



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

**JENNIFER SEIDEL**

BA (University of Toronto, 2013)

“Cultivating the Three Sisters: Haudenosaunee Foodways and Acculturative Change  
in the Fur Trade Economy”

Department of History

Monday, August 22, 2016

9:30 A.M.

Clearihue Building

Room B215

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Peter Cook, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. John Lutz, Department of History, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Nancy Turner, School of Environmental Studies, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Aaron Devor, Department of Sociology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## **Abstract**

This study examines Haudenosaunee foodways in the Great Lakes Region between the early seventeenth century and the mid to late eighteenth century. The study is divided into two parts. First, the Creation Story is explored as it transmits the origin of the Three Sisters, a cropping system of inter-planted corn, beans and squash. The teachings of the Three Sisters highlights the importance of polyculture and sustainability. Conversely, a Westerners' scientific account of how the Three Sisters came to be farmed together is studied. The independent pathways of the corn, beans and squash is examined as they arrived in New York State from the Mexico highlands. Recent findings show the Three Sisters were adopted independently in eastern North America beginning around A.D. 1300. They were grown together in some locations on a regular basis. The adoption of the polycultural complex of the Three Sisters was gradual and took place approximately 700 years ago as each of the crops adjusted to the climate and new surroundings. Secondly, the relationship between food, specifically the Three Sisters and acculturative change are examined pre-and-post contact. Acculturative change occurs when two independent cultures comes into contact with one another. The degree of influence is not equal as one culture can be absorbed, shaped or influenced more strongly by the other culture. The Haudenosaunee culture underwent acculturative change because the fur trade economy affected their foodways due to the influx of European goods such as the brass kettle and encroachment on their land and hunting grounds. The Haudenosaunee retained the core of their cultural beliefs and cultural practices because they made decisions, specifically their selection of goods and agricultural practices, as an extension of their cultural beliefs. Acculturative change resulted in a more monocropped and creolized agricultural system, usage of draft animals, fruit orchards and the plow. This study lies at the intersection of ethnohistory and food history. This study will serve as a tool to analyze and understand Haudenosaunee historical experiences from a First Nations cultural perspective.