

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY ENGAGED SEARCHES

PRESENTED BY VANESSA WOLFE FOR
MUSKOWEKWAN FIRST NATION

OCTOBER 24, 2022

Remembering the Children:
A Community and Academic
Research Gathering



Sunday, October 23rd – Tuesday, October 25th
Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg, Manitoba

MUSKOWEKWAN FIRST NATION

On behalf of Muskowekwan leadership, Historical Site Group and membership of Muskowekwan, we are honored to stand in prayer, extend support and continue the commitment to creating sacred spaces of healing with all. We acknowledge all Nations, Elders, Chiefs, Knowledge Keepers, Survivors, Former Students, Descendants, Community Champions and Organizers. Creating these sacred spaces of sharing truth and healing is vital on this journey to finding a place of understanding as we walk as individuals, families and nations on this path to Truth and Reconciliation



For our nation, Muskowekwan, it has been a way of life, it is our reality and we were born into this legacy of cultural genocide for 111 years that the residential school was in operation. We all share one sure fact in common and that is the history.

We have known our truths for generations. The knowledge was a known fact that there were unmarked burial sites near the Residential School.

When the structure that is presently standing was built in 1930 some graves were moved.

An elder shared that in 1944 a priest ordered the remaining graves to be leveled.



Indians' gravesite disturbed

By **TREVOR SUTTER**
of The Leader-Post

MUSKOWEKWAN INDIAN RESERVE — Band members here were shocked and angered Thursday after learning that the remains of about 20 corpses were removed from an old, unmarked burial site and placed in garbage bags to make way for a sewer line.

"It's blatant disrespect for the traditional Indian way," said Phillip Wolfe, a member of the

**"It's blatant
disrespect for the
traditional Indian
way."**

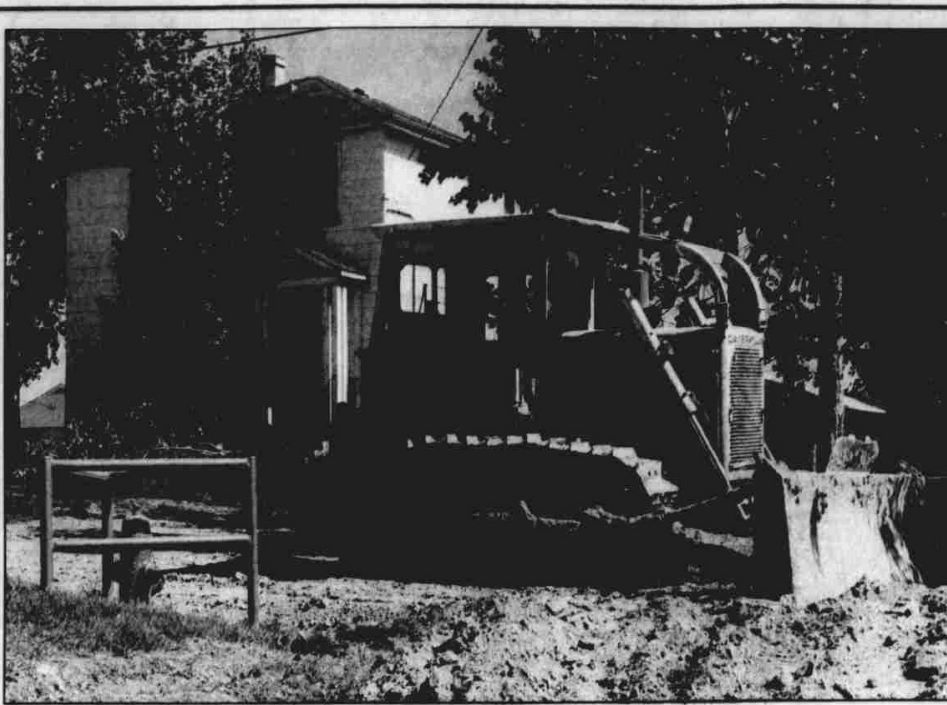
— Phillip Wolfe

unearthed it ordered work at the

July 1992

- A contractor uncovered 19 graves metres behind the IRS when digging for a sewer line
- Construction was not stopped when the graves were exhumed
- Contractors threw remains in garbage bags
- When leadership was notified all work was stopped
- The community experienced shock, grief, anger, disbelief and hurt





Leader-Post photo by Trevor Sutter

A bulldozer on the Muskowekwan Indian Reserve is idle now

New burial for bodies

By TREVOR SUTTER
of The Leader-Post

The remains of 23 human bodies accidentally removed from an unmarked burial site at the Muskowekwan Indian Reserve will be given a new resting place and a "suitable" memorial, the chief of the reserve announced Friday.

Albert Pinace said his band council was aware of a burial ground near the reserve's residential school when it ordered construction of a sewage line, but it didn't realize the extent of it.

"It's unfortunate that the band was not informed as soon as the

first grave was uncovered on Tuesday," Pinace said in a media release Friday. "I think the band council acted correctly in my absence in stopping construction as soon as it learned of the situation."

As of Wednesday, the remains of 23 bodies were removed from the burial site and placed in plastic garbage bags to make way for the sewer line. Human skulls, bones and pieces of caskets from the site are currently being stored in a locked building near the construction site.

The burial site, located only metres behind the band's residential school, was destroyed after the religious order that operated the

school removed the grave markers to make way for a building in 1957.

The land surrounding the school — including the burial grounds — was transferred to the band as part of a land entitlement settlement with the federal government in 1980.

Angry band members were still asking questions about the incident Friday, and some are holding the band council responsible for ordering work that disturbed the burial site.

"People I've talked to are really (angry)," said Phillip Wolfe, a member of the Muskowekwan band. "They want to know who ordered the work to be carried out

without consulting band members."

Other band members say their council should resign over the incident. And they're also concerned about the band's plan to turn nearby sacred grounds on the reserve into a sewage lagoon.

"I almost cried when I saw what happened to the site," said Clarence Bruce, another member of the Muskowekwan band. "You don't do that type of thing, whether you're Indian or not."

Pinace said elders from seven reserves will determine if construction of the sewer system will continue and what is to be done with the unearthed remains.

- Elders and Knowledge Keepers from the 7 Nations Muskowekwan, Daystar, Kawacatoose, George Gordon, Fishing Lake, Kinistin and Yellowquill were called upon
- Respecting the diversity of protocol for all 7 nations, all gathered in prayer and ceremony on our lands to assist in determining steps forward
- Remains were buried in a new location
- Staff residences from the site were relocated
- Burial site remains behind Historical Site (IRS) unmarked

Muskowekwan leadership will continue the work that was put in place by Chief's and Council before us. Our nation places strong value in survivors, former students, descendants and our members by engaging, informing and honouring their resilience

As a result of the unmarked graves discovery in 2018, the community identified a need for a Wellness and Healing Centre. This became a reality with the consultation and engagement of the community. The community gave direction of what they wanted to see in their wellness centre. Leadership worked on the project with community partnerships and our place of wellness and healing will be in operation this year.



Grave search paves way for new wellness centre

LYNN GIESBRECHT

On Muskowekwan First Nation, a search for unmarked graves has begun near a former residential school so a new health and wellness centre can be built without fear of disturbing any remains.

"What we're planning on doing is putting a fence or a memorial marker there ... where we find these unmarked graves, just to acknowledge that they were there and buried there," said band councillor Cynthia Desjarlais.

She believes most of the graves date back to the early 1900s. After the old wooden residential school building burned down around 1913, a new brick school was constructed on top of some of the graves, she said.

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) in

issues, we're dealing with addictions. You know, for a community to deal with one of those alone is challenging, but then to deal with all three combined, there's a multiplier effect to that," he said.

"Many of those issues can be traced right back to those schools that were existing across Saskatchewan and Canada. That is the root of the problem. So if we don't ever address the root of the problem, we're not going to solve the issues that we're dealing with."

The wellness centre will have a combination of cultural and clinical approaches to healing, but with the focus on the cultural, said Belerose.

He said current clinical approaches to healing have not seen good success rates, which is why the community is looking to do things differently.

JUNE 1, 2021

Muskowekwan and surrounding communities came together in prayer and ceremony to support all in the Kamloops Indian Residential School. The waves of grief were felt by all in the heartbreaking discovery of the 215 that never made it home



A4 WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2, 2021 REGINA LEADER-POST

CITY-REGION



A woman holds a child during a memorial and vigil that was held on Tuesday at the grounds of the former Muscowequan Indian Residential School. BRANDON BARBER

Pipe ceremonies honour children found in graves

All Indigenous people grieving in residential schools aftermath, says Muskowekwan councillor

...and a small voice
whispers, "They
found us."



JUNE 22, 2021



Engagement session and media announcement with Chiefs and members of the 7 Nations. Elders, survivors, former students look at old records of the IRS and help identify possible sites for GPR work. Ceremony and direction from Elders and Knowledge Keepers as the work was set to begin

REGINA
LEADER-POST



In-patient	67
ICU	12
Vaccines	1,005,275
Deaths	565

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23, 2021

POSTMEDIA

COVID-19

ASKS

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ospitals **A2**

ACCINES

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Joan Manitopyes, Rose Young and Doreen Smoke look at archival photos of the former Muscowequan Indian Residential School on the school's grounds on Muskowekwan First Nation on Tuesday. Young points to herself in a photo as a student of the school in 1946. **BRANDON HARDER**



People stand Tuesday on the grounds of the former Muscowequan Indian Residential School on Muskowekwan First Nation where federal funding to search for unmarked graves was announced. **BRANDON HARDER**



AUGUST 2021

Meeting with the membership in August with 6 members in attendance. The GPR work begins on our nation. Dr. Kisha Supernant, Terry Clark and their team work diligently. New York Times reporters Nilo and Ed spend a couple weeks in the community speaking to survivors and documenting the work. All involved are respectful and follow protocol while on our nation. Photos courtesy of The New York Times



HISTORICAL SITE ADVISORY GROUP

- After the first meeting with community in August 2021 there was a need identified to engage and consult as the work continued
- As such, the Historical Site Advisory Group was established and we have consistent monthly meetings with a mental health therapist in attendance
- The Historical Site Advisory Group core values are love, respect, honesty, humility, courage (bravery), wisdom and the foundation of all-truth
- The advisory group consists of elders, survivors, former students and any interested members
- The advisory group has become an integral source of support, guidance and most importantly bringing prayer throughout this process



HISTORICAL SITE ADVISORY GROUP

- To assist leadership in prayer for the healing, reconciliation and wellness of our nation
- Create sacred spaces of healing, learning, culture, language and holistic health opportunities for survivors, former students, descendants and members of our nation
- To advise and make recommendations in meeting the Historical Site project goals, engagement and planning sessions
- To do our best in respecting that everyone has their own experience with the history of residential school, whether we experienced direct or multi-generational impacts, everyone has their own truth, every single story or experience is valued and respected in our circle. We honor their contribution. Prayer leads our path to truth, reconciliation and healing. We will be supportive in our own journey of healing and do our best to create better for the next 7 generations.



ONGOING PROJECTS FOR THE HISTORICAL SITE



We host many visitors
to the nation who are
interested in the
historical site



GPR WORK CONTINUES

- July 2022-Preliminary report from the GPR work conducted from 2021. Recommendations-continue search and conduct more research in historical archives to identify graves
- October 2022-University of Saskatchewan team comes out to conduct more areas for the search
- Winter 2022/23-Plan for the GPR grids for Spring 2023



GPR WORK CHALLENGES

- Technicians who specialize in this area are in high demand
- As we do the work we are finding that more areas are needed to be identified in search
- Resources needed to continue work
- Train and purchase our own equipment or partner with other communities as opportunity for members to gain skills and do the work ourselves
- Data collection and interpretation takes time and weather is always a factor



RESEARCH

- Canada Youth Works for Research Summer Student from May 2022-August 2022 to assist in research and administration for project
- Research conducted at the following:
 - Manitoba Archives, St. Boniface, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, Canada (Federal), Hudson Bay Archives-June 2022
 - Saskatchewan Archives, Saskatchewan Legislative Library, First Nations University of Canada-July 2022
 - National Archives in Ottawa-August 2022
 - Next Steps-Partner with the Treaty Commissioners Office of Saskatchewan-October 2022



RESEARCH CHALLENGES



- Historical records are in French and need interpretation
- Research and records are scattered in different organizations and are inconsistent
- Some records may be classified as restricted and this is a timely process in accessing
- Limited resources and all records are not available
- Privacy and confidentiality issues
- Time consuming



POPE VISIT-EDMONTON

- Members of Historical Site Advisory Group attended to papal visit in Edmonton-partnership with Bishop Bolen from Regina

WORKSHOPS WITH DANICA MITRIC

- Masters student in England/UK who originally was from Carleton University-Architect student
- Workshop with Elders and Youth in July
- From workshops we composed some plans and ideas for future project development

AZRIELI SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE & URBANISM

- Architect students-summer student project building a software model prototype to assist in the preservation and conservation project
- Models will assist all technicians as project develops-architect, engineer, construction, etc.



PARKS CANADA-HERITAGE PROGRAMS

- Proposal submitted January 2022 and was successful
- Pilot project, one of a kind agreement with Parks Canada for reclamation, conservation and preservation
- Signed an agreement August 2022 to begin project in Spring 2023
- November 2022-Video project with Historical Site

NATIONAL TRUST FOR CANADA

- National Trust for Canada placed the site on its Top 10 Endangered Places List in 2018
 - October 2022-Received Governor's Award for community led efforts in the project as a National Historical Site
 - Ongoing partnership toward rehabilitation as a site of conscience and creative partnerships
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NATIONAL TRUTH & RECONCILIATION DAY



Muskowekwan honors the history, our ancestors, Elders, survivors, members, all children and hope for the future. As a community we come together to share in a day that is nationally recognized. We as a nation walk together on this path to healing each and every day



NATIONAL TRUTH & RECONCILIATION DAY

As a nation we appreciate our Community Champions that continue to support, educate, pass on the teachings and are a great resource for our nation. May we continue to build upon our strengths in reclaiming our language, our unique culture and the connection to the land, our home, Muskowekwan. May we continue to support each other in this healing together.



CREATING AWARENESS



FUTURE GOALS



GPR Spring 2023

Upon completion of GPR work engage the 7 Nations to gather for prayer and ceremony

Begin development on the old residential school site as a National Historical Site

Continue research and compile to identify unmarked graves

Honor former students that attended from 1886-1997 with a monument



ULTIMATE GOALS

- The Historical Site will provide a space of learning, awareness, culture, history and healing that honours our nation and all who attended
- Create a library of history according to our own unique identity with video, historical documents, oral testimony and any means of recording and preserving
- When unmarked graves are identified create a beautiful memorial and flower garden that provides a peaceful space of eternal rest
- The old chapel will be converted into a non-denominational place of worship~all are welcome to pray and worship in their belief. We embrace all beliefs and welcome prayer and peace as we were not allowed to practice our spirituality for generations
- Continue the healing and creating these sacred spaces for acceptance, belonging and being valued. Heal at each our own pace and never lose sight of how far we come and remain committed to creating a better future



~ Questions ~
~Comments~
~Feedback~



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Qujannamiik

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THANK YOU

Kinanâskomitinawaw

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Kleko kleko

