

Manitoba Heritage Summit 2020

Manitoba Archaeological Society (MAS) Statement - Presented by Amber Flett, Past President October 1, 2020

Hello, my name Amber Flett and I am an archaeologist with InterGroup Consultants. I am also the Past President of the Manitoba Archaeological Society, or the MAS, and I have sat on the Executive and Council since 2008. The Executive and Council is comprised entirely of volunteers – all who work full time as archaeologists, professors, or are graduate students.

Myself and the MAS recognize that despite the virtual nature of today's gathering – we are all joining in from, and discussing the traditional lands of Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Ininew (Cree), Oji-Cree, and Dakota Nations, and that we are within the homeland of the Metis Nation.

The MAS was established in 1961 by people concerned with how increased development was impacting archaeological heritage, so they organized to:

- promote the preservation, investigation, and publication of archaeological information;
- organize professional, amateur, and public individuals interested in Manitoba archaeology;
- foster the study and teaching of archaeology throughout the province;
- enlist the aid of all citizens in reporting, preserving, and recording archaeological sites;
- and to raise money through donations, grants, contracts, and other fund-raising efforts to promote the endeavors of the society.

As we near our 60th anniversary, we recognize that while our mandate has been consistent over the years, the world in which we operate has changed drastically. Although there are challenges, there have also been changes for the better that have provided us with new opportunities.

As many of you know, **funding** is always a challenge. This is particularly true when it is of an insufficient amount and can only be used for programing. We would like to note that the funding we receive has not kept up with rate of inflation and is not on par with archaeological societies in our neighboring provinces, all of whom have some form of paid staff. For small, 100% volunteer-run organizations like the MAS, this exacerbates all our other challenges. This includes:

- **Volunteer burnout:** Chronic underfunding means that our volunteers must meet both the operational and programming needs of the organization. We, like most other membership-based organizations, are facing decreased membership. This means that our volunteer pool has become smaller, and when coupled with the trend of decreased volunteerism it means our already very small core group of dedicated volunteers, all who have other full-time commitments, are over-extended and eventually burn-out.
- **External Funding:** Because our volunteers' efforts must be expended on daily operations in addition to current program delivery – we are simply at capacity and do not have the fiscal or human resources to pursue external project/program-based funding. While there are certainly a lot of available opportunities – our ability to pursue these is hampered by our current capacity.
- **Decreasing membership:** Over the past 20 years, our membership has continually decreased due to:
 - 1) Demographics – our membership audience is primarily older and new, younger members are not joining. We feel this is because we simply do not have the money and the people to reach these new, younger, more diverse audiences by engaging with them on their terms – we try our best, but again are limited, and finally,
 - 2) Roughly 95% of Canadian archaeological employment is Cultural Resource Management, (i.e. – consulting), but the lack of a robust archaeological industry in Manitoba means young people go elsewhere for study and eventual employment.

Of course – all challenges can be reframed as opportunities. Ones that we are passionate about and are committed to meeting is our ongoing public outreach and continued efforts at Indigenous involvement.

We have seen a rise in interest and a resulting small increase in membership because of the Olson Site Public Archaeology Dig over the previous two summers. This is reminiscent of the increased interest we saw when, with a paid position, there was a public archaeology program at The Forks in the 1990's. This shows that people are interested in archaeology and will participate when they have the occasion to do so.

This past year, the MAS reached out to Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council, Bird Tail Sioux FN, Dakota Tipi FN, Long Plain FN, Swan Lake First Nation, Sioux Valley Dakota Nation and Canupawakpa Dakota Nation, all of

whom have traditional territory within the same area as the Olson Site. Greg Chatkana, a Knowledge Keeper from Canupawakpa Dakota Nation performed a smudging ceremony to begin the project in a good way, and we were also honored to have a pipe ceremony conducted by Chief Pashe, Elder Linda Nadon and Darryl Taylor of Dakota Tipi First Nation. The forming of these relationships demonstrates the beginning of what can be possible with true collaboration and partnerships.

Manitoba's celebrated history has primarily been told in mainstream media from a settler perspective. Indigenous voices were silenced through colonization – the Indian Act, the creation of the reserve system, residential schools, the pass system and continued individual and systemic racism have all worked to extinguish the presence and contributions of Indigenous people and their communities to our province. More than 10,000 years of stories live within this province, and archaeology is one way to help regain and reclaim pieces of them.

Archaeological sites are non-renewable heritage, when destroyed, they – and the precious information they carry - are gone forever. Each site, each artifact is irreplaceable. They are the physical links between people today and the land. The history of our Ancestors can be reconstructed from what was left behind, but ultimately, archaeology is not about the tangible – it's not about the sites, the arrowheads or broken bits of pottery – it's about the people who made these items, who used them, who lived here and made a life here since time immemorial. They have stories to tell us, lessons to teach us – and they do that through the material culture they left us – this is our collective heritage as Manitobans.

The opportunity for true collaborative partnerships is especially relevant today. Looking forward we are working to create an advisory group of Indigenous Elders and retired archaeologists and to collaborate more broadly with our sister disciplines.