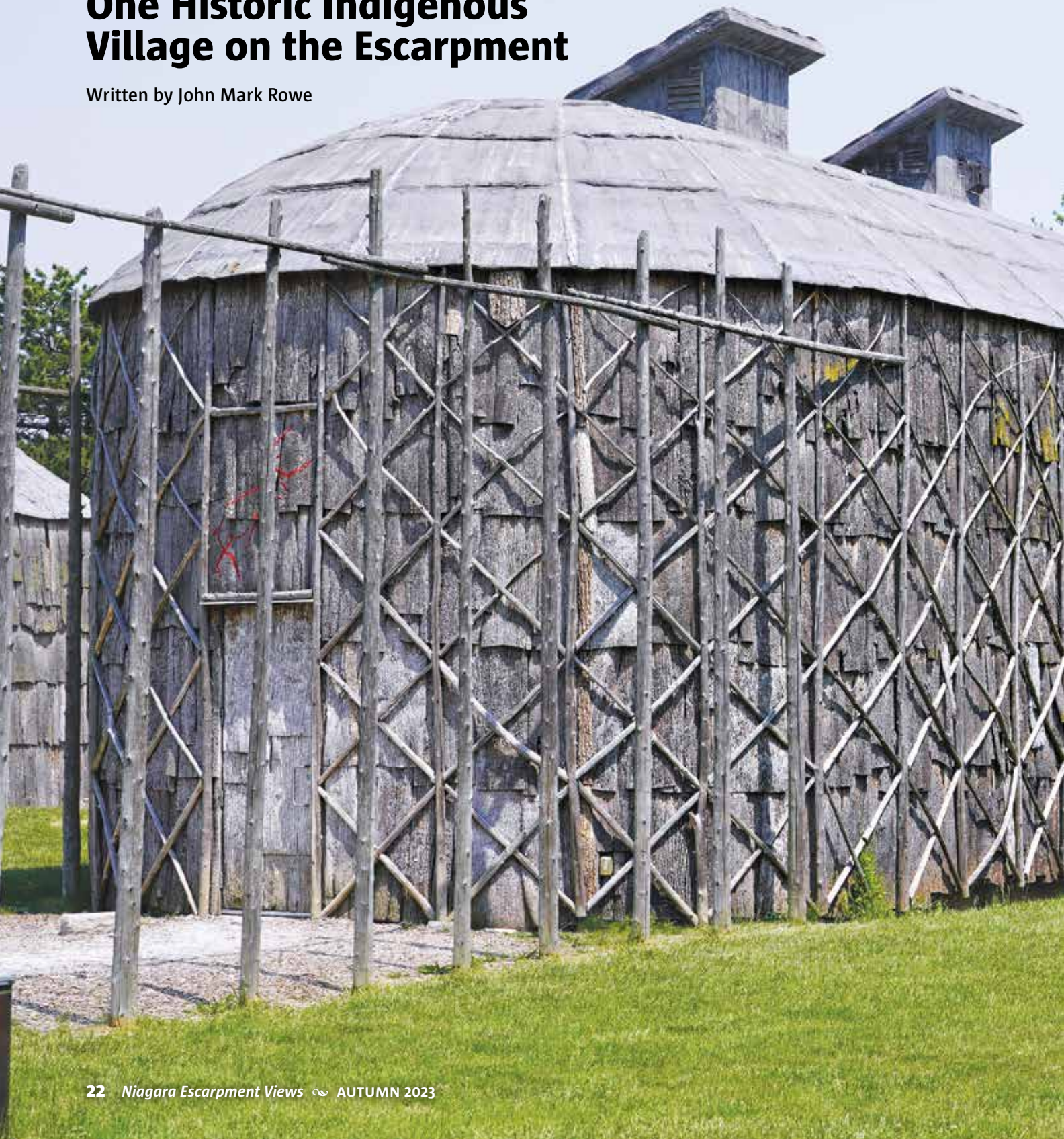



# Tracing People of the Past

## One Historic Indigenous Village on the Escarpment

Written by John Mark Rowe







**W**e can travel back to the Halton Hills part of Turtle Island about 460 years, thanks to a number of archeological digs. One site on the Niagara Escarpment has been located within Scotsdale Farm, an Ontario Heritage Trust property. The six studies from 1984 to 2004 were carried out by the Ontario Heritage Foundation, University of Toronto and Laurentian University. They revealed a village perched on a promontory overlooking Owl Creek, a tributary of the Credit River.

This longhouse and palisade, at right, reconstructed at Crawford Lake Conservation Area near Milton, suggest how the 16th-century Iroquoian village on land now called Scotsdale Farm, may have looked. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS





▲ Possible site of the village which was on a terraced plateau near a steep drop to Owl Creek. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

**D**ating the site was greatly helped by reference to the 1973-74 work at Crawford Lake in Milton. The archeological digs that led to the reconstructed longhouses at Crawford Lake, along with pollen deposits, placed villages there in the 1370s, 1400s and finally 1622-1652. The site at Scotsdale, labelled Emmerson Springs by William Fox, is estimated to range from 1550-1580.

The suggestion has been that these residents may have been Neutral peoples, correctly known as Attiwonderonk. If so, this is about the farthest east they have been located. Europeans labelled them Neutral because they maintained peace with the Huron-Wendat peoples

and with the Five Nations Haudenosaunee. These were all Iroquoian-speaking peoples. The Neutral lived in the Hamilton-Niagara region and western New York, controlling the flint or chert to make arrowheads for war and trading it with the Wendat and Haudenosaunee who were at war with each other.

When this village was extant, the Attiwonderonk population was at its peak, perhaps explaining their easterly expansion into Wendat territory. They prospered because they had not yet been exposed to the European diseases, religion or the demands of the fur trade.

#### **Village of Longhouses**

The 2004 Laurentian University report by

archaeologist Alicia Hawkins incorporates findings from previous studies to deliver a detailed report on the Escarpment's local inhabitants 460 years ago. The village of longhouses sat on a terraced plateau, surrounded by a defensive palisade. South of the wall, the ground drops steeply to Owl Creek below, providing further defence. This area is in a transition zone from the Carolinian forest of maples, oak, hickory, beech and Black Walnut to the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence Forest of Red Pine, Eastern White Pine, Eastern Hemlock, Yellow Birch, maple and oak. The site has a maple-and beech-dominant uplands to the north with an oak-dominant forest to the south and a cedar swamp at the base





▲ Owl Creek on Scotsdale Farm is near the site of the 16th-century village that was discovered by archaeologists in 1984. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

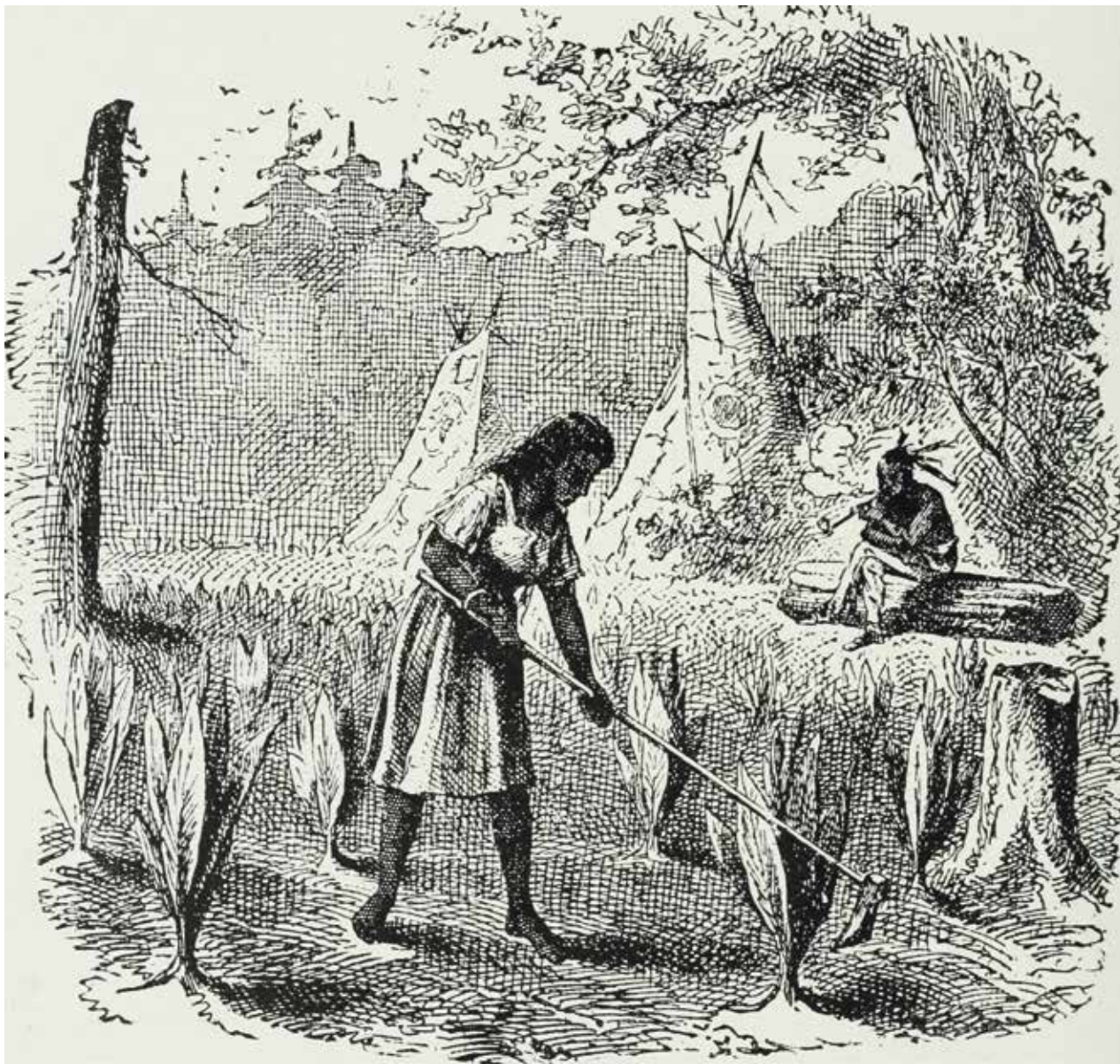


▲ The Attiwonderonk, thought to have lived in the 16th-century village, were Iroquoian-speaking. This stamp issued in 1976 shows a man and woman dancing. COURTESY OF JOHN MARK ROWE.



► Woodland near the site of the former village would have provided food and fuel for the inhabitants. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.





◀ A Petun woman is hoeing tobacco plants while a man smokes while sitting on a log. IMAGE COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA IMAGES.

▲ The “three sisters” grown together by Native peoples are corn, beans and squash, all of which would keep well through the winter. This display is at Crawford Lake Conservation Area. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

of the slope. Cedar swamps provide winter yarding habitats for White-tailed Deer.

White-tailed Deer were the most common bones found at this site, being the principal source of food. But meals were varied with proteins like Black Bear, wapiti, which is a Native word for elk; raccoon, and Grey Squirrel. The ubiquitous Passenger Pigeon, now extinct, Eastern Wild Turkey, and Eastern Box Turtle were common meals along with whitefish, salmon, trout and suckers.

Remains of domestic dogs were found throughout the village site. Dogs were used for hunting, protection and companionship by the early inhabitants, valued then as

now for the same reasons.

Smoking tobacco was a common pastime among these people evidenced by the large number of ceramic pipe fragments discovered. The pipes ranged from very decorative designs to completely plain. One intact pipe was found near a midden. Quite a number of fragments in one area, partially underground, suggest the site of a sweat lodge.

### Found Artifacts

The majority of chipped stone at the site was Onondaga chert. It was transported here from the Niagara region and then chipped to form scrapers, wedges and points. Ground stones were used

for axes. A stone effigy and a stone pipe fragment were also interesting discoveries. Grinding stones were usually granite and included grinders and hammerstones.

A few small flat or tubular pieces of copper suggest these were decorative items traded with northern tribes. Quite a number of worked bone beads also point to decorative items worn by the inhabitants. Worked and drilled deer phalanges also suggest a type of wind chime.

The Neutral, Wendat and Petun peoples, all being Iroquoian-speaking, also hunted, fished and grew the “three sisters” – beans, corn and squash throughout this area. The Petun may

have supplied the tobacco.

All these archeological findings paint a picture of a thriving village of Attiawonderonk peoples living in community on the edge of the Escarpment. They obviously travelled and traded with the neighbouring villages and nations. This site at Scotsdale Farm in Halton Hills gives a satisfactory glimpse of daily life before European contact.

### Devastating Contact

European contact had a devastating effect on the Attiawonderonk population. Their neighbours the Wendat were greatly affected by smallpox and the divisiveness of Christianity. In 1649-50





▲ A few arrow or spear points made of Onondaga chert were found at the longhouse location and the midden. For an idea of the finds, shown here are artifacts found at other locations, from the Native American Collection, Peabody Museum, Harvard University. PHOTO FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

◀ The "three sisters" grown together by Native peoples are corn, beans and squash, all of which would keep well through the winter. This display is at Crawford Lake Conservation Area. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

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Photos from "Seven Stones"

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▲ The Attiawonderonk village site is located on Scotsdale Farm which has an entrance on Trafalgar Road in Halton Hills. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

► This map of “Huron Country,” marked either 1631 or 1651, is thought to have been drawn by Jesuit missionary Jean de Brébeuf. It shows Georgian Bay in the north, part of Lake Ontario in the south, Lake Huron in the west and Lake Simcoe in the east, as well as some rivers and streams. IMAGE COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA IMAGES.



their enemies, the members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy residing south of Lake Ontario, saw an opportunity to remove their principal rivals to the fur trade. They moved through Ontario destroying and dispersing the Wendat peoples. Many fled to their Attiawonderonk allies, but destruction of the Neutral nation by the Iroquois was the next stage in securing all these lands. The residents of the Escarpment that were not killed fled to Quebec, to western tribes or were adopted in the Haudenosaunee tribes like the Seneca. While the Wendat nation still has a presence in Quebec, the Attiawonderonk – Neutral peoples no longer exist.

Part of the Aninshinaabe nation moved south into this area by the 1690s. They became known as the Mississaugas of the Credit, following a seasonal cycle of movement and harvesting along the Credit River and other rivers. They gathered at the mouth of the Credit for the autumn salmon run, held ceremonies and were visited by French traders who gave them blankets and other useful items on credit. In the winter months extended family groups hunted in today's Halton Hills area. After sugaring-off they gathered again at the mouth of the Credit River for the spring salmon run, ceremonies and to repay the French traders with the pelts collected during

the winter. Extended families would again disperse around the shores of Lake Ontario to grow the three sisters and enjoy the summer weather.

Salmon and trout are once again plentiful in the Credit River. The forest cover protects an increasing population of animals, rodents, birds and the odd *Ursus americanus* or bear, along the Escarpment in Halton Hills. While a vast amount of history separates us from the people who once lived above Owl Creek, we are still able to get a sense of their world while hiking along the Niagara Escarpment today. **NEV**

*John Mark Rowe's last feature for this magazine was "Royal Retreat," in Winter 2022-23.*



▲ This photograph from 1910 shows a Huron woman harvesting corn, possibly in a manner similar to how Native peoples have prepared winter corn for centuries. IMAGE COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA IMAGES.



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