

DUST FAN BELT

also Everlasting or Evergrowing Tree Belt

The Dust Fan Belt, also known as the Wing Belt and the Everlasting Tree Belt, is displayed at Haudenosaunee council meetings and has two meanings. The belt is called the Everlasting or Evergrowing Tree Belt because the purple beads form a stylized White Pine tree, depicting the Tree of Peace under which the Five Nations buried their weapons when they formed the Confederacy. This tree, also known as the Great Tree of Peace, is a symbol of the permanence and vitality of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Belt's presence during council meetings reminds those present of the original promise the Five Nations made to each other and of their duty to maintain that alliance. It is considered one of the oldest wampum designs in existence.

The belt's second intention comes from its other names Dust Fan and Wing Belt. The stylized zig zag pattern also symbolizes a traditional fan made from a bird's wing used to sweep and smudge a sacred space in preparation for council meetings. The belt with this interpretation also "sweeps" the mental space of those meeting to protect the council and chiefs from the metaphorical "dust" or harmful thoughts that may cloud their vision when making decisions or engaging in political discussions.

The Dust Fan Belt is one of many wampum belts that were unethically acquired by the New York State Museum. In 1898, Reverend William Beauchamp, an Episcopal priest who ministered at the Onondaga Reservation, obtained an original Dust Fan belt for \$25 on behalf of the museum regents and gave it to the museum. The Onondaga chiefs account of the exchange, however, as well as Beauchamp's, indicate that the Onondaga never intended to relinquish ownership of the belt and were led to believe they were only loaning it temporarily for safekeeping. Almost a century later, the Dust Fan Belt and several other wampum belts were repatriated to the Onondaga in 1989. After decades of efforts to regain the belts, the repatriation was an important acknowledgment that the belts belonged to the Onondaga, the wampum-keepers of the Haudenosaunee, and that wampum belts are living historical and cultural records.