



## Strengthening the Algonquin presence

By Claudia Smith

Indian River.... Indian Creek.... Indian graves.... an Indian cave.... Indian artifacts.... Lanark County and its neighbours have many traces of the historical presence of the Omàmiwinini or Algonquin people and their ancestors. Indigenous families were living on the land at least 10,000 years before European feet trekked through the forests of the county and their ploughs dug into the earth.

Archaeological digs in the Rideau Lakes area and along the Mississippi, Clyde, Indian and Fall rivers have unearthed evidence of Algonquin encampments. Stone axes, scraping tools and projectile points have been discovered by sharp-eyed people and round, black marks were found on a grassy flat near the Clyde River, where year after year wigwam poles once pressed into the earth.

Since the retreat of the Ice Age, Algonquin people have travelled throughout the territory according to seasonal harvests. Every spring, family groups travelled along frozen rivers to ancestral maple bushes in Lanark County to tap the trees.

Keen-eyed wood-cutters have found slash marks deep in maple wood made long ago by native women to release the sweet sap. It dripped down pieces of bark into birch-bark containers and when hot rocks were added to the sap, the water boiled off, leaving the sticky sweetness.

Maple sugar making was a time of celebration after long, hard winters. The process was shared



Indigenous peoples of southern Ontario began making pottery 3,000 years ago (c. 1000 BCE). The decorative patterns on this selection of ceramic rim sherds are distinctive of the Algonquin and other cultural groups within the Woodland and early post-contact periods. An exhibit of indigenous artifacts is open for public viewing at the Tay Valley Township municipal offices at 217 Harper Rd. just west of Perth from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily until December.

*David Zimmerly Photography photo*

with the settlers, and the sweet maple bounty offered life-saving spring nourishment.

According to their tradition of hospitality to strangers, the Algonquin people welcomed the pioneers. Initially they guided the settlers and shared venison, fish and edible wild plants.

Skills were passed on to the immigrant women on how to tan deerskin and make moccasins and jackets. In times of need, the newcomers were more than glad to accept aid, and stories are told of settlers who fell ill with "the ague" and of Algonquin women who were often able to save their lives.

Many early pioneers were grateful and respected the Indigenous people and their skills.

"Those Indians are God's aristocracy.... (they) know more by instinct - what the Almighty has put naturally into their heads - than most white people gain by years of study."

Despite Aboriginal title to the land as set out in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the colonial governments that oversaw settlement continued to grant deeds to the settlers for land in Algonquin territory. Some family records indicate that the land granted to

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## Orchids, activities and historic books

Purdon Conservation Area is a natural treasure, down a dirt road between the hamlets of Watson's Corners and McDonald's Corners. Maintained by the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority, the area is at its peak in June and early July, as the famous Lady slipper orchids make their annual appearance along the easy-



The Watson's Corners Community Hall is home to many community events, and also houses the books of the Dalhousie Historic Library.

*Photo courtesy of the Township of Lanark Highlands*

walking boardwalk.

This year, the Lanark and District Museum is reviving a local tour to take in the orchids. On June 17, attendees can start at the museum at 10 a.m. with a talk by Rhodena (Purdon) Bell, whose family owned the property, until Joe Purdon passed it on to the conservation authority to preserve the rare orchids.

The tour includes a bus trip to the Watson's Corners Community Hall – a hub of the local community – and then a walking tour of Purdon Conservation Area before returning to the museum in Lanark village.

The hall in Watson's Corners hosts fundraising breakfasts and suppers and special events throughout the year. It also houses the Dalhousie Historic Library, which was the first public library in the former Bathurst District and the first rural library in Ontario, getting its start in 1828.

Now a museum, it includes



Purdon Conservation Area between Watson's Corners and McDonald's Corners is best known for its lady slipper orchids, but the walking trails have an attraction all their own.

many old books, artifacts and genealogical records, and is available by appointment by calling 613-259-5454 or 613-259-5223.



## LOOKING BACK



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their ancestors in the 1830s was occupied by Indigenous families.

A few cleared the front 100 acres of their parcel and left the back 100 for the original inhabitants and respected the Algonquin gravesites. Other settlers feared "the strange people who lurked in the woods."

As more and more pioneer families arrived, many considered the Algonquins "hostile" and troublesome when they objected to the settlers taking over their lands.

Dispossessed of their land and outraged by savage assaults, the lives of Algonquin families became increasingly wretched. They could no longer assume they had the right to land their canoes to prepare a meal or sleep.

Permission to come ashore, where they had been landing for centuries, was often denied with threats. With timber production peaking in the 1860s, the rivers were choked with logs, making travel by canoe impossible, and wildlife fled before the groan of falling pines.

The land that had sustained the

Algonquin gathering and hunting way of life for thousands of years was radically changed, and the family bands retreated again and again to find food and somewhere to live.

The Algonquins of Ontario are negotiating a land-claim treaty and are in a position to revive their culture with a resurgence of pride in their identity, language and customs. They are actively cataloguing sacred and ceremonial sites as well as harvesting, camping and congregating places.

For more information, go to <http://www.tanakiwin.com/>.