

From Huronia to Wendakes: Adversity, Migrations, and Resilience 1650-1900 edited by Thomas Peace and Kathryn Magee Labelle

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Book Reviews

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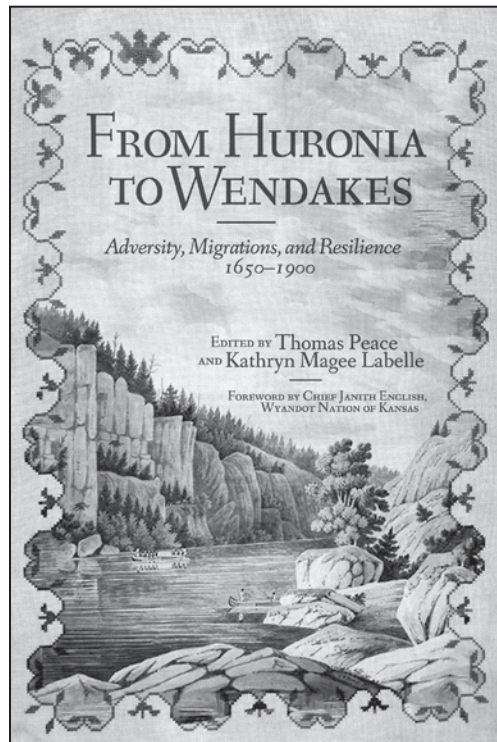
***From Huronia to Wendakes
Adversity, Migrations, and
Resilience 1650-1900***

Edited by Thomas Peace and
Kathryn Magee Labelle

Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016.
256 pages. US\$34.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-
8061-5535-7 <<http://www.oupres.com/>>.

From Huronia to Wendakes: Adversity, Migrations, and Resilience 1650-1900 contains an intriguing collection of papers that argue that Wendat dispersal, cultural change, and even intermarriage with colonial settlers from 1650-1900 were strategic and successful adaptations designed to maintain their Indigenous sovereignty in a post-1650 colonial North America. This book will force historians and archaeologists to seriously question much of the previous historical scholarship that has generally portrayed the post-1650 Wendat, Wyandot, Wyandotte nations as diasporic, assimilated, and destroyed Indigenous peoples. Obviously, the new perspective offered in this book has application to the colonial history of other Indigenous peoples of North America.

The goals of the book are twofold: 1) to write Wendat history from a transnational and dynamic perspective as a case study of “Indigenous survival and rejuvenation,”



and 2) to form a collaborative network of non-Indigenous and Wendat scholars to write a truer history of the entire Wendat Confederacy (i.e. “multitude of Wendakes” (7)), utilizing archaeological, documentary, and oral history evidence and including Wendat voices (9-10). The book admirably fulfills both goals.

From Huronia to Wendakes is organized into eight chapters, and includes a

brief foreword and list of suggested readings. The foreword, by Chief Janith English (Wyandot Nation of Kansas), praises the various authors for their respect and collaboration with the contemporary Wendat people for including Wendat voices in post-1650 Wendat history. The “Introduction,” written by the editors Kathryn Labelle and Thomas Peace, situates the book as a counter-argument to the widely-accepted image of the early seventeenth-century Wendat as “a people destined for destruction” (6). The editors note that, contrary to earlier research by archaeologists and historians based primarily on pre-1650 evidence that portray the Wendat as a decimated and destroyed people scattered to the wind as refugees, this book “brings together the work of emerging scholars studying Wendat communities in the post-1650 era” (7) that presents Wendat history as replete with examples of Indigenous agency, resilience, and persistence. The young scholars who contributed to this book obtained their Ph.D.s over the last decade and all worked collaboratively with the Wendat, integrating oral history and Wendat voices into their work.

Each of the six numbered chapters that follow the Introduction present a historical case study of Wendat cultural resiliency and economic and political persistence, ranging from the mid-seventeenth to early-twentieth centuries. In Chapter 1, Kathryn Labelle challenges the traditional interpretation of the seventeenth-century Wendat occupation and evacuation of Gahoendoe (Christian Island, Georgian Bay). Labelle makes the case that, traditionally, archaeologists and historians have treated Gahoendoe as the end of the Wendat people. Through careful reinterpretation of documentary and archaeological evidence, Labelle argues that the decisions to quit “Huronian,” occupy Gahoendoe, and then

leave the island as several discrete groups, settling in dispersed but united communities in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region, were made as a “strategy of calculated dispersal” (29) to maintain Wendat sovereignty and their important status as middlemen in the French-Indigenous fur trade of the seventeenth century.

Chapter 2, by Andrew Sturtevant, presents the eighteenth-century Wendat as brilliant geopolitical agents, manipulating both the British and American military during the American War of Independence. Sturtevant uses archaeological and documentary evidence to recreate the socio-political relationships between the western Wendat communities at Detroit and Sandusky, making a convincing claim that the Wendat Confederacy was still operational as a leading Indigenous confederacy in late eighteenth-century eastern North America.

Chapter 3 continues the story of the eastern Wendat after their departure from Gahoendoe 1650-1651. Thomas Peace provides a detailed look at the political economy of the Lorette Wendat from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. Peace builds a compelling case that the Lorette Wendat adopted a clear strategy to maintain Wendat territorial sovereignty and political independence for close to two centuries that involved acquisition of legal title to land, cultivation of close relationship with other Indigenous communities in Quebec by being highly mobile, and embracing cultural change through manufacturing, education, and intermarriage with non-Wendat. He supports his interpretation of Wendat history by looking at the biographies of two prominent and influential Wendat men—Otehiondi and Sawatanen, both of whom successfully protected Wendat culture, lands, and sovereignty, sometimes through legal

means, by selective engagement with other Indigenous and settler nations and by the adoption of Western manufacturing, land tenure, and education. This strategy is still employed in twenty-first century Wendake to maintain Wendat political autonomy and land sovereignty.

In Chapter 4, Michael Cox claims that the Wendat relationship with Presbyterian missionaries in the Sandusky region of Ohio in the early nineteenth century was characterized by Wendat practicality. He argues that the Sandusky Wendat utilized missionary goodwill as a source of labour, medical treatment, education of children, English instruction, and assistance with legal dealings with the U.S. government. Cox eschews the idea that the nineteenth-century Sandusky Wendat became assimilated to Protestant American values.

Chapter 5, written by Brian Gettler, presents a history of the economy of Wendake in Quebec from 1800-1950. Guided by three main strategies adapted from the settler economy, namely production (manufacturing), consumption (stores), and finance (investment and real estate), Gettler traces the economic history of Wendake from traditional hunting and agriculture in the eighteenth century to a more Euro-Canadian and capitalist economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that included manufacturing, stores, and real-estate investment, causing the emergence of elite families in the community. Interestingly, the surnames of Wendat entrepreneurs and elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries match those of contemporary Wendat political leaders.

Chapter 6, by Annette de Stecher, examines the role of gifts in Wendat-Canada diplomacy. The case study involves two decorated birch bark trays presented to Lord Elgin (Governor General of Canada)

and his wife in the mid-nineteenth century that were designed to be lasting physical memories of the close political relationship (i.e. alliance) between the Wendat and colonial Canada. Like wampum belts, the trays are symbols of Wendat sovereignty and independence, presented to reinforce Wendat rights to land and resources in the face of nineteenth-century colonialism.

The final chapter of the book, "Concluding Voices," offers a fascinating set of insightful comments about the book provided by several Wendat historians, archivists, and Elders, as solicited by the editors. Despite considerable praise for the book's emphasis on Wendat resilience and persistence and the collaborative research of its authors with one another and the Wendat, a noteworthy critique voiced by the Wendat is that the book does not contain any Wendat authors, suggesting that it is time for the Wendat to write their own history books, building on the autohistorical research of Georges Sioui.

In summary, *From Huronia to Wendakes* should be considered an essential addition to the library of any serious scholar of Wendat history and should be read more widely by historians and archaeologists who are writing the histories of post-seventeenth-century Indigenous peoples of eastern North America, especially when dealing with geographically dispersed Indigenous peoples. Tom Peace and Kathryn Labelle deserve congratulations for assembling a collaborative group of young, leading-edge scholars and Wendat knowledge-keepers to produce a book that will become a model for writing the history of Indigenous people in North America through a lens of cultural resilience and political persistence.

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