



The Brief

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Sussex ceremony honours the stolen Indigenous children who never came home

By TRACY GLYNN



Wolastoqey grandmothers Alma Brooks and Ramona Nicholas following the ceremony at the location of the Sussex Vale Indian School on July 1, 2021. Photo by Aditya Rao.

As thousands across the country, including in Fredericton and Saint John, gathered to mark “Resilience Day” in place of Canada Day, as a way to reflect and act on the discovery of unmarked graves of children who attended the country’s residential schools, 50 people attended a sombre ceremony organized by the Peace and Friendship Alliance on the grounds of the Trinity Anglican Church, the former site of the Sussex Vale Indian School.

“The ceremony we shared with local residents of Sussex along with our graceful allies was a seed we have planted in order for us to press reset and rebuild Peace and Friendship relations,” said Wolastoqewi Kci-Sakom spasaqsit possesom, also known as Ron Tremblay, Wolastoq Grand Chief morningstar burning.

Wearing orange shirts, some saying, “It’s ok now, they found us,” members of the Peace and Friendship Alliance, including the Wolastoqiyik, Mi’kmaq and L’Nu, settlers, newcomers and children, spent the afternoon in a traditional ceremony around silver maples, one of which had a window from the Sussex Vale Indian School leaning against it.

While there were no residential schools in the province of New Brunswick, there were day/residential schools like the one in Chatham, now Miramichi, where Indigenous boys did stay and went to a school run by the Catholic Church. Day/residential schools were established near reserves in the province, the last of which closed in 1992 near Metepenagiag.

The New England Company operated the first day/residential school in the province, the Sussex Vale Indian School.

The New England Company, also known as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, was created in England in 1649 with the purpose of converting people in the British colony to protestantism. According to W.S. McNutt’s *New Brunswick, A History: 1784-1867*, the Wolastoqiyik (Maliseets) were a problem for the settlers and the school offered a solution to their protests to the settler encroachment of their land.

In 1787, when Loyalists were arriving in New Brunswick following the American Revolution, the New England Company formed a board of commissioners tasked with buying land for Indian schools, first in Sussex Vale then later in Woodstock, Sheffield, St. Andrews, Miramichi and other locations. Board members included New Brunswick elite: Thomas Carleton, the province’s first lieutenant-governor; Rev. Jonathan Odell; Ward Chipman, New Brunswick’s solicitor general; and Chief Justice George Duncan Ludlow.

The day schools and day-residential schools had the same

objective as the residential schools: to assimilate Indigenous people into settler society. In 1920, Duncan Campbell Scott, head of Indian Affairs and a chief architect of Canada’s Residential Schools, said, “I want to get rid of the Indian problem... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill.”

In 1920, before Scott made residential schools mandatory for all Indigenous children, ages seven to fifteen, there was the Sussex Vale Indian School that was supposed to school Indigenous children with the purpose of assimilating them and converting them to Protestantism. The Sussex Vale Indian School did house children, the likely result of funds provided by the London-based Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in 1792.

The New England Company was not happy that the Sussex Vale Indian School, run by Rev. Oliver Arnold, was failing to convert Indigenous children to Protestantism. Indigenous parents of the children had followed their children and settled along the Kennebecasis River, near the Sussex school, and sometimes they would get back their children. The New England Company blamed the failing conversion mission on the Indigenous children returning home to their families after school, so, in 1807, the Sussex Vale Indian School introduced a new program that combined schooling with indentured servitude.

Nicole O’Byrne is an associate professor of law at the University of New Brunswick who has been conducting research on the Sussex Vale Indian School. According to documents uncovered by O’Byrne, settlers received money in the amounts of 20 pounds a year from the New England Company to train the Indigenous children in a trade and take care of them, but many children became farm workers and domestic servants rather than apprentices.

O’Byrne has noted that the program was beneficial for the settlers. With no limit to the number of children a family could have, Rev. Arnold, the head of the school, had five or six children stay with his family. Children as young as eight months old were taken to live with settlers and the children’s parents were paid a stipend to stay away. One contract uncovered by O’Byrne found that one child was contracted to work for a farmer until he was 21. The documents also point to numerous cases of sexual exploitation of girls.

Andrea Bear Nicholas, professor emeritus of native studies at St. Thomas University, likens the program to slavery. She said the children never learned to read or write while they were also being forced to abandon their Indigenous language.

NB Media Co-op and CHCO-TV launch political talk show: the NB debrief

Two independent media outlets in New Brunswick – the NB Media Co-op and Charlotte County Television – have come together to bring you the NB debrief, a talk show on politics that promises to inform and inspire.

“There are some incredible people doing some incredible work to challenge the status quo in New Brunswick – fighting for affordable housing, organizing for workers’ rights and resisting austerity. The NB debrief will introduce you to some of the everyday New Brunswickers fighting for a more equitable province,” says Aditya Rao, a co-producer of the show and a board member of the NB Media Co-op.

Show host Tobin Haley, a community-engaged scholar and activist based in Fredericton, asks hard-hitting political questions about New Brunswick to the province’s community-builders and change-shapers, the movers and the shakers.

“CHCO-TV is excited to partner with the NB Media Co-op on the NB debrief that involves engaging viewers in Charlotte County, across the province and beyond on important issues while also training people how to be citizen journalists, a goal of both our media outlets,” says Andrew Sutton with CHCO-TV.

Topics for the first season include the Peskotomukhati Nation’s struggle for state recognition, the decades-long fight for abortion access, tenant advocacy in the face of a housing crisis, how unions are organizing against attacks on workers, and what people are doing to combat punitive social policies that keep people impoverished.

Guests this season include Peskotomukhati Chief Hugh Akagi, reproductive rights champion and lawyer Kerri Froc, Clinic 554’s Dr. Adrian Edgar, New Brunswick Federation of Labour’s Daniel Legere, CUPE’s Sandy Harding, the Common Front’s Abram Lutes, and anti-poverty advocates Tanya Hatt and Sarah Lunney.

In our first show, the NB Media Co-op’s Susan O’Donnell, Matthew Hayes and Tracy Glynn discuss how the NB Media Co-op has challenged a media landscape dominated by J.D. Irving, a member of the Irving group of companies, an empire that controls and influences most of the province’s important industries such as forestry, energy and construction.

“We need Irving-owned industries in New Brunswick to be the subject of serious public scrutiny and investigative journalism. However, J.D. Irving Ltd. owns Brunswick News Inc., which owns every English daily newspaper (*Telegraph Journal*, *Times & Transcript*, *The Daily Gleaner*) as well as several community papers (*Miramichi Leader*, *Victoria Star* and *Kings County Record*). The Irving media often presents the view that what’s good for an Irving company is good for the province. We know that is not the case,” says Susan O’Donnell.



How to watch the show

The NB debrief can be viewed on UHF and Fibe 26, Cable 126 and BellTV 539 as well as on CHCO-TV’s Youtube channel and on the show’s website, nbdebrief.org.

NB MEDIA CO-OP’S 12TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WITH ARSHY MANN

September 23, 2021

Charlotte Street Art Centre,
732 Charlotte St., Fredericton

5:00pm - NB Media Co-op’s AGM with Milda’s Pizza. All are invited but only members can vote. Please RVSP at info@nbmediacoop.org.

7:00pm - Public talk with Arshy Mann, journalist with CANADALAND, on the dark consequences of Canada’s real estate obsession.

CUPE gives Higgs 100 days to settle on fair wages

By SUSAN O'DONNELL



In videos that can be viewed on the Facebook page, Union News Channel, CUPE front-line workers react to news that the New Brunswick government is handing out multi-million subsidies to big companies to pay their power bills while the government refuses to increase their wages.

CUPE members are losing money every year because their wages do not keep up with the rising cost of living. Hundreds of union positions are unfilled as qualified New Brunswickers choose to work outside the province where wages are fair.

Major recruitment and retention problems mean that many public sector workplaces in New Brunswick do not have enough staff, and existing staff are struggling to fill the gaps.

CUPE leadership says this situation must end, the time has come to draw the line.

CUPE NB president Steve Drost announced at a media event in late May that Premier Higgs has until Labour Day in September to fix recruitment and retention issues and bring fair wages to the 21,860 CUPE members in bargaining. More than 8,580 workers are now in deadlock,

and more than 13,280 are headed for conciliation in the next two months.

“It is totally wrong that these workers are being forced to choose between survival and dignity,” said Drost. “If the Premier and his cabinet refuse to act in a reasonable and responsible way, once these 100 days have passed, CUPE members will have to mount a province-wide coordinated action. The Premier is forcing job action on the citizens of New Brunswick.”

“This ultimatum as far as we are concerned is the most responsible way to get this government to act,” Drost continued. “By September, most residents will already be vaccinated. A hundred days is more than generous, considering that most of these workers have been waiting up to four years to get a contract.”

Wages are losing buying power

According to Statistics Canada, since 2017 the cost of living has gone up every year. A basket of goods that cost a hundred dollars in 2017 would cost \$107.50 today. Wages that stay the same are losing buying power.

CUPE workers with contracts that expired in 2017 have not had a cost of living increase since then. According to the Bank of Canada inflation calculator, a worker who made \$20 an hour in 2017 should be making \$21.52 an hour today to keep up with the cost of living.

The situation is even more difficult for CUPE’s casual workers. Because of unfair labour practices by the provincial government, many casual employees in the public sector

are not receiving full pay for their classification. Some have been serving the public for many years, in some cases more than 20 years, and receiving only 80% of the wages and none of the benefits earned by a permanent employee.

Casual worker wages are the lowest paid, and they are struggling the most to get by. A CUPE casual cleaning attendant who made \$14.03 per hour in 2017 should be making at least \$15.10 per hour today just to keep up.

“Who is the union?” asked Drost. “It could be your brother, or your sister, your neighbor, your friend, your family, your parents, your partner. Public sector workers all contribute to the local economy, we’re the backbone of the economy. What few dollars we do get we spend in our local economy.”

A social safety net requires investment in public services

Drost believes that continuing to freeze public sector wages, creating “massive” recruitment and retention issues, will cause considerable harm to this province.

He referenced a recent study finding that not addressing poverty and housing issues is costing New Brunswick \$1.4 billion annually. To start rebuilding the social safety net for everyone in New Brunswick, the government needs to start investing in public services.

At a recent meeting of the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, Drost learned that although provinces across Canada have taken serious financial hits during the pandemic, the Atlantic provinces fared much better. In fact, New Brunswick is coming out of the pandemic in one of the strongest situations.

“At the end of the day, it comes down to choices,” said Drost. “If this government continues to choose to de-invest in public services, in the long run, that’s going to be fewer services for our children, fewer services for our families.”

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) represents more than 28,000 public sector workers in New Brunswick.

Susan O'Donnell reports on labour for the NB Media Co-op.

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A historian and activist for the restoration of the Wolastoqiyik language, she is clear that her people did not lose their language, their language was stolen from them.

According to O'Byrne, “the Sussex Vale Indian School was designed to strip language and culture away from Indigenous students.”

While children were leaving the school illiterate, the New England Company decided to close the school in 1826. O'Byrne further explains: “Sussex Vale was closed after two boards of inquiry reported on the serious financial irregularities and other wrongdoing at the school.”

Alma Brooks, a Wolastoqey clan mother, told those gathered at the Sussex ceremony on July 1 that the Sussex Vale Indian School promised that the children would receive a plot of land, a cow and seedlings upon completing school, but they never did.

Brooks came across the name of her grandfather’s brother in a news story about the Sussex Vale Indian School. She said he went to the school and never returned home to their community.

Premier Blaine Higgs has promised to look at the church-run schools for Indigenous children that operated in the province.

Meanwhile, Aboriginal Affairs Minister Arlene Dunn has said that the government will review the birth alert system that is still in place that takes newborns from their parents.

At the Sussex ceremony, Donna Augustine Thunderbird Turtle Woman, an L’nu traditional elder, spoke of her work with residential school survivors.

Lorraine Clair, a Mi’kmaq woman from Elsipogtog who experienced RCMP brutality during her two arrests at the 2013 shale gas protests, spoke of the impact that Isabelle Knockwood’s book, *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi’kmaq Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie*, Nova Scotia, had on her.

Clair shared that she grew up in foster homes and, like the children at the Shubenacadie Residential School, she experienced her caretakers scrubbing her skin to make it more white. She wrote an honour song for the children and sang it at the ceremony, bringing many to tears.

Let the statues and murals come down

Sussex, the mural capital of Atlantic Canada, has two murals that historians and Indigenous scholars and activists say whitewash history and are historically inaccurate.

Regarding the mural, “Education Humble Buildings,” by William Lazos, Russ Letica with the Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick and the Wolastoq Tribal Council, shared on Facebook, “Are New Brunswickers ready to talk about the mural that represents the indigenous residential school @ Sussex NB. Because it needs to be gone.”

A romanticized depiction of early education in Sussex, the mural shows a teacher guiding a child into the light of knowledge. “The mural bears no resemblance to the horrific realities endured by the Indigenous children who attended the school,” said O’Byrne.

The other mural, located on the Sussex Regional Library, is supposed to tell the Wolastoqey creation story, but according to Nicholas, is not the story of her people, rather folklore created by the 19th century American writer Charles Godfrey Leland.

In Prince Edward Island, the Sir John A. Macdonald statue was quickly taken down after Charlottetown city council decided to remove the statue in late May. In 2020, the University of New Brunswick announced that they would remove George Duncan Ludlow’s name from their Law Building due to his involvement with residential schools and his support of slavery. In 2018, the statue of Edward Cornwallis name who oversaw bounties on the scalps of Mi’kmaq people came down in Halifax. In 2011, the Cornwallis was stripped from a high school in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, after organizing by Mi’kmaq elder Dan Paul, author of *We Were Not the Savages*.

As statues and symbols that celebrate the perpetrators of genocide come down, the Wolastoq Grand Chief and others say that is not enough: the Canadian state in all its colonial,

capitalist, patriarchal, racist and imperialist forms must be dismantled and replaced with a society that respects all life, including the seven generations.

The Peace and Friendship Alliance is one body of Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks from across the Wabanaki region working to protect the lands, waters, people and all creatures, and respect the Peace and Friendship treaties.

Later this summer, a new kind of memorial will be installed in Fredericton. The memorial will be devoted to Berta Cáceres, a Lenca woman from Honduras who was murdered for defending Indigenous Lenca territory from Canadian resource companies and for opposing the Canadian/American-backed coup in Honduras. A handcrafted bench will be installed between two apple trees at Hayes Farm to honour her.

Before she was shot to death in her home by hired assassins, Cáceres told a community facing unwanted development: “My companions, colonialism has not ended. That is why this fight is so tough for the Indigenous people, and there is a state apparatus at the service of that. But we also have power, companions, and that is why we continue to exist.”

Back in Sussex, Mary McKay Keith, a resident, invited people to her home after the ceremony to have a potluck feast. She said, “Standing with Indigenous peoples in their grief for the loss of these many, many children, and acknowledging the role of my ancestors in this genocide was important for me to do.”

Another Sussex area resident, Mary Ann Coleman, who attended the ceremony, said: “This is really the first step in a reconciliation process, coming together in ceremony for the children who went to the Sussex Vale Indian School and residential schools across Canada, recognizing the harm that was done and how we have benefited from it.”

“We all need to know the history of this place, in order to honour the pain and loss of the Indigenous communities, as well as the ideas of the Peace and Friendship Treaties on which their intentions first rested. I was honored that so many of them came to Sussex to give us those teachings, and I hope it helps us to do the work of reconciliation that we need to do,” said Stephanie Coburn, a farmer from the Sussex region and former president of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick also in attendance.

The Wolastoq Grand Chief says the Peace and Friendship Alliance will return to Sussex and hold numerous talking circles with interested people to continue the dialogue and focus on truth and reparation: “We need to have these difficult conversations relating to genocide. This has nothing to do with guilt, although everything to do with responsibility, because once you know, you can’t say you don’t know!”

Residential School survivors and others needing support can call the 24-hour Indian Residential School Crisis Line at 1-866-925-4419.

Tracy Glynn is a writer with the NB Media Co-op and participates in the Peace and Friendship Alliance.

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NB Media Co-op

180 St. John St., Fredericton, NB E3B 4A9

Email: info@nbmediacoop.org, Website: nbmediacoop.org

NB Media Co-op @nbmediacoop