March 2009 Issue

Feathers In The Wind

Articles provided by members and friends of The Ontario Métis Family Records Center

In This Issue:

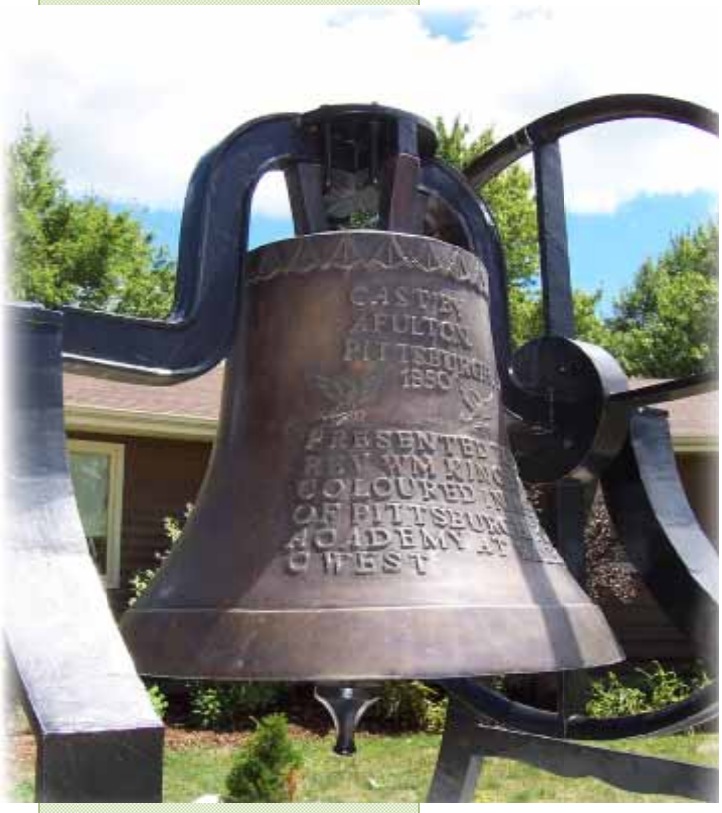
"To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?" This quote by Marcus Tullius Cirero (106 BC to 43 BC) encompasses a core belief of our organization.

Submissions to Our Newsletter

Articles for the newsletter are greatly appreciated from both members and non-members.

- Send articles to info@omfrc.org
- Articles should not be offensive or in bad taste.
- Articles should be of direct interest to First Nations and/or Métis.
- Articles should contain the author's name.
- Depending on volume, we may not be able to include all submissions.
- Your article could also be used on one of our websites.

Disclaimer:
Articles in the newsletter express the opinions of the authors, not necessarily those of the MFRC / OMFRC. Our newsletter is meant to be a voice for the aboriginal community and their opinions are as varied as the community itself. Some of the articles will be controversial, we ask you to read them with an open mind. By listening to people we may not agree with, we learn, and our perspective on an issue may change.

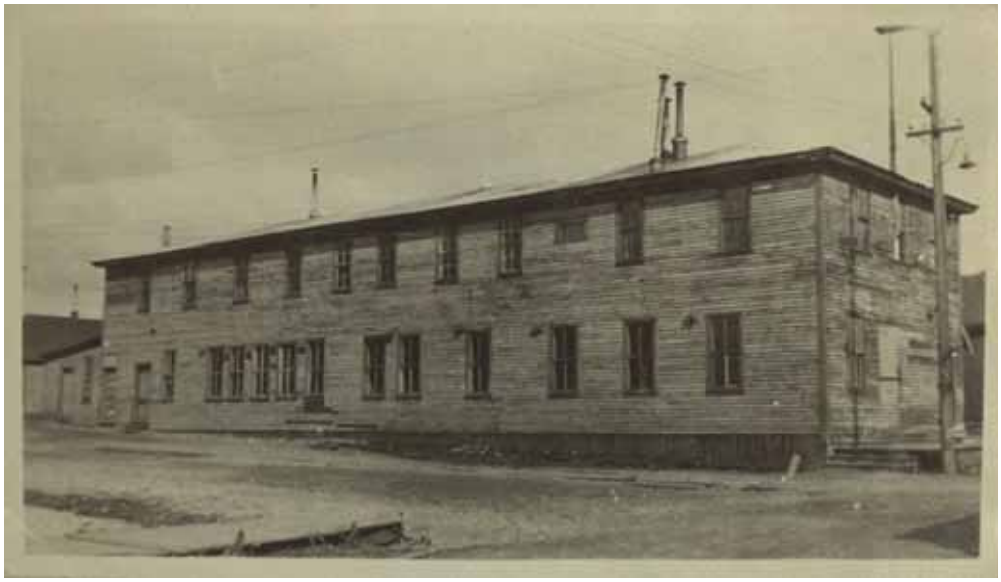


The Buxton Liberty Bell

This is a replica of the Buxton Liberty Bell. Below are the letter that came with the bell and the reply letter sent from the people of Buxton. The bell was a gift to the settlers of the Elgin/Buxton settlement, sent in 1850 from the Coloured inhabitants of Pittsburgh. The bell was rung every time a fugitive slave reached safety in the settlement. The original bell still hangs in St Andrews United Church in present day South Buxton. In the past there wasn't a North and South Buxton, it was all part of the Elgin/Buxton Settlement, located in the township of Raleigh Canada West. The settlement was six miles long and three miles wide, covering 9000 acres. It was the largest and considered to be the most successful of the planned settlements for the refugees of slavery. In 1999 the original 9000 acres of the settlement was designated as a site of national historic significance by the government of Canada, making it the second largest National Historic Site in Ontario. The Buxton Museum grounds contain a museum with three rooms of exhibits depicting the journey from slavery to freedom, an 1852 original log cabin, and an 1861 schoolhouse which is the only one still standing in Canada that was built by fugitive slaves. The museum library holds many original documents as well as census records, marriage, birth and death records as well as family trees of families from the settlement.

Editor's note: Many people aren't aware that aboriginals were also the victims of slavery. Unions between Blacks and aboriginals produced many descendants who meet the OMFRC's definition of Métis. Our thanks to Spencer Alexander.

Native Schools



Richard Pratt, the founder and first superintendent of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, believed that the goal of Indian education was to "kill the Indian in him, *to* save the man (Peterson)." This assimilation approach of education was the key of our government's policy towards Indian education for much of our country's early history. It wasn't until recently that we as a nation began to embrace the uniqueness of the native cultures and their importance in educating the native youth both on and off the reservation.

The study of Indian education in America can be divided into roughly three different time periods: the Missionary Period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the Federal Government Period from the late nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century and the Modern Period, defined by cultural acceptance and influence in Indian education (Juneau). The tribes of North America had been teaching their children the ways of their societies for millennia before the first Europeans came to our shores but the study of formal Indian education began in the early sixteen hundreds with the arrival of Christian missionaries.

The three main countries involved with the colonization of North America: the French, English and Spanish all brought their own religious missionaries. In the French-controlled north, the Jesuits were responsible for educating Native Americans. The French approach was to send out Jesuit missionaries with the fur trappers and traders where they spread the Catholic faith along with the French language and customs. The educational plan was to infuse French ideas into the tribal communities rather than to superimpose their beliefs onto the natives. This approach was more a result of a lack of formal infrastructure rather than a genuine respect for the native communities. The English approach was different from that of the French. The English colonists, unlike the French, were trying to impose Protestant Christianity and English values onto the natives. Also unlike the French, the English tended to use more formal systems of education to achieve their goals. The clash of cultures between the English settlers and the native tribes led to the establishment of special schools designed to teach the native children. English missionaries believed that if native children could learn about and adopt Christian values and English societal norms, then both groups could live peacefully alongside one another. This idea is best personified in the works of Eleazar Wheelock, the founder of Moor's Indian Charity School and Dartmouth College (Eleazar Wheelock). Reverend Wheelock created Moor's Indian Charity School with the belief that the youth were the way to create a "new" Indian – one who accepted the Anglo-Christian world as its own. The final colonizing power in North America were the Spanish. The Spanish used the Mission-style of education. They brought in families, clans and even whole tribes to live alongside the Spanish settlers and Franciscan priests. This co-existence resulted in the transfusion of Catholic beliefs and Spanish customs to the natives living in the missions. This was achieved through both formal and informal academic and religious education by the Franciscan Friars. These Mission Indians were then sent into the communities of the surrounding tribes to act as missionaries to spread their newly acquired beliefs (Houston). Whatever the approach used by the three colonial powers, the goal was the same: acceptance of Christianity and the adoption of the European style of society.

The next phase of Indian education in America dealt with our Federal Government's attempts at educating Indian children. While the European colonists' attempts at education focused mainly on religious and cultural goals, the Federal Government's educational goals were more about cultural, economic and political assimilation. As America moved westward the settlers came into ever increasing conflict with the native peoples. The inevitable result of these conflicts was the victory of the U.S. Military over the warriors of the native tribes. Once the native peoples were conquered by the U.S. Government, the next step was to assimilate the native peoples into American society. The Federal Government and the native tribes signed a variety of treaties which defined the relationship between the government and the tribes, most of these treaties included provisions where the Federal Government would provide schools, money and teachers for on-reservation schools (History of Indian Education). These provisions were rarely met and over the next forty years there was a shift away from reservation schools to White-run boarding schools. The Indian boarding schools were based on the model created by Richard Pratt at the Carlisle Indian School. The academic curriculum of the boarding schools was focused on home-making skills for girls and agricultural and trade skills for boys. This, along with a healthy dose of English and Christianity, was designed to create an individual who was capable of succeeding in American Society. But as Captain Pratt has infamously stated, the schools had to "kill the Indian" before the student would be ready to enter "civilized society". Thus the real goal of these boarding schools was to remove the youngest generation from the tribe, assimilate them into the White World and destroy the Native Culture. They accomplished these goals by using harsh rules, and harsher discipline, to ensure that any attempt to resist was effectively squashed. (Brainwashing and Boarding Schools)

In 1928 the Federal Government published the Meriam Report which stated, among other things, that Indian education was of poor quality and if the government was to improve upon this education, the native family unit needed to be strengthened, not destroyed. The report also called for a more Indian-centered curriculum taught by highly-qualified teachers (History of Indian Education). By the end of the 1930's most of the boarding schools had been closed and most children were being educated in schools on the various reservations. Despite this, the recommendations in the Meriam Report were not effectively implemented. The real change in Indian education didn't occur until the 1960's & 1970's. As African-Americans were fighting for their civil rights, so were the Native Americans. The activism of leaders like Dennis Banks and AIM (American Indian Movement) brought to public attention the plight of American Indians. In 1969 the Special Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education published a report entitled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy-A National Challenge* (Native Education 101). This report called for increased control of native schools by the native communities, increased funding of these schools, and outlined the damage that had been done by a century's worth of poor educational decisions by the Federal Government (History of Indian Education).

Native Schools (Continued)

Over the last several decades we have seen a variety of laws, policy initiatives and executive orders all designed to improve the quality of Federally-supported Indian education. The focus of these government actions have been better schools, better teachers, more money, and culturally-driven curriculum. In addition to Federal focus on Indian education many states are also actively assisting in improving educational opportunities for native students. States such as Montana, Idaho, Minnesota, and New Mexico, among others, require that native history and culture be taught in public schools (Zehr-Native American History). By including this in the state curriculums native students are feeling more accepted and welcome in the off-reservation schools, which increases academic performance and cultural acceptance.

The incredible gains made in Indian education over the last 5 decades cannot overshadow the difficulties still faced by many native students. Native students had a graduate rate of 49.3% in the 2003-2004 school year, compared to 76.2% for white students (Native Education 101). This discrepancy is alarming and a variety of factors contribute to it. One of the main factors is poverty. Poverty rates on Indian reservations are extremely high and many students are raised in extreme poverty which adversely affects academic success. An off-shoot of this problem is student mobility. The yearly migration of native families from reservations in the summer, to cities in the winter to find work, negatively impact child education. Research consistently points to the fact that children who frequently change schools tend to fall behind academically and even more disheartening, are more likely to drop out of school all together (Zehr-Mobility).

The issue of how and why to educate native students has been something the Western culture has struggled with since we first came in contact with the indigenous peoples of America. We have seen the focus move from western styles of instruction and western focus of curriculum to one that better reflects the unique and rich culture of the native peoples. This shift towards the native peoples and their culture is a positive step forward but much work is still needed if we as a nation are going to fulfill our duty to our native brethren. The problem of Native American poverty is incredibly difficult to deal with and is adversely affecting native children's schooling. Until we are able to deal with this much larger issue, native students will not be able to succeed at the level they deserve.

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Matthew Hawley

Matthew Brian Hawley, Métis, is a long time resident of western New York's Finger Lakes Region; Native American stories speak to how this area was formed – the Creator placed His hand on the land in blessing and left His imprint. Matthew resides on the western shores of Keuka Lake, one of the five freshwater lakes formed in that imprint. His home rests on lands once walked and hunted by Chief Red Jacket, Seneca Nation.

Matthew graduated from Keuka College, Keuka Park, NY with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History/Political Science in 1997. This article is from a paper presented while working on his Master's Degree in Education at Elmira College, winter of '09. Matthew knew he would most likely be more informed on the subject than most of his fellow students due to his long standing interest and subsequent research into native histories, but he was still quite taken aback when he realized his fellow classmates had little more than a rudimentary awareness of Indian history. He was pleased, however, by the class' genuine interest and their questions which allowed him to share information beyond the limited scope of the paper; future teachers, regardless of the subject they intend to teach, need a working knowledge of our earliest people.

Saskatchewan's Sacred Circle

The following article appeared in the Toronto Star on September 13, 2008. We are presenting it here with the kind permission of the Star and the author, Carol Perehudoff.

SASKATOON, SASK. – It's nice to know some things are still sacred. The 1,700-year old medicine wheel at Wanuskewin Heritage Park just outside Saskatoon, Sask., is so sacred it's hard to find anyone to talk about it. "It wouldn't be appropriate for me to speak about it as I'm not an elder," says Lorin Gardypie, Wanuskewin's Cultural Resources Coordinator. "And remember, if you do meet an elder you need to make an offering of tobacco."

Tobacco is a small price to pay for a living link to a mystical place, but the elder whom Lorin recommends is fasting and therefore unavailable. Finally, I decide to go out to see the medicine wheel on my own. It's not the first time I've been here. Wanuskewin is one of Saskatchewan's top draws. For at least 6,000 years it was a gathering spot for Northern Plains Peoples. Today, there are 19 pre-contact sites, an interpretive center and a comprehensive trail system that winds in and out of the river valley.

The medicine wheel, or sacred hoop, is one of the most mysterious remains of the nomadic tribes who roamed here. Set amid the prairie grasslands on a plateau overlooking the South Saskatchewan River, the wheel is a circular boulder alignment that sits at the end of the Circle of Harmony Trail.

It's one of at least 70 medicine wheels scattered over North America and no two are alike. Some are made up of a single ring, some have double rings, some are shaped like stars. Many have central cairns and are divided by spoke-like lines of stones.

Some, like the famous Bighorn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming, are aligned with the stars. Their original purpose is unclear. They might have been burial grounds, or places for ritual, ceremony and healing. Some say they're a way of communicating with other life forms: spirits, the creator, even aliens.

The wind smells like sage as I stand on the viewing platform overlooking the stones. A flock of geese flies overhead, platform overlooking the stones. A flock of geese flies overhead, signaling fall. This is one of the northernmost wheels in existence, and while it's not made up of huge standing monoliths, like a Canadian Stonehenge, it has nonetheless survived since about 300 AD. Strangely, the grass surround it

CAROL PEREHUDOFF PHOTO

The medicine wheel, above, in the Wanuskewin Heritage Park, which chronicles the culture of the Northern Plains People, is 1,700 years old. The original purpose of medicine wheels is unknown, but some speculate they may have been used as burial sites, or for healing rituals, even as a way to communicate with other worlds.

here hardly grows compared to the long grasses that surround it. Years ago, when I had just returned from living abroad and was at a crossroads in my life, I came here for the first time. You wouldn't think an ancient circle of stones can help you get your life in order, but medicine wheels have likely been healing tools for centuries.

Today, New Age practitioners have adopted the concept of the medicine wheel because of the holistic idea of balance. In healing terms, the medicine wheel represents the cycle of life and is divided into four slices: heart, mind, body and soul. If one of these areas is neglected, it's believed, illness can be the result.

The medicine wheel helped me realize that my life could use a lot more balance – a simple thing to learn, yet one that provided a lot of clarity.

Now I'm curious to see what more I can learn. I stare at the stones, but the medicine wheel isn't talking, like a shrink who listens but makes you come up with your own answers. One day, hopefully, I'll be able to come here with an elder, but for now, it's just me and the wheel. Finally, I backtrack along the trail, past ancient tipi rings and the Opamihaw Buffalo Jump, where massive bison stampeded to their deaths some 2,300 years ago. Back at the Visitor's Centre, I start talking to Tala Tootoosis, a cultural interpreter, who helps me understand why medicine wheels are so hard to define. "There is no right or wrong way to interpret things," she says. "There are lots of tribes and they all have different teachings. Each person has a different purpose in life so we all have to learn different things. There's a different meaning in everything, this all comes from the cycle of life."

I take this to mean that a medicine wheel has a unique lesson for each of us. A shrink couldn't have said it better.

Wanuskewin Heritage Park is five kilometers north of Saskatoon. For more information visit www.wanuskewin.com, 1-877-547-6546.

The Chippewas of Rama First Nation Sacred Circle

Editor's note: The construction of sacred circles continues today. The Chippewas of Rama First Nation community contributed more than $500,000 to the re-development of the Orilla Soldiers' Memorial Hospital. The hospital incorporated a sacred circle in recognition of the community's support. The sacred circle is 22 feet in diameter and is divided into four equal sections. The sections are painted yellow, red, black and white to signify equality and respect for all people. A maple tree was planted in the centre of the circle. Sharon Stinson-Henry, Chief of Rama First Nation, stated: "The most important part of a Circle is the centre, because that is where the spirits of the four colours meet."

Ancient medicine wheel might help you connect with the past, or the spirits – or yourself

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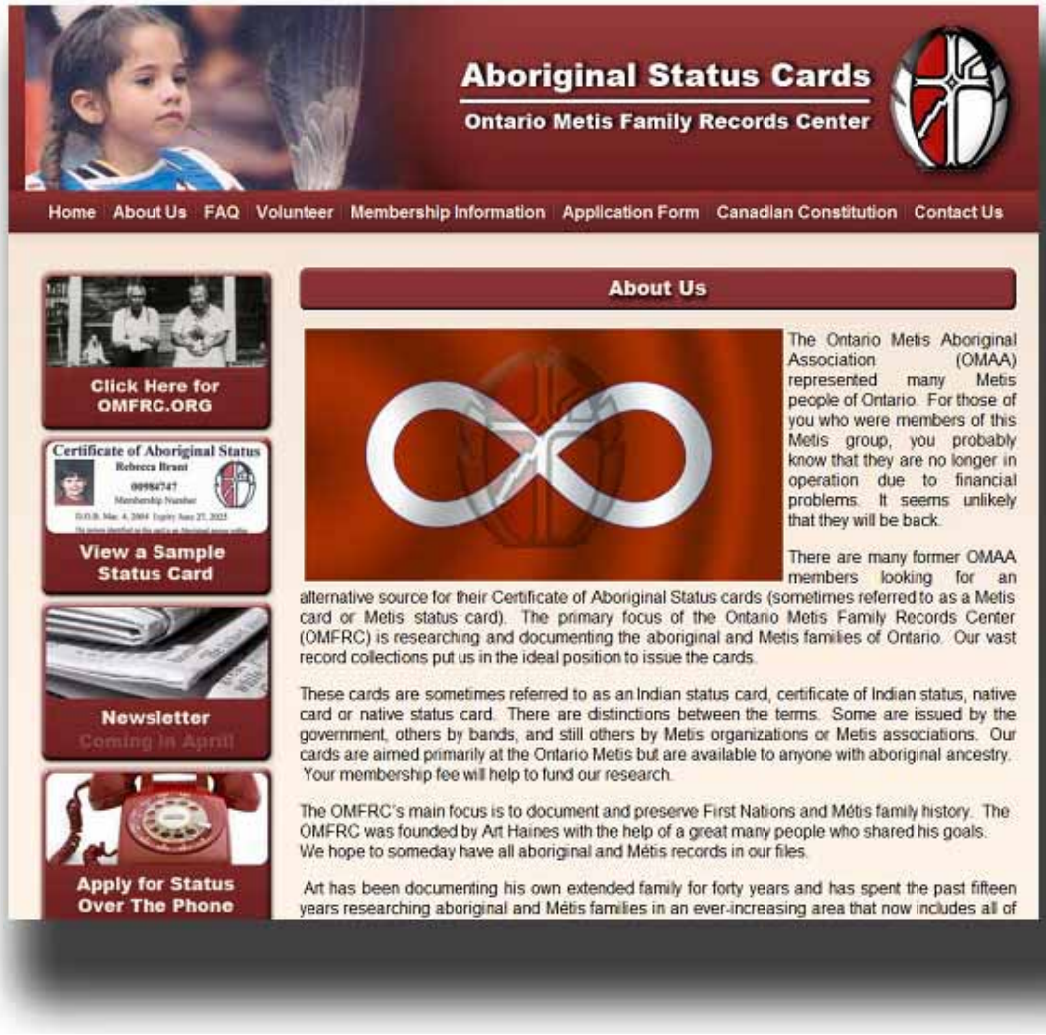

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