

Homelands and Treaty Paper: The History of York Region

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York Region is a municipality located within Canada. It shares much of its borders with Durham Region to the east, Peel Region to the West, Simcoe County to the northwest and Toronto to the south. It encompasses nine different municipalities, consisting of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, and Whitchurch-Stouffville. Despite a population of almost 1,110 million, according to the 2016 census, only 0.5% of the population identify as Aboriginal people (Rao, 2017). That equates to about 5,915 people of the total 1,110 million people in York Region who identify as Indigenous people.

The land where Markham is today and the encompassing parts of York Region are on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee people, the *Métis Nation* and the Huron-Wendat people (*Archaeological History*). They lived in the area thousands of years before the Europeans arrived in the area. European settlement started in 1794 when the first settlers came to what is now known as Markham, was driven by the promise of free farmland (Welch & Payne, 2012).

Within the municipality of York Region, “there are 1,453 Indigenous and archeological sites registered with the Regional Municipality of York” (Raza, 2017). The first archaeological site is called the Mantle Site. It is in Whitchurch-Stouffville. “From 1500 to 1530, the site was inhabited by 2,000 people over 4.2 hectares” (Raza, 2017). There were about 95 longhouses that were enclosed by a three-row wooden palisade. The second archaeological site is called the Aurora site. It is also in Whitchurch-Stouffville. It also belonged to the Huron-Wendat. It was a 3.4-hectare village located “on the southeast corner of Kennedy Road and Vandorf Sideroad” (Raza, 2017). The third archaeological site is called the Seed-Barker site. It is another large village located in Vaughan. It also belonged to the Huron Wendat. It featured “7 longhouses, 13

other structures and more than 11,000 artifacts” (Raza, 2017). The next significant site located in York Region is the Damiani Site. It is another Huron Wendat village located in York Region. It is in the Humber River watershed. The final archaeological site in York Region is in Richmond Hill. It is called the Lost Brant Site. It is “situated around Lake Wilcox” (Raza, 2017). There are many more sites located in the municipality of York Region.

History states that the Mississaugas came over to Southern Ontario from their former homeland north of Lake Huron around the year 1700 (*Origin & History*). The Mississaugas, whom we refer to as the Anishinaabe people were one of the largest native groups in Canada. They survived off Mother Earth by hunting and fishing and harvesting plant materials to create traditional food and medicine. In the Spring, they often fished and collected maple sugar. In the fall, the Mississaugas harvested wild rice which was one of their staples that is found in shallow waters and gathered using birch bark canoes. In the winter, the Mississaugas hunted for their food. Traditionally, they lived in dome-shaped or conical birch bark wigwams (*Origin & History*). The first group went south from a river they came across, and the other headed southeast to Scugog Island.

The effects of Colonization were also concerning this time. When the Europeans first met the Mississaugas, they traded knowledge in exchange for fur (*Community Profile*). However, soon after the Mississaugas realized they were not friendly, had their villages attacked and then were ravaged by diseases (*Origin & History*). They prospered on the land for centuries until the British came in the search for more land after losing the war. During this time, many treaties were made with little to none in return. The treaty that formed the Western part of Markham is the Toronto Purchase Treaty No. 13 in 1805. This treaty came about in the 1780s as the Crown at the time recognized the need to secure communication and supply lines to their western outposts

and to unite settlements (Duric, 2020). To meet the needs of the Crown, Sir John Johnson met with the Mississauga's at the Bay of Quinte. That was when they sold the lands stipulated in the treaty. The Western part of Markham was included in this treaty. However, soon after they came to realize the legitimacy of this deal since the deed was blank. That is what led to many opposing the treaty since there was no clear delineation of boundaries. As a result, the Mississaugas filed a claim claiming the unlawful attempt to acquire more land.

Shortly after the Toronto Purchase treaty of 1805, the government introduced the Indian Act in 1876. It was the historical record that showed the reasons for the issues many of the Indigenous people such as the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation suffered. At the time, it brought upon Residential Schools. The Residential Schools system was introduced as a way of killing the Indian in the child. They were sponsored by the government and they were established as a way of assimilating Indigenous children into the Euro-Canadian culture. As a result of the Residential Schools, Indigenous Children were forcefully removed from their families, exposed to sexual abuse, and deprived of their ancestral backgrounds.

The Indian Act was also harmful to the Indigenous people simply because Canada adopted many discriminatory policies. At the time, the Indian Act had forbidden Indigenous people from speaking their language (Joseph, R., 2018). The Indian Act had given educators the mandate to teach Indigenous children how to "read, write, understand, and speak English at all cost" (Joseph, R., 2018). Indigenous children were also renamed with European names as a way of assimilating Indigenous children with the European culture. As a result, the original inhabitants of Markham suffered a lot of hardships brought on by the Indian Act.

The rest of Markham was acquired under Clause 2 of the Williams Treaties of 1923 (*Williams Treaties*). At the time, this was the last land cession treaty that was collectively signed by the governments of Canada and Ontario along with seven First Nations (*Williams Treaties*). Along with this treaty, the land was transferred in exchange for cash. While the Indigenous people have argued that they were promised the right to fish and hunt, the treaty was interpreted differently. By signing this treaty, three tracts of land were transferred to the crown. The first tract of land laid between Etobicoke and Trent River, the second extended it to Lake Simcoe and finally the third laid between Ottawa River and Lake Huron. Along with this treaty, the land where Markham lies today was transferred over. One implication of this treaty is that Aboriginal rights were not honoured, unlike past treaties. The Aboriginals had to surrender all their rights to the land. Another implication is that each of the Mississauga and Chippewa people received \$25 (*Williams Treaties*). However, the Mississauga people and Chippewa people also received one-time payments of \$233,425 and \$233,375 respectively (*Williams Treaties*). These payments were modest and only represented a fraction of the value of the land. Finally, as part of signing the Williams Treaties, it preserved the signing bands their existing reserves, however, did not provide for any new reserve lands (Government of Canada; Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2013).

Despite signing the Toronto Purchase No. 13 and the Williams Treaties, many Indigenous people were forced onto reserves. Reserves are land that has been set aside by the government. While the Indigenous people were contained into reserves (Joseph, R., 2018). Europeans had full access to the land that once sustained Indigenous life. As a result of these reserves, many Indigenous people suffered impacts to their emotional, social, mental, and physical health. It is no wonder that many are resorting to using the medicine wheel as a way of healing from the

impacts of the Indian Act and treaties such as the Toronto Purchase No. 13 and the Williams Treaties.

When the original inhabitants were forced into Reserves, they lost their essential connection with the world. As a result, they suffered long-standing trauma. This is because the land was an integral part of their wellbeing. It is no wonder that the medicine wheel places a strong belief on the land as a way of determining a person's wellbeing. With the medicine wheel, however, Indigenous people can have a mind-body-spirit connection when they can balance the four aspects of the medicine wheel (*Medicine Wheel - Practices for Spiritual Health*). When the 1805 Toronto Purchase No. 13 and the 1923 Williams Treaties were signed, the government neglected to recognize the rights they had originally promised to the Mississaugas and the other original inhabitants in exchange for the land they had turned over.

It is of no wonder that the government made attempts to settling both the Williams Treaties and the Toronto Purchase Treaty No. 13. In 2010, the settlement of the Toronto Purchase was an important milestone (Canada, 2010). At the time, it has been found that the government did not provide an adequate settlement for the land at the time it was acquired (Canada, 2010). This financial settlement was a breakthrough in correcting past wrongdoings, honouring the obligations that were originally promised and brings upon closure the First Nations were looking for (Canada, 2010). The settlement was signed for \$145 million (Canada, 2010).

Another important milestone was the Williams Treaty Settlement in 2018 (*Williams Treaty settlement looks huge in headlines*). This settlement was signed because members of the seven Williams Treaty First Nations claimed the government took the land and other rights unjustly (*Williams Treaty settlement looks huge in headlines*). This settlement was signed for

\$1.1 Billion which amounts to \$85 an acre of land that was surrendered to the crown under the terms of the Williams Treaties (*Williams Treaty settlement looks huge in headlines*).

With regards to the contemporary presence of Indigenous peoples and communities within York Region, the closest Indigenous communities are geographically are the Mississaugas of Credit First Nation (*NativeLand.ca*) to the west, the Chippewas of Georgina Island to the North (*Indigenous Month*) and the Mississauga of Scugog Island First Nation to the east (*Whose Land*). According to the government of Canada's website, it is determined that there are 871 people in the Mississauga of Credit First Nation (Government of Canada; Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012), 725 people in the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nations (*Georgina Island*) and 131 people in the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation which is quite surprising (*demographics*). Despite the small population of Indigenous people in and around the city of Markham, Markham still praises building friendships and supporting First Nation communities in Ontario.

Presently, there are also many examples and locations concerning Indigenous people past, present and future and their contributions towards culture and society. In 2017, the Aaniin Community Center, a brand-new community center was opened in Markham, Ontario. It is located on 14th Avenue near Middlefield Road in Markham, Ontario. The name was derived from an Ojibway word that "means hello or welcome" (*Aaniin Community Centre*). It was chosen "to welcome Markham's many diverse communities, to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017" (*Aaniin Community Centre*) and to honour the First Nations people.

The upcoming York University Markham campus at Enterprise Road and Rivas Road in Markham, Ontario, is another example where institutions respect and recognize the land they are on. It is scheduled to open in 2021. As part of the efforts on acknowledging the land, York University recognizes the fundamentals of Indigenous traditions and values while respecting the original inhabitants of the land where the new campus is built (*Ceremony formally acknowledges Indigenous lands at Markham Centre Campus site* 2018). It is part of a collective effort to building and restoring the relationship with the Mississaugas of the New Credit.

Another great example was the Manitobah Mukluks pop up store in the Upper Canada Mall in Newmarket. It is “an indigenous-owned company that makes what it calls Canada’s original winter-boot” (*Manitobah Mukluks brings Indigenous voice to Newmarket mall*). The philosophy of the store is that “it’s a retail environment, but it’s also space where people can come to interact and to be in spaces with each other that might not exist” (*Manitobah Mukluks brings Indigenous voice to Newmarket mall*). As part of the opening of this pop-up store, it primarily focused on showcasing Indigenous innovation and technology to the people who may not be used to it reminding them how much the Indigenous people have contributed to Canada.

Throughout my research, it is proven that Indigenous people have helped shape the land into what we know today. Their legacy is a very important aspect of Markham. As such, Markham is committed to building and nurturing strong bonds with the Indigenous people through mutual respect, trust, and cooperation while demonstrating the gratitude of being able to call Turtle Island home (Markham Review & Media, 2018). This was shown when Markham partnered with the Eabametoong First Nation to sign a historical accord (*The City of Markham and Eabametoong First Nation Sign Partnership Accord* 2017). Eabametoong First Nation is an Ojibway based First Nation that is located 360 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, Ontario and

about 1,000 kilometres north of Markham. By signing this agreement, it aims to do three things. The first is to “promote social, cultural, and economic collaboration in conjunction with Canada’s sesquicentennial celebration” (*The City of Markham and Eabametoong First Nation Sign Partnership Accord* 2017) that happened in 2017. The second thing is to “promote harmony and goodwill for the betterment of their residents” (*The City of Markham and Eabametoong First Nation Sign Partnership Accord* 2017). Finally, this agreement has the goal to “stimulate public awareness” (*The City of Markham and Eabametoong First Nation Sign Partnership Accord* 2017).

This agreement was a first of its kind between an urban municipality and a remote First Nation community. It had the goals to serve as a “tangible expression of reconciliation and an innovative way” (*The City of Markham and Eabametoong First Nation Sign Partnership Accord* 2017) to work to ease the inequalities that the Indigenous people have suffered. As part of this agreement, Markham is offering tools to support the Eabametoong First Nation, sports, and fitness equipment as well as resources in municipal management. By doing so, this agreement helps to promote harmony, goodwill and to increase public awareness.

Despite many positive movements for addressing issues with regards to how discriminated against the Indigenous people were for who they were, there are still some issues that must be addressed. One issue is the Indigenous Life Matters signs that were stolen and burnt from people’s lawns. While we are often taught to reflect on our values of being welcoming to a diverse community, there have been a few instances where some hateful people that do not cherish equality. I speculate that as societal views are constantly changing, people often feel that they are more entitled and should receive the same respect as Indigenous people. Another issue

is that violence against Indigenous women is on the rise in York Region. It is of no wonder that efforts are underway to mend the societal gap that is experienced by Indigenous people.

In closing, it is nice to see that the Government is looking back at the Treaties and the effects it had on Indigenous people. It is also nice to see that they are taking Indigenous rights seriously and efforts are underway to correcting the mistakes in the past. As the government has committed to renewing the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples, reconciliation efforts should be aimed at closing the socio-economic gap and should be based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership (Duric, 2019). Despite suffering from many years of mistreatment, the collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is the way to moving forward. I can only hope that there will be a time that Indigenous people from all over Canada will find it in their hearts to forgive and realize the past is the past.

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Appendix One

Check List for Indigenous Studies 1001H and 1002H Papers

This list contains the items that you should ensure your paper contains. **Please check each item and attach it to your paper as the last page. Assignments will not be accepted or graded without it. Copy and paste this page into your assignment.**

- ☐ Separate Title Page APA style with following text: Assignment Title, Name, Student Number, Seminar Code, Seminar Leader's Name, Date
- ☐ Single use declaration appended on last page
- ☐ Page Numbers on all pages but not on title page
- ☐ Pages are within the page count of the assignment
- ☐ Document is double spaced
- ☐ Pages are in correct format: 1" margins all around, Times Roman font, 12 point
- ☐ Paper has appropriately sized paragraphs, and paper is more than one paragraph
- ☐ Citations in APA Format
- ☐ No Wikipedia references or citations
- ☐ Paper is print ready, i.e. paper has been run through grammar and spell check and results verified with a human being other than the author
- ☐ There is a formal introductory paragraph
- ☐ Indigenous, Aboriginal, Inuit, Métis appropriately capitalized
- ☐ Aboriginal, Indigenous are not used as nouns but as adjectives
- ☐ Please sign the following statement: Gordon Chan

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