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ABSTRACT

This collection of background material, lesson plans, and activities concerns wampum belts and other uses of wampum among the Mohawk Indians. It is divided into four sections--the introductory narrative and three lesson plans. The lesson plans are on the uses of wampum, the making of wampum, and wampum belts. Each lesson plan provides the vocabulary to be discussed, purpose, instructional objectives, materials, methods, and an activity sheet for evaluation purposes. The activities are illustrated with pen-and-ink drawings. A selected bibliography concludes the booklet.

(AMH)

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ONIKORHA

(Wampum) An Illustrated Guide

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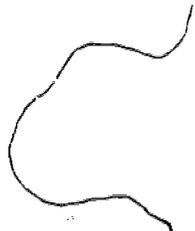
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## Table of Contents

- I. Introductory Narrative - Wampum Belts
- II. The Uses of Wampum  
Illustration  
Activity Sheet
- III. The Making of Wampum  
Illustrations  
Activity Sheet
- IV. Wampum Belts  
2 Row Wampum Belt  
George Washington Covenant Belt  
Hiawatha Belt
- V. Bibliography



WAMPUM BELLS  
By Tenanetorens

To most people a wampum belt means any beaded belt made by Indians. Glass beads were introduced by white traders and with these the Indian people did beautiful embroidery work. Before the introduction of glass beads, embroidery work was made with porcupine quills. The long hair from the bell or chin whiskers of the moose was also used. With the introduction of the crude glass bead, the far more artistic porcupine quill and moose hair embroidery became a lost skill.

The true wampum bead was not made of glass. Along the Atlantic coastal waters from Cape Cod to Florida is found the quahog or round clam shell. Using this material the coastal Indian peoples made wampum beads. These were long cylinder shaped beads about one-fourth inch long and one-eighth of an inch in diameter. These were of two colors, white and purple. In ancient times wampum was strung on thread made of twisted elm bark. The word wampum is the Algonquin Indian word for these shell beads. It was a term used by the Indians of the New England States. The name has survived to the present day. The early Indians of the Atlantic seaboard used this white and purple wampum for personal decorations as well as for trading purposes. Belts, wrist bands, ear rings, necklaces and headbands of wampum were observed by the early white colonists while visiting New England Indians. The Indian people originally drilled this wampum shell with stone or reed drills. Later

iron drills were substituted. Even white people became wampum makers and the first money of the American colonists was wampum.

At first only the coastal Indians had wampum. The east end of Long Island was the original seat of the wampum trade. The Narragansett Indians who were related to the Long Island Indians soon controlled the wampum trade. They supplied the nations of the interior with their wampum. This wampum was exchanged for furs from the western Indians.

Our Iroquois People used wampum for official purposes as well as for religious ceremonies. According to tradition, wampum was introduced to the Iroquois by Hiawatha at the time of the founding of the league of the Five Nations. Hiawatha decreed and regulated its use. He taught the Five Nations that wampum should bring and bind peace and take the place of blood. He first introduced it to the Mohawks and after telling the Council of its use, his co-worker, Deganawidah, used wampum to console or wipe away the tears of Hiawatha whose heart was heavy because of the loss of his daughters. This was the first Condolence Ceremony and has existed without change down to the present day. The first wampum used by Hiawatha was made from fresh water shells. There are traditions among the Iroquois that, before shell wampum was known to the Five Nations, wampum was made from wood stained black and white. An Onondaga tradition says that the first wampum was made from the quills of the eagle. At any rate Hiawatha seems to have been the first to use shell wampum for ceremonial.

oses.

As wampum became more plentiful it was used more and more until it came to be regarded as something sacred. Wampum strings served as credentials or as a certificate of authority. No Iroquois chief would listen to a messenger or pay attention to a report until he received official information through a runner who carried the proper wampum string or belt. Wampum guaranteed a message or a promise. Treaties meant nothing unless they were accompanied by wampum. Belts were given and received at treaties as seals of friendship. No Iroquois individual or nation would think of breaking a word or treaty if the treaty was made over a sacred wampum belt. With every important treaty wampum belts were exchanged. Sometimes as many as forty belts were exchanged at a single council. Likewise, every law passed by the Iroquois Council was recorded with a certain string or belt of wampum. The treaty or law that went with the wampum was memorized by certain trained individuals.

The Onondaga Nation whose country was situated in the center of Iroquois Land was chosen, not only the Keepers of the sacred fire (Capital) of the Iroquois Confederacy, but the Onondaga Nation was likewise the Keepers of the wampum or records.

Twice a year the Wampum Keepers, at a special council, would gather the people and taking each wampum belt or string would hold it aloft so that all could see. He would then recite the message or law that went with the

particular wampum that he held. After reciting its meaning, the belt or string was passed from hand to hand among the entire gathering that its design and meaning would always be remembered. At that time younger warriors who had been selected because of their keen minds were given special training and instruction by the older wampum keepers.

These young men would some day become Keepers of the Wampum and it was necessary that their training started early.

It has been recorded by early white men that a wampum keeper, even after several years had elapsed since a treaty was made, would hold the belt that went with the treaty and repeat word for word without error, the entire message even though some of the treaties and promises were quite lengthy.

It is said that before wampum was introduced the wing of an eagle was given to sanction a treaty. In historical times beaver skins and painted sticks have been used to replace wampum when it was scarce.

Six strings of purple wampum united at one end stand for the Six Nations. When this is laid in a circle the council was open. When it was taken up it meant that the council was over. Each nation of the Iroquois had a special string of wampum that represented their people. These are as follows:

Mohawks - six strings tied together, two purple beads to one white.

Oneidas - seven strings tied together, almost all purple beads.

Onondagas - four strings tied together, two purple beads to one white.

Senecas - four strings tied together, two purple beads alternated with two white.

Cayugas - six strings tied together, all purple beads.  
(When a speaker at an Iroquois council addresses a particular nation, he picks up and holds in his hands that particular nation's wampum strings.)

#### NOTES

While reading a wampum belt special care was made to hold the belt correctly. Usually when the message or speech was half finished the speaker would turn the belt over.

A certain amount of wampum could ransom a murderer or captured prisoner.

A clan, one of whose members had been killed, could hand a wampum belt to a noted warrior. If the belt was accepted by the warrior, it meant that he would take over the responsibility of getting revenge for the clan and thus uphold their honor, the honor of the members. If the warrior let the belt fall it meant that he would not accept the responsibility.

White wampum was the emblem of something good, of peace and purity. Purple wampum meant more important affairs of a civic nature.

A belt painted red was war belt. If such a belt was sent to a nation it was an invitation for them to join in the war. If the belt was taken it meant that the nation would accept the invitation. If at the council it was thrown to the ground it meant that the nation would not join in the war.

Wampum is still used in the ceremony of raising up a new Chief and in the Iroquois Thanksgivings and Kariviioc Ceremonies.

Every Chief of the Confederacy and every Clan Mother has a certain string or strings of wampum that is their certificate of office.

Invitation wampum for a civil or religious council is still used. A small stick attached to the wampum strings and covered with notches tells the number of days before the council is to be held.

When a Head Chief or lesser chief of the Confederacy dies, a runner is sent to each nation carrying proper wampum strings. He walks from one end of the reservation to the other and every once in awhile he will give a certain call (Kwee?). If he gives the call three times, one call after another, it tells the people that a head Chief has died. If he gives the call once at certain intervals it means that a War Chief has died. His walk ends at the Council House and there he tells the Chiefs the sad news, showing proper wampum strings.

Because of the scarcity of wampum only wampum strings are used today. Most of the old belts are lost. Many,

through one way ~~or~~ another, have found their way to the  
show cases of museums. A few individual Indians still  
have hidden away some of the old Wampum belts.

<sup>1</sup>Tehanetorens. Wampum Belts. (Onchiota, NY: Six  
Nations Indian Museum). pp. 3-5

TOPIC: Uses of wampum.

GRADE LEVEL: 4-6

TIME ALLOTMENT: 20-30 minutes

VOCABULARY TO DISCUSS: onikórho - wampum beads

PURPOSE: To acquaint the student with the uses of wampum (and to correct the stereotype of wampum used for money).

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

1. tell how the use of wampum originated
2. list ways the Indians used wampum
3. list reasons for the use of wampum in treaties
4. list each nation of the Iroquois and the wampum strings that represent each

MATERIALS: picture of wampum, Book: Molly, Anne; Wampum.  
NY, NY: Hastings House Pub. 1977. Chapter 5.

METHODS: Read Chapter 5 in Wampum - "How the Iroquois Got Wampum" p. 43. Discuss with the students the many uses of wampum. Relate to the students the meaning of wampum as used in treaties. List the nations of the Iroquois on the board and discuss the special strings representing each nation.

EVALUATION: Given an activity sheet, the student will answer six out of eight statements correctly.

## INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE

### HOW THE IROQUOIS GOT WAMPUM

Long ago, says one myth, lived an Iroquois named Hiawatha. His heart was sick because his Indian brothers were fighting one another. Many men, women and children died in these continual battles. Hiawatha resolved that the tribes should make peace. First he would ask the Mohawks to join in an alliance with his people.

Hiawatha set out alone upon his journey. His bow was at his back and his traveler's pouch of deerskin hung from his belt. His thoughts were upon nothing but his desire to end the bloody wars.

As he hurried on, he heard the clamor of ducks. Soon, he came to a pond. As he came near, the ducks flew away. He saw then that the pond had gone dry. Its bottom was filled with shells. He took some in his traveler's pouch. When he stopped to rest upon his journey, he made belts of them. These he would use to make the union between the brothers strong.

When he got to the Mohawks he called to them, "I bring you good news." And he told them of his plan to make peace.

The chief men of the Mohawks said. "We can see the bloody trails. We can see the bad things. Those bloody tomahawks and bows, they must be buried forever."

And so the Mohawk nation was the first to join with

Miawatha in a confederacy. And the wampum belts and strings he had made were used to bind them together. Then the Mohawks went away with Miawatha to all the hostile Iroquois nations and he showed their councils how to make and use wampum?

<sup>2</sup>Nolloy, Anne. Wampum. NY, NY; Hastings House Pub. 1977.



## ACTIVITY SHEET

### USE OF WAMPUM

Choose a word from this list and complete each sentence below.

Mohawks      promise      wampum string or belt  
Hiawatha      friendship      religious ceremonies  
Six Nations      peace

1. Wampum guaranteed a message or a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Belts were received at treaties as seals of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Official information was carried by a runner who carried the proper \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Six strings tied together, two purple beads to one white, represented the \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Six strings of purple wampum united at one end stand for the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. According to tradition wampum was introduced to the Iroquois by \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Hiawatha taught that wampum should bring and bind \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Wampum was used in \_\_\_\_\_.

TOPIC: The Making of Wampum

GRADE LEVEL: 4-6

TIME ALLOTMENT: 30 minutes

VOCABULARY TO DISCUSS: onikorha - wampum beads

PURPOSE: To acquaint the students with the procedure of wampum making.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

1. name two kinds of shells used for wampum making
2. list the two colors of wampum and tell the meaning of each
3. describe 5 steps in making wampum
4. discuss why wampum is scarce today and where the beads are kept

MATERIALS: A string of wampum (authentic), or replica of wampum strings, or pictures

METHODS: Discuss the uses of wampum. The teacher will tell the students where wampum beads were first made, and by whom. Name the shells used (quahog or chowder shells). Describe the time consuming process of making these beads:

1. splitting the shell
2. grinding
3. drilling

4. grinding the ends
5. polishing
6. stringing

Give the colors of wampum and their meanings.

white - good peace & purity

purple - important affairs - mourning- condolence.

Discuss with students where wampum is kept today and why it is scarce.

#### EVALUATION:

Given an activity sheet, the student will answer seven out of ten questions correctly.

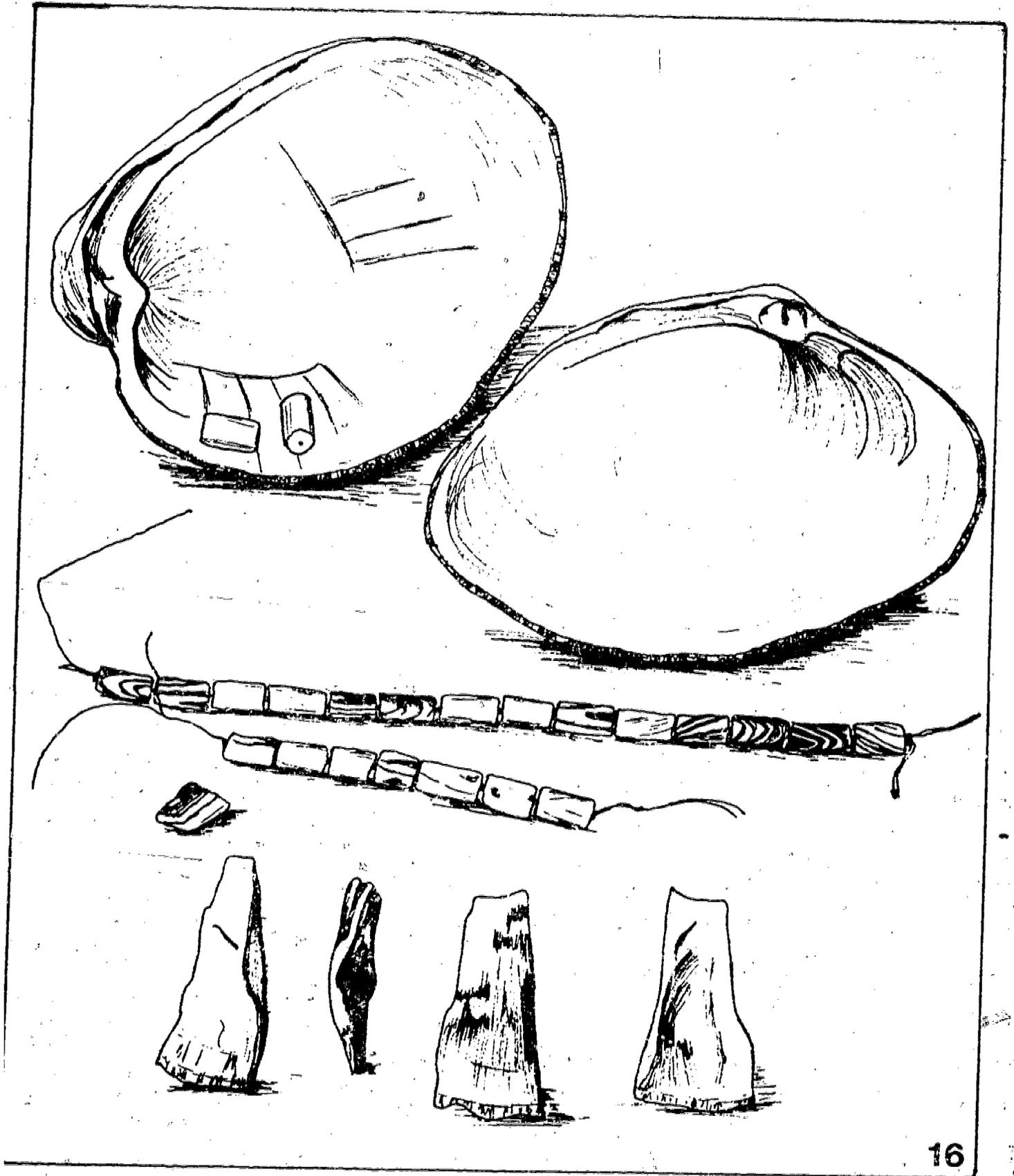
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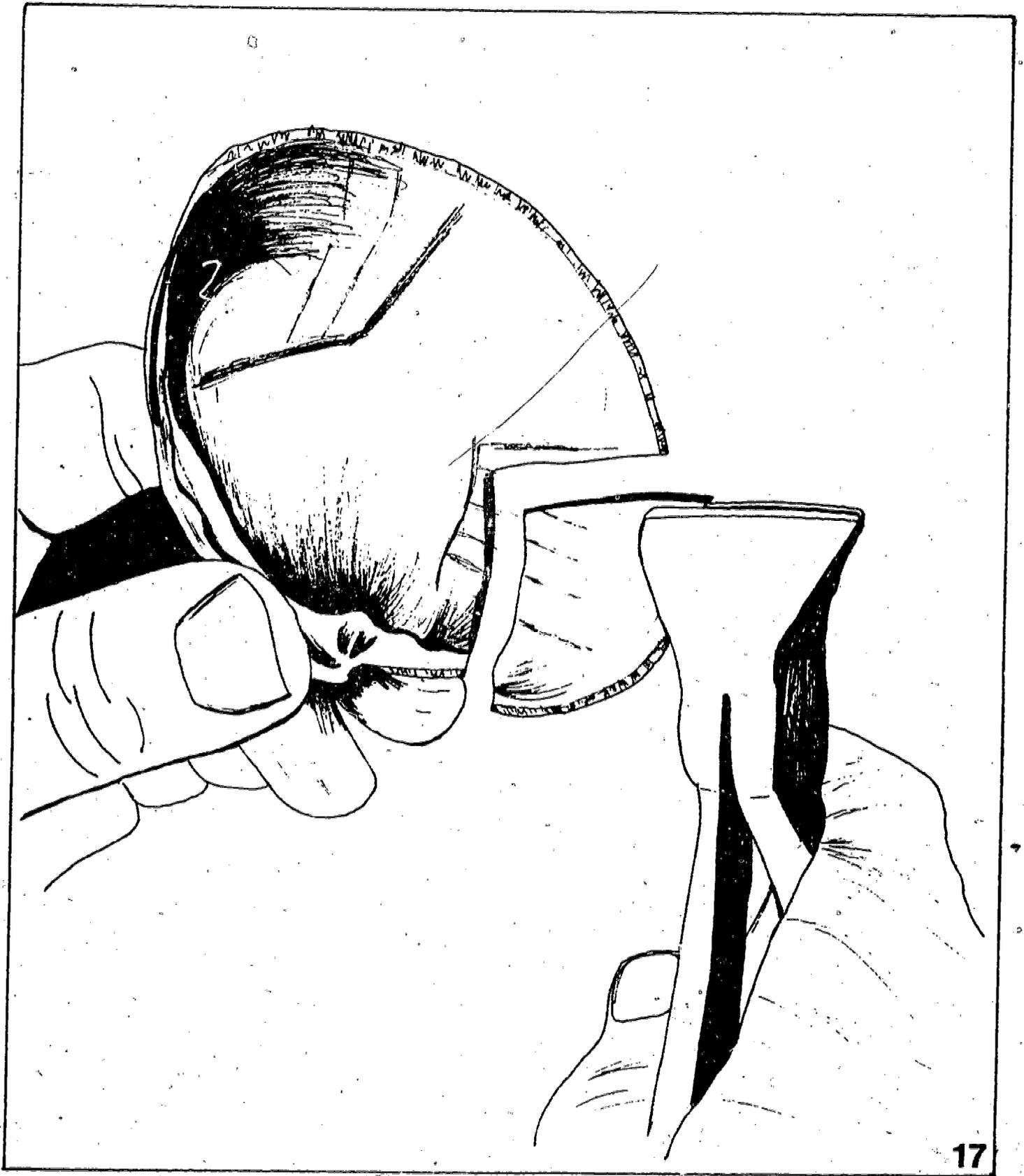
ONIKORHA OR THE ORIGINAL WAMPUM

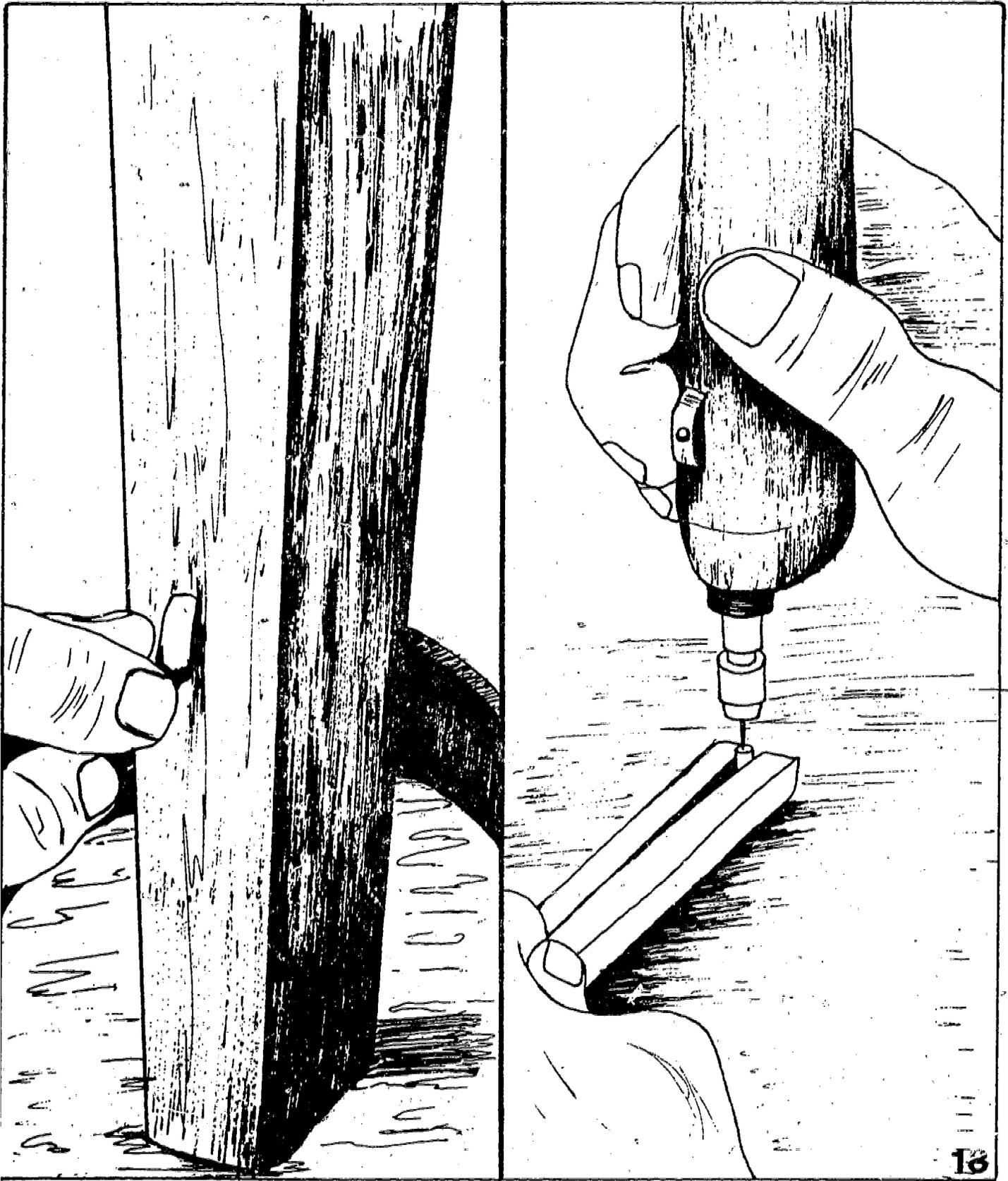
Instructor-Myron Clute

Steps of Making Onikorha (Original Wampum)

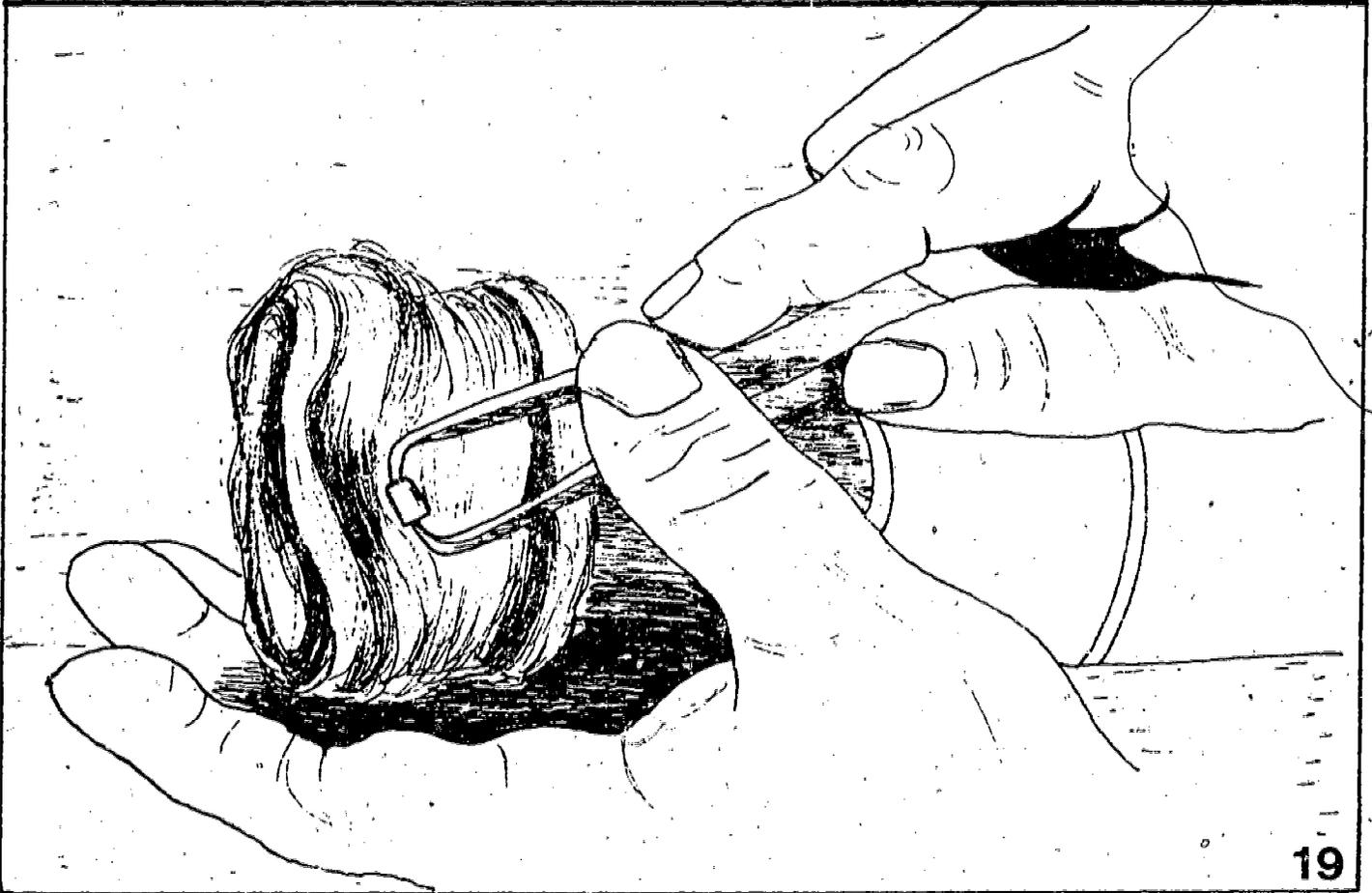
1. Shell- The quahog or chowder shells are the best to use because of their thickness
2. Splitting- The shell is split into half inch by quarter inch sizes with clippers.
3. Grinding- The shell is ground into standard size (rough form) with a stone emery placed in a bowl of water is to reduce friction and heat so that the shell won't shatter.
4. Drilling- at this point it is placed in a hard wood vice, or any wooden vice, then drilled lengthwise through the center, not completely to the end, the drill is then removed, the Onikorha bead is turned to the opposite end then the hole is completed through this end.
5. Grinding- Again the bead is evenly shaped and smoothed with the emery stone it is now ready for polishing.
6. Polishing- Using a buffer and silver polish each bead is polished then strung.

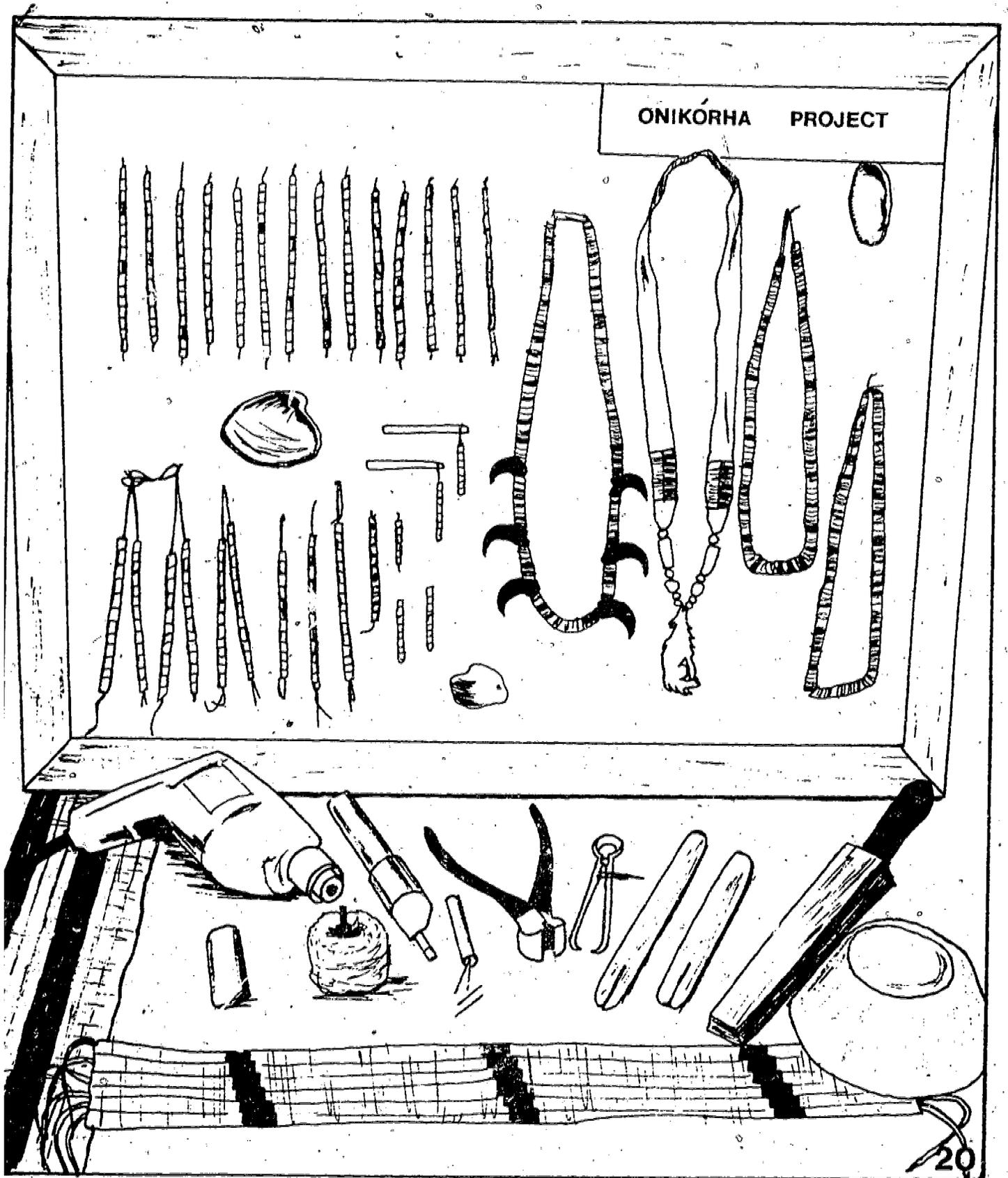






18





## ACTIVITY SHEET

### WAMPUM MAKING

Read each statement. Write true or false in the blank at the right.

1. Wampum was used for sending messages and recording events. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Wampum beads were brown. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Wampum beads were made from quahog or round clam shells. \_\_\_\_\_
4. A purple belt was a war belt. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Clippers are used for grinding. \_\_\_\_\_
6. White wampum symbolized good, peace and purity. \_\_\_\_\_
7. The first step in wampum making is splitting the shell. \_\_\_\_\_
8. A vice is used to hold the shell for grinding. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Each bead is polished before stringing. \_\_\_\_\_
10. There is plenty of wampum today. \_\_\_\_\_

TOPIC: Wampum belts

GRADE LEVEL: 4-6

TIME ALLOTMENT: 30 minutes

VOCABULARY: akiataha - belt

I. PURPOSE: to provide information regarding three important wampum belts.

II. INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

The student will:

1. recognize and name each belt when it is shown
2. describe each of the three belts
3. give the meaning of each belt

III. MATERIALS: Pictures of the 2 row wampum belt, the George Washington Covenant Belt and the Hiawatha Belt. Replicas of the actual belts if available.

IV. METHODS: Hold up the picture of the 2 row wampum. Ask a student to describe the belt and ask if anyone knows what it means. Tell the students the meaning of the belt. Discuss why the belt was necessary. Hold up each of the other belts. Follow the above procedure.

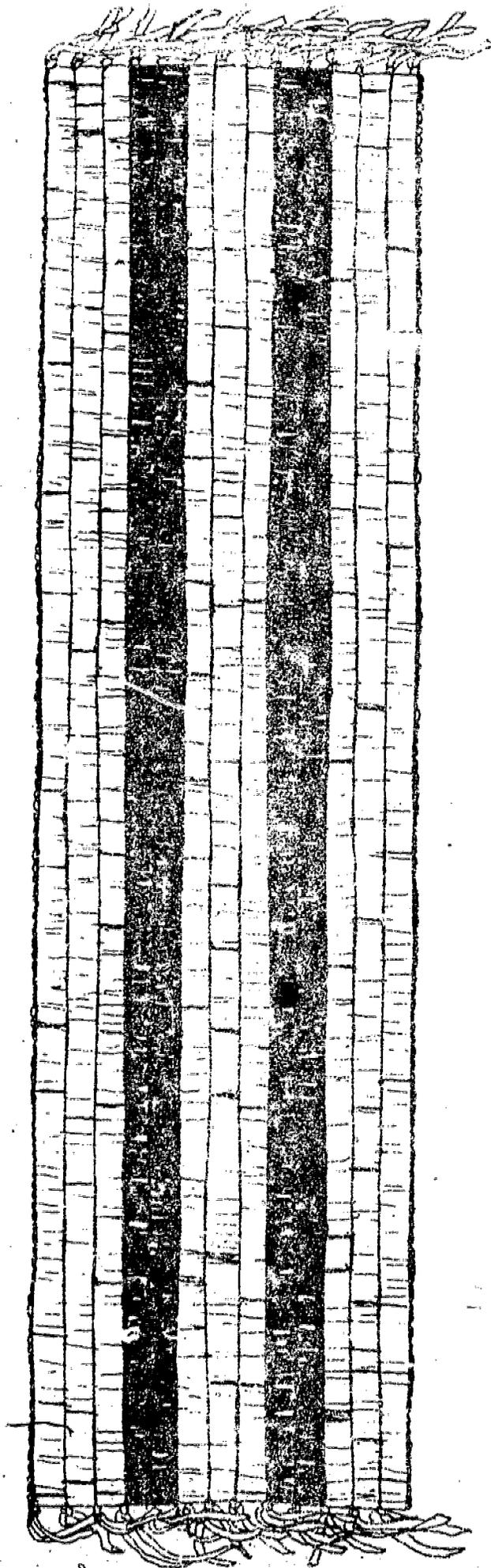
V. EVALUATION: When given an activity sheet, the student will answer each question correctly.

## INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE

### TWO-ROW WAMPUM BELT

The belt says; "This symbolizes the agreement under which the Iroquois welcomed the white peoples to their lands. We will not be like father and son, but like brothers. These two rows will symbolize vessels, traveling down the same river together. One will be for the Original People, their laws, their customs, and the other for the European people and their laws and customs. We will each travel the river together, but each in our own boat. And neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel." The agreement has been kept by the Iroquois to this date.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Rarihokwats. How Democracy Came to St. Regis & The Thunderwater Movement. (Rooseveltown, NY: Akwesasne Notes). p.1



## INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE

### GEORGE WASHINGTON COVENANT BELT

Size: Length, 6 feet  $3\frac{1}{2}$ "; Rows wide, 15; (approximately 10,000 beads)

Color: Purple beaded figures on a white beaded background

#### DESCRIPTION:

Symbolizing 15 men with outstretched arms and clasping hands. In the center is a figure of a house; from the roof extends a protecting shelter for the two men on each side; these are the keepers of the eastern and western doors (Mohawk, Seneca) guardians of the Iroquois longhouse. The remaining 13 figures represent the original 13 fires (colonies) joined in unity by clasped hands. The design is made with dark beads on a solid white background which denotes peace and friendship.

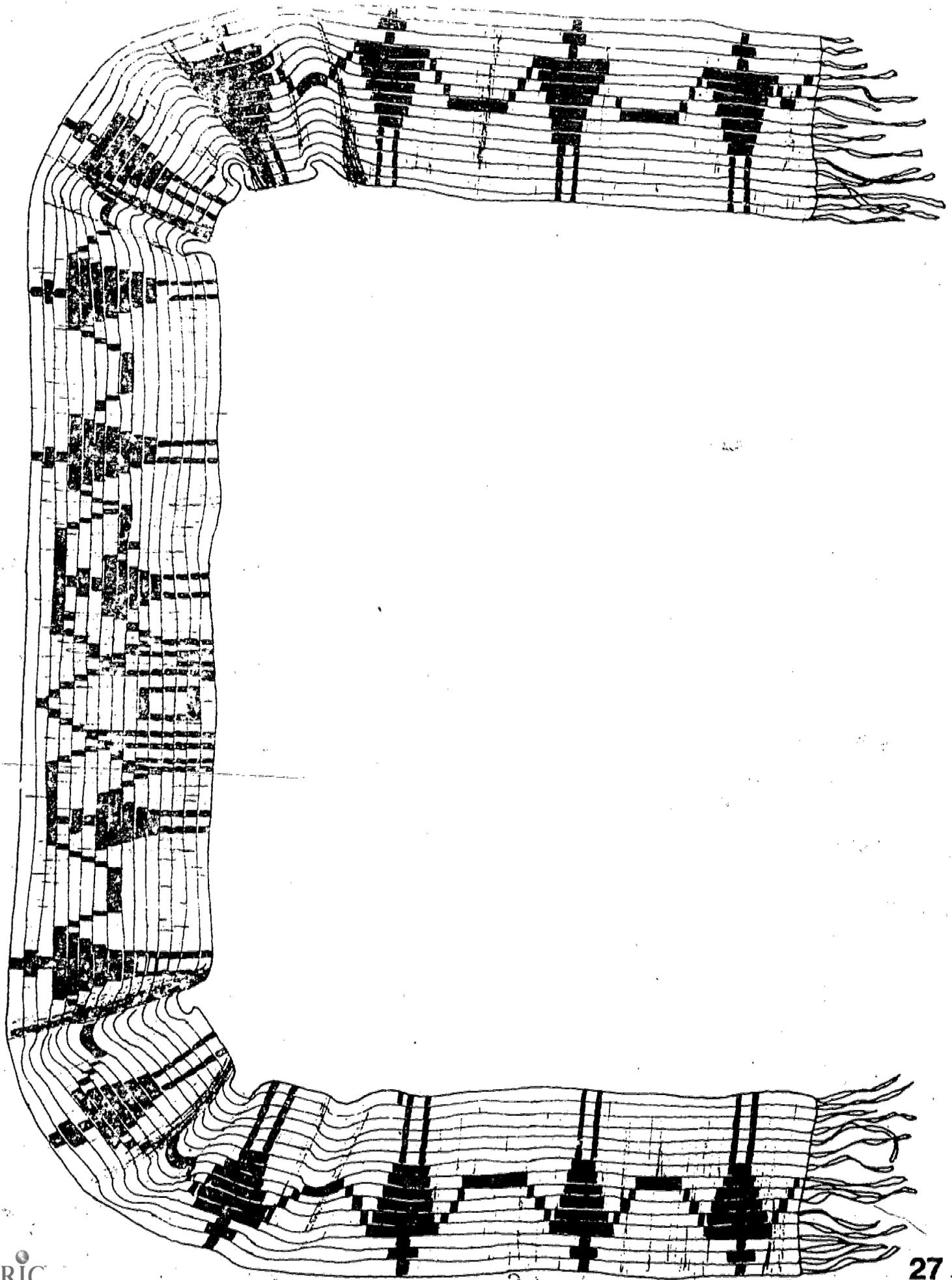
This belt is thought to symbolize the treaty of 1779 during George Washington's Presidency. Among many other promises made by the United States in this treaty was that the U.S. acknowledged the lands reserved to the six nations to be forever property of the six nations, and the U.S. would never disturb or claim these lands, that the lands were to remain theirs until they alone chose to sell. They also promised they would protect the six nations from any including sep-

arate states, and that they could never interfere in the internal affairs of the six nations.

Today this treaty has always been upheld faithfully by the six nations. Now the U.S. only makes an effort to distribute 3 or 4 yards of annuity cloth each year as provided in the treaty. However if the U.S. had been able to keep their word all of western New York would still belong to the six nations and the Kinzua Dam would have never been built.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Iroquois Wampum Belts. Gowanda, NY:

Gowanda Central School



INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE:

HIAMATHA BELT

Size: Length, 21½"; Width, 10½"; Rows wide, 38.

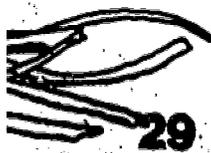
Description:

A broad belt of wampum of thirty-eight rows, having a white heart in the center, on either side of which are two white squares all connected with the heart by white rows of beads shall be the emblem of unity of the five nations.

The first of the squares on the left represents the Mohawk Nation and its territory, the second square on the left and near the heart represents the Oneida Nation, and the white heart in the middle represents the territory of the Onondaga Nation, it also means that the heart of the Five Nations is single in its loyalty to the great peace, and that the great peace is lodged in the heart and that the council fire is to burn there for the Five Nations. Further it means that the authority is given to advance the cause of peace whereby hostile nations out of the league shall cease warfare. The white square to the right of the heart represents the Cayuga Nations and its territory of the Seneca Nation.

White here symbolizes that no evil nor jealous thoughts shall creep into the minds of the chief's while in council under the great peace. White, the emblem of peace, love, charity, and equity surrounds the Five Nations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> -----Iroquois Wampum Belts. (Gowanda Central School: Gowanda, NY.



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