

**Plans for the Presentation of Indigenous History
at the Historic Saranac Lake Museum
March 14, 2022**

Land Acknowledgment

Historic Saranac Lake recognizes that the museum is located on land traditionally inhabited by the Haudenosaunee people. Historic Saranac Lake recognizes their sovereignty, respects their traditions, and supports their enduring presence here.

Presentation of Indigenous History at Historic Saranac Lake

Learning and preparation

In 2019, Historic Saranac Lake acquired the Trudeau Building at 118 Main Street for expansion of our museum exhibits at the neighboring Saranac Laboratory Museum. As we embark on interpretive planning for the future museum, we recognize that we have been failing to acknowledge the history of Indigenous peoples in the region, and that our museum has been perpetuating the misconception that there was no significant Indigenous presence in the Adirondacks before or since white settlers arrived.

To take the time to learn and develop relationships we sought a Vision Grant from Humanities NY to support consultation with John Fadden, Board Member of the Six Nations Iroquois Cultural Center, and Tim Messner, Archaeologist at SUNY Potsdam. The project included visits with Iakonikonriiosta at the Akwesasne Cultural Center and a visit to the Wild Center to see the exhibit by Dave Fadden and to speak with Jen Krester. We read various books and articles including Rural Indigenouness by Melisa Otis, “Hidden Heritage” by Curt Stager, and “History in Fragments” by Lynn Woods.

Through this learning process, we have come to understand that for thousands of years until the present day, Indigenous peoples have considered this area a homeland and an important place of resource. We see the ways our museum has reinforced the misperception that Indigenous people never really lived here.

Indigenous history in the new museum

As we plan for future exhibits in the Trudeau Building, we are thinking about ways to broaden visitors’ minds to the scope of human history in the Saranac Lake region. We plan to create, in consultation with Indigenous scholars, a small introductory exhibit and short film to introduce visitors to the reality of the long Indigenous presence in the region and challenge the misconception that there was no significant Native presence before or after white settlers arrived. This interpretation will be planned and created in paid consultation with Indigenous scholars and Indigenous museum professionals. Historic Saranac Lake does not house Indigenous artifacts in our collection. We believe that Indigenous artifacts belong in the collections of museums owned and operated by Indigenous peoples. We may petition the NY State Museum to allow us to show artifacts on loan, if they would not be otherwise shown in Indigenous museums. We envision displaying a timeline that graphically shows the length of time that Indigenous people lived in this region and a map showing the territory of the Haudenosaunee. We hope to include several illustrations by John Fadden.

What the new exhibit will not do

We have no intention to attempt to present a comprehensive history of the Indigenous people of the region. We are in no way experts on this topic, and our museum collection does not pertain to Indigenous history. The Six Nations Iroquois Cultural Center in Onchiota is where visitors should go to learn about this history. Our goal is to open minds, question misconceptions, and then direct visitors to learn more in Onchiota.