
CANADIAN MUSEUM *for* HUMAN RIGHTS
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Letter to Association of Manitoba Archaeologists

The Association of Manitoba Archaeologists (AMA) has posted a letter on its website authored by Leigh Syms from April 8, 2010, regarding the archeological mitigation on the site of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). This letter contains a number of inaccurate statements based on what appears to be speculation, falsehoods, and a lack of information regarding the activities surrounding this particular project.

It is our view that in posting this letter in the public domain on the AMA's website, the AMA has associated its membership and code of ethics with these inaccurate and false statements. It is our view that prior to taking such an action, it is incumbent on the AMA to undertake more thorough due diligence, investigating the accuracies, or lack thereof, of the information posted on its website and thereby broadcast to the public.

We would like to rectify the numerous inaccuracies contained in the letter posted and request that this correction be made publicly available in the same manner in which the article by Mr. Syms was posted in the public domain.

We request that the AMA post the attached response on their web site and in their newsletter to ensure that the archeological community bases their understanding on fact. We hope that the AMA will extend the CMHR the same opportunity given to Mr. Syms to express our position on this matter.

Sincerely,

Angela Cassie
Director of Communications and Public Engagement
Canadian Museum for Human Rights

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The Importance of the Forks Site

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights places a high importance on Manitoba's heritage and recognizes the importance of The Forks site which has a rich and storied history of people coming together: beginning with Aboriginal peoples thousands of years ago; then as a center during the Fur Trade; and, with the coming of the railway, as a place where waves of immigrants first glimpsed the West. The CMHR is honoured to call this important land our home and look forward to welcoming the world to the site for years to come.

Prior to the start of construction of the Museum, we worked with the Province of Manitoba, the Forks, and various Aboriginal communities in Winnipeg to ensure that the site where the CMHR is being built is treated with the respect it deserves, including respect to the archaeological significance of this site. These conversations are ongoing and continue to influence the manner in which this project develops.

Archeological Mitigation Plan

Not only did the CMHR fund the 2008 archaeological excavation, the largest dig ever undertaken on The Forks site, it also opened this excavation to the general public and greatly raised awareness about the site, its history, and the field of archeology. Close to 1700 people visited the excavation site, with interpretation services provided by Parks Canada staff and the on-site archaeologist.

In 2009, a full mitigation plan was developed jointly by the Historic Resources Branch and Parks Canada and was systematically implemented by a qualified archaeologist. ALL construction activities that required drilling or digging through the cultural layers, including the pile caps, platform caps and trenches referred to by Mr. Syms, have a required mitigation plan. The CMHR followed all necessary steps and procedures required in heritage recovery projects; the Historic Resources Branch did not modify or diminish any procedures to accommodate the CMHR.

A copy of this mitigation plan is attached.

Treatment of Recovered Artifacts

The mitigation plan provides specific instructions on the requirements related to recovered artifacts. Implementation of these instructions and all handling of the artifacts were supervised by a qualified archaeologist in accordance with standard procedures as mandated by the Historic Resources Branch. All recovered artifacts were washed, identified and catalogued and stored in an interim location for analysis.

Approximately 500,000 artifacts were recovered in 2008 and an additional 80,000 to 90,000 artifacts have been recovered in 2009-2010. The artifacts have since been in the care of qualified archaeologists pending completion of their reports on the excavations. Once the reports are complete, arrangements

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will be made for the long term storage of the artifacts. The artifacts will be available for students and other interested scholars doing research studies in this area.

Exploratory Trench

Included with Mr. Syms' letter is a photo depicting a portion of the site where a large area was excavated. An exploratory trench in this area was a requirement of the mitigation plan and the assessment of the trench, completed by Quaternary Consultants, found the area to be sterile. Therefore construction in the area was allowed to continue and no "ancient village layers" were destroyed by the excavation, as claimed by Mr. Syms.

Archaeological Expertise

The owner of Quaternary Consulting, archaeologist Sid Kroeker, was the original contractor for the archaeological project on the CMHR site and he did an exceptional job. Mr. Kroeker advised the CMHR of his intention to retire and thus his hesitation to take on a multi-year project of this magnitude. Quaternary Consulting continued to perform to their usual standards up to a time when a new consultant was ready to take over. Mr. Kroeker was never disrespected by the CMHR or any other party involved with the project and he parted ways with the CMHR on good terms.

PCL, the CMHR's construction management firm, contracted Stantec Consulting to take over from Quaternary Consulting and complete the archeological requirements under the 2009 Heritage Permit.

The archeological work on the site was ongoing with no break between Quaternary's work ending and Stantec Consulting beginning. There was a good exchange of information between the two parties which allowed for an appropriate amount of information sharing and continuity on the project.

First Nations History and Participation

The CMHR is highly cognizant of the significance of the Forks site for Aboriginal peoples in Manitoba as well as the importance of ensuring participation of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in the activities of the Museum. These events may impact not only the social aspects of the community but also the artifacts that have been unearthed during the site preparation and construction of the museum.

The museum has consulted with respected Elders and taken their direction with respect to the handling and care of the items recovered. The Museum, together with its contractors, met with Elders prior to the beginning of the first archeological dig in the Spring of 2008 and again in the Winter of 2009 before the start of construction. On their advice, a medicine bag was deposited into each hole dug for pilings and caissons last summer and fall to show respect for Mother Earth and honour this special site. In Spring 2010, Elders in Winnipeg held a ceremony to honour some of the recovered artifacts.

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Our work with Aboriginal communities in Manitoba is ongoing and we are working to ensure their continued involvement throughout the construction and operation of the CMHR.

Budget

A point of contention which Mr. Syms refers to repeatedly throughout his letter is the budget allocated by the CMHR to the archaeological projects on site. The requirements for the 2008 excavations as well as the 2009 mitigation plan were jointly developed by the Historic Resources Branch and Parks Canada. The budgets were developed based on estimates of the number of hours required to complete the work as provided by the qualified archaeologist, not financial constraints imposed by the CMHR, as claimed by Mr. Syms.

Despite the fact that the CMHR has a fixed capital budget, funded in part by public money (which comes with a duty to ensure fiscal responsibility), we recognize the importance of capturing the cultural heritage of the site and have invested significantly to ensure that the resources required to implement the mitigation plan were set aside. At no time did the CMHR limit the recoveries nor the archaeology work required.

To date, the CMHR has spent approximately \$1 million on direct costs related to the implementation of the archaeology mitigation program and these costs are ongoing.

Increased Awareness

In addition to the \$1 million spent thus far, there have been additional indirect costs incurred associated with managing the excavation process and promoting the progress and the recoveries made.

In June 2009, the CMHR held a 4 day event at The Forks entitled “Amazing Feet” which featured the 800-year-old footprints uncovered during the archaeological dig. Sid Kroeker of Quaternary Consultants was on hand to answer questions on the archaeological record of the site and the CMHR digs. The event attracted thousands of visitors and greatly increased awareness of the cultural richness of the CMHR site.

In keeping with a commitment made on November 26, 2008, all partners are working together to ensure the stories of the site are told and the history of the site is available to the public. The CMHR is currently collaborating with the Province of Manitoba, Parks Canada, and the Friends of the CMHR on a web-based project that will feature previously untold stories about the site based on specialized analysis of selected artifacts found during the excavations.

In conclusion, the CMHR does not take Mr. Syms’ untrue, unfair, and possibly defamatory statements lightly. The CMHR has worked in partnership with the Historic Resources Branch, the Forks Historic Site, and Parks Canada to create mitigation plans, set appropriate budgets, and ensure proper procedures were followed during both the 2008 and 2009 excavations. Qualified archaeologists were employed on

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site throughout all stages of the excavations and while foundation work for the CMHR was taking place. We have collaborated with Aboriginal communities to honour the site and its historical significance particularly to First Nations peoples. We are committed to ensuring that all Manitobans can access the history of the Forks site, told through the stories of the cultural material excavated prior to and during the construction of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Angela Cassie
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Canadian Museum for Human Rights