

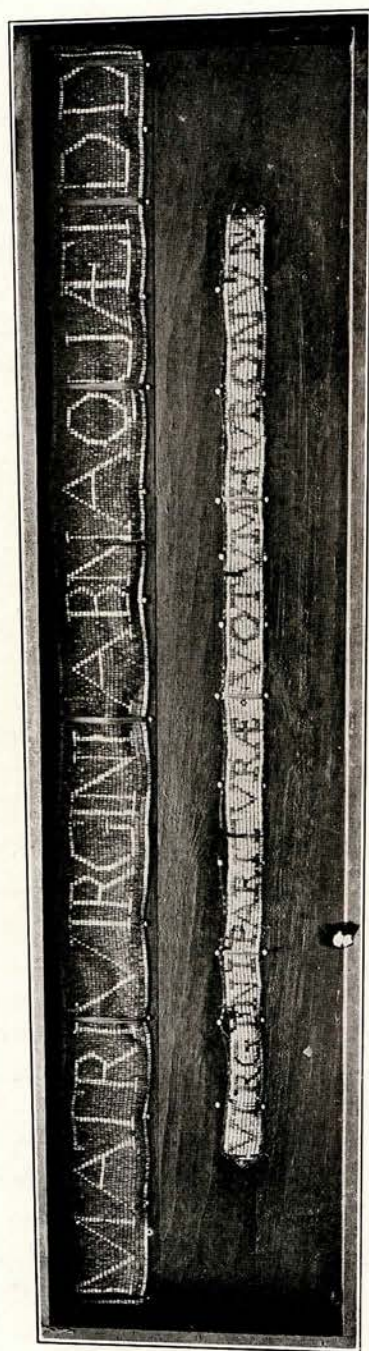
## RECENT DISCOVERY OF ANCIENT WAMPUM BELTS

**D**URING the summer of 1921, Doctor Gordon, the Director of the Museum, in company with Doctor Leon Legrain, paid a visit to the Cathedral at Chartres, France, and discovered in the crypt of the Cathedral in the Chapel of Saint Savinien and Saint Potentien, a gilded wooden frame containing two wampum belts made by the American Indians. One of these was presented by the Hurons in 1674 and the other by the Abnaquis in 1699.

The Huron belt is 1.445 m. long and 7 cm. wide. Upon the ground of white beads there is the legend in blue beads with letters 45 mm. high, VIRGINI PARITURAE VOTUM HURONUM, The offering of the Hurons to the Virgin who shall bring forth a Son. The belt was bordered with a sort of embroidery in red porcupine quills.

The Abnaqui belt is 2.18 m. long and 15 cm. high, having a legend in white letters 10 cm. high upon a background of blue beads, MATRI VIRGINI ABNAQUAEI. D. D.

These belts are of so much interest that a short historical account would seem desirable. When Champlain discovered the Saint Lawrence in 1608, he found the Huron Indians of the neighborhood carrying on fierce warfare with their neighbors, the Iroquois. By giving the Hurons firearms and other assistance, Champlain made such firm friends of the Hurons that they willingly accepted the French missions which came to them later on. The French established trading posts on the Saint Lawrence at Three Rivers and elsewhere and the Hurons made annual trips for trading purposes. The Indians invited the missionaries into their country and in 1615 the Recollect Fathers accepted their invitation and established the first mission. The Jesuits began their labors with the advent of Father Brebeuf in Huronia in 1626; but these missions all came to an end in 1650 with the destruction of the Huron commonwealth by the Iroquois. By 1643, the Iroquois had obtained some four hundred guns from the Dutch and this advantage encouraged them to make their final invasion of Huron country and enabled them to overcome the feeble resistance of the Hurons. A number of Hurons wintered in Quebec in 1649 and did not return to their own country after they learned of the desolation made by



Two Wampum Belts framed under glass in the Crypt of Chartres Cathedral.  
FIG. 20.

the Iroquois but were placed on land belonging to the Jesuits at Beauport. These were joined by Huron fugitives who came down to Quebec to seek protection and in 1651 they moved to Orleans Island which had been bought for them. Here a mission house was erected near their stockaded bark lodges. They numbered in all some five or six hundred persons. Here they were again attacked by the Iroquois and a few of them were given refuge by the French at Quebec until peace was declared between the French and the Iroquois in 1666. The Hurons then withdrew about five miles from the town where the missionaries arranged their lodges about a square and built in the middle of it a church to which Father Chaumonot added a chapel patterned after the Casa Sancta Lorette in Italy and now known as Old Lorette.

One of the earliest missionaries sent to the Hurons was the Reverend Martin Bouvart, a member of a prominent family of Chartres. He was a descendant of the famous Bouvart who was doctor to Louis XV. Father Bouvart was very proud of the city of his birth and greatly devoted to the patron Lady of the city. He was fond of telling the Indians about the Lady of Chartres and of her great miracles and of the ceremonies in the church. These talks appealed to the imagination of the Indians and they decided to send to the Lady of Chartres some evidence of their piety. In making their offering, they selected the thing which was most precious among them, the wampum beads which they used as money. They made the belt as above described in 1676. Father Bouvart wrote in the Huron language the vow of the savages to the Lady of Chartres; then he translated it into French and sent this along with the belt to the Chapter of Chartres where it was received in 1678.

Their vow, which follows, is interesting in showing the influence of the missionary teaching upon the imagination of the natives.

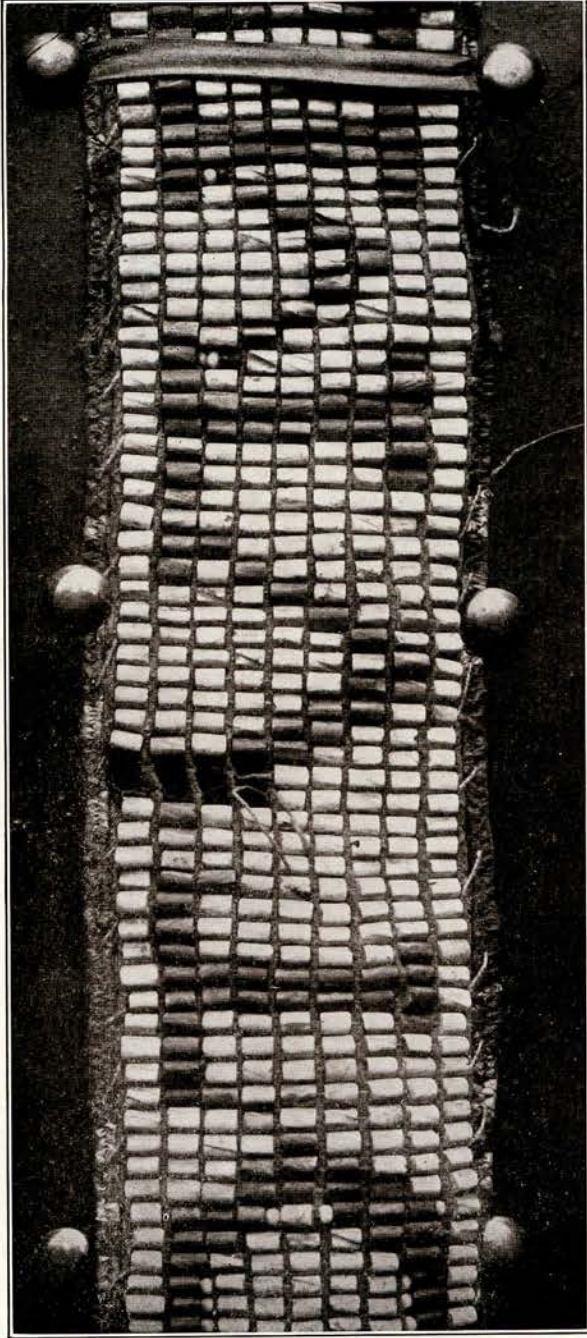
#### PRAYER OF THE HURONS OF LORETTE IN NEW FRANCE TO OUR LADY OF CHARTRES

Blessed Virgin, what joy we feel that, even before our birth, the town of Chartres built for you a church with this inscription: 'To the Virgin who shall bring forth a son.' Oh, how happy are the Gentlemen of Chartres, and how great are their merits for being your first servants! Alas! incomparable mother of God, it is quite the opposite with us poor Hurons; we have the misfortune of having

been the last to know and honor you. But can we not, at least, now repair our fault by making up, in some manner, for all the time in which we have not worshiped you? This is, Blessed Virgin, what we are today doing, in connecting ourselves with the Gentlemen of Chartres, that we may have with them only one mind, one heart, and one mouth, to praise you, to love you, to serve you. We entreat them, then, to present to you in our name, and for us all, the services which they have ever rendered you. Yes, it will be they (for we shall hope that they will not refuse us), it will be they, who, in so far as it is possible, will discharge our obligations before you; while their fervor will make amends for our slackness, their knowledge for our ignorance, their riches for our poverty. Furthermore, Virgin mother of God, although you have already brought forth your son, that will not prevent us from following the example of the Gentlemen of Chartres, in honoring you, even now, under the title of 'the Virgin who shall bring forth a son,' since it depends only upon you, in remaining always a virgin, to have us for your children. As we honor you here in a chapel like the house in which you have given to God a human life, we hope that you will in it give us spiritual life. Thus it will be that, being always a virgin, you will be also a mother—one who not only has given birth, or is giving birth, but who will always give birth until Jesus is perfectly formed in us all. It is this that we ask in presenting you this collar, as a sign that we are bound to you as your slaves.

The Chapter of Chartres was so well pleased with the prayer and the gift of the Hurons that they decided to send them a present that would perpetuate among them the memory of their consecration to the Lady of Chartres. So, three years later, in order to foster the zeal of these good and faithful savages, the Chapter sent to them a large silver shirt filled with relics. On the front of the shirt, they engraved a Virgin holding her Son, inside a forest cave just as the old Druids did according to the tradition of Chartres.

Four years before Champlain arrived on the banks of the St. Lawrence, the French had landed in Acadie to the south where they were favorably received by the Abnaquis Indians. The Abnaquis formed an early attachment for the French chiefly through the influence of these missionaries and carried on an almost constant war with the English until the fall of the French power in America. As the whites encroached on them, the Abnaquis gradually with-



Huron Wampum Belt.  
FIG. 21.

drew to Canada and settled chiefly at Becancour and Sillery. The descendants of those who migrated from Maine together with the remnants of other New England tribes are now in Saint Francis and Becancour where they number some three or four hundred. Some of these Abnaquis Christians were present at Lorette in 1680 when the relic sent by the Chapter of Chartres to the Hurons was received. They came home and told their people about the magnificent present that their neighbors had received from the eastern Fathers. They also began to talk about the miracles of the Lady of Chartres and decided that they too should consecrate themselves to the Virgin of Chartres and asked the Chapter of the city to join with them in a common League of Prayer; so, in 1691, the Chapter received a box which enclosed the vow of the Abnaquis to the Virgin of Chartres. In turn, the Chapter decided to send to them also, as to the Hurons, a small silver shirt full of relics.

In 1699, Father Vincente Bigot proposed to the Abnaquis Indians that they send a letter to the Chapter of Chartres with a present for the Virgin. The savages approved the idea and on January 27, 1700, the Chapter received a box containing a letter from Father Bigot and a letter from the Abnaquis thanking the Chapter for their former present, and a belt of wampum composed of eleven thousand beads equal to the number of members of the Abnaquis tribe. The Chapter in recognition of this gift, asked the trustees of the Cathedral to have a silver figure of the holy Virgin made, two marks in weight, on the model of the statue in the crypt, to be sent as a present to the Abnaquis Church. The statue according to the contract made with the goldsmith in Paris was to stand nine inches high and to weigh nine marks. In 1703 a letter was received by the Chapter acknowledging the receipt of the present by the Abnaquis.

It would seem from the letters from the missionaries as published in the Jesuit Relations 1654-1656 that the Indians were very early encouraged to make gifts of wampum on Sundays to the Virgin. "Each one giving a porcelain\* bead for each rosary

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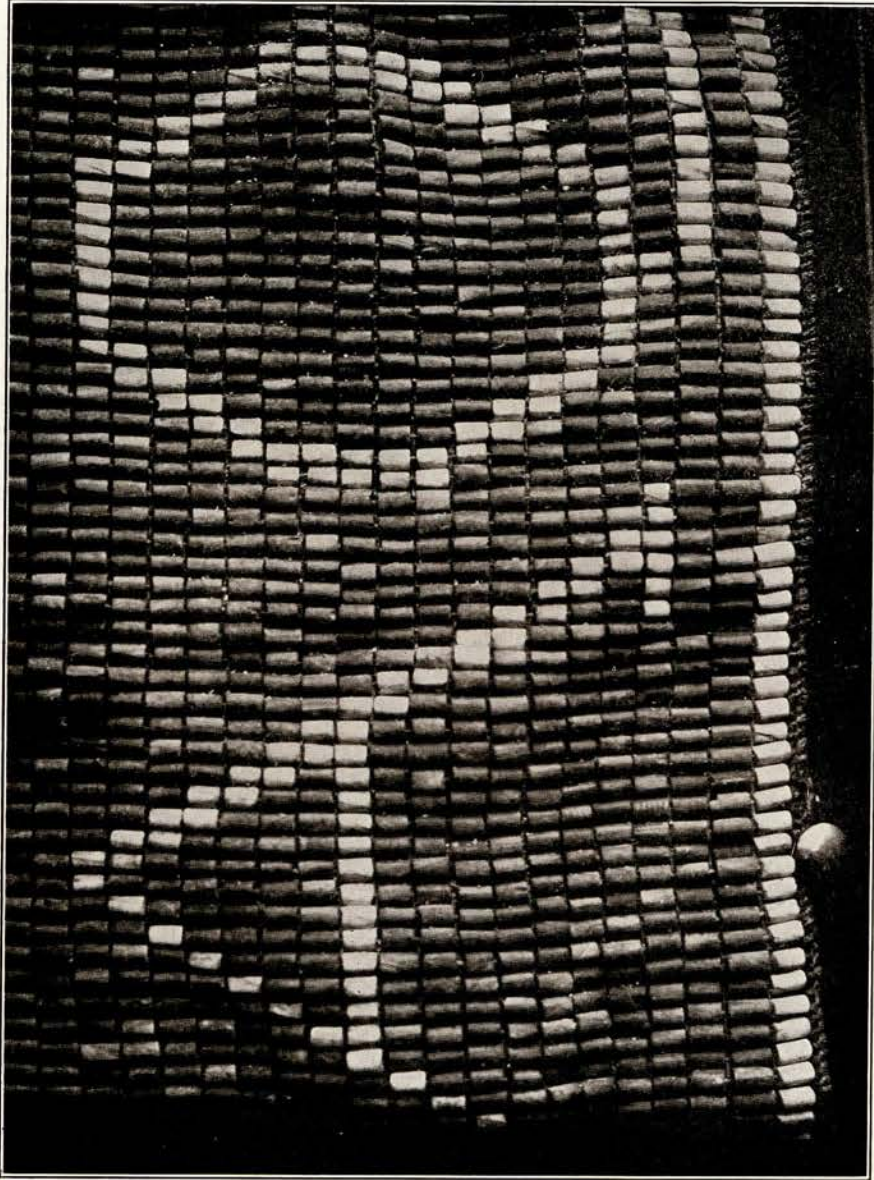
\* Porcelain is the word used repeatedly by the priests in their communications about and references to the beads composing the wampum belts. It shows that the fathers could have had but little interest in the native arts and industries and customs of the Indians. The beads are the native wampum or shell money made in two colours from the shell of the fresh water clam and the chief interest of the two belts is that they are the earliest of which we have an authentic account and a fixed date. Moreover, we know their history continuously from the time they were made until today.—EDITOR.

recited during the week. The number of these beads runs sometimes as high as seven or eight hundred. And their devotion has prompted them to make collars of these in the style of embroidery in which by interweaving beads of violet and white porcelain, they write what they wish to say in honor of the Virgin. They have formed a kind of public treasury which they use in helping the poor. We aid them in increasing this little treasury by adding the offerings of charity from the members of the Congregation of the Professed House at Paris.

“These good Huron members of the Church meeting together a short time ago to give thanks in their own peculiar manner, resolved to send to the Congregation of Our Lady of the Professed House of the Society of Jesus at Paris from the Huron Christians of the Congregation of Saint Mary on the Island of Orleans near Quebec, a collar on which are written in black beads upon a white background, the words ‘AVE MARIA GRATIA PLENA,’ and they begged me to accompany this devout offering of theirs with a letter which I wrote in their name upon birchbark, our substitute for paper, the translation of which is as follows: ‘Receive, O Lady of Heaven, this present offered to you by the chosen ones of your Huron servants. It is a collar full of hidden meaning. It is composed of our finest pearls. It is inspired and enriched by the utterances and the greetings given you of old by the angel Gabriel. We have nothing more precious in our hands and nothing holier in our hearts for presenting to you and for gaining us the kingdom of heaven through your mediation.’”

This would seem to be the first act of presentation of a wampum belt to the societies at home but the later history of this belt is unknown.

It seems to have been the custom to take up collections of wampum beads at the Sunday services and to decorate the cross with belts made of red porcupine quills as offerings to the Virgin. On Good Friday 1767, a plate was placed near the crucifix in Saint Mary's and more than four thousand beads were collected as an offering to the Virgin. Many of these, along with others from the collections, were made up into belts and collars and used to decorate the beams of the Chapel. In 1677, the Mission at Lorette sent to the Sault Mission a collar or belt to encourage them in their faith and this belt was attached to one of the beams of the Chapel.



Section of the Abnaquis Belt.  
FIG. 22.



THE MUSEUM JOURNAL

NOTE 1. Father Jacques Bigot came to Canada in 1679 and in 1681 was sent to the Mission of Sillery and for more than twenty-five years, he labored among the missions of Canada. His brother, Vincente Bigot, came out to Canada to assist him at Sillery in 1680.

NOTE 2. Father Joseph Marie Chaumonot arrived in Canada after three months rough voyage on the first of August 1639, going immediately to the Hurons where he spent the rest of his life of more than forty years among the missions.

NOTE 3. The ancient relics possessed by the Church at Chartres before the Revolution were placed in three different parts of the choir, on both sides and behind the main altar. This was called the Treasury. The holy shrine was placed at the farther end while above it and close to the ceiling was placed the Huron and Abnaquis belts. These two belts fortunately escaped the hands of the vandals at the time of the Revolution and still remain as a part of the Treasury.

W. C. F.