

Our First Nations Neighbours

According to several accounts, the first European to travel through Rice Lake was Samuel de Champlain about 1615.

But...

Artifacts from a 1974 archaeological dig on Rice Lake's Sugar Island are on display in the Alderville Community Centre. They point to the existence of **human settlement in this area about 1000-1500 years ago**, or during the Middle Woodland Period.

While all Canadians can join in the celebration of 150 years since four provinces formed the Dominion of Canada, First Nations can look back over a much longer history on these lands. The current residents of Alderville First Nation, on the south shore of Rice Lake, have a rich heritage.

Wars between the various native tribes in southern Ontario and the northern American states, **wars between the French and the English**, changing **alliances** between all four, and various **treaties** were the story of the 1600s, 1700s and early 1800s. They all set the stage for the more recent story of our native community.

At the time of the American Revolution (1775) people of the Mississauga nation were living in this area. As settlers continued to pour in from the United States, the Mississauga's traditional semi-nomadic way of life was increasingly under threat. The landscape was changing, and **the Mississauga were gradually pushed from their traditional hunting grounds.**

"The establishment of farms and additional settlements in the decades to follow disrupted the Mississauga's fishing and hunting... Many Indians were hungry for new religious guidance, since their old religion seemed incapable of protecting them."

Donald Smith, Sacred Feathers

It was within this context that the Christian Methodist movement in Upper Canada was born.

Methodism had come into Ontario with the loyalist settlers, and was seen by many to be a solution to the native population's problems. In the early 19th century, a number of Mississauga men became missionaries. One was **Peter Jones**. Born at Burlington Heights in 1802, Jones, or Kahkewaquonaby ("**Sacred Feathers**") in Ojibwe, converted to Methodism in 1823 at the height of his peoples' struggles. In 1825, he began work as a Methodist preacher. Between 1825 and 1833 he traveled throughout Ontario, including Northumberland County, and **was the first to create a vocabulary for the Ojibway language.**



"I cannot suppose for a moment that the Supreme Disposer has decreed that the doom of the red man is to fall and gradually disappear, like the mighty wilderness, before the axe of the European settler" – Peter Jones.

Despite the challenges that this legislation presented to all native Canadians, the community at Alderville continued to pass on their traditions. In 1914, Alderville finally gained access to the waterfront of Rice Lake, allowing the community to practice traditional rice gathering, fishing, and hunting. During the First World War, 35 men from Alderville served overseas, and 9 did not return. In 1927 a cenotaph was erected to commemorate their service. Later, those who served in World War II, Korea and other conflicts were added.

In 1937 Alderville celebrated its 100th anniversary with two services and a pageant. It was during that decade, however, that the rice began to disappear from the lake. Members of Alderville continued to harvest, but they had to travel to other lakes. It was not until the 1970s that the rich history and important traditions of the people of Alderville were widely recognized by the surrounding community. Roseneath Centennial School established a Native Enrichment Programme, and a Royal Ontario Museum dig began to excavate Sugar Island with the help of local students. As Ruth Clarke describes in her book it became “a turning point for their pride in being Indian”.

These slow cultural shifts would be followed by a major legislative one in 1985 with further changes to the Indian Act. With Bill C-31, women would be treated equal to men, allowing for women who married non-native men to regain status. Many women who had been born and raised at Alderville were finally allowed to return home. In the late 1980s, Ojibway became a subject at Roseneath Centennial School.



Harvesting wild rice on rice lake - c1921



Alderville First Nation Cenotaph



From 2008–2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established as a response to the legacy of the Residential School System, and offered those affected the opportunity to share their stories. In its final report, it recommended 94 “calls to action” for all levels of government, including policy changes in areas such as health and education, and for all Canadians. The Commission has set the direction, but it is up to us to see it through.

“The truth telling and reconciliation process as part of an overall holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy is a sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing.”

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

In February 2017, the first of several joint meetings between Northumberland County and Alderville First Nation was held. It is a program initiated by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in an attempt to build relationships between municipalities and Indigenous communities. Chief James Marsden stated in Northumberland Today that **“this is about building a better country, collectively...reconciliation between communities”**.

Canada may have formally become a country in 1867, but it was profoundly shaped by what came before. We can only hope to learn from this heritage, navigating the troubled waters of our collective pasts to a shared vision of 21st century Canada.

