

Anna Cornell

EDPOL 150

Dan Cornelius

12/13/22

White Pine: Tree of Peace

The Eastern White Pine is one of the largest and most long-lived tree species in Wisconsin. In the Iroquois culture, the tree represents peace, nonviolence, and the Iroquois political system. The Eastern White Pine served as the guiding image in the political system, social habits, and values of the Haudenosaunee people. The White Pine tree is a symbol of the connection between the land and the functioning of native society.

White Pine trees grow tall and straight up to 50'-100' tall and have feathered needles in bundles of five. Once a significant component of northern forests, extensive deforestation in the early 19th century removed many of these large Pines greatly reducing their dominance throughout its range. During the 1850s, White Pine forests in Wisconsin attracted the attention of lumber companies. By 1930, around 75 percent of the White Pine trees in Wisconsin were lost. This devastating loss directly impacted the health of the environment by exacerbating the effects of climate change. The loss of the White Pine negatively influenced societies' connection and relationship with the land, by promoting the broken exploitation of earth's resources.



Figure 1: Eastern White Pine

In Ojibwemowin the Eastern White Pine is known as *biisaandago-zhingwaak* and is widely known and appreciated for its physical and energetic power. In summer months, the White Pine through the process of photosynthesis creates carbohydrates that get stored in the tree as starch. The starch then gets converted to sugar in the form of sucrose that dissolves into the sap. Many Native Americans use White Pine sap medicinally to heal wounds and prevent infection. The tree's sap is a natural antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, and astringent which is used to draw out poisons, splinters, and infections. The liquid resin when dried turns into a hardened amber which can be used to start fires in wet conditions. White Pine sap is very water-soluble and durable which elicits its common purpose of waterproofing. The sap is melted down and mixed with beeswax to seal canoes, shelters, and clothing. While the White Pine has many physical importances and uses, the tree's symbolic qualities to the First Nations people, the Iroquois, are the most significant and influential.

The Iroquois, officially the Haudenosaunee, is an Iroquoian-speaking First Nations who once occupied northeast North America, most of New York State, and part of Pennsylvania where the White Pine was very prevalent. The Haudenosaunee society consisted of five tribes prior to European colonization which were known to have exceptional political and military organization, complex lifestyles, and an elevated role of women. (U.S.) The five tribes designed an advanced political system that was unknown in Europe at that time. (U.S.) The binding

constitution is known as *the Great Law of Peace*, which established a democracy between the five Iroquois- speaking tribes– the Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, and Mohawk around 1450 (Parker). With the establishment of this constitution years of conflicts and battles between the previous nations ended, which up until this point consumed a lot of the tribes’ time, energy, and resources.

This newfound state of peace is depicted in the Haudenosaunee legend as provided by a Peacemaker sent from the great spirit utilizing the White Pine tree as his instrument to secure peace between the five native nations. The uniting of the warring five Iroquois nations, marked “willingness to work together for peace and protection.” (Tree) The alliance of the nations is depicted by the Hiawatha Belt. This belt served as a tool in spreading the word of the uniting five tribes. On the Hiawatha Belt, there are five symbols, the middle figure being a White Pine. This peace tree is described as uprooted “to afford a cavity in which to bury all weapons of war”. (Parker) The White Pine serves as a visual record of the *Great Law of Peace*, the fundamental guideline of their alliance. Today, the Hiawatha Belt has been made into a flag flown in many places around the world. The Hiawatha Belt’s presence reminds the Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee leaders to maintain peace and to make decisions for only today, but the future Haudenosaunee citizens.



Figure 2: The Hiawatha Belt

The White Pine is a metaphor for the importance of implementing the three counterbalancing principles of life in order to achieve harmony. In the Haudenosaunee legend, the Peacemaker witnessed a tall White Pine that was kept standing by the three principles of life. The first principle is ensuring the mind and body are in balance so that peace between individuals and groups could occur. Second, humane conduct, thought, and speech requirements for equity and justice among people. Third, a society in which physical strength and civil authority would reinforce the power of the clan system. (Johansen) The Peacemaker explained that the tree was a metaphor for humanity and its connection with the principles of life. It was said that by upholding the principles of life there will be harmony in human existence and it will unite all people.

The Iroquois Confederacy planted a White Pine after its founding which became the primary national symbol for *The Great Law of Peace*. The characteristics of the White Pine tree figuratively illustrate the ideals and values of the Iroquois nation. Symbolically the White Pine's branches shelter the people of the nations, the roots spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace to all four directions spreading peace and strength, inviting other peoples, regardless of race or nationality, to take shelter under the tree. (Johansen) It is said in the constitution "If any man or any nation outside the Five Nations shall obey the laws of the Great Peace... they may trace the Roots to the Tree and if their minds are clean and they are obedient and promise to obey the wishes of the Confederate Council, they shall be welcomed to take shelter beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves". The White Pine serves as a living symbol of *The Great Law of Peace* and expresses the Iroquois value that peace and law are one of the same. The framework for their political system based upon valuing peace and acceptance was unique and abnormal for the time period it was established. By prioritizing peace as a way of life that must be embodied in social

institutions, the Iroquois exhibited a progressive political and social structure that was revolutionary for the 13th century.

The physical characteristics of the Pine tree are symbolic of the traditional cultural importance of the tree's existence. The proliferation and longevity of a White Pine 's lifespan represent the passing of The Great Peace down from the first chiefs to all of their successors. (Easterling) This ensures that principle standards and ideals of the Iroquoian government and society are not lost in future generations and that cultural traditions will live on. The evergreen as a symbol of immortality and eternal life gives society a reminder of the continuity of life. Also known as the Tree of Life, the White Pine serves as a indication of the life around you and the life in oneself that should be honored and cherished.

The White Pine presents itself through symbols in Iroquoian decorative art. The peace tree symbols are presented as a pattern of semicircles on two parallel horizontal lines that are supposed to represent the earth. The Tree of light is believed to connect the earth and the sky and it is a great source of power. This linking of the earth and sky by the White Pine reflects its importance in maintaining the unity of the universe and reinforces its sacred nature. In Iroquoian folklore, mythology, ceremony, and history the Five Nations always express peace under the metaphor of a tree. The White Pine which is also known as the Tree of Light or the World Tree symbolizes the unity of all life and the struggle against disintegration. (Schroeder)

The Iroquois values and ideals were brought to Wisconsin by the Oneida people after their horrific removal and forced relocation into the state. The Oneida people are an Iroquoian-speaking tribe that makes up the Six Nations League of the Iroquois. Originally they resided in upstate New York where following the American Revolution their villages had been burned and they were scattered throughout New York, having taken refuge with other Iroquois

tribes. The Oneida people were then removed from their homelands and were forced to resettle around 1820. From the American Revolution onward, Oneida's tribal land in New York shrunk from about six million acres to 4,500 acres by 1839. (Oneida History) Due to this fast and aggressive White encroachment, Williams and Jedidiah Morse launched a plan to relocate all New York natives to the Green Bay, Wisconsin area. This required negotiation with the existing tribes in the area, the Menominee and Ho-Chunk. The resettlement on the land set off an eight-year debate mediated by the Federal government between the Menominee and Ho-Chunk against the Oneida, Stockbridge-Munsee, and Brothertown. The Menominee eventually agreed to give land to Oneida which constitutes the current boundaries of the Wisconsin Oneida reservation which is comprised of 65,430 acres. Today, Wisconsin is home to the greatest indigenous diversity east of the Mississippi River with twelve indigenous nations currently living within the state's borders.

The Oneida people called the Madison Wisconsin area, Teejop, which translates to "Four Lakes". This became a significant area where Indigenous nations were located. Teejop is rich in history that possibly spans beyond three ice ages. Creation stories of the Ho-Chunk and Menominee tribes are rooted in Teejop. Lake Mendota located in Teejop is often referred to as "the most studied lake in the world," as it is the birthplace of the field of limnology. The connection between Mendota and the humans who have interacted with it over time is studied extensively and is often an area of interest to researchers. Today, discoveries and advancements are still being made to strengthen societies' understanding and acknowledgment of the people who came before us and their connection to the land.

The Tree of Peace, a White Pine tree, on Observatory Hill at UW-Madison was planted in 1988. From atop Observatory Hill, there is a view overlooking Lake Mendota and its

shoreline. This tree was planted by the Tree of Peace Society to spread peace among all peoples. (Tribal) “This tree will grow tall and straight, one heart, one direction. Our people will live together and make ourselves a symbol of peace.” (Tribal) This tree was planted by Jake Swamp-Tekaronianeken who established the Tree of Peace Society in 1984 to advocate greater ecological awareness and sensitivity. The tree is accompanied by a granite marker with the inscription: “For those people of the earth who search for the past, to healing power, wisdom and security. The tree will never die as long as the tree lives the people live. Placed 9 April 1988.” This serves as a reminder of the history of the land UW-Madison lies upon and to respect the stories and life that were here before us. It also calls on all of us to protect and care for the Earth and have the utmost respect when interacting with the environment.



Figure 3: The Tree of Peace

Swamp was a Mohawk Nation diplomat that planted hundreds of Peace Trees in many nations. He was known to possess great knowledge of the cultural heritage of the Haudenosaunee. Swamp wrote the *Giving Thanks Good Morning Message* which is based upon the Thanksgiving Address. The Thanksgiving Address is a message of peace, thanks, and appreciation for Mother Earth. The White Pine symbol promotes a healthy relationship between humans and the land. It urges us to rebuild the broken connection we have with the land. The overarching message of the White Pine has been brought to attention by their presence on

damaged and mistreated lands. Oftentimes, while other trees are cut down on damaged lands the White Pine remains prevalent due to its overabundance in northern states. Contributing to the symbolic message that we should repair societies' relationship with the land.



Figure 4: Jake Swamp

The Thanksgiving address directly impacts the teachings of the Six Nations— The Oneidas, Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Tuscarora. The Six Nations still implement the Thanksgiving address in their “ceremonial and governmental gatherings” (Tree of Peace). The abbreviated *Giving Thanks Good Morning Message* written by Swamp has been adopted into the daily routine of the Six Nations people. Each morning they greet the world by saying thank you to all living things. By the implementation of the values and teachings of the Thanksgiving address, the Six Nations have adopted and supported the importance of diversity in their community. They equate the gifts and embrace of nature to the gifts and embrace they show toward others that bring diversity to their communities.

The White Pine symbol promotes facilitating peace and strength within the human and environmental community one is surrounded by. Native societies looked at the land as a teacher through the harmony and peace that it cultivates and provides. This is something lacking in our

society today as we are shifting toward an unhealthy view of exploiting the land for our own personal benefit. The presence of the Tree of Peace, on Observatory Hill, serves as an indication of the history of land in Teejop. It should be looked to as an inspirational portrayal of the relationship between land and society, which we should try to uphold and advocate for.

Bibliography

- Cain, Cortney A. *Cultural Landscape Inventory*. Dec. 2005, https://d1t7dpw65z19lw.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2017/05/Observatory-Hill-_rev-2010_.pdf.
- Dana. "Sacred Tree Profile: White Pine 's Medicine, Magic, Mythology, and Meanings." *The Druids Garden*, 24 Apr. 2022, <https://thedruidsgarden.com/2017/12/03/sacred-tree-profile-White-Pines-medicine-magic-mythology-and-meanings/>
- Easterling, Jeff. "Tree of Peace: The Iroquois Legend of the Eastern White Pine ." *NELMA*, 22 Nov. 2017, <https://www.nelma.org/tree-of-peace-the-iroquois-legend-of-the-eastern-White-Pine/>.
- "Hiawatha Belt." *Onondaga Nation*, 1 Feb. 2021, <https://www.onondagation.org/culture/wampum/hiawatha-belt/>.
- Johansen, Bruce E., and Barbara Alice Mann. *Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy)*. Greenwood Press, 2000.
- Mike Kay The Frederick County Forestry Board. "Eastern White Pine ." *Post*, 5 June 2016, https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/environment/eastern-white-pine/article_d3b4cd03-8d89-51a1-abf0-1235c35ddec7.html.
- "Oneida Early Historical Background." *Milwaukee Public Museum*, <https://www.mpm.edu/educators/wirp/nations/oneida/early-historical-background>.
- Parker, Arthur C. "Certain Iroquois tree myths and symbols." *American Anthropologist* 14.4 (1912): 608-620.
- Parker, Arthur C. *"IROQUOIS GREAT LAW OF PEACE"*. https://cdn5-ss12.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_520401/File/Departments/Curriculum%20&%20Instruction/ELA/PARCC/3%20-%20PARCC%20Benchmark%20Tests.pdf.

“Peace Tree.” *Bernard C. Cohen - UWDC - UW-Madison Libraries*, 13 Apr. 1988,

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/BIPRF3ODGJLJU8N>.

Shaw, Justin. “Harvesting Sap: Reaping the Benefits of Natural Medicine.” *Trees Unlimited*, 11

Mar. 2021,

<https://treesunlimitednj.com/harvesting-sap-trees-reaping-benefits-natural-medicine/#:~:text=Pine%20sap%20can%20also%20serve,fire%20starter%20in%20wet%20conditions>.

Shanley, Patricia. "White Pine ." *The Cultural Value of Trees: Folk Value and Biocultural Conservation* (2022).

Schroeder, Herbert W. “Www.nrs.fs.usda.gov.” *White Pine Symposium Proceedings* ,

https://www.nrs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/jrnl/1992/nc_1992_Schroeder_002.pdf.

“Tree of Peace (U.S. National Park Service).” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/tree-of-peace.htm>.

“Tree of Peace.” *Tribal Relations*, 23 Feb. 2022,

<https://tribalrelations.wisc.edu/2021/07/12/tree-of-peace/>.

Williamson, Lynne. "The Great Tree of Peace." *Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order* (1993): 283.

<https://thetrackingproject.org/remembers-jake-tekaronianeken-swamp/>

