

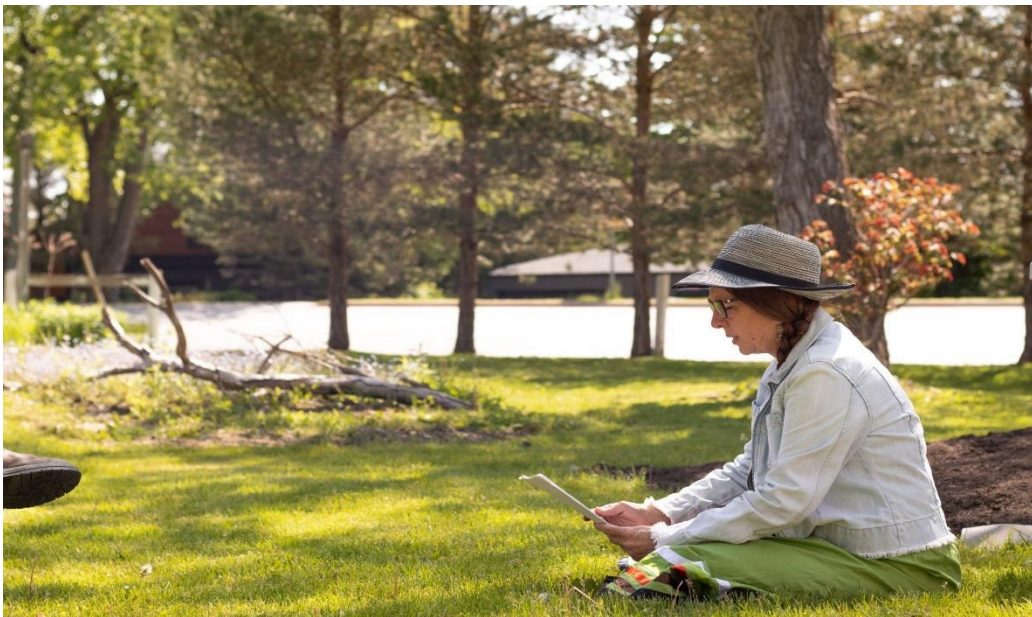
THE BROWN HOMESTEAD

Taking Action on Reconciliation

Hello from The Brown Homestead! We are an emerging heritage site located in the southwestern corner of St. Catharines, home to the oldest house in the city (c. 1796) and dedicated to re-imagining historic sites as engines of progress and development. We are also the caretakers of the Norton Cabin, a log cabin built by Mohawk Chief Teyoninhokarawen — also known as John Norton — around the year 1817. As the keepers of these significant built heritage structures, on land that is within the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples, we recognize our duty as stewards and caretakers of that land.

In 2023, our staff took part in the Indigenous Canada course designed by the University of Alberta. On Monday mornings following our weekly team meeting, we discussed individual modules as a group and shared our thoughts on what we were learning. We found this exercise enlightening, and were grateful for the fantastic course materials that guided us through the process. In this article, we would like to share a bit about why we chose to take this action, and to encourage others to consider doing the same.

[Indigenous Canada](#)



Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Marie Louise led us in planting a Three Sisters Garden this spring (2023) as part of The Brown Homestead Victory Garden program.

Passing the course and downloading the certificate of completion is part of the required training for our staff and board members. As a heritage organization, we are responsible for



learning about our nation's past as we partake in various forms of public education. As such, we believe in the honest exploration of history from multiple perspectives, even when it is challenging. We are committed to doing so in community with everyone who shares that history with us.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action issued in 2015 offer a framework for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians to come together to help repair the harm caused by residential schools and move forward with reconciliation. While they mainly address the federal government, we recognize that the government is merely an agency of the citizens of Canada and that individually and collectively, we are also called upon to find within them opportunities where we can take actionable steps to do our part to participate in a national process of reconciliation.

To that end, we have developed an organizational [Reconciliation Action Plan](#), in consultation with our Indigenous partners. Taking the course is part of this plan, where through our Fourteen Commitments we embrace our responsibility to take the policy recommendations of the TRC and 94 Calls to Action to heart, and to integrate them into our daily practices. Like the Homestead's Mission, Vision and Values, the Plan serves among the guiding principles by which we operate on a day-to-day basis, in terms of both our internal organizational culture and our community outreach and programming activities. It is also a living document, cultivated by our experience and in conjunction with our Indigenous partners. We believe that this will allow us to be part of meaningful and lasting change, and participate in a revitalization of the Tawagonshi or Two Row Wampum Treaty (1613) which guides our nations to live together peacefully with balance and respect.

In an article we wrote for our TBH journal, our staff shared some of their thoughts on the process as they walked away from these modules with a better understanding of the different histories and perspectives of Indigenous peoples throughout Canada. There's a real diversity of thought here and it's interesting to see which topics resonated with certain people.



Andrew Humeniuk, Executive Director, The Brown Homestead (TBH) tours the Woodland Cultural Centre exhibits along with TBH staff and board members in November, 2022.



Staff Takeaways:

What were some of the main takeaways from the Indigenous Canada Course, for you personally?

- One thing the course really brought to light was the insidious nature of colonialism. It seemed at the beginning of settler relations with various Indigenous Nations, there was an understanding and a reciprocal relationship, but things quickly started to shift and the friendship of various Indigenous nations was taken advantage of in the name of “progress” for the settler communities. Today, we live in such a fast-paced society, that history is important to know and be aware of, so progress doesn’t outweigh the importance and livelihood of all people and our environment.
- I felt it was important to learn about the current state of affairs concerning Indigenous peoples in Canada today. I mean, residential schools and Truth and Reconciliation are both in the news, and although they are important, neither addresses the struggles they are dealing with today. One is the past and the other is hopefully the way out of the difficulties Indigenous peoples face.
- This was a very interesting course that allowed a much more in depth understanding than what was taught in school.
- I appreciated how honest the course was. Growing up in the Canadian public school system, our education was very streamlined to topics that highlighted the Canadian government. Rarely were we taught of the government's negative impacts on the people of Canada, specifically First Nations peoples. Being presented with the whole truth is extremely important in forming unbiased opinions of history. The only way to move forward with reconciliation is to educate ourselves with a deeper understanding of all sides of history.

What is one thing that you think people need to know about Indigenous Canada when studying the history of our country?

- I think the course offers a good starting point to begin to understand and learn more about Canada’s Indigenous history, but it is mainly that: a starting point. It just begins to scratch the surface. It provides a lot of great additional resources to look into and I think it is also important that we make an effort to also dig deeper into the Indigenous history of our own local areas.
- I found it interesting that the matriarchal society was and still is a very prominent piece of Indigenous culture.
- I think most Canadians today have no idea how taken advantage and lied to Indigenous peoples have been since first contact to the present day. One obvious example that springs to mind is all the broken treaties from the past. And as a result, all of the land claims currently being worked out... and it taking decades to see any results. It feels like the government is stalling so if they lose the next election, someone else has to deal with it. We wouldn't dream of treating others this



inhumanely... so why do we continue to do it to them? By “we” I mean the government that represents the Canadian citizens.

- It wasn't until university that Indigenous history was included in my education, though most of the conversation was still solely around the fur trade and Indigenous reservations. Much of the Indigenous Canada course material is built from the foundation of how Indigenous peoples were treated for centuries, not just at the beginning of colonization. There is generational trauma that is still affecting these communities today. This should be something that everyone keeps in mind when interacting in conversation with or about Indigenous people in Canada.

Which piece of information gleaned from this course had the largest impact on you, or surprised you the most?

- I think overall, what surprised me the most, was the amount of information I learned that I was completely unaware of before, especially since I did all of my schooling in Canada, a lot of the topics covered in this course in regards to Indigenous history, relations, and Indigenous ways of life were not taught to us growing up. It was also enlightening to learn about the various Indigenous teachings, such as the Haudenosaunee Seventh Generation principle, in which the decisions we make today should be sustainable for the next 7 generations. As well as the teaching that we only borrow the earth from the next generation. This way of thinking really made an impact on me, because keeping that in mind is how we make decisions more thoughtfully and with much less of a negative impact.
- What had the most effect on me is how utterly resilient the Indigenous people can be. After centuries of mistreatment, they're still here and fighting for what's theirs. It's admirable and it's long past time to treat them as what they are... our equals.
- The history and intricacies of Residential Schools is unsettling. The fact that The Mohawk Institute Residential School (now the Woodland Cultural Centre) in Brantford was still operational until 1970 is unforgivable. Know better, do better. And we as a society didn't.
- One of the most profound impacts this course had on me was understanding that not all Indigenous communities experienced the same treatment. I feel as though most Canadians try and group all Indigenous peoples, while each group has its own cultures, beliefs, and histories. An example of this is how Métis people due to their mixed ancestry (First Nations mothers and European fathers) would be considered less Indigenous than the other groups during the selection process of children for residential schools. They would only be taken and forcibly admitted into the system if the schools had to meet their student “quotas”.



Indigenous History & Heritage Gathering



Award-winning Anishinaabe journalist and speaker Tanya Talaga gives a Keynote Address at the Indigenous History & Heritage Gathering (IHHG) in Ottawa, June 5-7, 2023.

"We are more than records. We are spiritual beings." - Tanya Talaga

As part of our commitment to engaging with Indigenous communities, we decided to attend the [Indigenous History & Heritage Gathering](#) (IHHG) in Ottawa in early June, 2023. This gathering brought together diverse groups who are working to amplify the distinct stories of Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island. Many of the concepts learned from the Indigenous Canada course were evident in these conversations, and we were able to apply our better understanding of Indigenous-settler relations and the complex experiences Indigenous peoples face today to the stories as we listened.

For us, the gathering was spent learning, respecting and connecting. Keynote Speaker Tanya Talaga's presentation was especially impactful. She is a journalist at the *Toronto Star* and is now a columnist at *The Globe and Mail*. She talked about the research she's done into locating missing and murdered children from residential schools. We encourage you to check out some of her books if you can, and learn from her experiences.

[Books By Tanya Talaga](#)



Speakers and panelists at the 2023 IHHG.

The gathering also included wonderful displays of Indigenous cultures including a Métis jig and Inuit throat-singing. There were a variety of panel discussions with topics like the preservation of primary sources and oral histories for those doing research into Indigenous land claims or inquiries into residential schools. There were also talks on place names, and returning traditional names to the landscape.

We are grateful to the organizers for putting on a fantastic event, and have been armed with further knowledge which can be used when we face choices regarding heritage preservation, community engagement, name attribution, and much more.

Thank you for following along with us as we journey towards reconciliation. If you'd like to receive regular updates about what we have going on at The Brown Homestead, please sign up via our [Connect Form](#) with the message "I'd Like to Subscribe!" We are also active on all social media channels and would love to connect with you that way.

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