

The Clay We Are Made of: Haudenosaunee Land Tenure on the Grand River by Susan M Hill

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The Clay We Are Made of
Haudenosaunee Land Tenure on the Grand River

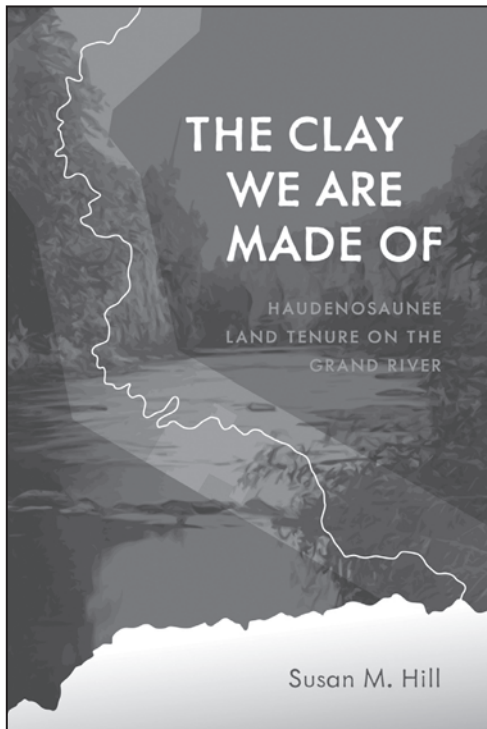
By Susan M Hill

Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, Series: Critical Studies in Native History, 2017. 242 pages, appendices, notes, glossary, and bibliography. \$27.95 paper ISBN 978-0-88755-717-0, \$25 pdf ISBN 978-0-88755-457-5, \$25 e-pub ISBN 978-0-88755-458-2 (www.uofmpress.ca)

Susan M. Hill, associate professor, Indigenous Studies & History and director of the Centre for Indigenous Studies at the University of Toronto maintains that for the Haudenosaunee (Hodinöhsö:ni), “land is possibly the best point of reference for considering history” (3). She later observes that the Haudenosaunee explain their world by using various spheres of existence and temporal boundaries” (81) Indeed, scholars writing on the Haudenosaunee have long recognized that that the

terrain and ecosystem along the Grand River were similar to their Mohawk Valley homeland in New York. In this regard, her conclusions here remind me of a statement made by anthropologist Keith Basso in his *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996). In it, Basso pointed out that to the Western Apaches, “the past is embedded in features of the earth ...which together endow their lands with multiple forms of significance that reach into their lives and shape the way they think.” (34) Having lost so much in the American Revolution, the Six Nations allied to the British recreated a world that they had remembered as best they could and reestablished their ancient Confederacy under the *Karihwa’önwe* (Great Law) along the Grand River.

The author quite effectively describes Haudenosaunee beliefs and how they fit into their history of land tenure in southern Ontario. She details the history of Six Nations land loss, pointing out that today the Six Nations people at Ohsweken have 55,000 acres, 5% of the land promised by the British to their allied Haudenosaunee allies in 1784. She describes how territorial reductions such as the Surrender of 1841 were sanctioned by the Crown and how officials failed to protect Six Nations lands. Yet, instead of just recounting Haudenosaunee land loss and treating them as mere victims, she quite effectively uses her facility in the Mohawk and Cayuga languages and her insider’s position as a Mohawk



scholar to tell both sides of the story.

Hill uses diverse sources to narrate her story, including the valuable primary accounts published by the Champlain Society, census materials, reports and correspondence found in Record Group 10 of the National Archives of Canada, Six Nations Council Minutes, and oral histories and published writings by Haudenosaunee themselves. In chapter one, she nicely explores the Creation Story, the Four Ceremonies, the *Karihwa'ónwe* (the Great Law) and the *Karihwiyo* (Good Message) of Handsome Lake (Sga:nyodai:yoh), and how they define gender roles, ritual, the natural world, land and boundaries, as well as identity. In chapter two she insists that, although the Good Message of Handsome Lake provided a mechanism for accommodationist change within which Haudenosaunee could maintain their identity, it also reaffirmed the previous teachings of the *Karihwa'ónwe*. To her, Handsome Lake was not breaking with traditional beliefs and gender roles since the Good Message importantly reinforced both clans and the matrilineal governmental structure of the Great Law (75). In contrast to Anthony F. C. Wallace's writings, she brings out that women never abandoned their important role in horticulture, a fact that appears to be consistent with my own Seneca research in New York.

In chapter three, Hill's focus is on first contact with the Europeans right through the American Revolution. Unfortunately, she covers too much ground (in only 47 pages) and thus makes generalizations. When she discusses how the Haudenosaunee resettled refugees such as the Huron, Neutral, and Erie into their territory, she never mentions that they were conquered peoples and that the lands acquired by the Haudenosaunee at Ohsweken were lands

that the Senecas took from the Neutrals in 1650-1651. In chapter four the author finally gets to the agreement with the Mississauga, Haudenosaunee settlement along the Grand River, and the promises made by Frederick Haldimand and the Crown. Then Hill tells the familiar story of Joseph Brant's double-dealings, all without Iroquois Confederacy authorization, and how he and his family benefitted. Hill then focuses in on John Graves Simcoe, how Loyalists and squatters secured Six Nations land, as well as the nefarious activities of Samuel Jarvis, the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, and his scandalous investment of Six Nations trust funds in the ill-fated Grand River Navigation Company. In her fine analysis in chapter six, Hill documents the Confederacy Council's formal assertions of sovereignty made in petitions to the Dominion government and to Crown officials, especially from the 1880s to 1920.

Unlike some recent writings on more contemporary events at Grand River, Hill's book is a more balanced account admitting certain failings of the Confederacy Council. For example, in chapter four, she mentions that seven of the Haudenosaunee chiefs collaborated with Jarvis in the so-called "Surrender" of 1841. Later in chapter five, she informs the reader that the Confederacy Council, going against tradition, acceded to the Indian Act of 1869 and struck women off the annuity payroll when they married non-Indian men.

Although Hill brings new perspectives, there are some limitations to her work. Half of her book deals with the period before the Six Nations' resettled at Grand River and only 110 pages of the 242-page text are devoted to the years after 1784. Her book abruptly ends in 1924 with the Canadian invasion and overthrow of the

Confederacy Council and its replacement with an elected government imposed by Ottawa. She assumes that all of her readers are familiar with what has transpired in Six Nations history from 1924 to 2015. In an all-too-brief conclusion (less than four pages), the author abruptly drops into her narrative the work of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the areas of land claims, education, and environ-

ment. Using the historic metaphor, “polishing the chain,” the author then calls for a new era of mutual respect in order to prevent future policy disasters that too often has marred British and Canadian policies since 1784 (241).

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Travellers through Empire

Indigenous Voyages from Early Canada

By Cecilia Morgan

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University
Press 2017. 326 pages \$39.95 hardcover
ISBN 9780773551343 (www.mqup.ca)

While most examinations of Indigenous peoples in North America focus on the impact of an expanding Europe on the ‘new’ continent and its native inhabitants, historian Cecilia Morgan reverses the perspective to examine First Nations men and women who journeyed to the United Kingdom from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. In this fine-grained study, the University of Toronto historian considers how the North American voyageurs were affected by their exposure to the metropole, and occasionally also influenced Britons.

As readers of Morgan's earlier work on nineteenth-century political rhetoric, heroic historical symbols and people, and historical commemoration have come to expect, *Travellers through Empire* is based on thorough research, and provides thoughtful analysis within a presentation that is clear and persuasive. Her subjects this time had varied reasons for travelling to Scotland

or England. Some, like the part-Cherokee John Norton, had been shaped by birth and early years in Scotland. Norton, whose life spanned the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, represented the end of the era in which diplomacy and military alliance dominated Native-newcomer relations in the future eastern Canada. Several others, such as the Methodist missionaries Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby), and George Copway (Kahgegahbowh)

