

## DISSONANT IDEOLOGIES: THE ALGONQUIN-MISSISSAUGA PRESENCE IN THE OTTAWA-HURON TRACT IN NINETEENTH CENTURY ONTARIO

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### ABSTRACT

*The rationale and creation of Algonquin Park, in late 19th century in Ontario, occurred at a point in time when the political and social conceptions of Nature, and the policies and status of Aboriginal peoples were in an evolutionary flux. The nexus of discourses that became the basis of Algonquin park policy development were symptomatic of dissonant ideologies and divergent Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal perceptions of nature, land and resources. These perceptions were imbedded in different ontologies, cultural constructions, and techno-economic systems and resulted in the failure of park developers to communicate with the Indian department regarding apparent Aboriginal interests in the Ottawa-Huron territory. The narrative of the socio-historical Algonquin/Mississauga occupation, and their subsequent relocation from the Ottawa-Huron tract, encapsulates three divergent policy directions, which resulted in the creation of a culturally constructed perception of Aboriginal land tenure and the ideological rationale of the development of Algonquin Park. This narrative of socio-political construction forms the theoretical underpinning for the central premise of this paper; however, it focuses on the history of a group of Algonquin families who occupied the area of Algonquin Park. The case study illuminates possible objectives of park policy planners in maintaining the myth of the 'disappearing Indian' but leaves many unanswered questions regarding the lived experience of the people who inhabited the area. Indeed, it seems that the failure of government officials to resolve the petitions of Algonquin families for title to their lands within the area of Algonquin Park was intentional and exemplified new policy objectives to deal with what the government saw as 'the Indian problem'.*

### ALGONQUIN OCCUPATION IN THE OTTAWA VALLEY AND COLLECTIVE CLAIMS TO TERRITORY

The traditional territory of the Algonquin has always been within the area we now know as southeastern Ontario and western Québec (in the first half of the 19th century, petitions to government officials for title to land were signed both by the Algonquins and Nipissings, however this will not be addressed here). Conflict, due to European intrusion, began in the late 1700s when the Algonquin had reason to complain that settlers, trappers and lumbermen were encroaching on their territory. These conflicts continued throughout the next half century and became increasingly more hostile (Day and Trigger, 1978; Hanson, 1986). How the Algonquin people interpreted these conflicts on their land and their relationship with European government officials is a multi-faceted not well-understood part of our history and embodies only one of these divergent ideologies of the colonial environment. There is

extensive documentation to support the many petitions and claims submitted by the Algonquin (and Nipissing) nations regarding their loss of game and habitat, and subsequently their means of survival (see Huitema, 2001: 63-96). The prevailing view of government officials was that:

*"[a]s they have not fulfilled the divine command, to subdue the earth, their pretensions to ownership, in this respect are untenable. Their unsettled habitation in these immense regions cannot be accounted a true and legal possession, and the people of Europe...finding land of which the savages stood in no particular need, and of which they made no actual and constant use, were lawfully entitled to take possession of it and to settle it with colonies. ... We do not, therefore, deviate from the views of nature, in confining the Indians within narrower limits."* [Government of Canada, Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada (JLAUC), 1844-45, Section 1, unpaginated-hereafter, Bagot Commission]

The following quote from government officials exemplifies the historical legacy of the Algonquin people in the Ottawa Valley and acknowledges the repeated and ignored requests for title to their homelands:

*"...[T]heir hunting grounds on the Ottawa, which were formerly most extensive, abounding with deer, and other animals, yielding the richest furs, and which their ancestors had enjoyed from time immemorial, have been destroyed for the purposes of the chase. A considerable part has been laid out into townships, and either settled or taken possession of by squatters. The operations of the lumber-men have either destroyed or scared away the game throughout a still more extensive region, and thus as settlement advances, they are driven further and further from their homes, in search of a scanty and precarious livelihood. Their case has been often brought before the Government, and demands early attention."* (Bagot Commission, 1844-45, Section 2.3, unpaginated)

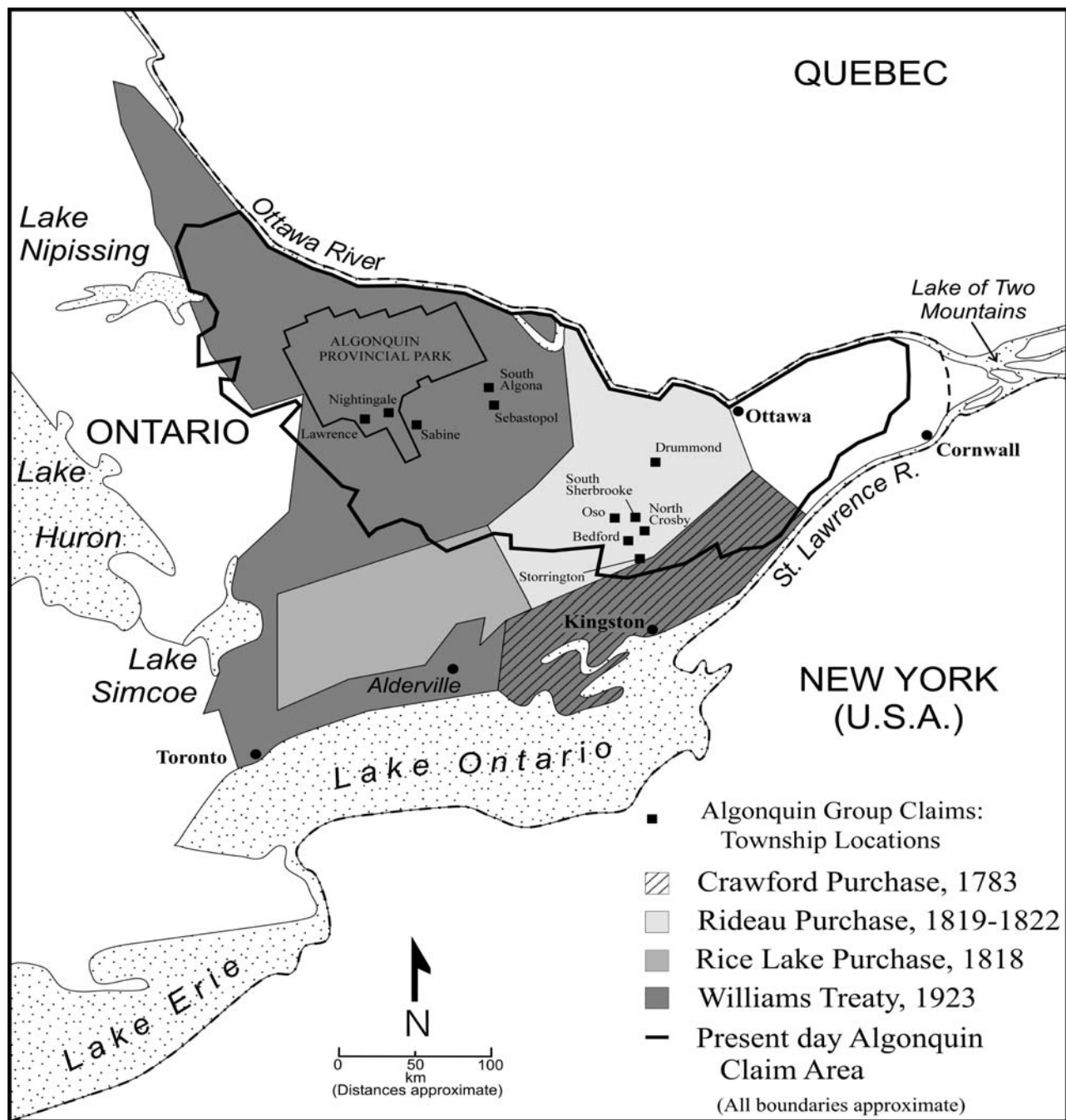
Not only did the Algonquin people attempt to negotiate claims to their homelands throughout this period, but historical accounts and extensive government documentation clearly indicate that their lands in the Ottawa Valley were clandestinely ceded by the Mississauga Nation who did not possess the rights to surrender these lands.

## **THE MISSISSAUGA/ALGONQUIN BOUNDARY DISPUTES**

The Mississauga-Algonquin conflict regarding the cession of lands in the Ottawa valley encompasses a period of over 100 years, from the late 1700s up to the *Williams Treaty* of 1923. The boundary between the watershed of the Ottawa Valley and the watershed of the Great Lakes was a zone of interaction and occupation for the Algonquin-Mississauga peoples and this area constituted a shared territory and a common resource base that supported their nomadic subsistence activities. Failure by government officials to address the complexity of nation-to-nation relationships and the native ideology of land and resource sharing based on social and political practices resulted in the imposition and introduction of Euro-Canadian values into the complex calculus of Native people-land relationships. The indiscretion of Mississauga cessions of Algonquin lands in the nineteenth century has resulted in continuing litigation to redress these long-standing claims to a long-standing disputed territory. Figure 1 shows the boundary of the present-day Algonquin land claim, which corresponds with their histori-

cally occupied territory and also illustrates the overlapping land cessions negotiated by the Mississauga. For a more complete account of the Mississauga-Algonquin and government contestations regarding the cessions of the Ottawa Valley lands see Huitema *et al.* (2002: 87-112).

**Figure 1.** Algonquin Claim Areas (1840 – 1899), and Mississauga Land Cessions (1783 – 1923).



## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AND LEGISLATION, AND INDIAN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Initially 'Indian Affairs' was under the auspices of the Department of Crown Lands (DCL) and this department controlled the allocation of Indian lands; however, the objectives of the department were to maximize profit from lands and resources. Later, 'Indian Affairs' became a federal responsibility but Indian land was still a provincial concern and under provincial control. This conflict of interests created obvious barriers for native people attempting to retain title to their land. The ideology promoted by the DCL was that Indians had no more rights to land "*than a panther or a bear*" (Joseph Trutch, Commissioner of Crown Lands, cited in Dickason, O.P., 1997: 234) and that the lands they claimed were "*of no actual value or utility to them.*" (Trutch, J. cited in Berger, 1981: 222) In addition, Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy-Superintendent-General of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), stated that their objectives were "*to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department.*" (Dickason, 1997: 302).

The evolution in ideas of 'conservation', 'preservation', 'nature', 'wilderness' and the place of the 'savage' in this wilderness during the mid-to late 1800s culminated in policies that were designed to control, civilize and banish native people to reserve areas with the ultimate goal of assimilation and/or eradication. The expression and articulation of these concepts impacted directly on the motivation that inspired the formation and development of Ontario's first national park – Algonquin Park. They also represent an underlying ideological disjuncture of policy direction concerning park development and Indian policy. Initially my research intended to demonstrate that the objectives and development of Algonquin park policy failed to integrate DIA policies of native assimilation and relocation. However, it now seems possible that the question of the 'Indian problem' had no place in the social construction of ideas regarding 'wilderness' and preservation, although ironically the 'noble savage' had always been seen as an integral part of 'nature' and 'wilderness' – the embodiment of 'wild nature' so to speak.

### THE ALGONQUINS OF ALGONQUIN PARK

Individual groups of Algonquins began petitioning for title to lands in the Ottawa Valley watershed in 1842 and over the next half century, requests for land and compensation came from Algonquins who lived in the Townships of Sebastopol; South Algona; Lawrence – watershed of the Madawaska – today part of Algonquin Park; Nightingale – today also part of Algonquin Park; and the Township of Sabine, as well as other locations throughout the Ottawa Valley (see Figure 1). The DIA and the DCL suggested that they relocate to reserves in Québec or to the Golden Lake Reserve established in 1873 in the Township of South Algona. The Algonquins were quick to point out that these reserves in Québec were not their homelands and that their hunting, trapping, fishing, sugaring and camping territories included all of the watersheds of the Mattawa, the Petawawa, the Bonnechere, the Madawaska, the Mississippi and the Rideau Rivers, and they did not want to be removed from their traditional homelands.

In 1857, petitions from five Algonquin kinship groups residing in Algona Township resulted in the creation of the Golden Lake Reserve 16 years later—the only reserve for Algonquins to be located in what is today the Province of Ontario. The creation of this reserve was problematic because it involved land that was under the provincial jurisdiction of the DCL. The provincial government and the federal DIA eventually agreed to allow the Algonquins to purchase the land in question. There is no indication that the Algonquin families ever purchased the land. The DIA eventually purchased a quarter of the requested territory for the Algonquins to be established as a reserve. A number of families chose not to relocate onto the small parcel of reserve land nor become registered Indians, and their descendants still live today in areas around the perimeters of the reserve on the Bonnechere River watershed.

In 1863, 400 Algonquin families living in the northern areas of Haliburton and Hastings Counties requested 4,000 acres of homeland in the Township of Lawrence but were told by the DIA to move to the reserves in Québec. The Algonquins replied that the lands in Québec were useless to them as their hunting grounds were in Upper Canada. The DCL did advise the Algonquins in 1866 that the southeast quarter of the Township of Lawrence had been reserved for them but they had no rights to the timber and could not interrupt parties who had timber licences in this area. The DIA sent a memo dated in July, 1866, (six days after the correspondence from the DCL), and recommended that a sale of lands be authorized for them at 20 cents per acre, payable from Indian funds, including payment for the expense of subdivision. Apparently, this was never undertaken. In 1868, the Algonquins inquired whether the lands set aside for them in Lawrence Township would be surveyed, and again requested title to the land. Russell replied that the DCL had no funds with which to subdivide the township into lots but if the Indian people could afford to hire a surveyor to do so, they would consider setting the land aside. In 1888, the Algonquins requested that their lands be exchanged for other land in the northern part of Hastings or Haliburton Counties. The DIA suggested if they could find appropriate land elsewhere they could apply to the Province of Ontario for it. No documentation was found to verify whether the Algonquins ever made application to exchange their lands.

In 1894, the DIA advised the DCL that a request had again been made for a reserve and asked that they take the necessary steps to hand the land over to the DIA. DCL replied that this land was not set apart as a reserve or as a grant to the Indians and that when Crown Lands completed a report they would determine if the Algonquins had made any improvements on the land. Apparently, Crown Lands wanted the Algonquin people to meet the same requirements for homesteading as settlers who requested a claim to an area, but it seems that this was only a ruse to prevent them from settling on lands intended for inclusion into Algonquin Park. In 1894 and again in 1895, E. Bennet, Indian Agent, intervened on behalf of the Algonquins to inquire if any decisions had been made regarding the establishment of a reserve.

The DCL requested Peter Thompson, the first Superintendent of Algonquin Park, to complete an inspection of the lands in the southeast quarter of Lawrence Township in June of 1895. The report concluded that since the Township of Lawrence was situated close to Algonquin Park, the presence of the Indians there would pose a danger to the preservation of the game in the park. It also stated, "*that he [the late Mr. Thomson] did not find a single Indian settler in the township... and that there had been no attempt at clearing the land.*"(NAC, RG10, vol. 2401, File 83-203, Aubrey White, to Hayter Reed, 1895/11/16:108230: 1). White (DCL) informed Reed (DIA), "*You know the predatory habits of these peo-*

ple, how they roam about, and how difficult it is to keep watch of their movements in the forest." (NAC, RG10, vol. 2401, File 83-203, Aubrey White, to Hayter Reed, 1895/11/16:108230: 2). He also suggested that it was difficult to apply a white person's law, with respect to killing game, to the Indian who depended for his livelihood upon what he could kill in the forest. White concluded: "Under these circumstances I think you will see how impossible it is for the Department to sell or grant the Indians any lands in the township of Lawrence." (NAC, RG10, vol. 2401, File 83-203, Aubrey White, to Hayter Reed, 1895/11/16:108230: 3). Indian Agent Bennett advised the DIA that the Algonquins would not go to Golden Lake and recommended meeting with them to see what could be done. He also suggested that the Whitney [lumber?] Co. "has the most to do with keeping the reserve from them" and asked if he should try to make a settlement with the Company.

In 1896 and 1897, the Algonquins requested and agreed to join other families in Sabine Township but the DIA advised them to get consent from the Chief Ranger of Algonquin Park to settle there. The Algonquins replied that the land that they were talking about was not located in Algonquin Park so it made no sense to get permission from the Park Ranger. In 1897, the DIA again suggested that these Indians should go to the Golden Lake Reserve, but Bennett replied that these Indians did not belong to the Golden Lake Reserve and suggested again calling a meeting with them. He also stated that the land they wished comprised about 1,500 acres, but he suggested that the department give them 4,000 acres as the land was unfit for settlement [but not for lumbering] and would never be settled on by whites.

In 1987, White (DCL) advised McLean (DIA) that the DCL was not interested in helping to create Indian reserves in townships that would be opened for settlement and that the Township of Sabine was included in a timber licence. White added that if the Indian Department wished to open a reserve there, they would have to purchase the lands from Crown Lands. In 1899, the DIA submitted a report which concluded that the Algonquins should relocate to Québec or to the Gibson Reserve on the shore of Georgian Bay, north of Penetanguishine. The issue of creating reserve lands for these Algonquins was never resolved, and many drifted to the reserve at Golden Lake. But many also remained in the area, attempting to cope with settler and lumbering intrusions, and lost their power and ability to become recognized as owners on their own land.

Algonquin Provincial Park was established in 1893, initially named Algonquin National Park but changed in 1913 by the *Provincial Parks Act*. Initially it was comprised of 18 townships but was later enlarged to include townships from the east, west and south boundaries. This enlargement included the Townships of Lawrence and Nightingale.

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