

ASSINIBOIA

HIGHLIGHTS

June 2025 | VOL. 1



Photo by William Merasty



ASSINIBOIA RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL
◀ LEGACY GROUP ▶

Message from the Board



Welcome to the first newsletter from the Assiniboia Residential School Legacy Group. Thank you to our outgoing Executive Director, Ada Uddoh, for her leadership and service. Please join us in welcoming Toni Kipling as our new Executive Director. Toni is from the Peguis First Nation and her aunt Elsie Kipling attended Assiniboia Residential School starting in 1958. To connect with Toni, please email her at executive.director@assiniboiaresidentialschool.com.

ARSLG BOARD MEMBER PROFILES



ELDER MABEL HORTON | ARSLG Co-President

Mabel Horton was born and raised at Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, where she attended the R.C. Day School, then the Guy Hill and Assiniboia Indian Residential Schools; the latter from the years 1962 to 1967. Mabel was the first registered nurse from her community, having graduated from the Victoria General Hospital in Winnipeg in 1970. Later she obtained her public health nursing diploma, Bachelor of Arts, and a master's degree in Public Administration in 2010. Her places of employment included Winkler Hospital, Norway House Indian Hospital, Cross Lake Nursing Station, God's Lake Narrows and God's River, Eskimo Point (Arviat) Nursing Station, public health, home care, Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Health and Wellness Centre, Manitoba Keewatin Okimakanak, and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. Since her retirement in 2013, she acts as a (Owecihowew) Knowledge Keeper and advisor for various First Nations health organizations and national and international Indigenous research organizations.



ELDER BETTY ROSS | ARSLG Co-President

Betty Ross is originally from Pimicikamak First Nation, known as Cross Lake First Nation, in Treaty 5, Manitoba. She is fluent in her Cree dialect. Betty is more than fifteen years in the system. Today, her pride and joy are her two sons, two daughters, fifteen grandsons, and six great-grand generations. Betty retired from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority in March 2018, where she worked as a spiritual/cultural care provider. She is currently involved with Seven Oaks School Division as Elder-in-Residence for Elwick School, where she shares her residential school history "Sugar Falls" with kindergarten and grade eight students. Betty's also busy as a community Elder, devoting free time with Kairos Blanket Exercises and social justice/climate change issues, and offering Cree classes at the Indigenous Cultural Centre every Wednesday evening. Most recently, Betty got involved with Red River College students, sharing her first language, traditional/cultural teachings, drum songs, and so forth. Betty has been gifted as a Knowledge Keeper and Sacred Pipe and Medicine Carrier. She humbly shares these gifts and teachings today and forward through the generations. She wants to echo the following Ancient Words of Wisdom: "Always be grateful and thankful for every breath and every step you take on Mother Earth!" Ekosani, Thank you very much.

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 30th, 2025

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation/Orange Shirt Day

National Historical Site Designation & Plaque-Unveiling Ceremony

Assiniboia Residential School

Commemorative Monument & Gathering Place

621 Academy Road Winnipeg, Manitoba

MONUMENT



In June 2017, former Assiniboia Residential School students held a reunion in Winnipeg and visited the one remaining original building on what had been the school's grounds. After sharing their truths, a group of Survivors agreed to form a non-profit organization. Inspired by the vision of former student Theodore (Ted) Fontaine, the group developed plans to create a permanent monument to commemorate the resilience and legacy of the students.

Assiniboia Residential School Commemorative Monument & Gathering Place is located at 621 Academy Road in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The official opening ceremony took place on September 30th, 2022. The Monument is open to the public and hosts community events including an annual event on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.





REUNION 2024

Students have organized formal and informal class reunions over the years including most recently in 2013, 2015, and 2017. The Assiniboia Residential School Legacy Group hosted a class reunion for former students and their families on September 29th, 2024.



A sacred fire was lit at sunrise by Fire Keeper Cree Crowchild. There was smudging, followed by a welcome breakfast. Gifts for the students included a tote bag, t-shirt, certificate of attendance, custom lanyard, and a block-mounted print of the Monument. The group then participated in a strategic planning session to determine what direction and projects the Legacy Group should undertake on their behalf.



Survivors and intergenerational survivors were then transported from the Wyndham Garden Hotel to the Assiniboia Residential School Commemorative Monument & Gathering Place for a tour, visiting, and a light lunch that included bannock and jam.



The evening's gala dinner was emceed by Ted Bland, it opened with a prayer from Elder Mabel Horton, and featured speakers Premier Wab Kinew, AMC Acting Grand Chief Betsy Kennedy, and Elder Betty Ross. Summer Bear dancers and drummers led by Derek Hotomani also made for a lively and entertaining night together. Thank you to the volunteers from Wahbung Abinoonjiiag, Alex Mason at Imprints & More, Ashange Catering, and a special thank you to Sheldon Cote, who performed a pipe ceremony at the reunion.





MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew addressed the audience at the Gala Dinner for the Assiniboia Residential School Reunion on September 29th, 2024. This transcription of his remarks was edited for length and clarity.

I want to acknowledge the Grand Chief's words (Chief Betsy Kennedy). It takes a lot to bear your soul like that and I found it very moving. Let's show her a round of applause for the courage.

I was very lucky to spend time with my old man before he left us and to hear a bit about his experience at St. Mary's (Residential School). I have this pin here from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be an honorary witness, and I was very, very honoured to spend time with many of the survivors who participated in that and to hear their stories.

I want to commit, once again, in front of everybody here that we are going to keep the stories alive, and we are going to keep the memory going. And that is why tomorrow, for the first time in Manitoba's



history, Orange Shirt Day is a statutory holiday. Everyone has a day off to participate.

This is one of the first bills that our government passed and I was very proud, very humble to put my name on it. It is because I want every single kid, no matter where their parents work, to be able to participate in Orange Shirt Day. I want every single family to be able to spend time to learn about the survivor's experience, to learn about the parents left behind, to learn about the kids who didn't come home, and to just be able to carry those stories forward.



I really want to share a message of hope and a message of gratitude for all the residential school survivors. Could you put up your hand or just identify yourself if you're a survivor here in the room. Let's show them our appreciation with a hearty round of applause.

The basic message that I want to convey to you is this: you have changed Canada for the better. You have changed Canada for the better. I want to share a few images of what I have seen this past week as we get up to Orange Shirt Day, which is going to be tomorrow.

Friday night, I went to the Bomber Stadium. Thirty thousand people, probably ten thousand orange shirts, right? Many non-Indigenous people, but also many young neechies running out onto the field, long hair, proud of who they are.

My dad passed away about a dozen years ago, and I was sitting with my wife Lisa and our youngest, Tobasonakwut, and another woman that I work with, and I was just thinking like, could my dad ever have imagined this? How it is today, right.

Another moment, speaking of my old man. Before they, took him to St. Mary's, his name was Tobasonakwut. First thing is that

they cut his hair. Second thing is that they took his name away from him.

We have a little boy now, Lisa and I. He is six. You know what his name is? Tobasonakwut. And he has long hair. The other morning, I spent the time braiding his hair. You know, little things like that are possible in this country today thanks to the residential school survivors.

There are so many examples in the schools and the community centres and in places right across this great country of how things are moving forward for the better. Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, which led to the National Inquiry, and the Calls to Justice. There is a roadmap here.

You know, I don't think anyone would have said anything if survivors had responded from a place of hurt and a place of trauma. But instead, survivors came forward with a vision that said here are ninety-four calls to action, to bring people together and chart a beautiful path forward for this country where every child matters.

In spite of all the challenges, in spite of all the negativity, the



thing that I have always been inspired by is how survivors rose above that and had a message of unity and hope and positivity. So for that, I want to say miigwech.

To the survivors of Assiniboia, in particular, many of whom are very, very close. A lot of them are friends of my Dad. I am walking in the room and people are like, "Hey, I remember your Dad". I love to hear that. That's really awesome. But also guys like Phil Gardner, you know, Ted Fontaine, who are not with us. People that are very important to my wife's family, like her Uncle Fern. And then people who are important to us and our kids like Mabel. Or, because the boys met her when they were still learning how to talk, Maple. And

so those are the people who mean a lot to us. Then to understand that, you know, part of their journey was right here, just not even a kilometer away from where we are today, really, really is impactful.

I wanted to, just share a bit about our government's journey into office. It is coming up on a year. On October 3rd, it will be one year since the election. But the night before is a story that I want to tell you about, October 2nd.

We had run our campaign. It is the night before; a lot of nerves, a lot of anxiety. Lisa and I, my wife and I, we knew what we had a chance to do the following day. We knew, you don't know for sure, but we knew what we had a chance to accomplish the following day. To burn off some of the nerves, we went on a bike ride. We live in River Heights, so we went to Kelvin High School and then down Wellington Crescent to Assiniboine Park.

And it was kind of this weird, like gloomy, overcast sky. I don't know if you remember election day last year, but it was a crazy thunderstorm in the morning, right. And so, the night before you could already see the thunder clouds starting to gather.

At the end of this bike ride on the way back, I said, “Lisa, let’s go over here first. Let’s stop in at Assiniboia”. As you know, there is a little shrine on the steps quite often. Teddy bears and candles and stuff like that. We stopped there and we said a prayer together.

We talked about the people that I just mentioned, Phil, Fern, Mabel, you know, Ted, all the other people, and talked about the election that was coming the following day. I just looked at Lisa and I said, “You know life is hard, but life is beautiful”.

We got back on our bikes, and we went home, and the next day, crazy thunderstorm, as you may remember. Then my phone started lighting up, because it’s like, you know what it means in the Anishinaabe culture. People are saying, the thunderbirds are here to wash the difficult things away.

And then that night we had a very good outcome, and we were able to celebrate and really take in that moment. But I want you to know, when we formed government, as we were walking into the legislature, you, the survivors of the Assiniboia, were there with us. And you helped to usher us in. So I wanted to say miigwech.



And living in that neighborhood, River Heights, is interesting, because people knew, eh? People knew there was a residential school there. It’s not like, sometimes you hear, “Oh, we had no idea”. No, people in River Heights knew. Because I have talked to non-Indigenous people, the same age as the survivors in the room, and they said, “Oh yeah, no, no, we knew. We used to play hockey against those guys. They were really good”. The Kelvin High School team would play the Assiniboia High School team, right.

Well, as you know from the record books, the Assiniboia team was provincial champs. They won a few

titles, a few years running, so they were quite good. And so there is that awareness in the neighborhood.

I get to brag a little bit and tell you that my son was the captain of the Kelvin High School team in his graduating year, grade 12. And his younger brother, football team and varsity basketball this year. And then our youngest, hopefully, someday he will be at Kelvin too. And to me, beyond just bragging, the reason why I wanted to share that is this. That is how residential school survivors changed Canada for the better.

One generation ago, one group of kids was over here, on one side of Academy Road, and another group of kids was over there, on the other end of Academy Road. They were kept apart by the governments of the day. They were kept apart by the attitudes of the day. They were kept apart by the way the world was at the time.

But today, one generation later, all the kids are together in one school, learning together, playing sports together, making their lives together, the way that it always should have been. Progress is being made in this country.

The message that you have on so many of your shirts here today

that every child matters, we are getting closer to that. And don’t get me wrong, there is still so much more to do when it comes to child welfare and poverty and unequal access to healthcare and education. Absolutely, we’ve got to keep putting in the work.

But you cannot deny that we are moving forward in a positive direction. So much of it is due to the people who stood up, much like our acting grand chief, and very courageously shared their stories and said we would like better for the future of this country.

Once again, miigwech, miigwech, miigwech. I hope you have a wonderful Orange Shirt Day celebration tomorrow.

And to all the young people in the room: make your mind strong, make your spirit strong, make your body strong, wear your hair long. And when you do, you make the survivors proud. Miigwech, niichii-Anishinaabeg.

THE LEGACY OF THEODORE FONTAINE

A reunion of former students of the Assiniboia Residential School in 2013 was the initial attempt at bringing former students and supporters together. Planning and execution of such a gathering was challenging. Even the Creator expressed the sentiment that this would be a day for cleansing. It rained heavily the whole day. Thanks to the RCMP, we were sheltered with tipis on the playing fields of our former school. One Survivor, strongly reviving his traditions and culture, brought his own tipi with him.

In spite of the soggy day, quite a number of former students came out to enjoy visiting and reminiscing about those bygone days. The majority of Survivors who

participated were from the early years of Assiniboia. Sitting together on blankets with hot tea in our hands, we exchanged stories – good, sad, and bad. Friendships were rediscovered and renewed, and laughter floated up with the smoke from our smudge. It seemed that the spirits of many were with us, unseen, yet supporting our remembrances.

The second reunion was held in September 2015. Attended by Survivors and family members, and some River Heights residents



Photo by Ruth Bonneville | Winnipeg Free Press

and church representatives, we were warmly welcomed on the grounds by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. The staff set up chairs, microphone, and speakers, provided refreshments, and gave meaningful gifts to each Survivor. The RCMP tipi was again erected on the grass, and the Creator brought bright sun and healing winds to our gathering.

The third reunion, held 23 and 24 June 2017, was well attended by Survivors as well as people from the surrounding community of River Heights. The reunion sparked media interest and drew in the leadership of area churches, led by Westworth United. Many area and faith community volunteers contributed their time and talents to hosting a tea for Survivors and families, a reception and community dinner with entertainment.



The attendees were treated to an exceptional evening, an opportunity for building relationships, for understanding the true meaning of reconciliation, and for putting words into action.

On 30 September 2018, another major event took place on the Assiniboia playing fields. A huge powwow, led by Wab Kinew and coordinated by Grace Redhead, attracted over 200 participants including Survivors, First Nations, and River Heights community members to celebrate Orange Shirt Day, a public-awareness event held since 2013 to raise awareness of the Indian residential school system. The event was envisioned to bring the community together to celebrate the resilience of Survivors and their families while honouring those that have passed into the spirit world.

Many separate journeys came together in 2013, 2015, and 2017 in a spirit of communion. In these acts of reconciliation, we found spaces for healing, remembrance, sorrow, laughter, and friendship.

May we now come together as one community to make space for ceremony and commemoration, space for preservation and reconciliation, space to create this legacy of our shared journey.

May the love and peace of the Creator, and all who have left before us, be reflected in our spirits as the stars in the celestial heavens shine brightly to light our way, to guide and protect us.



Indigenous and non-Indigenous together, may we close our circle to honour this land and its legacy of freedom and hope for children.

Gichi miigwech.

Excerpts from the book *Did You See Us?* and the written work titled:

The Legacy of Reunion, Remembrance, and Reclamation

By Theodore Niizhotay Fontaine

FROM THE ARCHIVES



FROM THE ARCHIVES



Assiniboia High School All Indian Hockey Team 1960 won the Baldy Northcott Trophy, being champions of Junior B class of the Manitoba Amateur Hockey Association.
Front, from left: goalie Riley Runearth, coach Laurent Marchildon, captain Melville Courchesne, Rev. Fr. D. Robideaux, O.M.I., principal, assistant coach Luc Marchildon, Calvin Moser; middle row: Ralph Robinson, Harry Napiash, Oliver Nelson, Edward Pappanakes, Joe Guy Woods and Marcel Platt; back row: Paul Emile Wood, Paul Jobb, Bernard Linklater, Gordon Napiash and Isaias Bee.



Sports

Sports in the school is a source of mental as well as physical and moral education. These three aspects rolled into one leads to the formation of our character. The actual purpose of sports is to develop and improve our character and personality.

In September of 1964, in the elections of the Student Council, George Kakeway was elected as the Sports director on the boys side, and with the guidance of the supervisors, he organized the intramural competition in various sports, such as football in the fall, hockey in the winter and baseball in the spring. In between seasons, there are exercises, for conditioning us for the football or hockey season.

We also participate in the interscholastic competition, which, last fall was the interlake football league. During the winter the hockey teams were involved in the city hockey leagues. Fortunately for the football team, one fine day, they came home with the championship trophy. The Juvenile and Midget hockey teams too captured their respective trophies. This participation in the interscholastic competition is truly educational and it leaves us with some very memorable experiences.

The girls, during the winter season, have been curling and skating. Most participation was on curling during the noon hours, the fact remains that nobody ever seemed to win because, the girls rather played for enjoyment and not necessarily for trophies.

The skating rink was usually filled with our gracefull figure skaters. As a result of long hard practices, the girls gave a dazzling performance at the annual winter carnival. This demonstration proved to be very successful.

As winter now comes to a close, spring approaches and so does basketball, baseball and volley-ball. The girls are looking forward to participate in these coming sports.

We must also remember that the physical, mental and moral education combined is the integral formation of students. Truly we need these prementioned elements to make a place for ourselves in the future. We must be educated in order to fit into the modern society, so let us take means possible to achieve this goal.

MY STORY

Featuring
William Merasty



Once upon a time in Indian Residential School, my parents first met in Sturgeon Landing IRS located in Saskatchewan, northwest of The Pas, MB. After six years of courtship, they wed in Mom's hometown of Pukatawagan, MB. The newlyweds then settled down in Dad's hometown of Sandy Bay, SK. This community is northwest of Flin Flon, MB and was also home to my paternal grandparents, aunts and uncles. Across the river was the white community of Island Falls and its hydroelectric plant.

Childhood

I was born in The Pas, MB on July 25, 1947 at 5:55am at St. Anthony's Hospital. (My next visit to that hospital was at age 11 for two severed fingers).

In 1954, at age 7, I entered the residential school system at The Pas IRS. Three of my aunts - Cathy, Ann, and Cecilia - were also at this school, but were gone the following year. Classes were in the town school across from the hospital. So, I started school a stone's throw from where I was born; what are the odds?

In 1958, Guy Hill IRS, located north of The Pas, became my second school-home. It was located by the shores of Clearwater Lake, a beautiful resort area.



In 1961, Assiniboia High IRS in Winnipeg, MB became my final, and much beloved, school-home. In all, I spent ten years in Winnipeg. Classes were in the Julia Jane Murray Clark Building, now a National Heritage Site. On June 30th, 1967, I bid farewell to Assiniboia High School and residential school life.

Adulthood

In 1968 and 1970, I enrolled at the University of Manitoba. I learned: if you don't have fun in college, you'll NEVER have fun!

In 1971, I moved to Saskatchewan and worked with some notables at SK Indian Cultural College including Sarain

Stump, Winston Wuttunee, Gerald McMaster, Don Francks, Candace Savage, and Beth Cuthand. There, I met the lady I would marry. We have a son, Jason, born on the first day of spring 1974.

Middle Age

In 1984, I entered the University of Saskatchewan and earned a Bachelor of Education degree. I interned at Brownell School in Saskatoon, SK. And at the age of 41, I started a new life.

Old Age

I reached retirement age in 2012 and settled in the city of Prince Albert, SK. Since 2015, I have lived in a senior home where I indulge in hobbies.





VISIT THE ASSINIBOIA RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL COMMEMORATIVE MONUMENT & GATHERING PLACE

621 Academy Road Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

ARE YOU A FORMER STUDENT

OF ASSINIBOIA RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL IN WINNIPEG?

DID A FAMILY MEMBER OF YOURS ATTEND ASSINIBOIA RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL?



The Monument is open to the public and hosts community events including an annual event on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation - September 30th.



The Monument features the names of over 1,000 students and 86 communities. Read the information panels, sit on the benches, and appreciate the garden of ceremonial grasses and plants.

Please connect with the Legacy Group to join our mailing list and participate in upcoming events and projects.

Do you have photos, yearbooks, or other memorabilia from Assiniboia Residential School?

Please contact the Legacy Group through our website at www.assiniboiaresidentialschool.com

ASSINIBOIA RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

621 ACADEMY RD.



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Please visit our website:
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