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Wampum Belts with Initials and/or Dates as Design Elements: A Preliminary Review of One Subcategory of Political Belts

MARSHALL JOSEPH BECKER AND JONATHAN LAINEY

Wampum, defined as native-made shell beads of roughly standardized size and shape, evolved early in the seventeenth century and served as an essential element in the interactions among several Native nations and various European groups. The central region of wampum production was around Long Island Sound, while the principal area of wampum belt use was up the Hudson River and into Canada. Primary use was among the Five Nations Iroquois (Six Nations after 1722) and the Huron Confederacy. The incorporation of these shell bead elements of regular size (roughly three to four millimeters in diameter and eight to ten millimeters long) into woven bands, commonly called *belts* by the English and *colliers* by the French, took place at about the same time. The relationship between the standardization of this particular shell bead form and the production of wampum belts or bands is unknown, although it remains the focus of much speculation.

True wampum, or that category of shell beads of standard size also called “belt” wampum, was used primarily among the peoples of the Iroquois and the Huron confederacies, with the contiguous territories of these peoples creating a zone that Becker characterizes as the “Core Area.” Beyond this region the use of wampum beads, and particularly belts fashioned from them, was much more limited. Among the Penobscot, in Maine, one of the cultures beyond the Core Area, the chronological sequence for the use of wampum, as

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well as the range of functions, differed considerably from what has been described in the Core Area.¹ The role of what George Price identifies as the “wampum-producing tribes” such as the Wampanoag and Shinnecock, as well as each of the separate cultural traditions that developed for employing wampum (cultural transformations and unique features), merits its own separate study.²

Despite the hundreds of publications focusing on wampum that have emerged over the past two centuries, until recently no systematic investigations have provided a basis for understanding how belts and strings were used and in what kinds of distinct contexts. Aside from Beauchamp’s monumental compendium, few of these earlier works attempted to catalog even a portion of the known examples.³ The actual number of wampum belts that survive from the period before 1815, when their political use had largely ended, may exceed three hundred.⁴ Their evaluation in the context of the relevant historical documents enables us to develop and perfect theories regarding belts and their uses.

A recent overview of the history and development of wampum belts identified three distinct uses that were made of the specific type of shell beads identified as true wampum. By far the most commonly reported use of belts was in the political realm, with strings and/or belts of wampum presented in conjunction with requests made at meetings of various participating cultures.⁵ This type of formal presentation, sometimes thought of as “gift-giving,” was a purely secular activity.⁶ Secular wampum belts include the vast majority of known examples, having served as the normal wampum belts made for presentation during political or diplomatic discourse. Ecclesiastical belts occupy a second category of wampum use, with belts of special design being made by religious converts to Catholicism for presentation to other Native congregations or as gifts to ecclesiastical bodies in Europe. Ecclesiastical belts commonly are characterized by the presence of Latin texts, but all known examples bear a Latin cross as a marker.⁷ The third use for wampum was in personal adornment, with individual beads and strings of wampum often noted. Whether actual belts of wampum were used as personal adornment remains unclear. In many cases individuals depicted wearing wampum belts may be displaying these examples for public inspection rather than using them as decoration. Some variations may have existed in the use of wampum among the many tribal groups beyond the Core Area.⁸ Some belts that appear to be of wampum, depicted in paintings and photographs as “worn,” have been found to be straps of glass beads that only resemble true wampum belts. Real wampum belts very rarely incorporate more than one or two glass beads of the size and shape of true wampum.

Delineation of these three general categories relating to traditional uses of wampum beads also reveals that each includes subsets reflecting slight variations in meaning. Modern fabrication of replica, or simulated, belts may be considered a fourth group, but only traditional uses are included within the three traditional categories, which may be outlined as follows:

- I. Secular-Political (traditional belts)
 - A. Diplomatic-Political (the most common type of belt)
 - a. monochromatic
 - b. belts with simple designs (e.g., “Two-Path”)
 - c. belts with complex designs
 - d. belts with dates and/or initials (a small subset of secular belts)
 - B. Internal-Political (emblems and badges, possibly used only within the Iroquois Confederacy)
- II. Ecclesiastical (for religious converts)
 - A. With Latin texts
 - B. Latin cross as the primary or as the only indication of function
- III. Secular-Ornamental (strings and possibly belts for personal adornment)

In a recent paper Becker suggested that some nonecclesiastical belts bearing initials and/or dates were made late in the chronology, perhaps dating from after 1800 CE. The idea that these belts were made for sale and might be considered “tourist belts” also had been proposed.⁹ Newly collected data refute the idea that belts with initials and/or dates are a late development.¹⁰ More complete evidence is here presented, with a review of some of the data used in the earlier study. Now only one belt, the “IOHN TYZACKE” example (see number 16 below) remains a possible example of the tourist belt category proposed earlier. This preliminary overview of wampum belts with initials and/or dates forms the basis for a new conclusion and the assignment of these lettered examples to the “secular-political” category. This subcategory includes only a very small percentage of the total number of known, but not necessarily surviving, belts of wampum.

Two lines of evidence indicate that the use of traditional political wampum belts was in rapid decline after 1800 CE. Wampum belts become increasingly rare in the treaty records of the new United States of America after the beginning of the nineteenth century, but belts remained in relatively common use in Canada from the War of 1812 to 1814. Members of the Iroquois Confederacy in the United States placed greater emphasis on having written copies of treaty documents as early as the 1750s, and in most cases these documents superseded wampum presentation by the 1790s. Furthermore, the observation that by the latter part of the nineteenth century the specific original functions of individual belts within the Iroquois Confederacy had been forgotten also suggests several generations of unfamiliarity with the diplomatic protocols so commonly found in Core Area treaty minutes prior to 1800.¹¹

Becker’s hypothesis that the belts bearing initials and/or dates—or “lettered” belts, as Beauchamp calls them—appeared late in the history of wampum belt use now can be negated by several additional pieces of information.¹² First, we now have textual evidence that belts with initials were made as early as 1724. By the year 1745 at least one example of the lettered category of wampum belts is described in the documents, and by the 1750s lettered belts were being made in sufficient numbers that they appear with some regularity in treaty records and the general literature.

Intensive study of the few known examples of belts into which initials and/or dates had been worked, documented and surviving, suggests that they may be placed into a category or subset of secular belts. The well-documented “17♥♥45” belt provides an important clue to the early existence of dated belts. This belt also provides an indication of what may be the first known design element of curvilinear form rather than the common straight-line geometric design elements found on early belts. Recently, Jonathan Lainey addressed the question of wampum belts that bear letters or initials and collected some important data relating to the dates of their origins.¹³ His findings stimulated this renewed search of the literature and have enabled us to assemble relevant information specific to several belts with initials and/or dates that had been noted earlier.¹⁴ We now can present data on seventeen relatively well-documented examples as a preliminary review to an ongoing study of all that is known about belts that are a subcategory of the secular-political category.

SOME EXAMPLES NOW KNOWN

A brief list will provide readers with an orientation to the descriptive catalog that is being assembled by the authors. A distinction is made here between existing belts, those that have good primary documentation but are not now known to exist, and “belts” that are mentioned in secondary sources but may never have existed.

Documented Examples (N = 17)

1. The 1724 G. R. belt (and two others possibly from that early period)
2. The 17♥♥45 belt
3. WJ 1756: The William Johnson belt, first noted in 1763
4. The William Johnson belt of 1759
5. The Great Covenant Chain Belt of 1764
- 6–12. The G. J. belt of 1780 and six other Guy Johnson belts (G. J. or G. I.)
13. The 1786 belt
14. The Double G-T belt (American Museum of Natural History cat no. 50.1/1945)
15. The W □ C-Two People-1807 belt (Heye Foundation cat. no. 1/4004)
16. The IOHN TYZACKE—IPO belt (Heye Foundation cat. no. 20/898)
17. The I G S or Simcoe belt (Smithsonian Institution)

Belts with Limited Documentation and Possible Phantoms (N = 9)

The various records that have been culled in our research provide clues to the possible existence of nine other examples in the category of belts with initials, here noted as “A” through “I.” Our research on these nine continues, and still other examples are expected to emerge as this study progresses.

- A–F: Six possible G. J. or G. I. belts dating from 1780 (see no. 5 above)
- G–H: The possible G. P. W. and P. F. belts (see no. 1 above)
- I. Another Beauchamp Phantom? The G. R.–5 N–D. K. belt

SEVENTEEN DOCUMENTED EXAMPLES NOW KNOWN

1. The 1724 G. R. Belt and Two Others That May Date from That Early Period.

All three of the belts noted here may be phantoms created by William Beauchamp, but he may have read actual documents containing relevant information. Beauchamp also may have erred in assigning dates to examples about which he had read. Beauchamp states that “Gov. Burnett gave one [lettered belt] to the Six Nations at Albany in 1724, on which were the letters G. R., for King George.”¹⁵ We may assume that such letters actually would have stood for “George Rex,” but more significant is a lack of confirmation for Beauchamp’s statement regarding the belt itself. Presumably Beauchamp saw a note regarding a 1724 belt presentation in one of the colonial documents or in a letter dating from 1724. Beauchamp’s lack of any citation for this statement leaves us with only his statement as evidence that such a belt ever existed.

Anne Molloy says that a “GR” [*sic*] belt was made at some unstated time for the “Delaware” [Lenopi] and that the initials represent King George.¹⁶ Clearly she has taken all of her information from Beauchamp, as revealed by her mention of the two other initialed belts noted by Beauchamp in his 1901 publication.¹⁷ Molloy’s mention of the “Delaware” in association with the G. R. belt is either a fabrication or more likely an error in note taking, as is revealed by her other comments on lettered belts. The G. R. belt is the first of three initialed belts that were noted by Beauchamp (see below) from which Molloy copied the brief notes. No illustrations are known, and we have been unable to locate any confirming evidence or further references to the G. R. belt or to the following two belts with these specific initials.

A “G. P. W.” and a “P. F.” Belt? Beauchamp also states that “another [initialed belt] had G. P. W., for George, Prince of Wales [woven into the design]. A third had P. F., for Prince Frederick.” As with the G. R. belt, no indication is provided as to the source of these data as published by Beauchamp. Molloy’s gloss on this information notes only a belt with “GPW” on it, which she interprets as being made for the son of King George, or “for his son, the ‘Great’ Prince of Wales.”

2. The 17♥♥45 Belt and a Phantom Belt?

The 17♥♥45 belt had been noted earlier for the importance of its novel curvilinear design appearing at an early date.¹⁸ The significance of the use of an actual date in the design on this important political belt had not been recognized at that time. This is the earliest known dated belt for which we now have an excellent documentary record.

During an important treaty held at Easton, Pennsylvania, in October of 1758 a great number and variety of belts and strings of wampum were presented, and huge quantities of goods were given as gifts to the various Native groups in attendance. This gathering at Easton, to establish alliances during the French and Indian War and resolve Native land claims, largely involved Native peoples who were originally living south of the Core Area of belt use. Many of these Native participants from the northernmost Lenopi bands had shifted their area of activity into the periphery of the territory of the Six

Nations Iroquois and were thus under Six Nations suzerainty at that time. Their familiarity with wampum protocol was uneven, although the situation was politically and militarily important to all parties. Of note to us is the record indicating that some of the belts presented at this treaty of 1758 as symbols of earlier treaties were unknown to the participants, and still other belts were brought forth for which the meanings were unclear to the bearers.

During this period of conflict, commonly called the French and Indian War, Teedyuscung, a Lenopi (“Jersey”) from eastern central New Jersey, presented himself as a major political figure when in fact he had influence only over his own band members. The young Teedyuscung had immigrated into Pennsylvania in 1733 or 1734 with his band.¹⁹ By 1755 Teedyuscung used the French-British conflict to promote his own interests and those of his immediate kin. As part of his political maneuvering he claimed to represent a number of Native nations from the general region of central and western Pennsylvania. Most of his claims were entirely false, but one involving an interesting belt held by the Wapinger tribe appears to have been a valid emblem of an earlier treaty. At the meeting of 23 October 1758, during this important treaty,

Teedyuscung arose, and desired to be heard on behalf of the Wapings or Wapinger Indians, called the river Indians, living near Esopus [on the Hudson in New York], and produced a Short, broad Belt of White Wampum, having in the Center two Hearts of a Reddish Colour, and in Figures, 1745, wrote after the following manner, 17♥♥45. The Belt has [attached] a round Circle Pendant, representing the Sun. He then produced two Certificates [letters], one from Governor Clinton, and the other from Governor Hardy, both [of] which were much in Favour of the Wapinger Tribe of Indians. He said the Belt was given them by the Government of New York, and represented their Union, which was to last as long as the Sun should continue in the Firmament.

Teedyuscung addressed Governor Bernard, desiring by [the presentation of] a String of Wampum, that he would extend his Protection to the Tribe of the Wapings, and as their Chief was old and infirm, he requested the favour of a Horse to carry him Home [north, to the Hudson Valley], which was readily granted.²⁰

The Wapinger tribe, sometimes identified as the Pomptons or Wapings, are noted as having been presented with the 17♥♥45 belt by Governor Clinton some thirteen years before the treaty of 1758. The chief of the Pomptons or Wapings in 1758 may have been Nimhan.²¹ At the important treaty of 1758, which included the settlement of land claims made by all of the aboriginal peoples of New Jersey, it was brought forth to indicate the traditional alliance between the Wapinger and the British. The figures on the belt, as depicted in the colonial records of Pennsylvania, are actually only heart-shaped outlines open at the top, somewhat resembling modern profiles drawn of Indian pottery. Both heart outlines are depicted as lacking closure at the top, with the indented part of the outline left open. Beauchamp makes note of these treaty minutes and suggests that the “Circle Pendant” described

in the colonial records was actually an “ornament [that] may have been a flat, metallic ring.”²² Lainey suggests that the “round Circle Pendant” on the 1745 belt may have been a “Sun of Wampum” (*soleil de porcelaine*) such as those described as attached to belts as early as 1700.²³ At least one Sun of Wampum survives, in St. Petersburg, but other pendantlike objects associated with belts are known. Becker suggests that attachments noted in the documents might be official wax seals of the colony or the governor, or that these objects of leather and beads were meant to resemble the kinds of large wax seals attached to European documents. A category of Suns of Wampum and other attachments to wampum belts is being pursued in another paper.

Beauchamp’s Phantom Belt? The so-called G. R.–5 N–D. K. belt. Beauchamp’s presentation on lettered belts includes the note that “a very large belt” with initials was presented at the Treaty of Easton in 1757.²⁴ Apparently he means the 1758 treaty because Beauchamp follows his statement with the line that “a curious belt was shown by Teedyuscung a little before this” and then proceeds to describe the 1745 “Two-Heart” belt. Beauchamp states that at this treaty the Five Nations were acknowledged as having “sovereign power over the Pennsylvania Indians. In confirmation of the treaty Gov. Denny ‘gave a very large belt with the figures of three men in it, representing His Majesty King George taking hold of the 5 Nations King with one hand, and *Teedyuscung* the Delaware King with the other, and marked with the following letters and figure: G. R. or King George 5 N five [*sic*] Nations and D. K. Delaware King.”²⁵

Beauchamp offers no source for the text that he quotes. We have not been able to identify this “G. R.–5 N–D. K.” belt, nor have we ever seen another reference to it. The “Pennsylvania Indians” referred to in this treaty of 1758 included a number of relocated peoples, such as the Lenopi from New Jersey (“Jerseys”), the displaced Shawnee whom Becker believes to have been part of the Susquehannock confederacy, and possibly other Native groups that had come up from the south. Teedyuscung commonly presented himself as the “Delaware King,” and the English referred to him by that title. The trusting Molloy places Beauchamp’s phantom belt on her “list” of supposed belts with initials. Molloy describes a “GR . . . 5N” belt as having three (human?) figures, with one labeled “GR” and another labeled “5N” for the Five Nations. The “Delaware King” reference is omitted in Molloy’s version, perhaps because she relocated the word *Delaware* as it appeared in her notes to the G. R. belt (see above).²⁶

There were a few large belts presented at the Treaty of Easton in 1758, but none appear to be the belt to which Beauchamp refers. On 20 October 1758, in the midst of that treaty, Governor Denny delivered a long oration in answer to the “message of the Ohio Indians brought by Frederick Post, Pisquitomen, and Thomas Hickman.”²⁷ Several strings and belts of wampum are presented in punctuation of various points in this specific speech, with one particularly large belt presented following the major request. The large belt, to be sent to the Ohio Indians, is noted at first as “A Large Belt” and described in a paragraph as follows: “The Chiefs of the United Nations, with their Cousins, our Brethren the Delawares, and others now here, jointly with me send this Belt, which has upon it two figures that represent all the English and all the Indians

now present taking Hands and delivering it to Pisquitomen, and we desire it may be likewise sent to the Indians who are named at the end of these Messages,* as they have been formerly our very good Friends and Allies, and we desire they will go from among the French to their own Towns, and no longer help the French.”²⁸

The asterisk in this 1758 text directs readers to a note listing the names of the nine elders of the “Ohio Indians” who are allies. Then follows a long statement inviting all these people in Ohio to come to Philadelphia as guests. After this oration we find the following detailed description of the large belt just presented: “A Large White Belt, with the Figure of a Man at Each End, and Streaks of Black, representing the Road from the Ohio to Philadelphia.” This “Large White Belt” is again mentioned later in the treaty minutes of October 1758, where a reference is made to “ratifying the Peace, and the large Belt given thereupon, which he said should be sent to all the distant nations.”²⁹ At the end of this treaty, after the presentation and exchange of many signed deeds resolving various land claims, together with note of the related belts and strings, Governor Barnard “made particular mention of the Large Peace Belt.”³⁰ This example of a large “two-figure” belt (belt with two human figures) that was presented in 1758 is one of a great number of two-figure belts for which we have a considerable documentary record and of which several still exist. Which specific examples of two-figure belts relate to any specific treaty remains unknown. Nowhere in the colonial records for this treaty of 1758 is there any note of a large belt with several sets of initials such as the belt described by Beauchamp in 1901. The “Large White Belt” described in 1758 in no way resembles Beauchamp’s description of a belt with “G. R.–5 N–D. K.,” which must be considered a phantom example until specific documentation can be produced to verify its existence.

3. WJ 1756: The William Johnson Belt.

On 17 October 1763 William Johnson presented to his “Bretheren of Oghquago, and the rest” (possibly Oneida and Tuscarora) a specific belt bearing the date 1756, suggesting that the belt had been made some seven years earlier. Thus, although this 1763 transfer marks the first appearance of the belt in the historical record, the date inscribed on it indicates that Johnson used a belt that had been made and presented, or circulated, one or more times prior to this recorded event. Johnson’s presentation of this specific belt in 1763 was made in support of his request to his Native allies that they gather news of the activities of other Native groups, particularly of the “Delaware” and the “Shawanese.” Both of these groups were nominal allies of the English, but Johnson and others distrusted Teedyuscung and

those evil minded & foolish People the Delawares &ca. I must desire by this Belt of Wampum that You will lay yourselves out for procureing all the Intelligence you possibly can. . . . I expect to See this Belt with my name & year 1756, wh^h. I now give you[,] whenever You Send me any news, that then I may know it comes from Your Chiefs.

—A Black Belt marked WJ 1756³¹

Johnson's mistrust of this "Delaware"-Shawnee alliance was well founded. In 1755 the Lenopi had sided with the French against the English. When these Lenopi, here glossed as "Delaware," observed that the French could barely feed their own troops and had little to offer their Indian allies, they immediately switched sides. Later, perhaps as a result of their new alliance with the English, these "Delaware" and Shawnee became important players in the fur trade. They maintained a strong political and military union at least through the end of the eighteenth century, and frequent note was made of their raids on white settlements and farmsteads along the frontier.³² Lainey recently discovered information revealing that the WJ 1756 belt had been in the hands of the Oneidas and that it was used again in 1775 when they presented it to Guy Johnson. In 1775 it was described as "a Black belt of [9] Rows with the letter [*sic*] W I & 1756 in White on it." This information and the original texts are still under study.

Jean-Pierre Sawaya also reviews information relating to Sir William Johnson's presentation of the WJ 1756 belt. Sawaya attributes the date of 1756 on the belt to the year in which Johnson was appointed superintendent for Indian affairs by the English government.³³ Beauchamp states that "another of Johnson's lettered belts is elsewhere mentioned" along with mention of Johnson's 1759 example cited below.³⁴ This might be the WJ 1756 belt or another one with a later date. Unfortunately, Beauchamp provides no indication of his source for this information.

4. The William Johnson Belt of 1759.

In his section on lettered belts Beauchamp refers to "one other belt [that] must have been inspired for the [special] occasion. Preparations for the siege of Fort Niagara were in progress and Johnson held a council. At this [council] the Six Nations presented him [with] 'a Belt with the Figure of Niagara at the end of it, & Sir William's name worked thereon.'"³⁵

Probably only initials were worked into a design on this belt. The "Figure of Niagara" may refer to an end design such as that commonly found on belts, taking the form of a series of parallel lines. A design such as that could be interpreted as representing the famous falls or even a human namesake. The possibility that this belt and the WJ 1756 belt are one and the same must be considered.

5. William Johnson's "Great Covenant Chain Belt" of 1764.

The important 1764 belt was presented at the Treaty of Niagara, where it was described as being twenty-three rows wide and having the year 1764 "worked upon it." Further description of the belt notes that it, or the beads from which it was worked, was valued at "above £30."³⁶ At a value of two dark beads to the penny and four white beads to the penny, some three thousand beads may have been used to fashion this belt.³⁷

Paul Kane made drawings of the 1764 belt, as well as the 1786 belt (see no. 13 below), at some time about 1845. Jonathan Lainey is pursuing data relating to the production of these drawings and has recovered information about the belts depicted in them. David McNab provides some details from the Treaty at

Niagara, including the presentation of this belt.³⁸ McNab places the belt as well as the treaty into the larger economic picture of this frontier area as French influence was ending. With the French presence diminished, Native peoples in Canada lost an important competitive market outlet for pelts.

6–12. The G.J. or G.I. Belt of 1780, One of Seven Guy Johnson Belts.

Colonel Guy Johnson became the British superintendent for the Six Nations Iroquois at some point after 1776. He sailed to England in 1776 to secure this appointment. While he was in London, he had his portrait painted by Benjamin West (National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC, cat. no. 1940.1.10). Johnson's Mohawk friend, Capt. David Hall (Karonghyontye), is depicted as standing behind him, but whether Karonghyontye actually was with him in London is not known.

The authors now are assembling new data on the series of G. I. belts that have recently been discovered. Eventually we hope to use the documentary records to provide at least a basic description of each of these initialed belts. All seven now appear to differ in size and design, being linked only by the presence of Guy Johnson's initials. Some examples are as narrow as eight rows, while others are at least sixteen rows wide. No example of a "G.J." belt is definitely known to survive, but the authors suspect that no. 14, below, may be one example.



FIGURE 1. One of the G. I. (or "G. J.") belts (see text nos. 6–12) photographed early in the twentieth century (from M. R. Harrington, "Vestiges of Material Culture among the Canadian Delaware," *American Anthropologist* 10 [1908]: pl. XXIVb). Now located in the American Museum of Natural History.

13. The 1786 Belt.

In ca. 1845 the artist Paul Kane drew detailed sketches of three impressive wampum belts. One bears the date 1764 and is believed to depict the William Johnson belt noted above (no. 5). Another of these belts bears the date 1786 and is assumed to be an accurate portrayal of a belt for which we have not yet located documentary evidence. Jonathan Lainey is pursuing research on this newly discovered belt, for which we have at least the clue of the year in which it may have been made and presented.

14. The Double G-T Belt.

This supposedly “Munsee-Delaware” white belt (American Museum of Natural History cat. no. 50.1/1945) has a clearly formed “G” at one end followed by an “I” or a “T” with a poorly formed cross bar. At the opposite end of the belt is a “G-I” in a roughly mirrored image. The reading of this belt as “G-T” equates it in the minds of some viewers with “Georgius Tertius” (George III), which we believe to be imaginative but erroneous. Although George III (1738–1820) reigned from 1760 until his death, there is not a single document linking his name with any wampum belt. The possibility that these initials are actually “G. I.” and that they represent those initials found on Guy Johnson belts is being given careful attention. This belt may be the only surviving example of the seven Guy Johnson belts that have been documented in the literature.

15. The W □ C—Two People—1807 Belt.

This belt (Heye Foundation cat. no. 1/4004) is one of two initialed belts long held in the Heye Foundation collections at the Museum of the American Indian. Molloy provides a published picture of this interesting belt,³⁹ which may be of a relatively late date and which Becker had placed into a tourist category of secular belts. We now recognize this group as a subcategory of normal diplomatic (political) belts. The initials and the date provide an unmistakable orientation for the reading of this belt. Of note is that there are three different sections of the belt as demarcated by the color of the background. At the left is a white area into which dark beads have been used to form the “W □ C.” The central zone has a dark background on which appear two human figures at either end, holding or linked by a chain (?) that depends from their hands and runs across the lower part of the belt. Above this linking element (chain?), and in the center of the belt, is a small pipe also worked in white beads. At the right end is another white panel, into which the date 1807 is worked in dark beads. This is believed to be the year during which the belt was made, but no confirming text has been located. Jonathan Lainey suggests that the initials “WC” may be those of the Indian agent named William Claus, who was the son of Ann Johnson and Daniel Claus. Ann Johnson was a daughter of Sir William Johnson.

The WC-1807 belt clearly falls into this small, lettered subset of the secular category of wampum belts. Becker had correctly believed that the 1807 belt had been commissioned by non-Indians, but at first did not understand that it fell into the diplomatic subcategory of belts that emerged as early as 1745, and perhaps as early as 1724.

16. The IOHN TYZACKE—IPO Belt.

This is the second of the two Heye Foundation wampum belts (Heye Foundation cat. no 20/898) bearing a “text” and another for which Molloy offers a published picture.⁴⁰ Our research has been unable to identify John Tyzacke or anyone bearing a similar name. Lainey suggests that the obscurity of this person indicates that this belt is not one used in normal political interactions.

The ending text on this belt, or what appears to be “IPO” may have been intended to be a date, which appears to us as follows. The first letter is a “I” or an “I,” followed by a backward “9.” This is followed by the letter “O” or what could be a “C.” While this text string may have been intended to represent a date, the rude execution of the design does not enable the numbers to be decoded. If a late date is indicated, as perhaps the year “190[0]” or later, and the name on the belt represents a person not known, this example may be the only belt that now provides an example of a tourist piece.

17. The I G S or Simcoe Belt.

Beauchamp mentions a belt “probably presented by Gov. Simcoe, now in the national museum” (Smithsonian Institution cat. no. 165,103).⁴¹ Notes taken by Becker in 1976 on the collection held in the National Museum provide some clues as to what is meant by the vague wording of this and several other texts relating to this belt (see appendix). Beauchamp says that the I G S belt came from Willis N. Tobias of Moraviantown, Canada, who calls it “a companion belt to the one you [Beauchamp?] purchased from Mr [William Nelles?] Thompson.”⁴² Beauchamp appears to describe the I G S belt, but he may be referring to the “companion” of cat. no. 165,103.

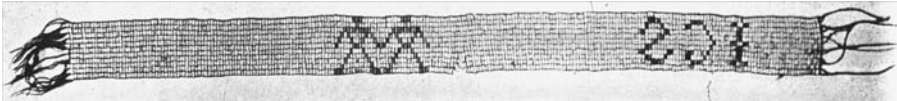


FIGURE 2. *The I G S (or Simcoe) belt (see text no. 17) in the Smithsonian Institution Collections (from Krieger, “Aspects of Aboriginal Decorative Art in America,” pl. 2 [bottom]; also published in Beauchamp, Wampum and Shell Articles, fig. 269).*

Becker’s notes regarding wampum in the Smithsonian Institution include data on five belts. Only one of these belts (no. 165,103) has initials. In 1976 Becker could not find any direct reference to any initialed belt as being in the Smithsonian’s collections. Under his listing for the Smithsonian Institution cat. no. 165,103 (see appendix) is information on what was identified in modern times as the “Confederation Belt,” a fourteen-row example some four hundred files long but said to measure twenty-two inches by four inches. A belt of roughly four hundred files length would have to be more than a meter long. However, in Becker’s notes relating to this example is a comment that appears to relate to the companion belt noted by Beauchamp.⁴³ The erstwhile companion belt, noted as having been given the modern name of “Peace Belt” and described as being a white belt nineteen inches long, bearing figures “of [an] Indian & [a] White & letters I.C.S.” In his reference to one of

three belts in the National Museum, Beauchamp prints a paragraph from the former owner that purports to give an origin for this example.

Beauchamp's published figure reveals a white belt some eleven rows wide and 244 files long (37.0 by 2.75 inches), plus an intact fringe.⁴⁴ He states that the beads are strung on a rough cord of red. Centered on the belt are two figures holding hands; both are eleven rows tall. Their triangular torsos are outlined in dark beads and filled with white beads. The three letters appear at the left end of the belt, if "I G S" is the correct reading. The "I" of the letters is an elaborate unit with crossbars on both ends and a bar through the center. All three letters appear to be only nine rows tall and centered across the eleven rows of the belt. Beauchamp suggests that these initials are those of John Graves Simcoe, who was in Ontario as the governor general of Upper Canada (Haut-Canada) from 1791 until 1794 or later.

On 13 October 1794 Lieutenant Governor Simcoe delivered a message to the Indian nations assembled "at the Wyandot village." No details of the treaty are provided, so we do not know if traditional wampum protocol was followed. The possibility that the editor of these papers omitted crucial references to wampum can be dismissed. The text of Simcoe's message suggests that wampum protocol was minimally operant since only in the penultimate paragraph is mention made of the presentation of a belt: "With this Belt therefore I now collect and bind you together." The importance of the occasion would suggest that the belt presented was of some size, but the use of political belts among the Wyandot (Huron) and others on the frontier may have been significantly diminished. No size, color, or decoration on this belt are noted.⁴⁵ Included with these published Simcoe papers is a letter, dated 9 December 1921, from "W. deC. Ravenel, Administrative Assistant to the Secretary [of the Smithsonian Institution]," written in answer to a query by the editor of these four volumes, Brig. Gen. Ernest Alexander Cruikshank. Ravenel quotes the following information from Mr. M. W. Stirling, then assistant curator of ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution:

The wampum belt referred to was purchased in 1899 from Mr. William N. Tobias. It is made of very fine old white wampum, the figures and letters being in blue. It has quite evidently been re-woven in comparatively recent years by unknown persons. It is woven on a home-made cord of red wool or tunic, the ends of which extend from either extremity as a fringe.

The belt is 34 inches long and a trifle less than 3 inches wide, being the width of eleven wampum beads. There can be no doubt concerning the age of the wampum, which certainly dates back to this period (1790). It seems probable that whoever re-worked the belt followed the original design.

In the museum catalogue the belt is listed as being Iroquois, although there appears to be room for doubt on this. It was collected in Moraviantown, Kent Co., Canada.⁴⁶

Reference to the possible use of red wool for the warp of this belt merits a brief note. Mathew Stirling, at the Smithsonian Institution, provided the information that Ravenel relayed to the editor of the Simcoe papers. Stirling concluded that the belt had been rewoven, based on the inference that woolen yarn or cordage was never employed by Native makers of wampum belts. Over the years several other observers have noted belts that are strung on woolen yarn, and all assumed that these belts had been restrung at some more recent period. When Becker first examined the small Penobscot wampum belt in the collections of the Vatican Museums, he reached the same conclusion. However, after an intensive search of the literature Becker concluded that woolen yarn and other materials may have been used for several examples of these aboriginal products.⁴⁷

At the top of the page printed by Simcoe is a rough but reasonably accurate pencil "sketch of Simcoe's Wampum Belt."⁴⁸ Ravenel also includes a paragraph extracted from a letter written by Beauchamp in 1899. Beauchamp interprets the belt as made by colonists for presentation to Indians and offers other logical but purely speculative interpretations of the design. While this may indeed be the belt presented by Lieutenant Governor Simcoe in 1794, it may derive from some other presentation. Becker assumes that Cruikshank identified no similar belt as presented by Simcoe among the papers that constitute the four volumes of letters and papers that he edited. Lainey has identified a photograph of this belt in Jennings's collection,⁴⁹ and Becker believes that this is the same belt illustrated by Beauchamp.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Secular-political wampum belts with Roman letters became more common after 1750, when there was a florescence in size and design elements. The Morgan 1850 belt now remains the only example of what Becker had called the tourist type of belt.⁵⁰ The Morgan 1850 belt was commissioned, or made to order, by a person outside the Native community for reasons distinct from any diplomatic, political, or ecclesiastical purpose such as those that previously had been the basis for fashioning wampum belts. In effect, the Morgan 1850 belt is a prototype of the numerous modern replica belts that have become increasingly common as elements in contemporary pan-Indian activities.

At least seventeen secular wampum belts bearing letters and/or dates can be reasonably documented in the literature, of which only four may have survived. In addition we have references to as many as nine other examples of belts with initials that have insufficient evidence for us to list them as distinct and separate examples. Even if all seventeen of the well-documented lettered belts had survived, they would form but a small percentage of the estimated three hundred surviving examples of wampum belts and large belt fragments that are known today. The probable survival of four examples, or just under 25 percent of all documented lettered belts, appears to be a reasonable reflection of the survival rates for the larger wampum belts from the Core Area in general. Of these estimated three hundred surviving wampum belts, approximately fifteen others have been identified as examples of ecclesiastical belts,

which have enjoyed a somewhat higher survival rate because of their specific consignment to Catholic Church contexts. The locations of a few ecclesiastical belts are now not known, and several are believed to have been lost in fires.

The vast numbers of small belts of wampum, which together with strings of wampum formed the stock and trade of every diplomatic meeting, have had an extremely low survival rate. Small belts and their reuse and recycling have been reviewed elsewhere.⁵¹ As belts grew in size and numbers after 1750, the many smaller examples, as well as the many strings of wampum that were made for various uses, were commonly recycled into larger belts. Even the larger belts were subject to recycling, either as their significance ended with the breaking of the treaties that they marked or as a result of any of the varied changes in political fortunes that mark the interactions between nations. Notable numbers of smaller belts survive from among the Penobscot, reflecting the absolutely smaller size of the belts fashioned by those people, as well as other factors in their culture. What were small belts among the members of the Huron and Iroquois confederacies were relatively large to the wampum-poor Penobscot, leading them to be more careful in the conservation of these objects. Other possible uses for wampum among the Penobscot, such as in the arrangement of marriages and in the transfer of political leadership, also may have contributed to the survival of numbers of small belts in their area.

Few if any of the wampum belts listed in this lettered category were as large as the larger treaty belts, and few seem to have been as large as even the average of the ecclesiastical belts. Belts with initials would, therefore, have been highly subject to recycling when large numbers of beads were needed for truly big belts. The very strong political nature of the belts with initials, often involving specific individuals such as Guy Johnson, also rendered them vulnerable to recycling. The death of the presenters, all of whom seem to have been specific colonial individuals in positions of authority to speak for the government, might leave a memorial belt vulnerable to being transformed into a return belt to the new person occupying the same position. Such presentations would have the effect of continuing the relationship between the original parties in a treaty by including a new colonial officer in the loop—by offering a belt fashioned from the beads of a predecessor. Such cognitive equivalencies would fit well into an integrated cosmology of peoples such as among the various members of the Iroquois Confederacy.⁵²

The documentary evidence indicates that wampum belts with initials and/or dates as design elements now can clearly be demonstrated as but one subcategory of diplomatic-political examples within the larger subset of secular-political belts. These secular belts formed the vast majority of the wampum belts made and used during the period of their primary use.

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NOTES

1. Marshall Joseph Becker, "A Wampum Belt Chronology: Origins to Modern Times," *Northeastern Anthropology* 63 (2002): 49–70. See also Frederick W. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907–10).

2. George R. Price, "Wampumpeag: The Impact of the 17th Century Wampum Trade on Native Cultures in Southern New England and New Netherlands" (master's thesis, University of Montana, Missoula, 1996).

3. William M. Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles Used by the New York Indians* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1901), 328–480.

4. Marshall Joseph Becker, "Wampum: A History and Catalogue of Known Examples" (manuscript on file, West Chester University, West Chester, Pennsylvania).

5. Becker, "Wampum Belt Chronology."

6. See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Norton, 1990).

7. Marshall Joseph Becker, "The Vatican Wampum Belt: An 1831 Example of an 'Ecclesiastical-Convert' Belt and a Typology and Chronology of Wampum Belt Use," *Bollettino—Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie* 21 (2001): 363–411. See also Marshall Joseph Becker, "Ecclesiastical Wampum Belts and the Abenaki" (paper presented at the 1999 University of Vermont fall conference "Remembering and Forgetting," Burlington, VT).

8. Marshall Joseph Becker, "A Penobscot Wampum Belt in the Vatican Museums: A Possible Nineteenth Century Example of Native American Diplomacy," *Bollettino—Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie* 24 (2004): 79–124.

9. Becker, "Wampum Belt Chronology."

10. Jonathan C. Lainey, "La 'Monnaie des Sauvages' ou les colliers de porcelaine d'hier à aujourd'hui. La collection de wampums du Musée de la Civilisation à Québec" (master's thesis, Laval University, 2003). Also see Jonathan Lainey, *La «monnaie des*

Sauvages. *Les colliers de wampum d'hier à aujourd'hui* (Sillery, Québec: Septentrion, 2004).

11. Becker, "Wampum Belt Chronology."
12. Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles*, 390–91.
13. Lainey, *La "Monnaie des Sauvages."*
14. Becker, "Vatican Wampum Belt."
15. Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles*, 390–91.
16. Anne S. B. Molloy, *Wampum* (New York: Hastings House, 1977), 73.
17. Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles*, 390–91.
18. Becker, "Wampum Belt Chronology"; Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*.
19. Marshall Joseph Becker, "The Moravian Mission in the Forks of the Delaware: Reconstructing the Migration and Settlement Patterns of the Jersey Lenape during the Eighteenth Century through Documents in the Moravian Archives," in "The American Indians and the Moravians," special issue, *Unitas Fratrum* 21/22 (1987): 83–172. See also Marshall Joseph Becker, "Native Settlements in the Forks of Delaware, Pennsylvania in the 18th Century: Archaeological Implications," *Pennsylvania Archaeologist* 58, no. 1 (1988): 43–60; Marshall Joseph Becker, "Teedyuscung's Youth and Hereditary Land Rights in New Jersey: The Identification of the Unalachtigo," *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of New Jersey* 47 (1992): 37–60; and Marshall Joseph Becker, "The Lenopi, the Native Americans of New Jersey South of the Raritan River" (manuscript on file, West Chester University, West Chester, Pennsylvania).
20. "Colonial Records of Pennsylvania [Binder's title]," in *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, vol. 8 (Harrisburg, PA: Theo. Fenn, 1852), 217.
21. *Ibid.*, 221.
22. Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles*, 391.
23. Lainey, *La "Monnaie des Sauvages."*
24. Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles*, 390–91.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Molloy, *Wampum*, 73.
27. "Colonial Records of Pennsylvania," 8:206.
28. *Ibid.*, 207.
29. *Ibid.*, 208, 218.
30. *Ibid.*, 222.
31. Sir William Johnson, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, ed. James Sullivan, 14 vols. (Albany: State University of New York, 1921–62), 10:898.
32. John Graves Simcoe, *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe, with Allied Documents Relating to His Administration of the Government of Upper Canada*, ed. Ernest Alexander Cruikshank, 4 vols. (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1923–26), 3:128. See also National Archives of Canada: Record Group 8: British Military Records (microfilm); National Archives of Canada: Record Group 10: Minutes of Indian Affairs (microfilm).
33. Jean-Pierre Sawaya, *Alliance et dépendance: comment la Couronne britannique a obtenu la collaboration des Indiens de la vallée de Saint-Laurent entre 1760 et 1774* (Sillery, Québec: Éditions du Septentrion, 2002), 109–10.
34. Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles*, 390–91.

35. Ibid. The authors identified only recently the source of Beauchamp's information, which was in E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, Vol. VII: London Documents* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parrsons and Co., 1856), 392.

36. Johnson, *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 11:309–10.

37. Marshall Joseph Becker, "Wampum: The Development of an Early American Currency," *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of New Jersey* 36 (1980): 1–11. Also see Becker, "Vatican Wampum Belt."

38. David T. McNab, *Circles of Time: Aboriginal Land Rights and Resistance in Ontario* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 49.

39. Molloy, *Wampum*, 72.

40. Ibid.

41. Herbert William Krieger, "Aspects of Aboriginal Decorative Art in America Based on Specimens in the United States National Museum," in *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution (for the Year) 1930* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931), 519–56, plus 37 plates. See also Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles*, fig. 269.

42. Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles*, 409.

43. Marshall Joseph Becker, "D Field Notes from 1976, Smithsonian Institution Research Project" (manuscript on file, West Chester University, West Chester, Pennsylvania).

44. Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles*, fig. 269.

45. Simcoe, *Correspondence*, 3:121–26.

46. Ibid., 3:126.

47. Marshall Joseph Becker, "Wampum Belts Strung on Wool" (manuscript in circulation; on file at West Chester University, West Chester, Pennsylvania). Also see Becker, "Penobscot Wampum Belt."

48. Simcoe, *Correspondence*, 3:126.

49. Francis Jennings and William N. Fenton, eds., *The Iroquois Indians: A Documentary History of the Diplomacy of the Six Nations and Their League* (Woodbridge, CT: D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian, 1984), reel 50 (of 50), doc. no. 128.

50. Becker, "Vatican Wampum Belt"; Becker, "Ecclesiastical Wampum Belts and the Abenaki."

51. Becker, "Penobscot Wampum Belt."

52. Marshall Joseph Becker, "Calumet Smoke, Wampum Beads, and Bird Quills: The Meanings and Materials Used by Natives in Economic Interactions with Europeans in Colonial America," *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of New Jersey* 58 (2003): 7–26.

53. James Mooney, "The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890," in *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, pt. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892–93), 285.

APPENDIX

A SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION WAMPUM BELT,
PROBABLY NO. 165,103

Krieger's publication of the I G S or Simcoe belt remains the primary documentation for that example. The fourteen-row belt seen by M. J. Becker in 1976 (no. 165,103), recently given the name "Confederation Belt," is described in Becker's notes as follows:

Both ends of the belt are damaged. The elements from "right to left" are as follow: a cabin with smoke coming from the roof; a second cabin, a human figure with hands folded on midsection, a figure with arms hanging; a second figure with arms hanging; two figures wearing pendants about their necks and clutching a "hatchet" (pipe?) between them; 7 "houses" standing on a single path (formed by a white row of wampum beads along the bottom edge); each "house" has a window and chimney but these 7 "structures" each differ in slight and probably insignificant ways. (See Becker, "D Field Notes from 1976," sketch A)

The Smithsonian Institution records, in which some confusion is evident, provide the basis for the following information, with some corrections and clarifications provided more recently by Becker. We suspect that data relating to the belts illustrated by Krieger in 1931 (see n. 41) have been confused in the museum records, with the following data said to relate to cat. no. 165,103: Twenty-two inches long by four inches wide; fourteen rows by about four hundred beads long. [These two data sets do not match, suggesting a transcription error or some other source of confusion. A belt of ca. four hundred files would be at least one hundred centimeters or ca. thirty-six inches long.]

Wyandot (?) Huron, an Iroquoian tribe
From: Chatham, Kent Co., Ontario, Canada
Acc. No.: 26237; Neg. No.: MNH 027
Collector: William Nelles Thompson
Purchased for \$100 on 29 September 1892
Exhibit Hall 9 [On exhibition in 1976?]
Illustrated: *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution 1930*, pl. 2 (middle); Krieger, "Aspects of Aboriginal Decorative Art in America," pl. 2 (bottom)

A label once associated with Smithsonian belt 165,103 reads, "Iroquois Indians, Canada." Possibly this is the "great Wampum belt of Union of the Ohio River Indians (in the attempted union between 1807 and 1811), whose keeper supposedly was the Wyandot tribe.⁵³ The man (Thompson?) from whom this (twenty-two-inch-long?) belt was actually purchased had no proof of how he acquired it. He claimed it was "traditionally" called the "Confederation Belt" of Tecumseh, which had been associated with a so-called "Peace Belt." The Peace Belt also belonged to this man (Thompson?) but was

sold elsewhere. The (Peace?) belt was said to be nineteen inches long, of white beads, with figures of an Indian and a white, and the letters "I. C. S." (I. G. S.?). This nineteen-inch-long "Peace Belt" supposedly originated with Roundhead, a Wyandot chief, and Bluejacket, a Shawnee. It was designed to throw the "seventeen fires" of the union (United States?) off guard.

Becker suspects that the complex designs seen on the long belt illustrated by Krieger could *not* fit on a belt only twenty-two inches long! In addition, a belt that is twenty-two inches long would seem to be a reasonable "companion" to a nineteen-inch belt, as noted below, but perhaps unrelated to the long and elaborate example illustrated by Krieger. Either Becker's notes or the museum records have been garbled. The information on belt 165,103 in Becker's notes continues below.

The supposed place of acquisition for belt 165,103 (Chatham, Ontario) is also claimed to be the place where Tecumseh fought his last battle, under the command of the British officer Colonel Proctor. Tecumseh was (said to have been) killed on 5 October 1813, at the age of forty-four, on the Thames River battlefield. Lainey notes the consistent pattern among belt vendors of claiming that each example had an association with a significant historical event. This "value enhancement" narrative applies to the sale of all types of antiques or items being sold that may date from the near or distant past. Becker notes that at the end of the nineteenth century, when many of the belts acquired "names," they also "acquired" historical connections. These creative histories reflect non-Native values, or modern fictions, that differ greatly from the values of honesty and reliability seen in the earlier records. Note that when belts were presented at the Treaty of Easton in 1758, those with questionable or forgotten histories were clearly identified as such. Even where the duplicitous Teedyuscung was creating a personal power base for himself, the Natives from other cultures would not permit fables to be created regarding belts in their possession.

The man from whom the Smithsonian belt 165,103 was purchased supposedly read what he called the "Confederation Belt" as follows:

Goot-chan-hoosh (an Indian?; see 6/12/1952 R. A. E., Jr.)

Elaborate houses of the whites are on the right (east) and wigwams on left (west)

[Five Human Figures from right to left]:

- a) Tecumseh (Shawnee)
- b) Roundhead (Wyandot): Shown grasping the hatchet with Tecumseh in agreement, to go to war against whites
- c) Bluejacket (Shawnee) agreeing with two others [above]
- d) Chief from "Big Fish River" *Na-maesi-sepu* (the Ohio or Mississippi). The name of the chief was not determined

e) Fifth figure is "Black Hawk," (Sauk and Fox) "who was a young man, [and] could not carry his tribe with him, or sit in the council of Old men—chiefs—, but could only urge his people to join with others in carrying on the purpose of the Confederacy." [For these named Indians see Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (in n. 1); see also "Colonial Records of Pennsylvania" (in n. 20), 8:207n].

In 1952 R. A. E. Jr. comments as follows: “The interpretation of the fifth figure is unlikely because: Black Hawk was born in 1767, thus was about forty in 1807 and a year older than Tecumseh, who was born in 1768. Keokuk was then chief of Sauk and was opposed to Black Hawk” (Keokuk was born ca. 1780).

Black Hawk did not join the Council of Chiefs as he was not in a position to do so.

R. A. E. thinks that since Black Hawk was not in a commanding position, he could not be represented on the “Confederation Belt.” However, R. A. E. acknowledges that Black Hawk’s opposition to the whites led him to lead the small-scale [attacks]. Black Hawk was of [age in] 1832 (at age sixty-five). But R. A. E. thinks he appeared to have little connection with the Confederacy.

Becker comments on the R. A. E. and Black Hawk information:

These and similar verbal “reports” lack any validity because they are not part of an oral tradition. These comments represent only the ideas or thoughts of individuals, and are narratives that are made up on the spot rather than representing collective or cultural traditions. However, elements of this story as it relates to the fifth figure (“e” above) may be valid, but may only incidentally have been applied to this belt. Age was not the sole criterion for leadership among these peoples. Since Keokuk was a chief, Black Hawk may have had subordinate status, or was considered to have the status of a “young man” and therefore could not carry his tribe with him (count on their support). By placing an image of Black Hawk on this belt the other four chiefs could provide him with “status” and thus gain the support of those few Sauk in sympathy with Black Hawk. The total populations within each of these groups were very small, and any support in opposition to the “Whites” was valuable.

The political sophistication of these native people had been often underestimated, and the use of these belts in providing validation of status, and to support the “official position” of these individuals was often not understood. This interpretation of the belt may be perfectly consistent as an oral tale, although it neither “proves” the alleged origin for this belt, nor does the belt “prove” the tale. My point is that the tale seems internally consistent, and possibly could reflect an original meaning for this belt. If so the tale might suggest the reasons for the design and date the belt’s origin. However, a vastly more reliable source of information would be a written contemporary description.

On 23 March 1976 William C. Sturtevant wisely suggested that we “do not label this [example as the] ‘Great Wampum Belt of Union’ nor give it any tribal identification. Merely refer to it as a wampum belt; [you] may state that it probably dates from the 18th century; [and] may say it is from the Great Lakes region—but do not be any more specific as to tribes. Our information on the history of this item is *not* accurate” (personal communication).

