

OPENING NOTE: AN EXPLANATION OF NAMES

Today, when possible, we refer to the different groups who have lived here by the names they called themselves.

Here's guide to help as you learn the story of Toronto's First People:

Name	Pronunciation
Anishinabe	Ah-nish·ih·nah·bey
Ganatskwyagon	Gan-et-ska-wa-gon
Haudenosaunee	Howd-in-sawnee
Huron	Her-on
Onondowahgh	Ohn-own-dough-wah-gah
Teiaiagon	Tee-ay-ah-gone
Wendat	Wen-dat

At first contact, the French and British gave first nations different names that are still widely known today, but do not always reflect the true nature of these groups.

Examples:

Name	European Name & Meaning
Wendat people who live on the back of a turtle	<i>Huron</i> messy fools with bristle hair on top of their heads
Haudensaunee people of the longhouse	<i>Iroquois</i> rattlesnake people
Onondowagah people of the great hill	<i>Seneca</i> renamed after "Osininka", the name of one of their villages

The Ice Age began two million years ago. At that time, Ontario was covered by a continental glacier, a slow moving mountain of ice taller than the CN Tower!

About 15 000 BCE, the ice in Ontario slowly began to melt and in 11 000 BCE, shrinking ice scraped across the land carving out meltwater lakes, including the Great Lakes. Lake Iroquois, the ancestor of Lake Ontario, was the meltwater lake left behind in the Toronto area. This ancient shoreline is noticeable in Toronto today as a ridge running across the city. You can really see it from the Baldwin steps near Casa Loma.

The name 'Paleo-Indians' is the archeological term used to describe the first humans living in North America. This group is made up of several cultures who lived here thousands of years. They were the ancestors of many First Nations people. The climate was very cold then - it was like living in the Arctic!

The ancient indigenous people were nomadic which means they travelled from place to place in family groups, following animal herds.

Their small population were hunters relying mostly on the large animals that lived in southern Ontario at the time: woolly mammoths, mastodons and caribou. They hunted these animals in order to survive.

Every part of the animal was used: meat for food; hide for clothing and shelter (tents); bone and ivory for tools. Tools were also made out of a type of sedimentary rock called chert or flint.

By the end of this period, the climate was warming and the last of the permanent ice in Southern Ontario was melting. This change in climate caused extinctions of large animals including the mammoth and mastodon. Caribou moved north where it was cooler. In the Toronto area, deer replaced the caribou.

These changes forced the people in Ontario to adapt how they lived.

The climate was warming throughout the Archaic Period. As a result, the Indigenous people of this period moved with the seasons to eat the available food.

The people living in Toronto at this time were hunters and gatherers who lived together in small bands (groups) of 20-50 people.

When the temperature was cooler during the autumn and winter, they moved into the forests for warmth and to hunt animals for food. When the temperature was warm during the spring and summer, they moved closer to rivers to gather plants and catch fish.

Travel was important to the small groups of Indigenous people trading goods and ideas with each other. They travelled on walking paths when they could not travel by canoe. When the ground was covered with snow, they would travel by snowshoe.

To make their trading journeys easier, the people of this period discovered a shortcut between Lake Ontario in the south and Georgian Bay in the north. This route was called the 'Toronto Passage' and included two of the main rivers flowing through Toronto, the Humber River and the Rouge River. Today, Davenport Road follows an ancient path along the shore of Lake Iroquois.

During the Woodland Period, aboriginal people in southern Ontario continued to move with the seasons to find food and to trade goods and ideas.

There were many reasons for trade among the different groups of aboriginal people at the time. It was a way to develop good relationships with new groups. Items were often given as gifts and a sign of trust and friendship within these relationships. Trade was also a way to learn from others and gather new ideas. The purpose of trade was not for personal profit.

First Nations have historically used natural resources (things in nature) to make tools that would meet their basic needs and make life more comfortable. Three important developments took place during this period that changed their lifestyle:

1. Pottery (made from clay):
containers were made which meant that food could be carried easily and stored for long periods of time
2. Bow and Arrow (made from bone, flint and sinew):
the use of these objects as weapons and tools meant that fighting and hunting were easier and more efficient
3. Agriculture (planting seeds and harvesting crops):
growing crops (corn, squash, beans) provided a nearby food source that was often more reliable than hunting alone

The Wendat (Huron) were descendents of the Woodland people. They lived among different nations of aboriginal people in the Toronto area who spoke related versions of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) language.

The Wendat people lived in semi-permanent villages in large buildings known as 'longhouses'. They lived and worked together to meet their basic needs.

Women did the farming which was becoming increasingly more important. Groups of men did the hunting and often trained as warriors to take part in raids and wars with other villages.

The many nations of Haudenosaunee speakers broke into two alliances: The Haudenosaunee Confederacy which was south of Lake Ontario and the Wendat Alliance which was north of Lake Ontario. The Wendat nation was in the Toronto area at this time.

By 1600, the Wendat and other members of the Wendat Alliance moved further north from the Toronto area. Their new location had fertile soil, good fishing and improved access to waterways that increased trade and improved relations with other aboriginal nations.

After the Wendat moved north, the Toronto area was left as wilderness that was occasionally used for hunting.

During the 1640s and 1650s, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy forced their aboriginal enemies in southern Ontario (north of Lake Ontario) to disperse. This included the Wendat which were in the Toronto area until this time.

After this defeat of the Wendat Alliance, the Onondowagah, one of the six nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy from New York, established two communities in the Toronto area:

Ganatsekwyagon on the Rouge River (exact date unknown)

Teiaiagon on the Humber River (1676)

Teiaiagon was the first permanent settlement built by the First Nations in Toronto with 4000 - 5000 people and 50 longhouses. For protection, the Onondowagah typically built their villages on high ground surrounded by fences. They were also built near forests and rivers in a location where they could overlook their crops, their main source of food. Teiaiagon was an excellent location for trade between different nations and later with Europeans.

Both Onondowagah settlements, along with five other Haudenosaunee communities, controlled Ontario's main north-south hunting and trading routes.

Historians suggest that in the 1680s the Onondowagah nations in this area returned to their homelands in New York. This left the Toronto area open for a new group of aboriginal people to move into.

By 1687, the Mississauga, a band of Anishinabe (Ojibway) took over the Toronto area and destroyed the Onondowahgh village of Teiaiagon.

The lifestyle of the Mississauga differed from the farming settlements of the Wendat and Onondowagah who had lived in the area previously. The Mississauga were hunter-gatherers who lived in seasonal settlements. Evidence shows that a group of Mississauga lived in a village on the Humber River close to the place where Teieiagon once stood.

The present-day City of Mississauga (located west of Toronto) is named after these Aboriginal peoples who now are known as the Mississauga of the New Credit. Today, there continues to be an Anishinabe population in the Toronto area along with aboriginal people from other nations as well.

The French began trading with First Nations people in the Toronto area during the 1600s and trade continued until 1759.

French trade items would make life more convenient for First Nations, however Europeans also brought with them new religious beliefs and new diseases which First Nations had no resistance to. Between 1634 and 1640, half of the First Nations population of southern Ontario died of European diseases like smallpox, measles and typhoid!

During this time, there was French and British conflict because both countries wanted control of the Great Lakes area to obtain beaver pelts (fur) to make fashionable beaver hats for people in France and England. Conflict continued into the 1700s when the Toronto area was claimed as land for France.

In 1722, the British established Fort Oswego, a successful fur trading post on the south side of Lake Ontario (present day New York state). In 1750, the French built a fur trading post called Fort Rouille (also known as Fort Toronto). They chose this location for several reasons:

- To get beaver furs from the area and the First Nations traveling the Toronto Passage
- To interrupt the relationship between the Mississauga and the British
- To become allies with the Mississauga

Contact between Ontario's First Nations and Europeans from both France and England (Britain) would have a great impact on both cultures and the landscape of Toronto.