

WampumFringe

Wampum on the Fringe: Absence of a post-1610 Commodity in Delaware, And why.

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#### ABSTRACT

Production of wampum, the marine shell beads of a relatively standardized size and shape, began in the 1590s. By 1610 this native-made commodity had become a significant part of the Dutch mercantile network in the Northeast. The principle production area was around the Long Island Sound. The economics of the pelt trade, however, created the greatest demand for wampum in the region of the three great confederacies: Susquehannock, Five Nations Iroquois, and Huron. This region became the Core Area of diplomatic wampum use. Peoples adjacent to the Core formed a Periphery in which wampum was used rarely, and only in dealing with peoples in the Core. The Lenape and Lenopi were among the cultures of the Periphery, where the principle use for wampum was in ornament. South of Bombay Hook in Delaware the use of wampum has yet to be found in the documents or the archaeological record. Reasons for this cultural boundary will be discussed.

#### TEXT

The region controlled by the Five Nations Iroquois became the epicenter of the "Core Area" in which wampum was used in diplomacy. This shell bead commodity, with a standardized size and shape, entered the picture during the period ca. 1590 -1604. This technological development correlated with the trade with Dutch merchants becoming more extensive and complex. Beauchamp's (1888: 195) brilliant observation that there is "no instance of any of the small council wampum before the beginning of the seventeenth century" was confirmed by several studies a century later (Lynn Ceci 1985, 1988, Becker 2002, 2008). By the 1700s the numbers of diplomatic belts noted in the many treaty records are so large that a simple listing has been

recognized as a daunting task (see New York [State] Assembly 1889: 234-365; also Shattuck 1991). Despite the vast numbers of bands and strings used in diplomacy prior to 1800, Beauchamp's suggested (1888: 195) that the use of wampum for religious purposes "seems of a yet later date" (after 1800). This extraordinarily astute observation now can be more explicitly stated. Only secular uses for wampum, in economic matters and in politics-diplomacy, can be documented prior to 1800.

Recent studies indicate that "true" wampum, also called "belt" wampum, became an important commodity in the Northeast in the decade 1590 to 1600. This decade correlates well with the dates for the formation of the League of the Iroquois, as determined by Kuhn and Sempowski (2001) based on calumet use and exchange. Strings of wampum may have been used in diplomacy as early as 1600, with woven bands appearing between ca. 1615 and 1620 (cf. Becker 2006).

#### Core Area

Throughout the region formed by the "territories" of the three great confederacies (Wendat/Huron, Five Nations Iroquois, and Susquehannock) the specific type of shell beads identified as wampum evolved beyond the traditional functions for marine shell beads. The earlier uses of marine shell beads within the Core Area included examples that were uniformly larger in size than those beads specifically identified as "wampum," with smaller examples uniformly discoidal in shape rather than tubular. We may infer that the earlier uses of marine shell beads included ornamentation, but some contexts suggest possible ritual functions. After wampum beads emerged as a specific type, or as a commodity ca. 1590 - 1600 CE, they soon became central to diplomatic protocols. Wampum diplomacy in the Core Area, as a mode of political interaction, may have begun as early as 1610 to 1615. By the 1650s wampum "prestation," or a formal presentation made in conjunction with a specific request, had largely superseded calumet ceremonialism at inter-cultural meetings. While calumet rituals continued to be powerful aspects of diplomacy in the western Great Lakes region and beyond, within the Core Area of wampum use the smoking of the calumet at treaties, or meetings between two or more cultural groups, soon became vestigial.

Approximately 250 surviving bands of wampum are known, most of which probably were diplomatic in origin. When considering the use of wampum within the Core Area, three central questions must be asked: who made it, why was the "belt" made, and to whom was it given or presented. Strings of wampum beads, either as a single strand of variable length or a cluster of two or more strings bound at one end (called "hands" or "branches") also were fashioned for diplomatic and other purposes, serving as "low-end" items in formal wampum prestation (Becker 2008). Diplomatic wampum bands, commonly called "belts" in English and *colliers* in French, were the most commonly noted woven type used at councils, or what in the English literature are identified as "treaties" (cf. Becker and Lainey 2004). Another type of wampum band, constructed in the same way as diplomatic belts but with distinct design elements, was made and used only within the Catholic Church and its convert communities. These "ecclesiastical" bands of wampum were made for presentation only among groups operating within the Catholic Church. Ecclesiastical bands include those that were presented by members of one religious "community" to members of another, or sent to religious officials or even the Pope (see Becker 2001, 2006). They were sent as "calls" made to the faithful or as a show of faith. Ecclesiastical bands might be considered as a sub-category of "belts" within the general category of diplomatic belts (see also Sanfaçon In press A).

Ornamental or decorative bands of wampum (see McBride 1993), also described as "personal" wampum, were made and used by people living in what we define as the "Periphery" of wampum use, and beyond. We also assume that ornamental bands were made and used by individuals of the tribes living within the Core Area as well, but this has not been documented. Ornamental wampum items generally remained among their makers, although they may have been given as personal gifts to people outside the community. Many other questions remain regarding non-diplomatic uses for this shell bead commodity, among which are uses in religious rather than diplomatic rituals. While contemporary natives commonly claim past ritual uses for wampum in religious contexts, actual records documenting such uses remain extremely rare (cf. Fenton 1998). Among the few religious rituals that are known are several post-1799 examples associated with the White Dog Sacrifice (see Becker and Lainey 2008, also Becker 2007b).

## WAMPUM AND THE FIVE NATIONS: THE CORE AREA

The Haudenosaunee (People of the Long House, or Six Nations, as some of the Five Nations Iroquois now prefer to be called) occupied the center of the Core Area of wampum use. As documented by the records that span the 200 years of wampum use, they remained the principal native users of diplomatic wampum (see Ceci 1982, Becker 2002, 2006). Of note is the fact that surprisingly few examples of wampum from any category now survive, or can be found within the traditional Core Area of wampum use (see Becker 2007a, b).

Most of the diplomatic belts that were presented to the Five Nations Iroquois, either collectively or to any combination of groups of these peoples, had been held at Onondaga. James Folts (1999: 152, from Beauchamp 1916: 215) notes that during that period of the mid-eighteenth century the "Six Nations Council at Onondaga had custody of a 'whole pile' of wampum belts" that were held in the cabin temporarily occupied by the Moravian brethren (see Becker Ms. A, 2007b). The Moravians Charles Frederick and David Zeisberger had been resident at Onondaga from 1754 into 1755 in order to learn the language. Folts (1999: 153) also points out that most of the diplomatic belts known from the documents now are lost, or had been recycled, and that there is considerable difficulty in simply tracking the numerous documents that record their use. Folts's important comments on the recycling of wampum reflects the ways in which native users cannibalized strings and belts of wampum in order to produce different products for use in a variety of situations (see Becker 2008).

Each of the many villages of the Haudenosaunee may have held numbers of diplomatic belts pertaining to their own specific group (see Becker Ms. A), in addition to items of personal adornment. We suspect that each collection of wampum held at a specific village included no more than a dozen diplomatic belts and fewer than 20 other wampum "pieces," including strings of wampum used as condolence gifts, wampum used as various types of ornamentation, and any possible ritual items of that specific locale that incorporated wampum (cf. Becker 2007b, Ms. A). There are vast quantities of wampum noted in diplomatic records, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (see Hauptman 1999), but only

sporadic ethnographic references to wampum and non-diplomatic uses among the Five Nations groups and the Tuscarora. These non-diplomatic reports rarely include examples of wampum artifacts, and such items were most likely to be held locally. They also may have been specific to the single culture from which they are mentioned.

#### THE PERIPHERY

The native tribes immediately surrounding the CORE AREA, including Mahican, Sokoki, Munsee Lenopi, Lenape, Ciconicin and many others, used wampum primarily as ornament and currency. On those few occasions when they went into the CORE AREA to conduct business of a diplomatic nature, they conformed to the customs of the CORE AREA by carrying strings, and more rarely belts, of wampum. Thus they understood the principles of wampum diplomacy, but only rarely used wampum to conduct negotiations or other business. This pattern is perhaps best seen among the Penobscot of Maine and their neighbors. These various Eastern Indians (often identified today collectively as Abenaki) conducted some wampum diplomacy when traveling west into the Core Area, but did not recognize that the colonial governments in Boston also understood wampum diplomacy (see Becker 2005).

The territory that is the modern state of Delaware was home to the Sekonese (Ciconisin), as well as to some bands of the Lenape in the area north of Bombay Hook, and to some Nanticoke in the region south of Indian River. We have some limited evidence demonstrating that the Lenape conformed to a true "Peripheral" status in the use of wampum diplomacy. Their diplomatic uses were rare and quite specifically geared to interaction with the Five Nations Iroquois. Aside from the Lenape zone, the remainder of the present state was beyond the fringe of wampum diplomacy. Therefore, which the discovery of wampum beads in Delaware's Native American sites dating from after 1600 would not be unexpected, their presence should be rare and probably reflects ornamental use. The possibility that native peoples anywhere in Delaware were fashioning wampum beads as a commercial commodity (Becker 1980) has never been indicated in the known historical documents, but the possibility certainly exists. That colonial people in the Dutch and Swedish periods, or in Penn's three lower counties, used wampum in commercial dealings is quite probable. Records of such

uses, however, remain to be identified. As we would expect in a situation at the fringe of the Periphery of wampum use, the evidence is extremely limited.

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