



A Wonderful Syncretion:

A Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Beaded Orange Lodge Crown

Christina Bates

Figures 1 and 2 show a headdress in the shape of a royal crown, decorated with Orange Order symbols executed in Iroquois raised beadwork. A remarkable syncretic object, its form and decoration express both Aboriginal and European ethos. The crown was found in a dilapidated state in the Folk Culture collection at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC). Extensive conservation, totalling 250 hours, reshaped the thin wires that support the contours of the crown, restrung beads and reinforced weak red woolen cloth and blue silk ribbon trim.¹ Initially restored for an exhibition on headwear from the CMC collections, it has since been featured in an Iroquois beadwork exhibition.²

The beadwork technique is in the Haudenosaunee or eastern Iroquois tradition, and more particu-



larly, in the Mohawk style from western Quebec and eastern Ontario. Starting in the late-nineteenth century until about 1920, Mohawk women developed this type of 'raised' beadwork to make picture frames, pincushions, bags, moccasins, hats and wall pockets to sell as souvenirs for tourists. The crown dates to this period, most likely to the late-nineteenth century. The dense beadwork is 'raised' by threading more beads than the paper pattern laid on the cloth required, so that the excess beads form an arch above the surface of the textile. The flowers and leaf forms on the two sets of 'arches' that curl up from the headband are typical of this style.³

The striking aspects of the crown are the beaded figures on the headband which depict symbols associated with the Loyal Orange Order, including King Billy on his white horse. A Protestant fraternal society, the Orange Order was founded in 1795 in Ireland to commemorate the victory of William of Orange at the battle of the Boyne in 1690, which deposed the Catholic James II, and restored Protestantism to the throne. Its members professed loyalty to the Crown of England and to the Protestant religion.

Immigrants from Ireland brought the Orange Order to Canada; the Grand Lodge of British North America was founded in 1830 near Brockville, Ontario. The Orange Order, like other fraternal organizations such as the Freemasons, provided a social network to new male immigrants and assistance in the event of illness or death. The Order was a powerful force in Ontario politics during its peak period in the late-nineteenth century.

The lodges adopted Masonic-type ceremonies involving degrees of movement within the Order, accompanied by secret passwords, handshakes and iconography. Paper charts presenting many symbols of the Order were hung in Orange Lodges and members' homes. Most of the symbols depicted were borrowed from the Freemasons, and referenced the Old and New Testaments.

It is likely that the beaded images on the headband of the crown were taken from one of these charts. The crown's decoration is a remarkable rendering of two-dimensional drawing on paper in three-dimensional beadwork. Centrally placed, we see King William of Orange on his white horse at the battle of the Boyne, turned to

Figure 1 (Previous page) and Figure 2

Headdress, decorated in Mohawk beading depicting Orange Order symbols on the headband, Ontario, late-nineteenth century
Clear and multi-coloured glass beads on woollen cloth ground, blue silk ribbon trim and blue polished cotton caul and lining.

32.5 x 32cm

CMC no.75-1365

Photography: Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC)



Framed lithograph on paper depicting Orange Order symbols from Peterborough, ON, late-nineteenth century
58 x 44.2cm
CMC no. 82-210

face his troops with sword in hand, flanked by the British flag. As we follow the horse around the headband we find crossed swords pointing to a heart, symbolizing justice; a member of the Order carrying the white staff of office; Jacob's ladder of the three theological virtues, faith, hope and charity; the caduceus, symbol of eternal life; the Masonic triangle of the Supreme Architect; a star and a cock, symbol of courage; the candelabra of the twelve apostles; an anchor, symbol of hope; a five pointed star; and finally, the Ark of the Covenant, constructed by Moses on God's command to contain the Ten Commandments.

Although the depictions were likely copied from a chart or other printed sources, they were also drawn from the lived experience of those participating in Orange Lodge rituals and parades. The conveying of the Ark of the Covenant played a central part in Orange rituals. The figures carrying the Ark on the crown wear characteristic white caps with black visors and long robes that Orangemen wore on parade and in the Lodge.

The crown appears to be unique; examples of Iroquois beadwork on robes and sashes for fraternal organizations exist, but no other object of this form


is known. In a creative simulation of the English crown, the headband supports four curved 'arches' that converge to be topped with four smaller arches, which perhaps represent the sovereign's orb and cross that surmounted royal crowns.

The beaded crown's use within Lodge culture is unknown. In nineteenth-century photographs of Orange parades, the Grand Master dressed as King Billy wore a plumed cocked hat and the other members wore the typical peaked caps. More likely the crown was used in the Lodge's secret ceremonies, donned when a member moved to the next degree in the Order. Otherwise it might have sat regally on a cushion in the Lodge, as the English crown is occasionally depicted in Orange Order charts.

Another question arises as to who used the crown. It was purchased in 1975 from an antique dealer who said it was from Loyal Orange Lodge (LOL) 756, Centreville, ON, but members of the Lodge did not recognize it when sent a photograph in 1995. It is also possible that it was used in a First Nations Orange Lodge, possibly the Mohawk Lodge on the Tyendinaga Reserve, which is close to Centreville. This reserve was granted to the Mohawks in 1793 when they lost their territory after the American Revolution. Most Iroquois loyal to the British were settled by the British government in the Grand River Valley on the north shore of Lake Erie, and a smaller number at Tyendinaga, on the Bay of Quinte. The Iroquois embraced many aspects of English culture. They were Christians and several were important members of fraternal orders, including Thayendanagea (Joseph Brant) who founded one of the earliest Masonic Orders in Canada and Oronhyatekha, a leader in the Orange Lodge and the Independent Order of Foresters.

Art history student Alisdair Macrae is convinced that the crown is a Mohawk invention made to create a new identity for members of a Mohawk Orange Lodge, and an attempt to

reorient them from marginalized status to a central position.⁴ Lodges were established on several First Nations reserves, including LOL 99 that was formed in Tyendinaga in 1842. Macrae contends that the form and decoration of the crown is an assertion of the Mohawk belief system, a confluence of assimilation and Native identity. The crown has affiliation with the *gustoweh*, or beaded feather Mohawk headdress, but despite the examples he provides it is clear that the crown relates to the Mohawk traditional culture not so much in its form (which clearly represents an English crown), but in its type of decoration and its ritualistic and status functions.

This object defies categorization. It was collected for its connection to Irish ethnicity and the Orange Lodge, but it also belongs to Aboriginal culture. Ruth Phillips writes in her article, "How Museums Marginalise": "The old forms of museum classification reinforce outdated notions of otherness by denying to objects made or used by aboriginal people an historical, diachronic positioning."⁵ Phillips calls for curators to break through the disciplinary classifications and restore to Aboriginal objects their historical specificity, especially objects that fall through the cracks. The ceremonial crown, made by an Aboriginal woman for male Anglo-Irish ethnic rituals in a rich geographical and historical context, is one of those needing rescue. But like the Orange Order itself, it guards its secrets well. 

Thanks to Beverly Gordon (who suggested the title), Judy Hall, Karlis Karklins and Ruth Phillips for sharing their expert observations on this object.

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Ark of the Covenant ceremonial chest from LOL 1133 (Hazzards Corners, Hastings County, ON), late-nineteenth century.

66.2 x 175.2cm

CMC no. 90-173

¹ Executed by Anna Jacobiec, CMC conservator (now retired), in 1996.

² *Hold Onto Your Hats!*, 1996-7 (<http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/exhibitions/hist/hats/hatoeng.shtml>), curator Christina Bates; and *Layered with Meaning: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Beadwork Traditions*, CMC, curator Judy Hall, 2004-2009.

³ See Dolores Elliott, "Iroquois Beadwork: A Haudenosaunee Tradition and Art," in *Preserving Tradition and Understanding the Past: Papers from the Conference on Iroquois Research, 2001-2005*, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick (Albany NY: University of the State of New York, 2010), 35-48; Beverly Gordon, "Souvenirs of Niagara Falls: The Significance of Indian Whimsies," *New York History* 67:4 (1986), 389-409; and Ruth Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1998).

⁴ Alisdair Macrae, "The Beaded Crown Headdress: A Sum of European and Aboriginal Methods," term paper for Dr. R. Phillips, Department of History, Carleton University, 8 February, 2010.

⁵ Ruth B. Phillips, "How Museums Marginalise: Naming Domains of Inclusion and Exclusion," *The Cambridge Review* 114:2320 (Feb 1993), 7-10.

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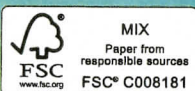
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