

# A WAMPUM-INLAID MUSKET FROM THE 1690 PHIPS' SHIPWRECK

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*In August of 1690, a fleet of ships under the command of Sir William Phips set sail from Boston to attack Quebec City during the second year of King William's War. The campaign failed and, as the fleet retreated, a number of vessels were wrecked in the St. Lawrence during a violent storm. The remains of one of these was discovered by a diver in a cove at l'Anse aux Bouleaux, Quebec, in 1994. Believed to be the Elizabeth and Mary, the wreck yielded numerous artifacts, including a wide array of weaponry. Among the long arms was a musket whose stock was decorated on either side with two crosses created by inserting wampum into holes drilled into the wood. Likely the property of a Praying Indian, this unique weapon is described in detail and comparisons made to other contemporary Native American objects decorated in a similar manner.*

## THE HISTORY

The summer of 1690 marked the second year of the War of the League of Augsburg, known in the English colonies as King William's War. With neither France nor England eager to commit troops and resources, colonial defense depended heavily on the local militias which, with the aid of indigenous allies, harassed and raided outlying settlements in sporadic, unconventional warfare throughout a wide and exposed wilderness frontier. In late summer, the English colonists embarked on a major campaign to carry the conflict into the heart of New France. The expedition consisted of a land and sea force that planned to act in a two-prong movement. The land element, coming from Albany and led by John Winthrop, was to advance through the Lake Champlain corridor and attack Montreal. While some of the troops did manage to reach their objective, the action had negligible impact and the land campaign was aborted early in the campaign.

The sea force, headed by Sir William Phips and consisting of a fleet of four warships and thirty transports crammed with 2,200 New England militia, left Nantasket, Massachusetts, for the Gulf of St. Lawrence on August 10. The plan was to descend the St. Lawrence River and besiege Quebec, the French colonial capital, from the west.

The expedition lasted more than two months, the slow progress attributed to bad weather, a lack of adequate charts for navigating the river, as well as time spent foraging and pillaging along the frontier of New France. Arriving before Quebec in mid-October, Phips realized that Winthrop had failed in his objective and its implications on the overall strategy. After a brief engagement on the north shore of the St. Charles River, Phips abandoned the campaign on Quebec. Losses to smallpox and "camp fever" took an alarming toll among the expedition's members. Violent weather drove many of the ships off course and a least four were wrecked on the poorly charted St. Lawrence River (Bradley, Dunning, and Gusset 2003:151).

## THE ARCHAEOLOGY

The remains of one of the wrecked ships came to light on Christmas Eve, 1994, when a diver, Marc Tremblay, was servicing mooring lines at his cottage at l'Anse aux Bouleaux, a small community located in Baie Trinite on the North Shore of the St. Lawrence between Baie Comeau and Sept Isles, Quebec. During his dive, M. Tremblay discovered what appeared to be a significant deposit of early historic artifacts in approximately three meters of water. As an experienced scuba diver and long-time member of a local dive association dedicated to the preservation of the area's submerged heritage, he immediately realized the importance of the discovery situated only 100 meters from the shoreline and informed government authorities of the find. From 1996 to 1997, the Parks Canada Archaeological Service, in collaboration with the Quebec Ministry of Culture (le centre de conservation du Québec) and the local volunteer association, le Groupe de préservation des vestiges subaquatiques de Manicouagan, conducted the archaeological investigation of the vessel.

The dive team uncovered remains of a section of the hull as well as a variety of domestic items and weaponry, the bulk of which is attributable to the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Historical research in the legal archives of New England suggests that this vessel is likely the *Elizabeth*

and *Mary*, a 45-ton colonial-built bark which was one of the ships in Phips' fleet (Pointe-à-Callière 2000:14-15, 20-21). It was last seen on November 3, 1690, as it headed home. The transport disappeared without a trace and neither the crew nor the militia contingent on board from Dorchester, Massachusetts, were heard from again.

As would be expected of a ship on a military mission, the wreck produced a varied collection of armaments including swords, pistols, long arms, and ammunition. Like most of the other recovered artifacts, the weapons represent a range of privately owned possessions brought on board by the New England militia force that the vessel was transporting. The diverse assemblage of weapons and accoutrements dramatically exhibit individuality as well as social/military status characteristic of British colonial militia organization of the period.

### THE WAMPUM-INLAID MUSKET

Among the weapons recovered from the *Elizabeth and Mary* is a unique musket (57M14N2-37) whose stock is decorated with inset wampum (Plate XA). With the exception of the barrel which was not retrieved, no major metal components were found in association. The relatively intact stock, represented by the butt end, wrist, and a portion of the forestock, measures 68.6 cm overall (Figure 1). Such a light, functional stock style was a popular choice within the context of the North American frontier. The rust-colored bird's-eye graining of the stock indicates it is made of maple (A. Bergeron, CCQ, 2006: pers. comm.) which appears to have enjoyed some favor among 17th-century British gunsmiths (Akehurst 1970:20). Although pleasing in appearance, the popularity of this wood was short-lived owing to its brittle nature which made it unsuitable for the stresses imposed upon a gun stock. Nonetheless, maple continued to be a popular choice for stocks among colonial

craftsmen in North America (Mullins 2008:73). The crescent-shaped butt configuration is a typical 17th-century stock style.

The precise identification of the lock mechanism that was associated with this firearm remains obscure owing to the lack of any metal components and the damage sustained by the upper portion of the lock cavity. What remains of the rectangular cavity is reminiscent of a seared matchlock, or possibly an early English flintlock ignition system. Holes indicate that two screws held the lock plate in place. Another four holes on the underside delineate the shape of the trigger guard, one nail forward of the guard bow and the remaining three securing the considerable tail. The bottom-mounted breech plug screw, extending from forward of the trigger guard through the area of the lockplate to secure the breech plug tang, further affirms a 17th-century provenance. Breech plug screws with an opposite (breech plug tang to trigger guard) orientation are considered to be characteristic of 18th-century manufacture. No butt plate was employed with this weapon.

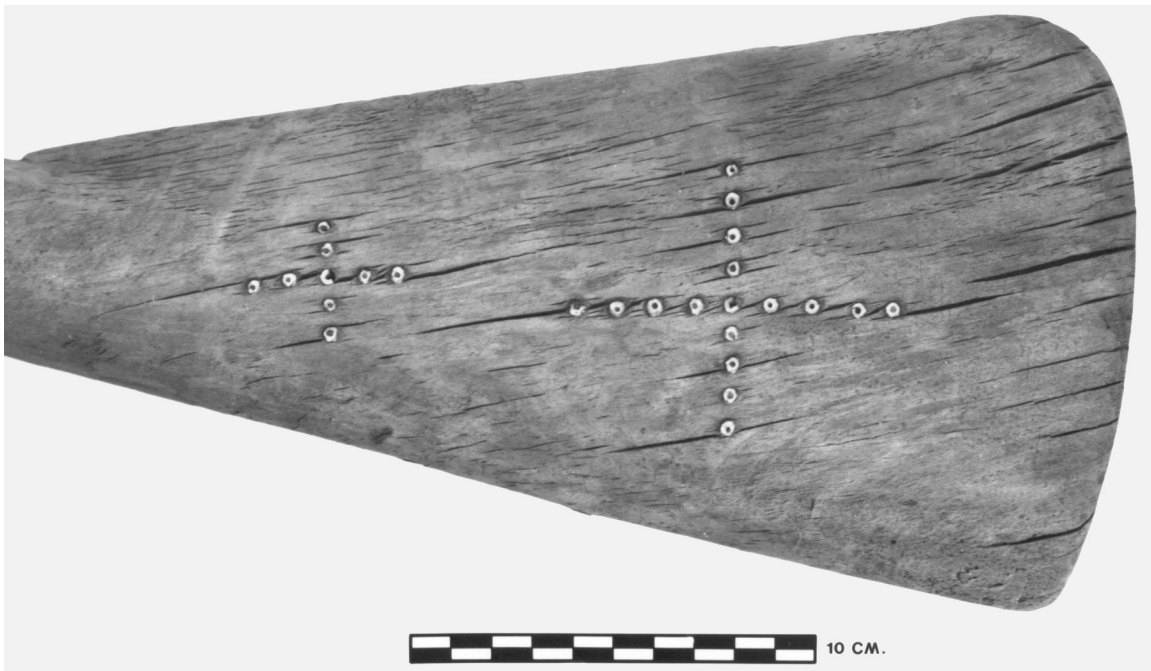
Either side of the butt stock exhibits two crosses composed of wampum beads friction-fitted into the wood on end. The rear cross on the right side measures 79 mm x 79 mm and consists of 17 wampum (Figure 2). The smaller cross measures 33 mm x 40 mm and is composed of 9 wampum. The crosses on the opposite side (Figure 3) are slightly smaller (63 mm x 74 mm and 28 mm x 36 mm, respectively) but composed of the same number of beads. In addition, a 100-mm-long row of wampum is similarly set into the lower edge of the butt stock beneath the crosses (Figure 4; Plate XB). It is formed by eight non-contiguous beads and a 5.9-mm-diameter lead plug situated between the third and fourth beads from the rear. The wampum is 3.6 mm - 4.2 mm in diameter and a single loose but incomplete specimen was about 4.8 mm long. The probable original length is estimated to have been around 6.5 mm.



**Figure 1.** The Phip's wreck musket stock with the cross patterns of inset wampum after conservation (photo: George Vandervlugt, Parks Canada).



**Figure 2.** The wampum crosses on the right side of the musket stock (photo: George Vandervlugt, Parks Canada).

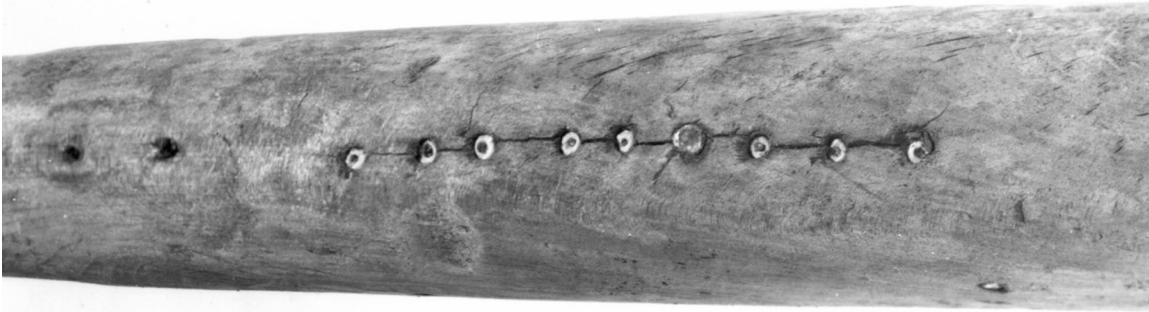


**Figure 3.** The crosses on the left side of the musket stock (photo: George Vandervlugt, Parks Canada).

### COMPARATIVE MATERIAL

The authors know of only one other European firearm that is similarly decorated with inlaid beads. This one, however, is from the last quarter of the 18th century and the

inlays consist of colored glass beads (O'Connor 1980:73, 78-79). Measuring 156 cm (61.4 in.) overall, the piece is a better-quality flintlock Northwest trade gun with a cast-brass serpent sideplate. The lockplate bears the engraved name WILSON and LONDON is engraved on the top



**Figure 4.** The row of wampum set into the lower edge of the stock (photo: George Vandervlugt, Parks Canada).

facet of the barrel just forward of the lock. The butt stock of European walnut exhibits initials and a date formed by forcing 147 glass beads into the wood. GG6 appears on the right side of the butt (Figure 5) while the date 1777 is on the other (Figure 6). An intermittent row of beads outlines the butt plate tang. The color of the beads is not specified but the majority appear to be white. The attributes of the gun are in keeping with the 1777 date. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the cultural affiliation of the person who did the inlay work.

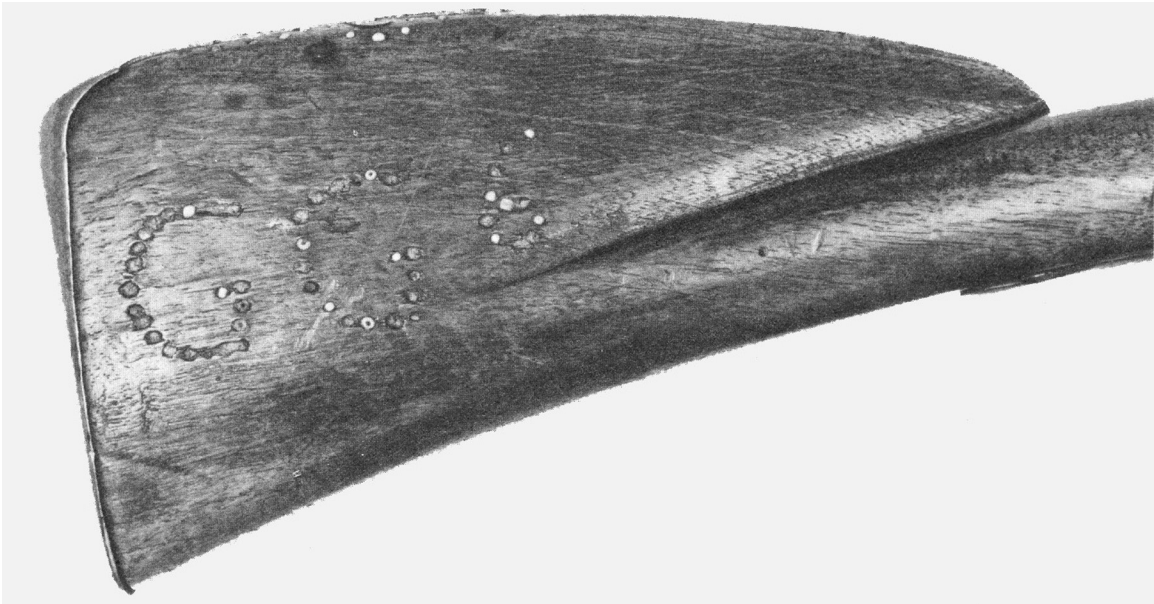
While there is a lack of evidence for wampum inlays in other firearms, such inlays were relatively common on 17th-century weapons, such as war clubs and tomahawks, made by the Native peoples inhabiting the Eastern Woodlands of North America. A splendid example of the former is in the Eugene and Clare Thaw Collection of American Indian Art at the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, New York (Meachum 2005). The wooden sword club is 61 cm (24 in.) long and elaborately decorated with carved images and various shell and metal inlays (Plate XC). One side of the blade portrays a tattooed human face with shell eyes and outlined with metal strips set in edgeways. The other side exhibits a snapping turtle and two headless bodies, probably representing slain enemies, again outlined with metal strips. A carved wolf's head adorns the pommel. The back of the blade is flat and decorated with various inlays. A zigzag series of metal strips runs down the center of the spine at the handle end while what were likely shell inlays adorned the opposite end. In-between these two end elements is a linear series of 29 white wampum beads alternatingly set in lengthwise and on end. This piece has a solid provenance, having been acquired during King Philip's War which took place in southern New England during 1675-1676, and pitted the local Algonquian Indians against the English colonists who were continuously encroaching on their territory. The club was likely taken from one of the Indians who took part in the fighting.

A ball-headed war club reputedly owned by King Philip (known to his people as Metacom, he was the sachem

of the Wampanoag Indians and leader of the Algonquin confederacy that made war on the colonists) is decorated with several rows of white and purple wampum, each bead set in an individually carved longitudinal hole (Salwen 1978:171, Figure 6; Volmar 2010). There are two rows along the back of the club but most of the inlay is now missing. A row of wampum also extends along either contiguous side of the shaft, about 44 pieces per side, and one side also exhibits a second partial row. The wampum is evenly spaced and inlaid perpendicular to the axis of the club. One side is additionally decorated with a linear series of small, triangular horn inlays, all but two of which are missing. The club is 56 cm (22 in.) long. King Philip died in battle in 1676, so if this is his club, it is coeval with the sword club described above.

Another ball-headed club collected before 1676 is attributed to the Mohawk (Feder 1971:76, Figure 85; National Anthropological Archives n.d.). The ball end is in the form of a human head while the distal end of the haft is in the form of a human leg from the knee down (Figure 7). To the rear of the head, and possibly representing hair, are several contiguous rows of white and purple wampum set end to end. These are not inlaid in the wood but are apparently held in place by gum. A row of wampum beads set side by side extends across the forehead from ear to ear and may represent a forehead band. In this instance, the wampum is set in a flat-bottomed groove cut into the wood.

Two tomahawks believed to predate 1650, and variously attributed to New Sweden, New Netherland, or the Iroquois, have their hafts covered with contiguous rows of white and purple wampum set end to end in the same manner as on the Mohawk club described above (Brasser 1978:87, Figure 6). Set in gum, the wampum was ground flat after the gum hardened. In the one case, the wampum apparently covered the entire haft and consisted of whole beads. In the other, the beads were split longitudinally and encased the haft except for a short section near the distal end which served as a handhold. In addition to the wampum, one tomahawk was also adorned with small pieces of bone, eight black



**Figure 5.** The right side of the stock of a Northwest trade gun exhibiting the initials GG6 composed of inlaid glass beads (courtesy: T.M. Hamilton and Pioneer Press, a Division of Dixie Gun Works, Inc.).



**Figure 6.** The opposite side of the trade gun stock with glass beads inlaid to form the date 1777 (courtesy: T.M. Hamilton and Pioneer Press, a Division of Dixie Gun Works, Inc.).

glass seed beads, and three tubular red glass beads. The one with the handhold was also inlaid with pieces of shell and four split polychrome glass beads with green surfaces. The tomahawks are 44.4-47.0 cm (17.5-18.5 in.) long.

A presumably later ball-headed club inlaid with glass seed beads in various linear patterns (Plate XD) is in the

Oldman Collection at the British Museum (Am1949,22.148). The opaque white beads are set into the wood on end as in the Northwest trade gun described above. In addition to the bead inlay, the club is decorated with triangular chip carving that includes a scene of a Thunderbird striking a man with lightning. The piece is undocumented but its form is similar to a 17th-century club at the Bibliotheque Saint Genevieve



**Figure 7.** Ball-headed club (right), collected before 1676 and attributed to the Mohawk, decorated with wampum set in gum (Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives, Neg. No. 962-H-1-2).

in Paris. The fact that the Oldman club is smaller and inlaid with glass beads and not wampum suggests it might date to the 18th century and be of Huron origin (British Museum 2010). The club is 54 cm (21.3 in.) long.

Wooden bowls were also occasionally inlaid with wampum by the Native people. Willoughby (1908:428-429, Pl. XXVII) describes a Mohegan specimen about 28 cm (11 in.) in diameter whose semi-circular handle exhibits an L-shaped configuration of white wampum (Figure 8). The beads are set side-by-side in carved grooves. The L is interpreted by Willoughby (1908:428-429) as standing for

the initial of Lucy Tantaquidgeon, an early owner of the bowl and sister of the noted Mohegan minister and missionary Samson Occom (1723-1792). The bowl probably dates to the first half of the 18th century. Willoughby (1908:429) also mentions another bowl of Pequot or Mohegan origin that exhibits “a zone of wampum inlay upon the outer side.”

A 17th-century Pequot burl bowl with minimal wampum bead inlay is in the collections of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center (Stephen Cook 2010: pers. comm.). The bowl has two pieces of white wampum inset vertically in the upper interior rim.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear from the foregoing that inlays of wampum, later replaced by glass beads, were a fairly common form of adornment among the Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples of the Eastern Woodlands. Popular for decorating various native weapons, it does not take a great stretch of the imagination to see wampum applied to the wooden components of European firearms. The indication is, therefore, that the inlaid firearm from the Phip’s wreck was either owned by an aboriginal member of the war party sent to attack Quebec or was obtained from such a person. In fact, several documents relating to the campaign of 1690 mention Native people comprising the militia obligations of many of the villages of Massachusetts (Watkins 1898:28, 77, 81). Identified as Praying Indians, two such men, Isaac Cop[p]s and William [Robeson], were reported to have been in the Dorchester contingent (Watkins 1898:42). The unique wampum-inlaid musket found at l’Anse aux Bouleaux could well have belonged to one of them.



**Figure 8.** Wooden Mohegan bowl with an L-shaped wampum inlay, ca. 1700-1750 (Willoughby 1908: Plate XXVII).

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