

By the late seventeenth century the Michi Saagiig (Ojibwa) had successfully pushed back the Iroquois and colonial powers (French, British). They controlled much of southern Ontario and the Kawarthas for the next 100 years.

The pressures of increased European and post American Revolution migrations pushed the Indigenous populations into unwanted land treaty negotiations.

Treaty Number 20, 1818, was signed between the Crown and the 'Principal Men of the Chippewa (Ojibwa) Nation of Indians'. The first legal settlers arrived in the Kawarthas that autumn.

Treaty Number 20 meant the surrender of Indigenous land but not the loss of hunting, harvesting and propagation rights to crops like Manoomin.



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Early Indigenous History in the Kawarthas

At least 12,000 years ago First Peoples migrated into the area we know today as the Kawarthas, soon after the retreat of the great ice sheet. Their arrival has been documented by archaeologists on Rice Lake and Stony Lake near Burleigh Falls. These sites are some of the earliest human habitations found in Ontario.

As the ice sheets and water continued to diminish, about 10,000 years ago, the Kawarthas began to look more like it does today. Forests were abundant with many types of deciduous and coniferous species. These changes in turn increased the animal and fish populations which encouraged Indigenous people to stay longer in one spot and build small communities. Archaeologists have found evidence of habitations throughout the area, including Pigeon, Balsam, Stony and Rice Lakes.

The evidence archaeologists find at these sites is called 'habitation debris'. This debris could be evidence of manufacturing stone tools and cooked animal bones. Scientists have also found technological innovations like fish weirs at Lovesick Lake.

The Kawartha landscape held great spiritual and cultural meaning for the Indigenous populations (as it still does

today). Ceremonial and burial sites were used for many hundreds of years. Jacob Island in Pigeon Lake is one of these 'special' places and according to Dr. James Conolly, Professor of Archaeology at Trent University, had been used from about 4500 to 1000 years ago.

Another important site available to visitors is the Teaching Rocks, or Petroglyphs near Woodview.

Early evidence from about 2500 years ago has been uncovered on Chiminis (Big/Boyd) Island in Pigeon Lake. These sites emphasized the importance of hunting, trapping, fishing and making use of the wetland resources like Manomin (wild rice).

A more complex ceremonial centre from about 2000 years ago can be found at Serpent Mounds on Rice Lake. There are also many more places in the Kawartha Lakes where archaeologists have uncovered

marine shells, silver jewelry and musical instruments used in ritual and ceremony.

Indigenous populations began maize cultivation and 'managed' landscapes around AD1300. Fields, fruit trees, prairies and mature open forests were tended by local people who have continuously been in the Kawarthas since the ice receded.

The world of Indigenous people changed dramatically when settlers and traders from Europe began to populate North America. Samuel de Champlain came through the Kawarthas in 1615 when he, along with others over time, contributed to escalating regional warfare between Indigenous groups. Battles were fought along the Otonabee River and in the Rice Lake region. Fox Island, Buckhorn Lake was also an important skirmish site. A musket ball has been found on Jacob Island.