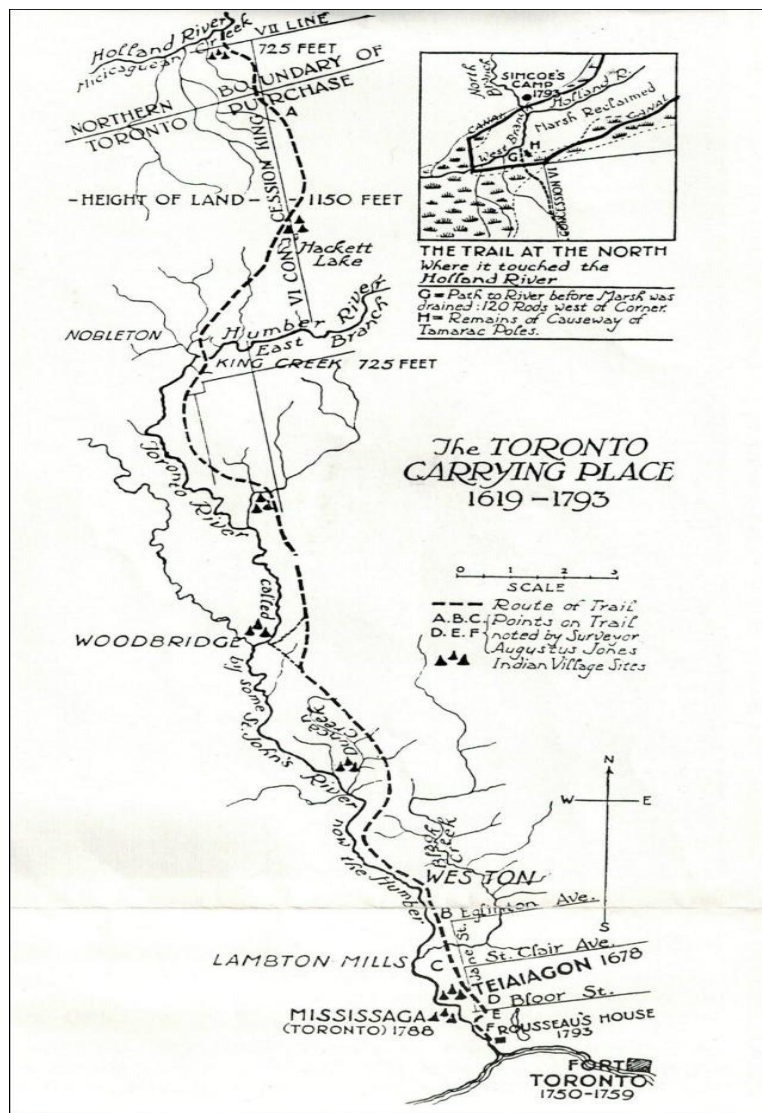
²⁷ Tree Media. (2015). *We are the Haudenosaunee*.

important to acknowledge historical figures like Etienne Brule and Samuel de Champlain (because they did accomplish huge strides politically and historically), historical interpretation changes quite often and it is important to reevaluate it in order to prevent harmful narratives from being perpetuated throughout history and cultural and historical erasure of other groups (specifically minority groups).

For my new plaque, I decided to name it after what the Mississauga's initially referred to as the Humber river: Kabechenong which means "gathering place to tie up".²⁸ I included a map of the river which was also originally known as the Carrying Place which I found on the Humber Valley Heritage Trail Association website. The website also provided some more historical information on the river and how it was inhabited by First Nations people and various animal species and became an essential portage route. I wanted to maintain the focus on the specific First Nations tribes that this river was so integral to: the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples as well as the wildlife that would be incredibly important to them as well. I briefly mentioned Samuel de Champlain because despite everything, he is an important historical figure for Canada and Quebec and worked intimately with many First Nations people for decades. I believe that my plaque should replace the former plaque because it provides more thoughtful information regarding the Humber river and the land that it has always belonged to.

²⁸ User, S. (n.d.). *The River and Earlier Trail*. Humber River Heritage - Humber Valley Heritage Trail Association Bolton Chapter. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <http://www.humbertrail.org/humber-river-heritage.html>.

Kabechenong



Kabechenong means “gathering place to tie up”²⁹ and is what the local Mississauga people use to refer to what is now known as the Humber River (which was named by Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe in 1787 after the Toronto Purchase).³⁰ The river was first occupied by First

²⁹ User, S. (n.d.). *The River and Earlier Trail*. Humber River Heritage - Humber Valley Heritage Trail Association Bolton Chapter. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <http://www.humbertrail.org/humber-river-heritage.html>.

³⁰ User, S. (n.d.). *The River and Earlier Trail*. Humber River Heritage - Humber Valley Heritage Trail Association Bolton Chapter. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <http://www.humbertrail.org/humber-river-heritage.html>.

Nations people until the Europeans arrived in the early 1600's to which the First Nations guided them along the river, one of the most famous of them being French explorer and founder of New France, Samuel de Champlain. The river became an essential portage route and one of the main trade routes that would become known as the Carrying Place Trail.³¹ The Humber river watershed is home to 143 species of birds, 30 mammal species, 61 fish species, 10 reptile species, 14 amphibian species, and 918 plant species. The watershed comprises 600 lakes, ponds and reservoirs and 750 tributaries.³² The Kabechenong has been an integral part of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat First Nations communities histories for hundreds of thousands of years. We recognize and acknowledge who the river and land rightfully belongs to.

³¹ User, S. (n.d.). *The River and Earlier Trail*. Humber River Heritage - Humber Valley Heritage Trail Association Bolton Chapter. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <http://www.humbertrail.org/humber-river-heritage.html>.

³² User, S. (n.d.). *The River and Earlier Trail*. Humber River Heritage - Humber Valley Heritage Trail Association Bolton Chapter. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <http://www.humbertrail.org/humber-river-heritage.html>.

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Tree Media. (2015). *We are the Haudenosaunee*.

Tree Media. (2015). *Value Change for Survival*