

**Saskatchewan
First Nations Milestones**

The purpose of this paper was to develop research specifically for the Western Development Museum's exhibits to celebrate the Saskatchewan centennial.

**Western Development Museum/Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre
Partnership Project**

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23 April 2003

The intent of this research paper is to identify “Milestones” that have touched the lives of First Nations people in Saskatchewan within the last 100 years (1905-2005). Naturally, milestones will continue to emerge in other research papers in the WDM First Nations story. This paper will attempt to limit milestones to avoid encroaching or overlapping.

The principles that guide the definition of a *milestone* is open for interpretation. Webster’s Dictionary defines *milestone* as *anything that is a mark of progress*. For our purposes, *milestones* are events recognized by First Nations people as triumphs, successes and/or life changing policies and incidents that have undeniably effected (positively or negatively) First Nations society. Fortunately, since the Second World War notions of opportunity and equality in Canadian society has augmented First Nations contributions and achievements in Saskatchewan and the rest of the country.

For the purposes of this paper, then, First Nations “milestones” will include the following categories:

The First and Second World Wars
Political Achievements
Cultural Achievements
Legal Achievements

Historically, oppressive legislation such as the *Indian Act* impaired the ability of First Nations people to participate and contribute to society in a meaningful way. However, over the last century many events have lead to the furtherance of equality in Canadian society. For example, the aftermath of WWII and the Jewish Holocaust alerted the Canadian government to the reality of genocide of oppressed peoples. Shortly after WWII the Canadian government made changes in order to satisfy the need for equality in our society. In 1951 the first were amendments to the *Indian Act* and not long after it became apparent that First Nations people would exercise their new-found rights and freedom in Canadian society.

The framework used for the *milestones* module has been broken down into ten sections based on the categories identified above. Each section represents a decade beginning with the year 1905. Please note that the following events cited by no means represent the many “milestones” that have been achieved by/or have affected First Nations in Saskatchewan (and Canada) in the last century.

1905-15

WWI (1914-1918)

1916-25

1923 - Batoche is declared a National Heritage site.

1921 – Meeting in Thunderchild First Nation of the Congress of the Indian League of Canada.

1926-35

1930 – Formation of the Saskatchewan Treaty Protective Association, the precursor to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (F.S.I.N.).

1936-45

1936 – Formation of the Union of Saskatchewan Indians.
WWII (1939-1945)

1946-55

Korean War (1950-1953)
1951 - The Indian Act is amended to limit the rights of Status Indian women who marry non-Indian men.

1956-65

1958 – Formation of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.
1959 – Appointment of Treaty Indians as assistants to Indian Agents.
1960 – First Nations people are permitted to VOTE in Federal elections.
1960 – Election of first woman Chief in Saskatchewan.

1966-75

1971 – The *Indian Act* (Section 94) allowing Treaty Indians to possess intoxicants.
1972 - Establishment of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

1976-85

1982 (April 16) – Formation of the first Indian Legislative Assembly in Canada.
1982 – Recognition and affirmation of Aboriginal Rights and Treaty Rights in Canada's Constitution Act (Section 35).
1977 (March) – Graduation of first female RCMP - Special Constable.
1977 – The Order of Canada is awarded to an Aboriginal person, the first from Saskatchewan.
1978 – Formation of the Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans Association.
-1982 – An eight year old boy from Pinehouse Lake is awarded a Medal of Bravery for his role in rescuing a little girl in a boating accident. He was the first Aboriginal recipient of this Medal. Since 1982 nine other Aboriginal people from Saskatchewan have been awarded the Medal of Bravery.

1986-95

1985 - Bill C-31 is enacted allowing the reinstatement of Treaty Rights for First Nations women.
1989 – Formation of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner.
1992 – Establishment of the first First Nation Masters of Business Administration in Canada.

1992 (June 27) - Grand opening of the Wanuskewin Heritage Park.
1993 – Establishment of the Saskatchewan Treaty Land Entitlement Act.

1996-2005

1997 – Opening of the First Nations Bank.
1998 (March 31) Appointment of First Treaty Indian to the Provincial Court of Saskatchewan.
1999 (April 23) - Supreme Court Ruling that lower court judges apply special provisions such as traditional cultural practices when sentencing Aboriginal accused.

INTRODUCTION:

Over the last century, the province of Saskatchewan has witnessed many historical events due to the overall attitude that residents of Saskatchewan possess. Such an attitude makes apparent the inevitable accomplishments that people will achieve when given the opportunity to do so. One group of people in Saskatchewan that have contributed to the Province (as well as to Canada) from the very beginning are the First Nations people. Beginning with WW1 to present day, every decade in the history of Saskatchewan has seen meaningful and important contributions made by First Nations individuals, organizations, and communities.

1905 - 1915

-This decade not only marked the beginning of Saskatchewan's history as a province, it marked the beginning of an international war in Europe. Great Britain was at war with Germany and Canada was obligated to join with Great Britain. Despite the fact that First Nations people were exempt from conscription and most were not the legal of 16 years old to enlist, a large number of First Nations people participated in the first World War. It is not known exactly how many enlisted.¹

Did you know!

-During the First World War, there were many Red Cross Society branches established on the Indian reserves throughout the province. Many of these branches received more, per capita, than any other in the country at the time! This goes to show that First Nations people across the province not only served in the war, but also gave a little from their pockets to assist the war effort financially.

1916 - 1925

-During the negotiation and signing of the Treaties in Saskatchewan (*1871 – 1906*), First Nations people were not familiar with European political institutes and the language that was practised at the time. Such barriers restricted First Nations people and the Canadian government from achieving progress in adopting a new way of life. But as time progressed so did the adaptability and learning ability of the First Nations people in

Saskatchewan.

It is during this decade that the political roots of what is now the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations would be formed. In **1921**, the Congress of the Indian League of Canada met at Thunderchild First Nation. Many of the Saskatchewan delegates at the conference received their first taste of organized Indian politics. One delegate at the conference, John Tootoosis Sr, would later become very much involved with the Indian political process including the eventual formation of the League of Indians of Western Canada (LIWC).²

-In **1923** Batoche was declared a National Historic Site by the Government of Canada. Parks Canada NCHS history states that, "The initial focus of commemoration was the armed conflict between the Canadian government and the Métis provisional government in 1885. Batoche also commemorates the history of the Métis community of Batoche, home of Métis culture and heritage."³

1926 – 1935

-The Saskatchewan Indian political identity in this decade (1920s) began to assume its present status. The League of Indians of Western Canada had formed in **1929** with residential schools and issues concerning land at the forefront of its mandate. Although the League of Indians of Western Canada stood for many just causes, there were still issues regarding the inclusion and equal representation of First Nations Bands.

-Some Bands in southern Saskatchewan were concerned about the issue of veterans' benefits. Although many First Nation people had fought in the Great War, they were not receiving the same benefits as the non-Aboriginal veterans. The compensation that was given by the government through the *Soldier Settlement Act* was coming from land that already existed as Reserve land.⁴ This was not acceptable to the First Nations people for they were also receiving greatly reduced areas of Reserve land. As a result the Pasqua, Piapot, and Muscowpetung Bands formed the Saskatchewan Treaty Protective Association in **1933**. Shortly thereafter, the Saskatchewan Treaty Protective Association changed its name to the Protective Association for Indians and Their Treaties. With its new name came a new mandate. The organization dealt with issues such as Treaty Rights, lands allocated and resources allocated to Indians, as well as creating improved education on Reserves.⁵

1936 – 1945

-In **1943**, yet another First Nation organization was formed. It was called the Association of Saskatchewan Indians and was the largest association in the province. Shortly after, in **1946**, the League of Indians of Western Canada (L.W.C.I.) convened a meeting in Duck Lake and invited the leaders of the Association of Saskatchewan Indians and Protective Association for Indians and Their Treaties. The possibility of uniting the three provincial

organizations was discussed at great length during the meeting. Later that year, a second meeting was convened and the plans for unification were finalized. The amalgamated organization would come to be known as the Union of Saskatchewan Indians (U.S.I.), the precursor to the organization of what is now known as the F.S.I.N. A constitution was drafted identifying the following mandates.

- The protection of Treaties and Treaty Rights
- The fostering of progress in economic, educational and social endeavours of Indian people
- Co-operation with civil and religious authorities
- Constructive criticism and thorough discussion on all matters
- The adherence to democratic procedure
- The promotion of respect and tolerance for all people⁶

For the second time in less than a century, Canada would once again be thrust into another World War against Germany. First Nations people would once again rise to answer the call for service in the war, even though there was no obligation to serve. There existed a treaty provision that exempted Status Indians from conscription. One of the major reasons that Aboriginal people joined the war effort was that a fear existed among First Nations people that there was a good possibility of losing the Treaties and the rights contained within them if the Germans were to win the war.

“At that time, the Elders mentioned and questioned, wondered what will happen when Hitler really does capture the government, what will happen to our treaty rights. If Hitler does win the government, we will also lose our treaties too.”⁷

1946 – 1955

-In **1951** the department of Indian Affairs amended the *Indian Act*.⁸ The purpose of the amendment was to involuntarily enfranchise any Status Indian woman (and her children) who married a non-status man. The amendment was used to reduce the number of Status Indians in Canada, for the amount of money that the Federal government spent was determinate on the total number of Status Indians in the country.

1956 – 1965

-In **1958**, the U.S.I. changed its name and became the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (F.S.I.N.). For

more than two decades, the F.S.I.N. worked towards fulfilling its mandate which was centred around protecting the Treaties and Treaty Rights”.⁹

-In **1959**, history was made when the Department of Indian Affairs appointed two men of Aboriginal descent as Indian agents. The position of Indian Agent had always been held by white men who often abused their authority.¹⁰

-In **1960**, Canada drafted the *Bill of Rights* which became part of the Law of Canada. Part of the Law dictated that all citizens in Canada had a legal right to vote in all elections regardless of sex, creed, religion or race. This meant that for the first time in history Status Indians would be permitted to vote and ultimately have their say in the country’s political affairs.¹¹

-As well, in 1960, the first woman Chief was elected into office in Muskeg Lake Cree Nation.¹² It is appropriate that this occurred in the same year that universal equality was officially declared in Canada under the Constitution.

1966 – 1975

-In **1971**, Section 94 of the *Indian Act* was repealed. The section stipulated that no Indian under the definition of “Indian” as stated the Indian Act was permitted to possess, consume, or distribute intoxicants.¹³

In the late **1960s**, a blueprint was drawn for the development of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (SICC). In the early **1970s**, the Elders and Chiefs of Saskatchewan established the SICC to research and address Indian education. The First Nations structure of SICC has changed several times since its inception. SICC was instrumental in the establishment of self-sustaining institutions for Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan. These institutions are the *Saskatchewan Indian Federated College* (SIFC), the *Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies* (SIIT) and the *Indian Teacher Education Program* (ITEP).

1976 – 1985

-In March **1977** the first Aboriginal female (a member of the Pelican Narrows First Nation) graduated as a Special Constable from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.¹⁴

In 1977 a Band member of Muskeg Lake First Nation had the distinction of being the first Aboriginal person (from Saskatchewan) to be awarded the Order of Canada for his “long and devoted service to his people, often under difficult circumstances.” Since then, fourteen others from various First Nations communities have been recipients of this distinguished medal.¹⁵

http://www.gg.ca/Search/honours_descript_e.asp?type=2&id=7

-In the same year, the Saskatchewan Indian Veterans Association (S.I.V.A.) was formed. The purpose of the organization is to seek compensation for veterans of both WWI and WWII for benefits that were never received.¹⁶

- On April 16, **1982** the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) re-structured itself in order to make a transformation from a non-profit group to an institution that would reflect an attitude of true nationhood. The organization enacted the Convention Act which in turn created the first Indian Legislative Assembly in the country.¹⁷

-In the same year Canada’s *Constitution Act* affirmed and entrenched the “existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.”¹⁸

-In **1985**, Indian women who lost their Treaty Status because of the **1951** discriminatory policies of the *Indian Act* could now apply for the re-instatement of their Treaty status through Bill C-31.¹⁹

1986 – 1995

-The Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC) was opened in **1989**. The mandate of the OTC is specifies that it is
“...an independent and objective office that will provide a forum and process to facilitate a common understanding

between the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and the Government of Canada on Treaty rights and/or jurisdiction in the areas of: Child Welfare, Education, Shelter, Health, Justice, Treaty Annuities, Hunting, Fishing, Trapping, and Gathering And other issues the Parties may place before the OTC.”²⁰ < <http://www.otc.ca/index.html>>

-May 20, **1990**, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that it was unconstitutional to restrict Band elections only to members who live on reserve, as set out in S.77(1) of the Indian Act. As a result Band members that lived off-reserve were given the right to vote for Chief and Council in Band elections.²¹

-On June 27, **1992** Wanuskewin Heritage Park opened its doors to the public.²² The purpose of Wanuskewin is to educate visitors about the culture, traditions and history of First Nations people. Wanuskewin also serves as an archaeological base for the University of Saskatchewan, boasting 6000 year old finds in the dig sites.

-In **1993**, the Federal government of Canada implemented the *Saskatchewan Treaty Land Entitlement Act*. The legislation’s purpose is to speed up the arduous process of fulfilling the outstanding land claims owed to the First Nations Bands in Saskatchewan.²³ < <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/S-4.3/94765.html>>

-In September of **1995**, SIFC along with the College of Commerce at the University of Saskatchewan implemented the first Aboriginal Masters of Business Administration program in Canada. The goal of the MBA program is to graduate Aboriginal students who are equipped with the necessary qualifications to work in Aboriginal/ non-Aboriginal within the public/ private sectors”²⁴

1996 – 2005

-In **1997**, The First Nations Bank, an affiliate of the Toronto Dominion Bank, opened its first branch, in Saskatoon.²⁵ The opening of the bank inaugurated economic autonomy of First Nations people in Canada.

-Another historical milestone was achieved on March 18, **1998** when the first Treaty Indian was appointed a seat on the Bench of the provincial court of Saskatchewan.²⁶ This appointment marks another legacy of First Nations’ excellence and meaningful contribution to society when opportunity exists.

-In a memorable **1999** Supreme Court ruling, a decision was passed to lower court judges to apply special provisions when sentencing accused Aboriginal people facing conviction.²⁷

Footnotes

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- ¹ McHugh, Ron. Remembering our Heroes. Website. Canada's Digital Collections, 9 November 2001, 11 December 2002. <<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/heroes/ronrez.html>>
- ² "The Historical Formation of the FSIN." Saskatchewan Indian. Spring 2000 v30, n2, p7.
- ³ Parks Canada: NCHS History. 9 February 2001, Batoche National Historic site. 28 February 2003.
<http://www2.parksCanada.gc.ca/Parks/saskatchewan/batoche/batoche_e.htm>
- ⁴ "The Historical Formation of the FSIN." Saskatchewan Indian.* Spring 2000 v30, n2, p7.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid. p16.
- ⁷ Ahenakew, Gordon. "Remembering our Heroes" Website. Canada's Digital Collections, 9 November 2001, 3 February 2003.
< <http://www.lights.com/cgi-bin/sicc/veteran/index.cgi?what=showfull;itemid=24>>
- ⁸ An Act to Amend the Indian Act. Canada. Department of Indian Affairs, 1951.
- ⁹ "The Historical Formation of the FSIN." Saskatchewan Indian. Spring 2000 v30, n2, p7.
- ¹⁰ "Two Saskatchewan Indians Appointed Reserve Agents First Time in History".
Saskatoon Star Phoenix. 25 March 1959, p6.
- ¹¹ Depart of Justice. Web page. 2 February 2003, 20 January 2003.
<<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/justice2000/85mile.html>>
- ¹² Aboriginal Faces of Saskatchewan. Web page. 29 August 1999, 20 January 2003.
<<http://www.sicc.sk.ca/faces/wlafoal.htm>>
- ¹³ Department of Justice. Web page. 2 February 2003, 21 January 2003.
<<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/justice2000/106mile.html>>
- ¹⁴ "First Female Special Constable". Saskatchewan Indian. November 1977 v7, n11, p11.
- ¹⁵ Governor General of Canada. Web page. 2 October 2002, 21 January 2003.
- ¹⁶ Lavallee, Lyla. "Second Meeting of Saskatchewan Indian Veterans Association"
Saskatchewan Indian February 1979, v9, n2 p5.
- ¹⁷ "The Federation of the Saskatchewan Indian Nations". Saskatchewan Indian. Fall 1995, p15.
- ¹⁸ Canada. *Constitution Act* 1982, Part 2, Sec 35 (1).
- ¹⁹ Johnco Website. 20 January 2003. <http://www.johnco.com/native/bill_c31.html>
- ²⁰ Office of the Treaty Commissioner. Web page. 23 January 2003.
- ²¹ Supreme Court of Canada. *Batchewana Indian Band v. John Corbière, et al* - and between - *Her Majesty the Queen v. John Corbière, et al* (F.C.A.) (25708).

²² “Wanuskeewin Heritage Park Grand Opening”. Saskatchewan Indian. June/July 1992, v21, n4, p1

²³ Department of Justice. Webpage. 26 November 2002, 11 December 2002.

²⁴ “SIFC to Begin MBA Program.” Saskatchewan Indian. May 1994, v23, n4, p21.

²⁵ First Nation Bank of Canada. Website. 15 February 2003.

<<http://www.tdcanadatrust.com/fnbank/>> This website was programmed with frames. To see the cited work, navigate the following from the opening page: About our bank> History.

²⁶ “Turpel Lafond Appointed to Bench”. Saskatchewan Indian. Spring 1998, v28, n1, p18.

²⁷ Supreme Court of Canada. *Jamie Tanis Gladue v. Her Majesty the Queen* (Crim.)(B.C.)(26300)

*All the citations from Saskatchewan Indian can be viewed online. The URL for the Saskatchewan Indian is: <<http://www.sicc.sk.ca/saskindian/>>. The references can be found through the respective year and headline names on the site.