

The Onake Story (1972-2023)

Much of this history was collected in a series of virtual interviews with former Onake Paddling Club member Alwyn Morris, Haunani member Val Simmons, and online articles published by the CBC. Canadian Outrigger Racing Association (CORA) has taken great care to cite the CBC articles when their research has been noted. Onake Paddling Club has never been a member of CORA, yet Onake Paddling Club has a rich history of outrigger canoeing crossing many decades.

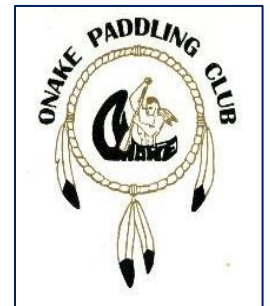
The history of Onake Paddling Club has been shaped by at least 3 major events. The first was the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway - a system of locks, canals and channels between Montreal and the Great Lakes - that took place between 1954 and 1959. The second was the progression of Alwyn Morris between 1973 and 1984 towards achievement of Gold and Bronze at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics. The third has been the ongoing recovery of Kahnawake Bay and growth of the Onake Paddling Club at this venue.

Onake Paddling Club

The club legacies that CORA had compiled in past years had been very much about individual clubs (False Creek; Lotus; Jericho; Penticton; Ocean River) with some "cross-over" references to other canoe clubs where there were connections. The "Onake Legacy" is quite different. This document is very much about all the previously unpublished connections between Onake Paddling Club and the outrigger paddling community.

Roots / Threads / Chapters

This chronicle is intended to capture unwritten history of outrigger canoeing with regards to Onake Paddling Club from 1972-2023, as records from prior to 2000 are becoming more and more scarce. The history of outrigger canoeing at the Onake Paddling Club is linked with the introduction of outrigger canoeing in Western Canada in the late 1980s and the growth of outrigger canoeing in Eastern Canada in the late 1990s. There is minimal mention of outrigger canoeing in Eastern Canada in online articles. It has only been via discussions between the CORA Historical Committee and notable individuals with knowledge of the introduction of outrigger canoeing to Ontario and Quebec that have uncovered much of the history of outrigger canoeing in Eastern Canada. There are at least seven threads / chapters that converged to lead to the current state of outrigger canoeing at the Onake Paddling Club and in Quebec.



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Onake First Nations Before St. Lawrence Seaway (1954-1959)

The St. Lawrence Seaway is a system of locks, canals, and channels in Canada and the United States that permits oceangoing vessels to travel from the Atlantic Ocean to reach ports in all five of the Great Lakes (Superior; Huron; Michigan; Ontario; Erie) of North America via the Great Lakes Waterway. The first proposals for a binational comprehensive deep waterway along the St. Lawrence were made in the 1890s. After decades of discussions between the Canadian and US governments, Canadian Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent advised U.S. President Harry S. Truman on September 28, 1951, that Canada was unwilling to wait for the United States and would build a seaway alone; the Canadian Parliament authorized the founding of the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority on December 21 of that year. The first positive action by the US Government to enlarge the seaway was taken on May 13, 1954, when U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Wiley-Dondero Seaway Act to authorize joint construction and establish the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation as the U.S. authority. Groundbreaking ceremonies took place in Massena, New York, on August 10, 1954. [01]



*One of the few photos of Kahnawake's shoreline before the St. Lawrence Seaway. (The Kahnawake Photo Archive/
Kanien'keháka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center)*

The joint venture between Canada and the United States began construction during the summer of 1954 to improve shipping along the St. Lawrence River. The Canadian federal government expropriated 1,262 acres of land in Kahnawake for the \$407 million project. Kahnawake wasn't the only community affected. Thousands of families in Quebec and Ontario were relocated, and 59 square kilometres of land along the river was wiped out by flooding. Akwesasne, a Kanien'kehá:ka community south of Cornwall, Ontario, also had land expropriated for the project. In Kanien'kéha - the Mohawk language - Kahnawake means "*by the rapids*". The community lost its namesake and access to the river when the St. Lawrence Seaway was built in the 1950s.

The St. Lawrence Seaway was officially opened on June 26, 1959. Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada and American President Dwight D. Eisenhower formally opened the St. Lawrence Seaway with a short cruise aboard the Royal Yacht Britannia after addressing crowds in Saint-Lambert, Quebec and sailing to Montreal. Today, over 200 million tonnes of cargo travel on the St. Lawrence Seaway annually.



A view of the Honoré Mercier Bridge and Kahnawake, Que., prior to the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway. (The Kahnawake Photo Archive/ Kanien'keháka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center)


Community members circa 1959 used to call the area now know as Johnson's beach "*the flat rocks*". What once was a two-minute walk from the heart of Kahnawake now involves a 20-kilometre detour by car to the nearby town of St. Catherine where St. Lawrence Seaway locks are located. [02]

Onake Paddling Club Founded (1972)

The St. Lawrence Seaway severed the community's connection not only to the river, but its longstanding connection to life on the water. It's part of the reason why a group of young adults started Onake Paddling Club in 1972 to create a new activity for youth to connect with their culture. Harley Delaronde was among the first paddlers to join Onake Paddling Club and later became the club's commodore from 1978 until 1990. When they first started, the men's war canoe team would be the last to practice.

Onake Paddling Club was founded in 1972 on the Kahnawake First Nation near Chateauguay. Onake Paddling Club is distinguished for being the first ratified First Nation sprint club in the Canadian Canoe Association (CCA) and for producing the first Native Canadian Olympic Gold medallist, Alwyn Morris. Onake translates as "birch bark canoe." [03]

Athlete Profile: ALWYN MORRIS



DOB:
November 22, 1957
Montreal, QC

Hometown:
Kahnawake, QC

Coach:
Frank Garner

Event:
Men's Kayak

Honours:
Olympic Hall of Fame - Inducted 1988
Canadian Sports Hall of Fame
Inducted 2000
Québec Sports Hall of Fame
Inducted 1991
Member of the Order of Canada
Awarded 1985
Tom Longboat Award 1977, 1984


International Results:

OLYMPICS 1984:
K2 500m - GOLD ●
K2 1000m - BRONZE ●
Also competed 1988; Selected 1980

Senior World Championships:
1983 - K2 500m ●
1982 - K2 1000m ○
Also competed 1977-1979,
1981, 1985, 1986

North American Championships:
1977 - K2 ● K4 ●

Pan American Championships:
1978 - K4 ●
1979 - K1 ● K2 ●



Alwyn Morris & Hugh Fisher Arc (1973-1984)

Alwyn Morris is one of the most prominent Indigenous athletes. Before he was a Gold and Bronze medallist in kayaking at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Summer Games, Morris got his start at Onake Paddling Club. Alwyn Morris was 14 when the Onake Paddling Club opened and was introduced to kayaking during a visit to a nearby club. The following summer, Onake Paddling Club procured its first kayaks. Alwyn Morris still remembers his first win competing at Onake Paddling Club's annual regatta, racing in the juvenile solo 500-metre distance.



A victory parade after the Carleton Place Regatta includes Harley Delaronde, Warren Goodleaf, Alwyn Morris and Kenneth Deer. (Onake Paddling Club/Facebook)

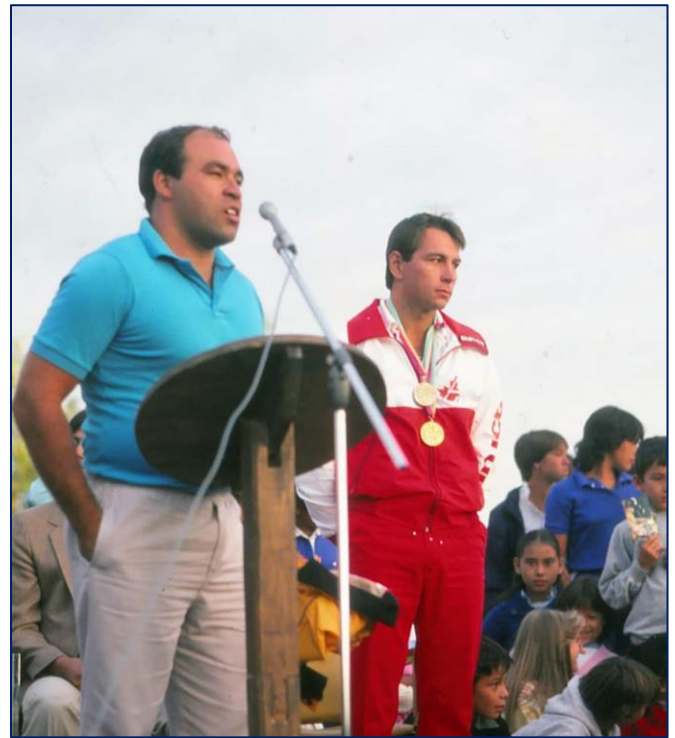
Some say that Hugh Fisher and Alwyn Morris put their lives on hold in order to pursue their sport. In their six years as teammates, these paddling champions not only worked around injury and sickness but put off schooling and careers in order to reach the Olympic podium. To them, paddling was not merely an activity to fill in the cracks along the road of life; it was their lives, and, in fulfilling their dreams, they were truly living their lives to the fullest. Alwyn Morris, a full-blooded Mohawk, grew up on the Kahnawake reserve in Quebec. After being told that he was too small to play lacrosse, the teenaged Alwyn Morris turned his talents toward paddling. By 1977, he was the national junior champion in the K1 500M and 1000M events. He continued to dominate single kayak events in Canada and around the world, winning six national titles and additional victories at regattas in Zaandam and Moscow. Hugh Fisher was born in New Zealand but was raised in Vancouver. He began racing canoes and kayaks at the Burnaby Canoe Club in 1970 and was on the Olympic team by 1976. After placing tenth in the K4 1000M event, Hugh Fisher trained extensively in Europe as well as in Canada with hopes of reaching the podium at the following Olympics. When the Canadian government boycotted the 1980 Games in Moscow, however, Hugh Fisher was left without a world-class competition. With increased determination, he set his sights on the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and began to train even harder. When the two paddlers met in 1980, they seemed destined for greatness on the water. Hugh Fisher, however, developed tendonitis of the wrist and was forced to sit out most of the 1981 season. In the meantime, Alwyn Morris teamed up with Hugh Fisher's former partner, Denis Barre. The two were so successful that Hugh Fisher almost gave up on the idea of returning to the sport. He finished his bachelor's degree and prepared to go to medical school. Fate stepped in, however, in the spring of 1982. Barre was injured and Hugh Fisher was called in to replace him as Alwyn Morris's partner. The two paddlers began a rigorous training program in Europe and were instantly successful. They claimed a Silver medal at the 1982 World Championships and a Bronze medal the following year. On a pre-Olympic tour in 1984, they placed second in the K2 1000M and fourth in the K2 500M events at the Moscow Regatta then went on to place second in the K2 500M and third in the K2 1000M events at the Brandenburg Regatta. The pair reached the pinnacle of their paddling careers at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Summer Games. They won a Gold medal in the K2 1000M and a Bronze medal in the K2 500M events. In what was one of the most memorable moments in Canadian Olympic history, Alwyn Morris stood on the podium and held up an eagle feather as a proud tribute to his aboriginal ancestry. Following the Games, Hugh Fisher returned to medical



school, while Alwyn Morris was appointed Ambassador of Youth in Canada. They qualified once more for the 1988 Olympic team but were not able to replicate their 1984 success. [04]

Alwyn's Olympic Gold medal performance not only skyrocketed him to the pinnacle of his sport, but it also redefined the narrative surrounding Indigenous athletes. His victory sparked a surge of inspiration across Canada, giving rise to a newfound understanding of Indigenous talent in sports. His success also ignited discussions about diversity and representation in athletics, both domestically and internationally. [05] [06] [07]

When Alwyn Morris returned home, multiple school buses were filled with community members to greet him at the airport. More gathered in the streets of Kahnawake as Onake Paddling Club hosted a parade and gathering to celebrate his accomplishments. [08]



Past and present members of the Onake Paddling Club celebrate Alwyn Morris's Gold and Bronze medal wins at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Summer Games.



Quebec Outrigger Canoeing Origins (1989-1999)

There is minimal online literature regarding the Alwyn Morris Western Canada flatwater and outrigger canoeing timeline. Fortunately, extensive virtual interviews with Alwyn Morris and Hugh Fisher and Drew Mitchell and Ruth Matson have provided some unpublished background on the 1980s involvement by Alwyn Morris with the growth of the Western Canada flatwater and outrigger canoeing paddling disciplines.

When an injury to Denis Barre in early 1982 resulted in Hugh Fisher being called in to replace Denis Barre as Alwyn Morris's partner, this set in motion a chain of events that would result in the formation of a Western Canada men's flatwater and outrigger canoeing program.

Drew Mitchell (FCRCC Alumni) was involved with the Canoe Kayak BC Strategic Plan in the early 1980s and was in Nanaimo and Burnaby when the daughters of Allan & Ruth Matson were sprint/flatwater paddling. Drew Mitchell & Hugh Fisher & Alwyn Morris came to Nanaimo to visit with Allan & Ruth Matson regarding sprint/flatwater paddling. Hugh was coaching the daughters of Allan & Ruth Matson. Not only were they scouting for young sprint/flatwater paddlers, but also for a venue to create a sprint/flatwater paddling centre. Loudon Park at Long Lake in Nanaimo was selected as a site. [09] [10] [11]

Many of the BC flatwater paddlers trained at Burnaby Canoe & Kayak Club (BCKC) in the early 1980s. Canada would send a large contingent of K1/K2/K4 paddlers to the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Summer Games. Hugh Fisher and Alwyn Morris formed 1982 & 1983 Molokai Hoe crews consisting of BC flatwater paddlers that did exceptionally well in the years just before the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Summer Games.

Tom Johnson kept the original Malia mould, the only mould available for outriggers in California, on his property in Lake Isabella, California until it was sold to the Head Coach of Lanakila Outrigger Club in 1974. The mould was used for several years to build canoes for clubs in Southern California, Northern California, and Hawaii. The Malia mould was then left unused for many years in a backyard in California. Several months after Expo '86, David Boulding of False Creek Racing Canoe Club (FCRCC) had competed in the Catalina Channel Crossing and learned of a James Takeo Yamasaki Malia canoe mould somewhere in California. David Boulding arranged to have Mike Neckar of Necky Kayaks trailer the Malia mould up to Canada on his return trip after shipping kayaks to California. David Boulding arranged with Jim Mancell of Lotus Sports Club and Steve Schleicher of Nimbus Kayaks to make two outrigger canoes from this original Malia mould. In 1988, after fabrication of the first two Canadian Malia OC6s had begun at Steve Schleicher's shop, Lotus Sports Club acquired their boathouse at Barnet Marine Park and the two Canadian Malia OC6s were moved to the boathouse where the finishing work was completed by Jim Mancell, Garry Mancell, David Boulding, Steve Schleicher (with all of the boat building expertise), Bob Disbrow, and several other paddlers. When the Lotus Sports Club finished using the mould for its Canadian Malia OC6s, the California Malia mould was delivered to Ron Kaschula of Calmar Fiberglass and made available to paddlers from False Creek Racing Canoe Club to build some additional Canadian Malia OC6s.

Alwyn Morris (1984 Los Angeles Olympics K2 Gold / Bronze Medalist) purchased 2 Canadian Malia OC6s in the late 1980s or early 1990s and parlayed his connections to have 2 Canadian Malia OC6s shipped via rail to Montreal Quebec as the first OC6s in Eastern Canada and as the starter OC6s for Onake Paddling Club. Those 2 Canadian Malia OC6s have since changed hands across several canoe clubs in Eastern Canada. CORA believes that one of these 2 Canadian Malia OC6s went to Jon Hutchison of Club Outrigger Montréal/Montréal Outrigger Club (COMMOC) from Quebec and it seems that another of these 2 Canadian Malia OC6s went to Balmy Beach Canoe Club in Toronto Ontario. [12]



CORA has various online photos of the Canadian Malia OC6 (with a Bradley Hawaiian Hawk ama) owned by Jon Hutchison of Club Outrigger Montréal/Montréal Outrigger Club (COMMOC) in Quebec waters.

CORA has no online photos or Canadian paddling club mentions / reference of any other Canadian Malia OC6 except for the two Canadian Malia OC6s presently owned by Wai Nui of Oakville Ontario. It is possible that Wai Nui acquired 1 of their Canadian Malia OC6s from Balmy Beach Canoe Club or from Onake Paddling Club. The bottom line is that 2 Canadian Malia OC6s were shipped via rail from Vancouver BC to Montreal Quebec, and there are now 2 Canadian Malia OC6s at the Wai Nui venue in Oakville Ontario with 1 Canadian Malia OC6 in Montreal Quebec – and the history of these 3 Canadian Malia OC6s remains a mystery.



Kahnawake Bay & Onake Paddling Club Next Generation (2005-2023)

Onake means birch bark canoe in Kanien'kéha, the Mohawk language. The Onake Paddling Club clubhouse sits at the tip of the Kahnawake Bay in an area commonly known as Johnson's Beach. The club is where Olympic gold medallist Alwyn Morris got his start. (Ka'nhehsí:io Deer/CBC).

Konwana'ke:ren Diabo is currently one of the club's top athletes, having trained with the Canadian national development team and represented team Quebec in several canoeing events. Most recently, she came home with five medals from the Canada Summer Games and a second-place finish at the Canada Canoe-Kayak Sprint National Championships. [13]

Onake Paddling Club has come a long way from its early years. The "heart and soul" of the club during the early years was the war canoe, but paddlers have since excelled in other flat-water racing, as well as outrigger canoeing and dragon boat events. The club's paddlers have won medals at local regattas across Quebec, provincial and national championships, the North American Indigenous Games, and tournaments across North America. While programming has evolved over the years, youth have always been the focus. Nearly two dozen youth participated in junior racing camp this year. It's exciting for Konwana'ke:ren Diabo to see more youth interested in paddling, and putting in the work to practice on and off the water.

In addition to a kids summer camp, they've also created development and racing camps where youth train and compete until the end of October. The club has an end of the season "fright night," where paddlers dress up in Halloween costumes.



Kahnawake Bay Restoration (2008-2023)

Onake Paddling Club sits at the tip of the Kahnawake Bay in an area commonly known as Johnson's Beach. The body of water has been used for paddling, fishing, and swimming but those activities have become threatened due to long term environmental impacts from the creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway in the 1950s. A pair of cinder blocks at the edge of the bay can be seen from Onake's docks, they're used as a marker for the bay's water level. If you can see them above the water line - the water is too shallow. A buildup of sediment caused by low flows, and aquatic plant growth have also made the bay difficult to navigate. Water conditions render the bay unusable by summer, forcing young kayak and canoe paddlers into the seaway to practice (Ka'nhehsí:io Deer/CBC). The water in Kahnawake Bay wasn't always like this but has gotten progressively worse with nutrient laden sediment piling up over the course of five decades. It has been a concern for probably about 20 years or so and it's just getting worse and worse. The Kahnawake Environment Protection Office (KEPO) has been leading efforts to restore Kahnawake Bay and Kateri Tekakwitha Island since 2008 with a number of studies to characterize wildlife habits, modelling the study area, community consultation, and work on sustainable solutions. There has been a massive environmental impact of the St. Lawrence Seaway construction that was not really documented at the time.



One of the many ships that pass through the seaway by Kahnawake every day. (Ka'nhehsí:io Deer/CBC)

Much of the excavated material from the St. Lawrence Seaway construction was put onto a series of islands that existed in Kahnawake, forming one larger island now named Kateri Tekakwitha Island, and the bay. Kahnawake's recreation bay

and Kateri Tekakwitha Island are amid an estimated \$2 million restoration project, funded primarily by the federal government, led by the Kahnawake Environment Protection Office (KEPO) to improve water flow, ecosystems, and access to the water. Work is in progress to dredge a 40-metre-wide corridor in the bay and harvest aquatic plants. Shoreline enhancements are also part of the project including five access points to the bay, like rock staircases to get down to the water and a beach. The restoration project includes developing a turtle nesting ground, marsh and linear pond on Kateri Tekakwitha Island.



This is a rendering of what Kateri Tekakwitha Island is supposed to look like when restoration is completed.

Quebec Outrigger Canoeing Growth (2014-2023)

The Greater Montreal Outrigger Challenge (GMOC) that ran 2014-2019 has provided worthwhile historical / visual history on the growth of paddlesports in Eastern Canada. The husband and wife team of Mony Sy and Patricia Gilbert, founders and organizers of the Greater Montreal Outrigger Challenge (GMOC), saw their four-venue (Oakville / Wai Nui; Montreal / COMMO; Ottawa & Hudson Yacht Club; Toronto / Toronto Sailing Canoe Club) Eastern Canada Waterway Series 1-person & 2-person & 6-person canoe event see year-after-year growth to more than 140 paddlers taking on the waters. Not only did Onake Paddling Club share their Bradley Lightning traditional OC6 with the GMOC Montreal event hosts, they also rented out their Bradley Lightning traditional OC6 at their Kahnawake Bay venue to assist CORA startup club Haunani Outrigger Club of Montreal have access to an OC6 until Haunani Outrigger Club was able to acquire an OC6 from Wai Nui of Oakville Ontario. The COVID global pandemic of 2020 brought a hiatus to the Greater Montreal Outrigger Challenge (GMOC) and CORA is hoping to revive this Eastern Canada Waterway Series in coming years. [14] [15] [16] [17] [18] [19] [20] [21] [22] [23]



One of the key notes in all the online references to the Greater Montreal Outrigger Challenge (GMOC) is the presence of an Onake Paddling Club yellow / black (Bradley Lightning) traditional OC6 at the Montreal events. CORA has no record of when this Onake Paddling Club traditional OC6 arrived, but this traditional OC6 can be seen in GMOC 2014-2019 online references. Ozone expanded their Eastern North America presence with the emergence of Ozone Canada East - ColdWater Canoe. The Ozone Eastern Canada distributor has provided many clubs in Eastern Canada including Mississauga Canoe Club, Sunnyside Paddling Club, Haunani Outrigger Club, and Onake Paddling Club with Puakea Malolo and/or Giblin Vortex Unlimited OC6s. Onake Paddling Club now owns a Bradley Lightning traditional OC6 and a Puakea

Malolo Unlimited OC6. Both of the Onake Paddling Club OC6s have the trademark Onake Paddling Club yellow / black colour design. [24]



References

Note	Article	Link
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[02]	CBC News, By the rapids, Restoring Kahnawake's bay and life on the water	https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/by-the-rapids/
[03]	Canada's Sprint Clubs Onake Paddling Club	http://cfly.ca/canoe/Onake.htm
[04]	Canada's Sports Hall of Fame Alwyn Morris & Hugh Fisher	http://www.sportshall.ca/hall-of-famers/hall-of-famers-search.html?proID=70&lang=EN
[05]	Montreal Gazette: History Through Our Eyes: Aug. 18, 1984, Alwyn Morris	https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/history-through-our-eyes/history-through-our-eyes-aug-18-1984-alwyn-morris
[06]	Alwyn Morris: An Indigenous Hero's Olympic Triumph	https://Indigenousheroes.ca/alwyn-morris/
[07]	Paddling from Kahnawake to Los Angeles, By Alwyn Morris for CBC Sports	https://www.cbc.ca/playersvoice/entry/paddling-my-way-kahnawake-to-los-angeles
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[20]	GMOC 2017	https://www.facebook.com/events/hudson-yacht-club/challenge-doutrigger-du-grand-montr%C3%A9al-2017-greater-montreal/107290496553640/
[21]	GMOC 2018	https://www.facebook.com/events/241937389996738
[22]	GMOC 2019	https://www.pointe-claire.ca/en/news/first-outrigger-canoe-race-at-the-pointe-claire-canoe-kayak-club/
[23]	Club Outrigger Montréal/Montréal Outrigger Club (COMMOC)	https://www.facebook.com/COMMOC.org/
[24]	Ozone Canada East - Coldwater Canoe	https://www.outriggerzone.com/dealers/coldwatercanoe/