

TELLING FOUNDING STORIES: AN EVENT SPONSORED BY “THE HEALING AND RECONCILIATION FUND,” ST. PAUL’S CHURCH (PRINCE ALBERT) AND RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOL, (SASK. RIVERS SCHOOL DIVISION).

On Wednesday, September 24, 2008, an event was held at Riverside Community School in which stories about the founding of the City of Prince Albert, and this area were told. Three hundred and fifty children, (90% of whom are of aboriginal descent) from grades one to eight gathered initially in the gym, and then in smaller groups in the library to hear Elders Philip Ledoux, and Stewart Amyotte and Rev. Sandy Scott tell the stories about some of the first people who built this community.

Elder Philip Ledoux told personal stories, and talked about life in his community at Mistawasis First Nation. Elder Stewart Amyotte spoke of his childhood and how he felt the impact of the residential school system through the experience of his parents and grandparents. Stewart also spoke about the importance of being able to bridge the gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal cultures and communities and live in two worlds. He said it is important to be able to hear an apology, find ways to accept it and work towards healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. His words and teachings were powerful and had an impact on students, staff, and members of St. Paul’s Church that attended the event.

Rev. Scott spoke about the founding of Prince Albert by Rev. James Nisbet and his party. He recounted the fact that the site where the city now resides was originally known in Cree as *kista-pinnanick*, and was a meeting ground for Cree people. Today Prince Albert is a city whose population of almost 40,000 people is 40% aboriginal. Nisbet’s party was made up of people who were of aboriginal and European descent, in fact two key leaders in his party easily bridged the gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities. George Flett (later ordained and served communities along the Saskatchewan/Manitoba border) was key in the establishment of the mission. He was born in the Saskatchewan River Valley and through his mother Peggy (Cardinal) Whitford was related to six remarkable chiefs on the prairies – Mekis, Osoup, Keesikoowenin, George Okanese, Antone Bone and Baptiste Bone. Flett was able to speak English, French, Cree, Gaelic and Salteaux, and his family lineage, cultural understanding and language skills established instant credibility for Nisbet’s mission.

Another key leader, among others was James McKay (later ordained and asked by Chief Mistawasis to serve as a missionary with that First Nation). McKay was renowned in the West as a great buffalo hunter. He could speak English, Cree and Gaelic. Wherever Nisbet went to preach on the plains, McKay went with him as guide, advisor and translator.

During the *Founding Stories Event* we learned that when aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities have lived side-by-side with respect both communities

have benefited. Flett, McKay, Nisbet and others dreamed of building a community where aboriginal and non-aboriginal people could live together in a mutually supportive way. At this event we began to talk about and see ways we can bridge two worlds and live together with respect and care.

The event ended in the school gym with a supper, cooked by *The Prince Albert Métis Women's Association* and hosted by St. Paul's Church. The night concluded with a celebration and round dance. John Schultz, the school principal commented: "There was a strong feeling of community and belonging at the event. Everyone learned something from the speakers and felt connected to them. I hope we can move forward from this event to do what Stewart said and build bridges between communities in our city."

The Rev. Dr. Sandy Scott
St. Paul's, Prince Albert
2008

