

President's Message

October 20, 2014

This past weekend was the inaugural ceremonies for the Upper Fort Garry Provincial Park and Recognition Wall in Winnipeg. Judging by the large turnout on a very cold Saturday morning, clearly this new park will become a centerpiece for urban recreation and history education, and the Metis role in the creation of our province and its growth over nearly two centuries.

This site, at the corner of Broadway Avenue and Main Street, is of historical significance and future importance to the Manitoba Metis Community. Back in 1836, Hudson's Bay Company Governor George Simpson decided to build Upper Fort Garry at the Forks. The fort was built on Metis Traditional Territory. As you know, Upper Fort Garry and the Red River Settlement, now known as Winnipeg, is at the Birthplace of the Metis Nation and is at the Heart of the Metis Nation Homeland.

Upper Fort Garry was the Home of Louis Riel's Metis-led Provisional Government and it was there in 1869 that the Metis introduced what has been described as one of the first Bills of Rights in Canadian history. One day, it will also be the site of the future Metis National Heritage Centre to showcase Metis history, artifacts, and culture to Winnipeggers, Canadians, and indeed, to the world.

Our Ancestors made great sacrifices in creating and building Manitoba. It is unfortunate that many sites and museums ignore this despite our Ancestors' struggles, hard work, and dedication. Metis contributions are not fully recognized. The Metis National Heritage Centre, and other initiatives we will undertake through our Louis Riel Institute such as classroom education and public information campaigns, will lift this veil of ignorance.

Unfortunately, I could not be there at the inaugural ceremonies and I had to send my regrets. I want to thank MMF Vice President Ron Chartrand for giving remarks on my behalf. He offered my best wishes to all for the successful celebration on this important occasion. By all reports it was a great celebration despite the weather.

We would again like to thank the Friends of Upper Fort Garry for the kind invitation to be an integral part of the ceremonies. We again thank all the volunteers of the Friends, with whom we will continue to work in partnership, as well as the various levels of government, companies, and individuals who through their labour or contributions made the day possible. I would like to give special thanks to Minister Gord Macintosh for attending and for his work in establishing the new Park.

In the recent news there has been comment that some people feel there will be an unprecedented or unbalanced focus on the Metis-related programming and history at the new Upper Fort Garry Park. On the other hand, others correctly say that our Metis History is Manitoba History. Without the Metis there would be no Manitoba. The Metis are the Founders of Manitoba. As the Supreme Court said, the Metis are Canada's negotiating partners in Confederation.

Back in 1965, Metis Leader Malcolm Norris once said "to be ignored is more vicious perhaps than to be oppressed." It is truly a welcome change to see there an enlightened perspective and inclusive approach in public education, and I thank Dr. Jerry Gray and his team at the Friends of Upper Fort Garry. This new Park and the future Centre will be a great opportunity to share the Metis side of Manitoba's story.

Upon closing, I offer my prayers those who have passed on and my condolences to those who have recently lost a loved one, friend or neighbour. My thoughts and hopes are with those who are sick. May you get well soon. I offer my best wishes to all.

Meeqwetch.

