



# Community Profile

Wahta Mohawks  
First Nation



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# Our Nation:

## Kanien'kehá:ka: People of the Flint

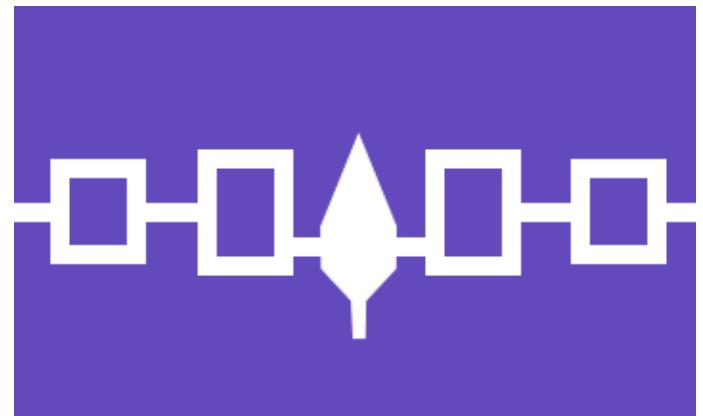
The Wahta Mohawks are a part of much larger group of Indigenous people with a long standing history connected both to Canada and the United States of America.

The people of Wahta are traditionally known as, Kanien'kehá:ka which translates to English as the "People of the Flint". Today, they are more commonly known as Mohawks, a colonized term. The Kanien'kehá:ka nation is part of a larger confederacy called the Haudenosaunee, which translates to "People of the Longhouse" or Iroquois.

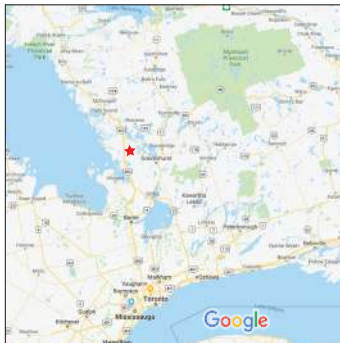
The Haudenosaunee were originally made up of five nations: the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), Onondaga, Onyotá:ka (Oneida), Gayogohó:no' (Cayuga), and Seneca. The Tuscarora joined the confederacy in the early 1700's. After that, the Haudenosaunee became known as the Six Nations Confederacy. In our traditional teachings, each of these nations have a unique history of how they came to be. These teachings also outline the roles of each nation within the confederacy. However, at one point in time, the Haudenos-

aunee people, mostly resided in what is now known as New York State. Through these traditional teachings, we understand that Kanien'kehá:ka people migrated North East to become the Eastern Door protectors. As the Eastern Door of the confederacy, they occupied a large territory around Lake Ontario and the upper St. Lawrence River.

***Wahta Mohawks are part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy***



The Haudenosaunee Flag is based on the Hiawatha Wampum Belt. It symbolizes the peace established by the original five nations who buried their weapons under a large white pine tree, the "Great Tree of Peace".



Wahta Territory, Source Google Maps

Post European contact, the Kanien'kehá:ka people were important trading partners with the Dutch and British. In the early 1600's the Two Row Wampum Treaty was created with the Kanien'kehá:ka and the Dutch to represent the peaceful coexistence between the two nations.



(Photo: Brian Lasenby)

*"This is a replica of the Two Row Wampum, the basis of our sovereignty. It's the grandfather of all the treaties between our two peoples. We made it with the Dutch in the early 1600's. The two rows of purple beads represent the Red Man and the White Man living side by side in peace and friendship forever. The white background is a river. On that river of life you travel in your boat and we travel in our canoe. Each of us is responsible for our own government and religion and way of life. We don't interfere with each others. The rows are parallel... We're equal. We don't call each other 'Father' or 'Son', we call each other 'Brother'. That's the way it's supposed to be between us."*

-- Todadaho Chief Leon Shenandoah Haudenosaunee, Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, Address to the United Nations General Assembly, October 25, 1985.

The Haudenosaunee as a whole, were well known for their sophisticated political structure and diplomacy. Their allegiance with the other nations within the Haudenosaunee made for powerful military campaigns. Colonizers also found it favourable to align with the Confederacy for their military strength.

There are several Kanien'kehá:ka communities that exist today: Akwesasne (QC, ON, USA), Kahnawake (QC), Kanesatake (QC), Six Nations of the Grand River (ON), Tyendinaga (ON) and Wahta (ON), as well as Kanatsiohareke and Ganienke which are located in the United States.

Each of these communities has a unique culture and history behind it. But, underlying every one of them is the same traditional knowledge, language and connection to the environment, all things, large and small.

Part of being Kanien'kehá:ka, is understanding our responsibilities as Onkwehonweh or "original people" and as caretakers of Mother Earth. Our culture is directly linked to nature and the harmony that exists between people and the land. As keepers of the land, it is imperative that we recognize every element, from the largest land mass, down to smallest living creature.

The Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen, commonly known as the "Thanksgiving Address" is used as a way of giving thanks to Mother Earth for all of her gifts. Traditionally, it was expected that everyone was to say the address twice daily and anytime that a group of people got together to discuss political issues. The Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen which translates directly to "The Words that Come Before All Else", is an opportunity for everyone in attendance to come together with a good mind and to foster respect for self, community, Mother Earth and the Creator. It is a reminder of all of the elements that are at stake with each and every decision we make as caretakers of the land, not only for the time being but for many generations into the future. It is a reminder of our responsibilities but also a time to reflect and give thanks for all of our gifts.

The Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen is not always recited the same way, but rather, the speaker does their best to give thanks to each and every creature that comes

## Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen (translated Thanksgiving Address)

*Let us all listen for a moment. We will give thanks to the Creator, for it is he who has made everything that is in this universe.*

*Let our minds come together as one mind and...*

*Let us give thanks to all people,  
Let us give thanks to our Mother Earth,  
Let us give thanks to all waters,  
Let us give thanks to all fish,  
Let us give thanks to all roots,  
Let us give thanks to all plants,  
Let us give thanks to all medicines,  
Let us give thanks to all insects,  
Let us give thanks to the sustainers of life,  
the three sisters - corn, beans and squash,  
Let us give thanks to the fruits, and the leader, the strawberry,  
Let us give thanks to the animals, and the leader, the deer,  
Let us give thanks to the birds, and the leader, the eagle,  
Let us give thanks to the trees, the shrubs, and the leader, the maple,  
Let us give thanks to the four winds - North, East, South and West,  
Let us give thanks to our Grandfathers, the Thunderers,  
Let us give thanks to our Grandmother, the Moon,  
Let us give thanks to our older brother, the Sun,  
Let us give thanks to the stars in the heavens,  
Let us give thanks to the Creator (all natural force/power)  
This is as far as I am capable of. If I have forgotten anything, then you continue and be of one mind and keep healthy.*

**\*\*Please Note:** The Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen varies as each speaker does their best job to give thanks to the natural world.

to mind as they conduct the address. Sometimes, the Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen can be very long, while other times it is much shorter. There are various reasons why this may occur, for example, varying language ability, time permitted, state of the community and type of community gathering, to name a few.



(Photos: Rachel Franks)

Among the Kanien'kehá:ka people, there are three traditional clans. These are the bear, the wolf and the turtle clans. Traditionally, these clans were incredibly important in understanding yourself, your role in your family and within the greater community.

Each clan was represented by the Clan Mothers. The Clan Mothers were typically Elders whose role included a variety of tasks, such as listening to the needs of their people, ensuring that the traditional teachings of the Longhouse were followed, selecting leaders, guiding the youth and making decisions in the best interests of the community. Clan Mothers were also responsible for some of the major decisions among the community. For example, these women were expected to choose the men who would become Chief.



Along with choosing the Chiefs, Clan Mothers also had the opportunity to remove them from power if they felt they were not serving the community appropriately. The role of Clan Mother was something that

was earned over their lifetime, thus, commanding the respect of others.

# A Brief History of the Wahta Community

## The Migration

Wahta Mohawk Territory, formerly known as Gibson Indian Reserve No. 31, has a unique history. The land did not traditionally belong to the Haudenosaunee. Our people travelled to this land in 1881, from Kanehsatà:ke (Southwestern Quebec, Oka) after tensions rose between the community and the Catholic church. For a number of years, violence in the area was on the rise due to religious disagreements and the desirability of the land. Kanehsatà:ke families were being offered more space, great farmland and support to create a new community, if they would agree to uproot completely to Gibson Township.

Many members of Kanehsatà:ke were not in favour of this move at first, as it meant that they would be agreeing to leave the lands that they had invested in building their community upon. However, over a number of years, a group of Kanien'kehá:ka people from Kanehsatà:ke decided, with a great deal of pressure and fear,

to leave their homes on the Ottawa River and travel a great distance to their new "home".

On October 20, 1881, 44 families - 70 adults and 33 children (15 years and under) left Kanehsatà:ke and headed for Gibson Township. This resilient group of

families embarked on an 11-day adventure, enduring freezing temperatures along the way. The first step in their journey required them to take a barge from their homes scattered near the shore of the Ottawa River to St. Anne. After they landed in St. Anne, the group boarded a train that would take them all the way to Gravenhurst, Ontario. Although some families stayed behind

in Gravenhurst for the winter months, many decided to continue their journey. Those families then had to get themselves to the port where they travelled on a steamboat through Lake Muskoka, to the town of Bala. After disembarking the steamboat, their journey really



Adam White on Sahanatien Lake  
(Photo: Courtesy of Wahta Mohawks First Nation)

began and became even more difficult. Since the Muskoka Region itself was only just becoming established, there were no roads into Gibson Township. While Indigenous people had lived and travelled through these lands for over 4,000 years, the trek, at this time of year was very difficult.

The Muskoka region is covered by beautiful lakes and rivers. At the tip of the Canadian Shield, the granite rocks peak out from a forest of both coniferous and deciduous trees. In the fall, when the first families were en route to the area, the leaves of the many maple, oak, and beech trees would have left a colourful blanket on the ground. But the dense population of the spruce, pine and balsam trees in between the bare branches, provided a canopy of green.

*"I remember my Grandmother telling me, that when they walked (sic) crossed Squaw Chutes, to where they had chosen their site to build their house, that the snow was 2 ft deep and she had her long dress on, it was frozen from her ankles up to her knees and she was carrying a baby, and that would be about a 2 mile walk from the river."*

Elder from Wahta Mohawks - Ontario Hydro Grievance Resolution - Final Report - Part 1

Once, this first group of families had landed in Bala, they took a raft down the Musquash River to Squaw Chutes<sup>1</sup>. While the river bank was likely an enchanting site in late October, the excursion down the river itself would have been a rather cold and unforgiving trip. Even after landing at Squaw Chutes, these families were not yet finished their journey. They arrived on the shores of the rapids on October 31, 1881 and camped there for the night in the chilly autumn air.

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<sup>1</sup> Squaw Chutes is the historical name of the rapids. This is not a name that is used anymore and we have not found an alternate name for it. Due to the flooding by Hydro, these rapids no longer exist. Let it be noted that the term "squaw" is considered derogatory and offensive. \*This term is still used for names in other places around Ontario and Canada.

When the families awoke the next day, they found a thick blanket of snow that covered the ground. The final leg of this trip would be, perhaps the most uncomfortable. Men, women, and children would have to trudge through the wintry forest to their final destination.



Winter landscape (Photo: Rachel Franks)

nations. In fact, many Elders have reported that their families said it snowed two feet the night before they set out to their land in Wahta.

## Building a Community

Once families had landed in what is now known as Wahta Territory, they had to construct their own shelters, as the homes that were promised, did not exist. While there were many assurances by the Canadian Government and Indian Affairs<sup>2</sup> that families would be taken care of once they moved, many of these promises were undelivered.

The now, people of Wahta had to find ways to survive over the winter in their new territory, as the provisions thought to have been promised by the government were not obtained.

Eventually, many of the Wahta settlers would become farmers. Some of the crops that were grown included corn, beans, potatoes, hay, oats, and other garden plants. However, it proved extremely difficult to farm the lands in Muskoka because of the rocky terrain, swampy lowlands and nutrient poor soil. Prior to leaving Kanehsatà:ke these families were told of the lush farmland and a prosperous future, but for many, life

<sup>2</sup> Indian Affairs was the federal department assigned to oversee Indians according to the Indian Act.



was very challenging for these Wahta settlers. Community members had to rely on each other for survival. This created a great sense of community and while there were still disputes, the need to survive outweighed issues between neighbours and families.

In fact, this sense of community continued for many years, even after houses were built and families were well established on the land. Elders remember a community member taking his horse and carriage into town after a road to Bala was finally built. “He would

go every Wednesday, or something that like

that, to collect some basic things; bread, and what not. He would charge 15 cents per family and pick up what they needed. Everyone knew to let him know what they wanted.

It would take him the entire day. It was a long trip at the time.”

Although noted by the Indian Agent<sup>3</sup> that Wahta farms were “unusually prosperous”, throughout the 1920’s, farming **became profitable** due to the Depression. However, as the community settled, families had found other ways

to make a living and sustain themselves. Many went to work at local lumber yards as the forestry industry was taking off in the Muskoka region. The lakes and rivers made for easy transportation of the logs. Many other opportunities popped up due to the booming

industry. The seemingly endless amounts of hard and softwood trees created economic diversity in the area.

Xavier Laforce was one member who leveraged this opportunity by making furniture and coffins. Many others found employment at local mills.

Some of the community

relied on more traditional skills such as hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering. They would trade items such as berries and fish for other goods but would also make jam or maple syrup

to sell. It is reported, that Isaiah Dewasha picked and sold moss. Later, Isaiah Sahanatien and his wife Ellen used to travel into Port Carling to sell handmade crafts from the community.

Wahta has never had its own doctor, instead members mostly relied on natural remedies and traditional healing. While

most people in the community had some knowledge of the local medicinal plants, Leah Thompson (nee Stock) was particularly educated in this area and is remembered by many for her skills.



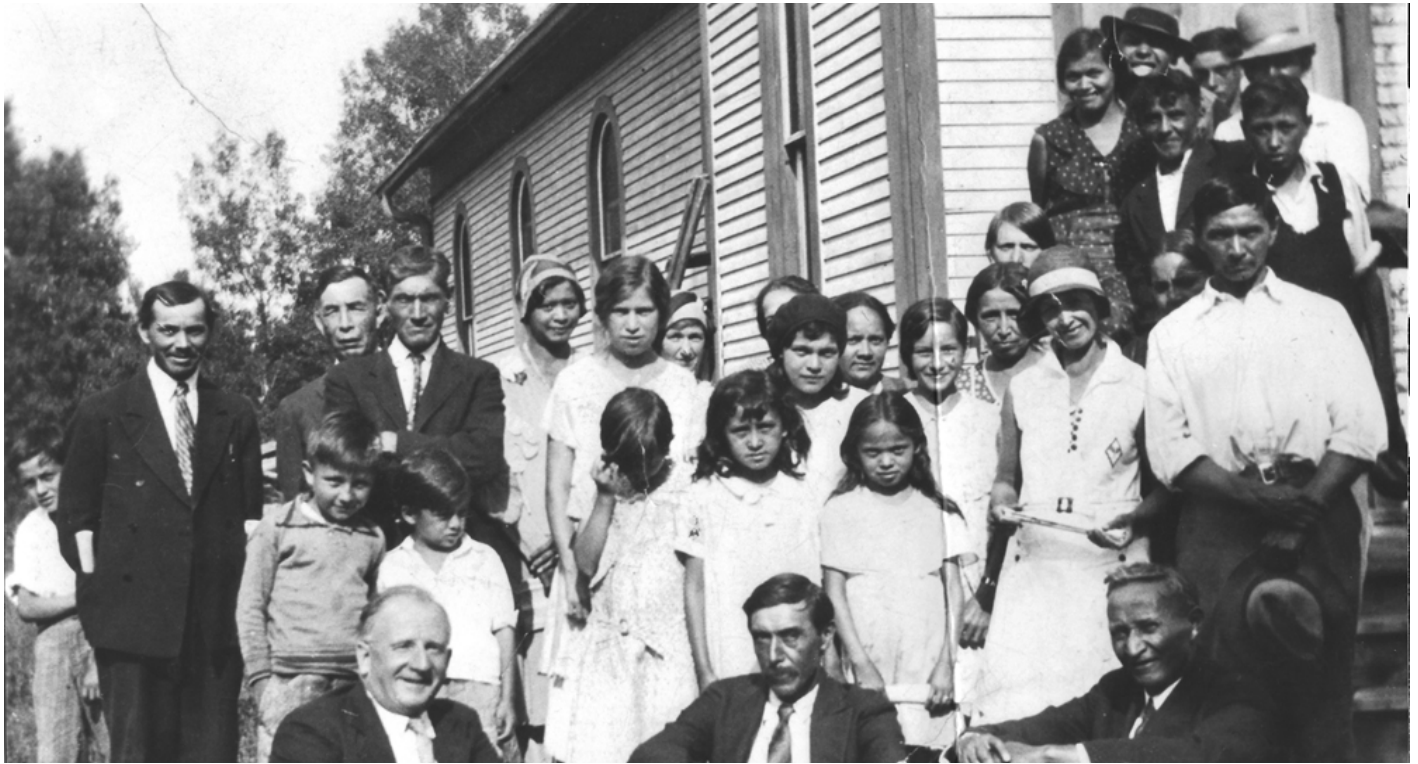
Log Rolling at Bala Regatta 1913  
(Photo: Courtesy of Wahta Mohawks First Nation)

*“Well when my kids were young if they got hurt or something, they had Leah Thompson to bandage them up if they got cut or something and put some Indian ointment on. ... There was some kind of oil that she mixes with some kind of an herb. Was it plantain? No. We used a lot of those too for infection. I can’t remember. ... Maybe it was beaver oil. I think it was beaver oil. And what was that good for? I guess, when it bleeds too much. She had some kind of a medicine that was like a yellow powder. She put the oil on first and then she would sprinkle with this yellow power, it’s some kind of an herb and it stops the bleeding.”*

Elder J, A History of the Wahta Community, Holmes, J.

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<sup>3</sup> Indian agents were assigned by the Government of Canada to First Nations communities to oversee happenings in the community, help to communicate with the Canadian Government and ensure that the Indian Act was being enforced by controlling many aspects of their lives.



Church Group (Photo: Courtesy of Wahta Mohawks First Nation)

## Over The Years

By 1932, Wahta had 255 people listed as members. While there were families that continued to move to the community, the population did not increase much over 20 years, as some did return to Kanehsatà:ke. The membership list had only 230 people by 1953, and in fact it declined to 214 by 1960 and further declined to 204 in 1974.

Some of the reasons for this decline, could be attributed to the 60's Scoop, enfranchisement and relocating to find employment. During the "60's Scoop", many First Nation children were taken from their homes and placed in foster or adoptive care. Enfranchisement often occurred through marriage, where women were forced to give

up status if they married someone who was not a status Indian. When this happened, not only did these women and their subsequent children, lose their status, but with that, all of their rights to live on the land, which inherently disconnected them from their community, culture and language. This practice, conducted by the Government of Canada at that time, was ultimately forcing the Indigenous population to assimilate.



Community Members (Photo: Courtesy of Wahta Mohawks First Nation)

The Wahta membership began to increase again by 1982 to 241 members.

In 1993, the Wahta population rose to 609 members; many of these members lived beyond the Wahta borders. During this time, many Indigenous people



around Canada were retaining their status and community memberships due to Bill C-31 and Indigenous community memberships across the country were on the rise.

For a small community like Wahta, it can be hugely impactful to remain a strong presence within the greater Muskoka region. Presently, the Wahta Mohawk Territory has approximately 175 individuals living on the territory and a membership of approximately 742

members who live across Canada and in the United States. These numbers may increase yet again, due to the recent Bill S-3, which would allow people who are entitled, the ability to have their name added to a band list.

Throughout the history of Wahta, the people in the community have developed an incredible amount of resilience, both as individuals and the community as a whole. The resettlement of families to the Wahta lands, the impositions of the Canadian Government and school systems, all but could have destroyed such a small group of people, but, instead the community persevered through hard work and a commitment to building a better life.

It was not only these large governmental impacts that threatened life in Wahta, but community members also experienced an incredible number of house fires. They had devised their own system of fighting fires, even without a fire department to rely on. The community came together to fight both house and forest fires alike, to help preserve their community and its members.

As a tight knit community, the people of Wahta enjoyed the land in which they resided and even though they had to work hard, they still took time to enjoy it.

As cited in A History of the Wahta Mohawk Community, many Elders remember holding community picnics on Picnic Island, while others remember the baseball games in the field beside the old school;

presently the Cultural Healing Centre. The community would also gather regularly at the church for many events and worship.

Wahta Mohawks is a relatively new name for the community. For most of its existence the community was known as Gibson Reserve. In 1991, the community changed

the name to reflect both the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) language and culture, but also the physical environment that surrounds the community.

The word Wah:ta, is a Kanien'kehá:ka word that translates to "sugar maple". Most people who live in or have visited the Muskoka region will understand why this is perfect name for our community, located in the beautiful Muskoka region. Wah:ta is telling both of the land, but also the gift which the land provides to us. The Wahta Mohawk membership embraced the name change and viewed it as one more step towards reclaiming their traditional language and culture.

While much has changed in the community over the years, there are daily reminders of our humble past and hardworking roots scattered among its' land and people. Currently, the community is working to record as much of their history and traditions as possible in order to preserve the culture and language. However, one concept that holds strong throughout Wahta's history, is the belief that among every challenge, there lies a great opportunity!



Gibson Braves Baseball Team (Photo: Courtesy of Wahta Mohawks First Nation)



# Timeline Information

1600's - Two Row Wampum Treaty created with the Dutch

1881 - Delegation from Oka inspects Gibson Township

1881 - Chief: Louis Sahanatien (from Kanehsatà:ke)

1881 - Wahta Community settles on new territory (November 1)

1883 - Chief: Angus Cook - community dispute as to direction of leadership,

1884 - First postmaster, Louis Sahanatien was appointed

1885 - First church built at Wahta

1886 - First road to Bala opens

1886 - First school opens in Wahta (government run school - open until 1952)

1887 - Mohawks of Tyendinaga asked to purchase land in Gibson Township but it was declined in case more residents of Kanehsatà:ke arrived

1893 - Chief: Francis Decaire

1895 - First "Indian Agent" at Wahta

1901 - Mission House built

1900's - First saw mill opened (behind Wayne decaire)

1902 - First bridges built across Musquash and Moon Rivers

1902 - Chief: Louis Sahanatien

1906 - Chief: Napoleon Commandant

1907 - Forest fires

1908 - Second church built

1910 - Chief: Louis Sahanatien

1914 - Forest fire

1915 - Chief: Peter Strength

1915 - Hunting restricted to Wahta territory for Wahta community members

1919 - 10,787 acres of the Wahta territory lost to the Province of Ontario

1921 - Chief: Mitchell News

1921 - Sub school opened in Peter Strength's house, to service students in that area of the community. Meary Strengths (Peter's daughter) was the teacher. It closed in 1921.

1924 - Chief: Albert Commandant

1926 - Maximum extent of farmlands established

1927 - Chief: Mitchell Franks

1931 - Chiefs monument built to honour the pioneer chiefs of the community and celebrate the leader's over the first 50 years

1932 - Chief: Isaiah Sahanatien

1933 - Department of Indian Affairs (now Northern



Isiah Sahanatien, Elected Chief 1930  
(Photo: Courtesy of Wahta Mohawks First Nation)

and Indigenous Affairs) transfers Big Eddy lands to Hydro

1937 - Wahta council passed a resolution to petition for the right to hunt and trap anywhere outside of the reserve and wanted protection from the game warden.

1941 - Chief: Albert Commandant

1942 - Wahta land is flooded by Ontario Hydro

1942 - Church Creek dries up

1946 - Council resolves former hunting and trapping issue by having a community game warden

1947 - Chief: Robert Stock



(Photo: Rachel Franks)

- 1952 - Chief: Gordon Sahanatien
- 1952 - Second School built (Government run school, located where Cultural Healing Center is now - open until 1958)
- 1954 - Dorothy Strength becomes the first female Councillor elected (1951 *Indian Act* declared women eligible to vote and run in band elections)
- 1957 - Wahta bought a trapping license from the Provincial Department of Forestry to allow them to trap in areas of the land claim territory.
- 1958 - Wahta children began attending off reserve schools
- 1958 - Hwy 69 was built through Wahta territory
- 1960 - "Status Indians" in Canada provided the right to vote in federal elections
- 1961 - Chief: Sidney Commandant
- 1966 - development of Iroquois Cranberry Growers began
- 1967 - Muskoka Road 38 began construction in 1967 (paved in 1972 and 1973)
- 1969 - Last "Indian Agent" at Wahta
- 1973 - Chief: Kenneth Commandant
- 1970s - Annual Wahta baseball game and community picnics are hosted
- 1975 - First harvest of Iroquois Cranberry Growers of approximately 600,000 pounds
- 1975 - Muskoka Road 38 is completed, the road is straightened out to allow easier travel.
- 1990 - Chief: Stephen Stock
- \*\*1990 - Highway blockade (hwy 400?? Oka??)
- 1993 - Lyla Commandant becomes the first, and so far only, female chief elected in Wahta
- 1995 - Chief: Stephen Stock
- 1996 - New Band Office opened which allowed the administration and staff to more easily service the needs of the community
- 1996 - Gibson Reserve name is officially changed to Wahta Mohawks
- 1999 - Wahta Church is burned down (July)
- 1999 - Chief: Blaine Commandant
- 2003 - Wahta Church is rebuilt
- 2002 - Chief: Blaine Commandant
- 2010 - Wahta gym opens
- 2012 - Nursing Center opens
- 2014 - Chief: Philip Franks (to present 2018)
- 2017 - Iroquois Cranberry Growers closes all operations
- 2017 - Cultural Healing Centre Opens
- 2018 - Language revitalization strategy built

# Treaties

The Wahta Mohawks do not have the typical land treaties in place that many other communities have. This may have to do with the fact that these are not their traditional lands, but rather the lands that they were moved to. Therefore, the treaties that are acknowledged by the Wahta Mohawks are some of the longest standing.

## Two Row Wampum

The Two Row Wampum Treaty between the Haudenosaunee, specifically the Kanien'kehá:ka and the Dutch in 1613 is the most acknowledged treaty by the Wahta Mohawks. The Two Row Wampum belt is fairly recognizable and more commonly referred to. It is made up of two rows of purple beads, separated by a row of white beads on either side. The two rows are equal in size and run parallel. This was designed to represent the two nations and their relationship to each other; both are equal to each other and will co-exist on the



Two Row Wampum (Photo: Donna Young)

land, but it is also a reminder that both nations shall retain their own beliefs, identity, culture, language and traditions.

This treaty is widely referred to as it encompasses the same beliefs that we are striving for today.

Similar to the Two Row Wampum is the Covenant Chain which was made between the Haudenosaunee

and the Royal Crown, there was no land attached to this treaty, but rather, it was a way of existing with each other.

## Great Peace Treaty

The Great Peace Treaty was another historical treaty made between New France, the Kanien'kehá:ka and other First Nations. This treaty was created in 1701, in what is now known as Montreal. This agreement came to be, while the the Onkwehoweh was working both with both the French and the British. Six months after this treaty was designed, a similar peace treaty was made in New York between the French and the Huron.

## Nanfan Treaty

The Nanfan Treaty or Deed is yet another historical treaty made between the Haudenosaunee and the Crown in 1701. This treaty placed traditional beaver hunting grounds under protection. This treaty was meant to protect our hunting and fishing rights, but it is problematic because some of the lands were placed under the British.

In fact, a number of years ago, a Wahta member challenged this treaty in court after he was caught fishing up near Lake Superior, which is part of the lands within the Nanfan Treaty. This community member went to court, but did not win the case. At that time, Wahta did not appeal the ruling, due to the amount of money and the strength of the case, however, it did ignite a battle to assert hunting and fishing rights among First Nations people.

This is an issue that the Wahta Council and Community continue to spend time and effort focusing on in order to develop their own appropriate policy to ensure that hunting and fishing rights are preserved as well as the local wildlife.

## Robinson Huron Treaty

There is some controversy over whether the Wahta



Mohawks are in fact a part of the Robinson Huron Treaty. This treaty was made between the Anishinabek Nation and the Crown in 1850 and essentially allowed initial exploration and exploitation of the land.

The reason for the controversy over this treaty, is because, technically Wahta Mohawks resides on the lands that were included in the treaty, however, we were not signatories on the treaty and therefore, the community does not benefit from the treaty.

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## Settlement & Land Claims

As mentioned in the previous section, “A Brief History of the Wahta Community”, the people of Wahta relocated on the territory after ongoing disputes in Kanehsatà:ke. Before they arrived, three delegates from Kanehsatà:ke, travelled to Wahta to see the land they were being offered. It was only after several days, when they saw all of the different parts of the territory that they agreed, because they realized that each area had its own strengths. However, in 1918, the Government decided to repossess over 10,000 acres of the land that was given to the community members.

This land was no longer accessible to the Wahta community members to own and develop. Instead, it was taken back and eventually sold to non-indigenous people, many of whom now use this land seasonally, like much of the other land in Muskoka.

Over the last few years, the Wahta Band Councils, have been working with Indigenous and Northern Affairs, the Ministry of Natural Resources to reclaim some of those lands. The reclamation process is incredibly long and tedious. It requires significant time and effort on

behalf of the Wahta Community and Band Council in order to maintain momentum and ensure that the process moves forward. Although it seems it should be mostly the Government’s responsibility to ratify this wrongdoing, in fact, the people of Wahta are required to dedicate the time and effort needed to proceed with this endeavour.

In fact, some of the land located on McMaster Lake in between Wahta and Mactier was purchased back by one of the former Band Councils in an effort to return the land to the community, it is currently being held in trust.

This is not the only land claim that the Wahta community has had to work for. Shortly after members settled on the lands, Hydro also began a project to develop the lands, particularly around the Moon and Musquash Rivers. This in an effort to generate power for the growing region. Over a number of years, Hydro

built dams, cut trees and flooded lands to prepare and service people all over Muskoka. They did so, without much regard to the Wahta community and its future. During the construction of the dams and power lines, they damaged over 225 acres, as well as creating many



A Muskoka River (Photo: Brian Lasenby)

more issues for the community.

Over the years, the impact that the Big Eddy dam and various power lines was becoming more and more obvious to both the people and the environment. Therefore, in 1973 research on the Ontario Hydro land claim began. This process continued for almost 25 years. An incredible amount of work went into this joint project. Ontario Hydro team members worked alongside the the Wahta Mohawk Chief and Council at the time and Project Coordinator, Beverley Franks to understand the damage the Hydro projects had on the community.

Throughout the Hydro Grievance, testimony was gathered from many of the community elders at the time, both in Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) and English. Most of these interviews were recorded, and all were translated.

ed. Archival research, including legal documents, correspondence, maps and photographs were taken into account and comparisons were made between; the land before and after and the compensation paid for indigenous and non-indigenous properties.

Finally, in 1997 the two sides reached a settlement. However, as far as many community members are concerned, the damage that was done to the land, wildlife and the impact on daily lives is something that is not so easily mended.

While this land claim is ultimately "settled", the effects still remain and will continue to affect both the people and their relationship to the land for all future generations. Not only will the memories linger, but the ongoing requests from outside companies to leverage our land remains a threat for the community.

*"You know, money can't  
replace what they've taken."*

Elder - Oral History Project, Grievance Resolution,  
Wahta Mohawks and Ontario Hydro, December 1997

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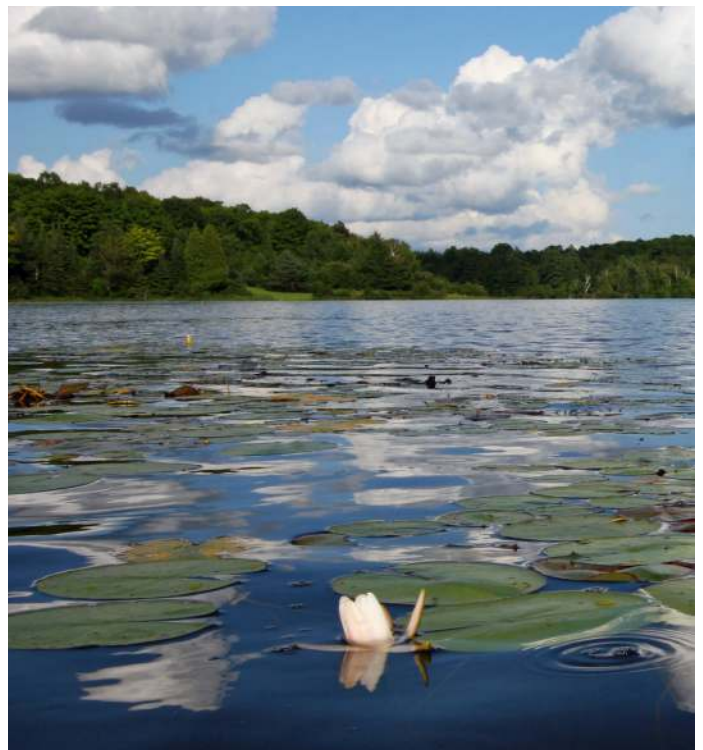
## Environmental Issues

### Water

Sadly, the Wahta Mohawk community echos some of the same issues that plague many of Canada's First Nation communities. For instance, Wahta is part of the over 70% of indigenous communities around the country who are under boil water advisories, or have been under order, to not consume their water.

The Wahta community has officially been under a water advisory since 2013. However, there have been a number of short term water advisories in effect as far back as 2001.

Some of the issues with the water are due to the fact that homes rely on their wells for the water. The water in these wells is often hard and extremely high in manganese and iron. The tile beds in these wells are old, thus, the risk for contamination is even higher. The Band Administration office frequently offers water testing to community members and can conduct



Water Lilies (Photo: Brian Lasenby)

the bacterial testing, but when it comes to testing the water for sodium and other minerals, the water must be sent out to receive results.

On top of all of this, the sodium levels in the water are very high. Some believe that this is due to amount of salt that is used on the highways during the winter. This salt is absorbed into the land and water.

At one point in time, Health Canada used to conduct chemical tests on the community's water. However, that no longer is carried out by Health Canada, and the Wahta community does not have the resources to monitor these types of environmental issues.

Recently, Wahta has been awarded funding to support the implementation of a water treatment plan. Both the Provincial and Federal governments have committed to each contributing one third of the funding to launch the project, with Wahta to contribute the remaining third. In its initial phase, the treatment plant will service approximately 20-25% of the community. While, this is a great opportunity, this project will take time. The council will need to determine a location for the plant and locate not only one, but two wells in that area that meet the requirements to support the plant. If none can be accessed nor found, the council will have to drill two new ones.

One of the major issues that Wahta will face when moving forward with this project both with drilling wells and with expansion, is that it sits upon a great deal of bedrock. This type of geography will drastically increase the cost of construction as blasting will be required to further development.

Even still, Wahta is lucky to have the opportunity to begin this process and is excited for the positive changes ahead.

## Wildlife Conservation, Hunting and Fishing

Presently, the Wahta Band Council is working to update an existing environmental policy. Part of this policy is set to include a new hunting and fishing bylaw. The existing bylaw is from the 1970's and does not yet include any mechanisms to monitor the wildlife and other species.

Some of the questions that have come to light during this current iteration of the bylaw include:

How do we preserve both the wildlife and our traditional hunting and fishing practices?

Should we allow other First Nations community members to hunt and fish on Wahta territory and can we expect them to acknowledge the bylaw?

Do we limit hunting and fishing to Wahta members or do we allow non-indigenous community members, such as spouses, the same rights as listed members?

If we allow hunting and fishing of outside members, do we ask for taxes, by way of meat to use to prepare meals for community events?

The Band Council has been seeking community consultation to help create this new policy to ensure that both conservation as well as community use and vision is taken into consideration.



Loon (Photo: Brian Lasenby)





## Hydro Project Effects on the Environment

The Hydro project that is referenced in many other sections, again, surfaces here as many of the implications of this project had a detrimental effect on the environment. While it is difficult to review all of the issues in detail, some of the most obvious effects on the environment are due to flooding. These flooded rivers and lands, had an impact not only on the vegetation in and around the rivers and flooded areas, but also on the wildlife. Land animals and humans alike, experienced a reduction of their land use, some requiring to relocate entirely, while the impact on water quality and changes to rivers, affected traditional fish spawning waters. There were many changes that occurred in the lakes, specifically, Brophy and LaForce Lakes.

## Landfill Site

Another, more contemporary environmental issue that some community members have highlighted, is the landfill site. While the Wahta landfill does have recycling bins available, many households do not sort their recycling from their garbage. Presently, there is no way of monitoring or enforcing this as standard practice among households. Without a pickup garbage service, the community must take their own garbage to the landfill. This in itself, can be a difficult task for some, however, this also means, there are no consequences for unsorted trash.

One of the goals that community wants to consider in the near future, is creating an easy to use system or process to encourage all households to recycle.



## Bala Falls Hydro Project

While the Bala Falls hydro project that is underway, does not directly involve Wahta Mohawk lands, it has been in the forefront of a larger controversy in the eyes of the community.

Over the years, both government and independent businesses are expected to obtain First Nations consultation, especially with respect to lands. The idea behind these consultations, are meant to provide traditional information and cultural understanding of the lands. Hopefully this will highlight the impact these projects will have on the land, the effects on future generations and the impact on nearby communities.

The issue that Chief Philip Franks was attempting to highlight during his highly publicized protest at the Bala Falls in 2014, was that Swift River Energy Limited had not carried out the proper consultation with the nearby First Nations communities. The Bala Falls, flows into the Moon River, which runs through part of the Wahta territory. Therefore, the Canadian Government and any company working on this project has an obligation to consult regularly with the community as the project progresses and evolves over time. Chief Franks' goal was to draw attention to the consultation process itself as being problematic. Not only was the process inadequate but highly unregulated.

Even through these are some of the basic treaty rights of indigenous people, the Canadian Government had no standardized practice. This meant that from ministry to ministry the expectations of these "consultations" varied greatly and often the wants and needs of the First Nations communities were largely ignored.

While it is too late for the Bala Falls project, the Indigenous and Northern Affairs department of the Government has updated their guidelines to better outline the expectations for consultation with First Nations communities.



Church Group with Children (Photo: Courtesy of Wahta Mohawks First Nation)

## Education

### Education in the Early Years

Throughout the years, Wahta members have experienced various evolutions of education. Shortly after the original members settled here, the first school was built. This school was run by the government, and the teachers were appointed by the church. Over the years, most of these teachers were not licensed or trained, thus, the turnover of these teachers was very high. Many only stayed for a few years before moving on.

While education was highly regarded in the community, it was sometimes, not very well attended. Like many communities at that time, traveling to and from school was difficult. Eventually, a second school was built that was intended to be more accessible for everyone, located centrally - in what is now the Cultural Healing Center.

Both of the schools in the Wahta community were strictly day schools as opposed to residential schools that many First Nations children at this time attended. While there are some members who have fond memories of their time at these schools, many also have more distressing memories of their experiences

within the schoolhouse walls and the relationship with the teachers. The Kanien'kehá language was not to be spoken and there were strict punishments for breaking this rule.

The school in the community remained open until the early 1950's. Once the school closed in Wahta, students began traveling to attend school in Bala at the Legion and in Port Carling. This made education even more difficult. Families wanted their children to go to school, but once they had to travel outside of the community, this became much more difficult for many reasons.

Thankfully, the majority of the Wahta Mohawk members did not attend residential schools. However, the effects on those who did attend residential schools, or the day schools run by the church, have left a huge impact on the community. The efforts needed to heal those wounds will undoubtedly take an incredible amount of time, but the Wahta community is committed to working toward healing and creating a better way of life for future generations.

## Attending School Off Community Land

When children began attending schools outside of the Wahta Territory, there were many challenges that stood in the way of success. For many, school was a place where they would face incredible amounts of racism, both socially and systemic.

Once children were old enough, they were forced to leave home to live in a boarding house or had to find a home to attend high school. Some lived in large boarding houses, while others boarded with families. Many youth moved to Bracebridge or Gravenhurst, but some traveled as far as Toronto to take specialty courses such as business so they could find careers such as secretaries.

Eventually, buses began running from the community to the local elementary and high schools which allowed the young students to remain home with their families until they completed grade 12.

## Education Today

Today, the Wahta youth living in the community attend many schools in Muskoka. It has been a priority for the community and the Education Coordinator at Wahta Mohawks, to ensure that Wahta students feel both empowered and successful in school.

The Trillium Lakelands District School Board has been given a copy of “O Canada” sung in Kanien’kehá by the Wahta ladies drum group, The Singing Birds. This version of the national anthem is played in rotation with the French and English versions of the anthem at Glen Orchard Public School. You can request a copy from the TLDSB or from that Wahta Mohawks Education Coordinator.

The Education Coordinator works closely with Trillium Lakelands District School Board (TLDSB) to develop deep relationships both with school officials,

teachers, students and parents. Much of the improvement and success of the students can be attributed to these relationships that have been built over the years. Wahta and TLDSB now have an education agreement that has a focus on strengthening the whole child and keeping in mind the best interests of all students from Wahta. Together, they have created a First Nations Metis Inuit (FNMI) Committee, that meets regularly to share efforts and initiatives in their school and discuss further opportunities for improvement. The committee members include principals, the Wahta Education Coordinator, superintendent and/or director and teachers.

One of the most recent and exciting projects that the FNMI team are developing is a cultural room at Glen Orchard Public School. Here, one of the classroom spaces at the school has been transformed into a learning space called, Tsi Iontiarorokstha, which means, “The Gathering Place”. This room is meant to provide all students with a place to learn about the environment, traditional knowledge and where any indigenous students at the school can take pride in their culture and enable them to become or continue to be ambassadors of their community, culture, and bring light to indigenous issues and concerns. By building the students capacity and providing a platform for sharing, the hope is that Wahta students will not only see themselves represented at the school, but supported, celebrated and admired for their traditional knowledge.

Students are encouraged to take on the responsibility to teach their school community about their traditions and culture. Often students choose to do this through various artistic endeavours, whether that be a play, visual arts, written or oral stories and poems.

The hope is that the Wahta Community, Glen Orchard Public School and the Trillium Lakelands District School Board can work toward a shared vision of developing curriculum for land-based learning right on the school property to not only benefit Wahta youth, but all students.

Over last 10 years, graduation rates of Wahta students out of high school are nearly 100 percent. Before the current Education Coordinator began in 1991, only about 20 percent of Wahta students graduated from



high school. But after the community began working closely with TLDSB and the families of elementary students, graduation rates went up quickly, including students with special education needs.

## Elementary Schools

Glen Orchard Public School (TLDSB)

Gravenhurst Public School (TLDSB)

Beechgrove Public School (TLDSB)

Rosseau Lake College (Independent)

Tawingo College (Independent)

## Secondary Schools

Gravenhurst High School (TLDSB)

Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School (TLDSB)

St. Dominic's High School (Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board)

Rosseau Lake College (Independent)

Supporting Education in Wahta

## Tutoring

Presently, the community offers weekly tutoring support to students at the Cultural Healing Centre as well as leveraging a number of established programs to assist students in finding success in school whether that be in mathematics, languages, special needs support, and social emotional learning.

## Holistic Understanding of Students

Much like the success of any other relationship, communication is a key. Wahta Mohawks Education Coordinator, Carol Holmes, along with both TLDSB elementary and high school principals meet twice a year to discuss each student individually. This allows staff to get to know each student on a holistic level and supports transitions early on for greater success. Often, students are paired up to get to know new schools before they transition. In fact, many kindergarten teachers come out to the Wahta community to meet with parents, provide private school tours, and consolidate programming to best meet the physical, social, mental and spiritual needs of each child.

*My own father, Peter Franks, shared his high school experience when I was about enter my grade 9 year. My father and his family had moved to Wahta from Kanehsatà:ke in the spring. Come fall, he had to uproot yet again to attend Gravenhurst High School. He lived in a boarding house, minutes from the school along with several other boarders. He shared some of the struggles he had living away from his parents and siblings. He was the eldest and first to leave home at only 15 years old.*

*While he was involved in various school activities, such as being on the Gravenhurst High School gymnastics team, he still had his fair share of difficulty. Living "in town", away from his family was difficult and lonely. Although he completed high school, it did not come without some of the burdens inevitably inflicted by having so much independence at such a young age. The community as he knew it, his culture and the close knit family he was accustomed to having, was absent during the school year, and this had an everlasting impact.*

*My Dad had a personal connection to the land and nature, that was incredibly strong. But, when attending school in Gravenhurst and later in Bracebridge this passion was difficult to foster in the way he longed for. As an adult, particularly in his last year of life, he made every effort to get back to the land spending time learning from the environment and teaching my brothers and I, as much as he could in the time he had left.*

*While I know my Dad appreciated and valued his education, it was always clear to us that some of his best learning happened when he was either in his canoe or wandering through the bush.*

Rachel Franks, 2018

## Celebrating Success

At the end of every school year, the Wahta community throws a celebration to honour the students' hard work, achievements and next steps. Families, community members, teachers, principals, Superintendents, Trustees, Board Directors are all invited. Each student is highlighted and celebrated. It is both motivating and impactful not only for the student, but everyone in attendance and provides a further sense of community and support for each child.

## Building Strong Relationships

Ultimately, what has made the most impact on education, are the dedicated efforts to build strong relationships between the community, families, teachers, schools, administrators and the boards. These relationships foster better understanding and empathy and allow the focus to be directed to each individual child as a whole. The commitment that senior administrators have demonstrated is a great start and the hope is for that to continue both with the support of the Wahta Community and the school bodies.

## Education Successes and Challenges

All of the commitment and effort that the Wahta community has put into Education has had a great impact on the success of individual students from the community as well as the relationships between schools and families.

Wahta students, as well as other First Nation, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) students are self-identifying and with greater confidence. This heightened sense of self-worth can help to lay the foundation for a positive future for these students. These high levels of self-identification may be linked to the number of initiatives, symposiums and Indigenous role models that have been highlighted in the board over the last few years.

However, there is still a lot of work to be done. While students face less racism in schools, Indigenous stu-

dents still face additional challenges. Access to information can still be challenging for families in Wahta, including information on school or board websites about services, bursaries, scholarships, and other supports. The relationships that are in place now are very strong, but as time goes on, the commitment to Wahta students must remain for this success to continue.

Finally, as time goes on, it is important that greater representation of Indigenous people be evident throughout all aspects of local education from school employees, to board members, trustees and other experts. Creating opportunities for Knowledge-Keepers and other First Nation community members to share their traditional skills and knowledge can help to strengthen both the entire Wahta community. Also, the sharing of this knowledge can help build a positive self-identity for Wahta students and help to build the relationship with the local school communities. Maintaining strong relationships with schools, can help to open many doors, that will provide benefits for many generations.

## Post-Secondary Education

Growing numbers of Wahta students have gone on to post secondary, finding success in a variety of fields such as, nursing, social work, education, various streams of science and arts programs.

According to the Wahta's Education Coordinator, almost every student who goes on to attend post-secondary schooling has graduated successfully. This is largely due to the supports that have been developed over the years and tireless effort of the community and Carol Holmes, specifically, to ensure students learn to advocate for themselves within the system. The motivation from Wahta students is also an incredible factor. Demonstrating the drive to both attempt and achieve these goals is something that continues to build momentum among the youth in the community.



# Governance

The Wahta Mohawks are governed by an elected Chief and Council as dictated under the Indian Act guidelines. While the community technically governs themselves, the structure is directly linked to the Canadian government and is viewed by some members of the community as a continued act of colonization. Much like other First Nation communities, each election of Chief and Council can have a dramatic impact on the community as a whole as this way of determining governance has been imposed.

While some other Mohawk communities have some form of traditional governance represented in the community, Wahta does not have its own. At this time, the Longhouse in Wahta is used primarily for teaching culture and language.

The Wahta Chief, Council and many members, believe that we are at a crossroads when it comes to our governance. We can either maintain the structure put in place by the federal government or, we can begin to develop our own structure. While having our own, more traditional system is the more preferred approach when thinking about the future, it does not come without its issues.

Creating, or reverting back to a more traditional Council, will not be easy after so many years of living

in a country that, for much of its history, was focused on eradicating the cultures and languages of First Nation peoples. For instance, even implementing the traditional clan system presents many issues. While some individuals know their clan, many do not fully

understand the roles and responsibilities that come with your clan and the role you take on in your clan. Not only that, but many community members, do not fall under the traditional clan system, as the clan is passed down through the mother.

Therefore, finding the right balance of traditional and modern approaches takes time and is highly complicated. At this moment in time, the Wahta Chief and Council is beginning the process of working towards

this bigger vision by working with the community to update or rewrite the Membership Code. It is of the utmost importance to have community engagement during this process as it will essentially inform where we go in the future. The difficulty is sometimes defining what it means to be a Wahta Mohawk. This can be challenging as so many of our members have dual backgrounds and so developing a common understanding of who we are as a people can take time. What is most important is that the community works together to maintain a strong and healthy community.



Adam White and Isiah Sahanatien  
(Photo: Courtesy of Wahta Mohawks First Nation)





# Administration & Community Supports

The Wahta Mohawks Band Administration building is really where a lot of the great community supports are born. The staff work, often collaboratively to design supports, facilitate programs and bring in experts to help the community thrive. The Band Administrator and office staff work endlessly, to ensure the community's needs are met.

As a service provider, the departments ensure that there are a variety of programs available to support the community in living a well-balanced life. There is a large focus on the children and youth since they are the future of our community. In fact, in the 1990s it became clear, that many of the children in Wahta were demonstrating anti-social behaviours, therefore the staff began to design programs to help kids prepare for school. Nowadays, these programs have greatly expanded to also focus on teaching culture and helping to strengthen their resilience and sense of self identity.

The Health Services Team works collaboratively with several other departments, to develop, plan and imple-

ment programming for members of all ages.

While Chief and Council are separate from the Band Administration, they work closely together to ensure



Wahta Mohawks First Nation Administration Building (Photo: Rachel Franks)

that the programs reflect the needs of the community and are focused on revitalizing culture and language. They even hold an annual consolidated program planning meeting, where program staff come together to discuss community needs to move towards holistic programming. This is an example of

how the Yoga and Mindfulness programs came to be.

## Resources

The Band Administration is responsible for many resources available to the community. The band office is home to the Wahta Library, and hosts a variety of activities. There is a large multifunctional hall with a stage, suitable for wedding receptions, fairs, large presentations, among other events. The Administration also services the Health Hub in maintaining the gym and outdoor walking track. The Cultural Centre is another building that hosts a variety of events,



Medicine baskets (Photo: Rachel Franks)

speakers, and many of the child and youth programs. The grounds of the Cultural Centre is also home to a playground, tennis court, baseball diamond and community garden.

These resources are fully accessible to community members. Most of the programs and services offered by the administration are made available free of charge.

## Children and Families

Health Services provides many types of programming and events for children and families over the course of the year. There are many activities to attend from a variety of crafting lessons, to day trips and of course, cultural programming and wellness supports. Wahta also has a number of annual programs and special events have been running for many years. Community members look forward to participating in these activities with their friends and families each year. The Health Services team also continue to develop new initiatives such as the Early Years Program that began in April, 2018 to better the community.

### Crafting and Cultural Programs

- Wreath making for kids and families (Spring)
- Paddle painting (Fall)
- Traditional Kids Camp (March Break and Summer)
- Cultural Storytelling guest speakers
- Roles and Responsibilities workshop
- Aboriginal Day Celebration
- Skirt making

### Day Trips and Outings

- Children's apple picking (Fall)
- Pumpkin Inferno (Fall)
- Wet'n'Wild Water Park (Summer)
- St. Jacob's Market
- Family Day Weekend skating on ice trail (Winter)
- Family Skates in Bala (Winter)
- Santa's Village (Summer)
- Midland Pow Wow (Summer)

### Supports for Children/Families

- After school programming (3-4 days per week)



(Photo: Rachel Franks)

- Dolly Parton Imagination Literacy Program
- Early Years Program (0-6 years)
- Swimming lessons (Summer)
- One-on-one camp support
- Assistance with Jordan's Principle Applications
- Non-Insured Health Benefits

### Wellness Initiatives

- Children's mental health referrals
- Mother's Support Group
- Healthy Relationships workshops
- Mental Health Fair
- Student nutrition program (school aged children)

Children's mental and holistic wellness is at the forefront of all programming offered to children and families in Wahta. The Health Services and Education teams work hard to ensure that the needs of the children in the community are met and that the community is supportive of their needs. Dr. Ed Connors is one of the many mental wellness supports that Wahta members leverage in a variety of contexts due to his understanding of the traditional and cultural ways of knowing and doing. Another great support for families are the social welfare workers from B'Saanibamaadsiwin (Aboriginal Mental Health Program) which is a division of the Canadian Mental Health Association and Enaahtig Healing Lodge.

Over the years, a greater emphasis has been placed on traditional and cultural programming. Kara Wan-oth-Mee has begun planning both youth and family



camping excursions, as well as teaching youth traditional skills such as hide tanning, skirt making, and supporting the traditional camps that take place at the Wahta Community Longhouse.

Recently the Health Services team has implemented both a Student Nutrition Program and a Good Food Box initiative. Both aim at providing children and families with nutritious food. The Student Nutrition Program consists of a bag of healthy snacks for the week that they can take to school. These bags are made up by the Wahta after school team. School aged children can access this program free of charge.

The Good Food Box is designed for families and adults. This box costs families between \$10-15 per week and is full of vegetables and fruit. Both of these programs have been widely adopted by the community, again, supporting the development of the whole child.

## Adult and Elder Programming

While there are many programs offered specifically for children and youth, the Health Services team also creates programming that is open to all members. These programs help to foster a sense of community. They also ensure that there are a variety of programs available for the adults and Elders of the community.

Some of the programs offered to adults and/or Elders in Wahta include:



(Photo: Donna Young)

## Crafting and Cultural Programs

- Roles and Responsibilities workshop
- Paddling Painting
- Wreath Making
- Moccasin Making
- Mitten Making
- Beading
- Snow Snake making
- Community Circle Training

## Day Trips and Outings

- Community Shopping Days
- Elder's Conference
- Wellness Conference
- Halloween Haunt
- Christmas Luncheon
- Golf Tournament

## Supports for Elders

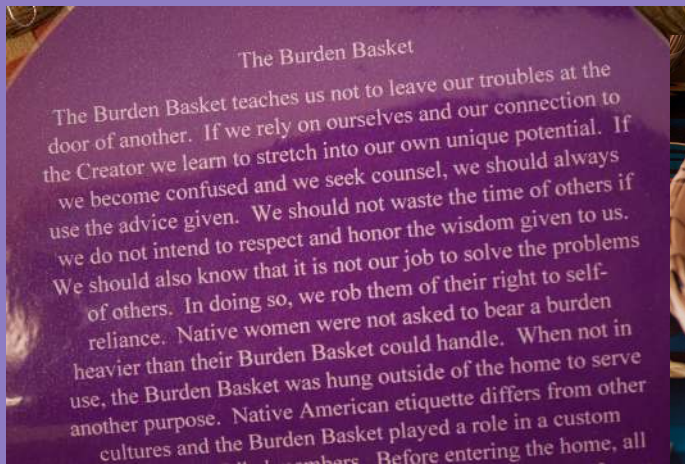
- Meals on Wheels
- Traditional Healers (visits community 4 times per year)
- Homemakers (PSW support)
- Medical travel
- Non-Insured Health Benefits
- Snowplowing
- Yard maintenance

## Wellness Initiatives

- Pole Walking (twice weekly)
- Healthy living programs (diabetes, foot care, dietitian support, blood pressure, etc.)
- Chair exercise
- Mental health support
- Health Fair - essential oils workshop
- Good Food Box
- Yoga and Mindfulness classes

The administration also ensures that families, specifically Elders, are safe during storms, power outages, and extreme weather watches. Community members visit vulnerable people in the community and provide them with water and other resources, if needed.





Burden Basket (Photo: Rachel Franks)

## Knowledge-Keepers and Language Supports

Unfortunately, there are only a few Knowledge-Keepers and native language speakers left in the community. The community recognizes that we must put forth the time and effort to preserve our culture and language and this is a critical time.

Our Kanien'kehá speakers are dwindling. Presently, there are approximately five left in the community. While we do have some resurgence of the language in second language speakers, there is significant work to be done in order to maintain our rich traditions.

Recently, Ryan Decaire, worked along language experts and Elders to create a Language Strategy that the community is excited to implement. Ryan is a second language speaker and has spent a number of years learning the language through an immersion program in Six Nations, and by speaking with community Elders both in Wahta as well as other Mohawk communities.

Grace Franks has also been a great resource for language preservation throughout the years, teaching alongside her sister Mina who lives in Kanehsatà:ke. The pair have taught in several communities.

Dennis Stock and Carol News are also first language speakers who continue to use their language and share

it with others.

The language is widely tied to the culture and vice versa. Therefore, we understand just how great the impact would be if we were to lose the language.

Terry and Lucia Sahanatien have put in endless hours of learning and practicing Kanien'kehá:ka traditions and creating a space to share their knowledge with community members at the Wahta Community Longhouse. Terry, who is also sometimes known as the Pine Tree Chief, Kanenrahkénia:te, organizes community socials where they teach songs, dances and conduct traditional teachings, such as the Creation Story, Origin of the Clans, among many other lessons. In fact, their grandson, Iohate has also become very knowledgeable of the culture and continues to both learn and share his traditional ways of knowing with others.

The Wahta community also seeks support from other Kanien'kehá:ka Knowledge-Keepers outside of the community such as Tom Porter, to teach and mentor the community in their cultural revitalization journey.

# Role Models

There are many community members who are recognized as role models in their own way, who leverage their gifts to contribute positively to the community. Their contributions help to develop a respectful environment as they promote the language, traditions and heritage of the community.

**Pine Tree Chief Kanenrahkénia:te** (Terry Sahanatien) and **Iohate Sahanatien** and **Lucia Sahanatien** are constantly working both within the community and outside, to revitalize traditional culture, language and educate neighbouring communities about traditional ways. They work hard to organize community socials at the Wahta Mohawk Longhouse and they provide workshops and naming ceremonies for children and adults alike.

**Ryan Decaire** is another role model when it comes to language. The time he has spent dedicated to learning the language is admired by many, both young and old alike.

Similarly, **Grace Franks** has continued to support language development both in Wahta and many oth-

er Kanien'keha:ka communities over many decades. Both **Grace and Shirley Strength** are also recognized as role models within the church. They have demonstrated resilience and remained true to their beliefs regardless of the ebbs and flows with respect to Christianity in the community over the years in a respectful way that provides space for all.

**Stacey Decaire** is yet another community role model. Her dedication to community events, self-advocacy, growing peace in the community and her personal resilience, continues to inspire others.

**Carol Holmes** has been a pillar in the community for many years, specifically in regards to education. Her efforts to build strong relationships between the local schools, school boards and the Wahta families has made an undeniable impact in the lives of the students. Her commitment and dedication to the children and youth over the years has been immeasurable and consistently makes an effort to support efforts made by local teachers, schools and administrators to improve the quality and educational experience of the Wahta students.



War Memorial (Photo: Rachel Franks)



# Community Highlights & Initiatives

There are many highlights and initiatives in the community. These range anywhere from events such as Earth Day Clean Up days to highly involved initiatives that will impact areas such as cultural development. Some of the highlights are events that have brought members of the community, both on and off territory together, for many years, while others are in the beginning stages.

The bi-annual Fishing Derby is one the most beloved events put on in the community. It takes place both in the Summer and Winter. The Summer Fishing Derby is a legacy of the Community Picnic that was started in the earliest years of Wahta settlement. Later, it included the annual baseball game and while it has morphed, it remains a staple in the community.

## Language Revitalization

Revitalizing the language has been a priority of the community for many years, however, without a clear vision of how to accomplish this task, we have not seen as much revitalization of the language as we would

hope. However, recently, a Language Strategy Plan was developed that aims to bring that vision to fruition. Presently, the community is looking for a language activator who can help to implement the plan.

Along with the Language Strategy, there is ongoing cultural programming in the community that remains a highlight for many members. Often, basic language is infused into these programs to help kick start the revitalization.

## Cultural Healing Centre



Wahta Mohawks Cultural Healing Centre (Photo: Rachel Franks)

One of the biggest initiatives that has occurred in recent history was the transformation of the former “Indian Day School” into what is now known as the Cultural Healing Centre. The goal of this initiative is to provide the community with a safe place for healing of all kinds, from individual and family counselling, to cultural programming, naming ceremonies, and the Annual Aboriginal Day celebrations.

This is also the place where many community workshops and meetings are held. Some of these include community development, and the Good Minds Community Project.



Wahta United Church (Photo: Rachel Franks)



# Economic Development Initiatives

For many years the community of Wahta ran the Iroquois Cranberry Growers (ICG). They not only supplied large companies such as Ocean Spray with cranberries, they also created a wide variety of cranberry based products such as jam, bog honey, BBQ sauce and tea. The development of the ICG began in 1966 and slowly grew into a very successful business. In the 1990's, when the ICG was the height of its success it generated substantial revenue for the community. However, over the years as more and more cranberry operators popped up around North America, the marsh in Wahta also saw some of its worst crops, leaving the ICG in a dire situation. In 2017, the Council decided to close the cranberry marsh for good to pursue other options for the community.

Wahta has recently created the Wahta Development Corporation. Although this is a new development, they have already begun their first project called Wahta Signs Incorporated and are investigating further opportunities for expansion.



(Photo: Brian Lasenby)

Wahta Mohawks are proud to continue to grow and develop their economic portfolio. They continue to be recognized as a strong, progressive community as they begin new initiatives that will help to secure economic benefits for today, and for the future.

On top of these community-based developments, there are also a number of independent small businesses on the territory owned and operated by community members. Some of these include:

- Wahta Convenience Store and Gas
- Wahta Station
- Wahta Springs
- First Nations Liquidation

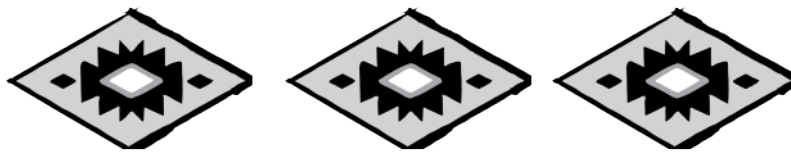




(Photo: Rachel Franks)

## Glossary

Mohawk Word	Translation	Commonly Used English Word
Haudenosaunee	People of the Longhouse	Iroquois
kanien'kehá:ka	People of the flint	Mohawk
kanien'kehá		Mohawk language
Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen	words before all else	Thanksgiving address
Onkwehonweh	original people	Original people of North America
wah:ta	sugar maple	sugar maple



# Meet the Writer



**Rachel Franks** is a proud Kanien'kehá:ka, and member of the Wahta Mohawks. While growing up in Bracebridge, she spent her childhood attending Wahta community events, participating in a variety of programming and building a deep appreciation of her community and nation. Rachel has since become a teacher who recently left the classroom to pursue her passions in reshaping education. She is currently the Education Lead at Future Design School and is determined to empower indigenous youth across Canada with the tools they need to leverage their cultural knowledge, personal skills and interests, that will prepare them for their own journey.

## Other Community Profiles Available in this Series

