

Early Site History

The earliest settlers in Niagara were the Mound Builders who settled in the region around 100 AD. By 1400, The Neutral Peoples occupied the area. It is from their word, “Onguiaahra”, which describes the waters flowing between Lakes Erie and Ontario, that Niagara is derived. The Iroquois defeated the Neutrals in the mid 1600’s and any surviving members were absorbed by other Iroquois’ tribes.

Local Neutrals first contact with Europeans was in c.1600, the Neutral’s inhabited the Grimsby area until the 1650s. In the height of the Neutral settlement during the 1600s there was a population of around 16,000 Neutral/linguistic Iroquois families living in south western Ontario. Their major sources of food included corn, beans and gourds, with fish, deer, elk, goat/ sheep, vegetables, nuts and berries being a secondary source. At the time of European contact Canada has been inhabited for more than 4000 years by a Neutral population of around 12,000.

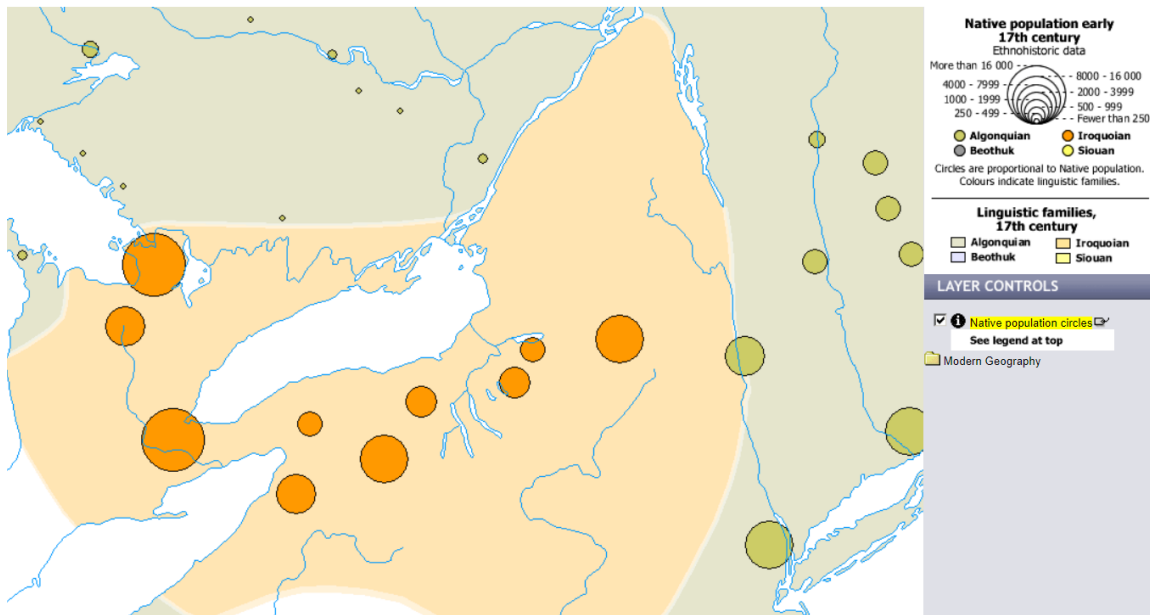


Figure 1: Map showing the Indigenous population in the early 17th Century. *Source: Historical Atlas of Canada.*

The most prominent population in the area before the arrival of the British, the Mississauga of the Credit, had settled in the region after 1634-35. An Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) nation, their traditional territory was bounded by the Rouge River Valley, west to the headwaters of the Thames River, [London] to Lake Erie’s Long Point, then east along the Lake Erie shores, the Niagara River, and Lake Ontario until arriving back at the Rouge River Valley. They were primarily resident around the mouth of the Credit River (Port Credit). Grimsby / Niagara area was essentially their seasonal hunting grounds.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 recognized Indigenous sovereignty over the land they occupied and required that if the Crown needed land for military or settlement purposes, they had to purchase it from the Indigenous occupants. When the Crown required land on which to settle for Loyalists who were forced from their homes in the United States, following the American

Revolution (1765-1791), they had to negotiate with the Mississaugas of the Credit. The outcome was the Between the Lakes Treaty of 1792 which provided some 3 million acres of the western portion of their territory.

With the southern Ontario treaties of 1781/1827 (#381) The land was established as Crown Property and surrendered as part of the Treaty of Niagara (1764) The Indigenous population established themselves in the Grand River area. When looking at census records Indigenous men start to show up as seasonal fruit workers for the various fruit farms in the area. It should be noted that after the eradication and dispersal of the Neutral Nation in the 1650s, from the time of the very first European settlement around the Forty Mile Creek, historically the First Nations were totally absent from Grimsby as full time residents until the early 1900's when commercial factory jobs drew the 1st families to settle in town.

The truly significant interface between Grimsby's European settlers and Indigenous Peoples was during the war of 1812 when many warriors settled here during that period of conflict. Unfortunately, no records of specific individuals actions related to this survive. British Col. William Claus, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, presented a wampum belt to Native allies for their assistance during the War of 1812.

The Grimsby Loyal Canadian Society, precursor to the Grimsby Historical Society, had Chiefs of the Six Nations as honorary members in the 1800s, in recognition of their active engagement and friendship during the War of 1812. These Chiefs attended the Society's Annual meetings in Grimsby, visiting from their homes on the Grand River.

The first Indigenous family to show up on the census as citizens of Grimsby was the Lickers family in 1907. In 1921 more families migrated to the area.