

NEWS RELEASE

FIRST NATIONS COMMEMORATE 250th ANNIVERSARY OF THE TREATY OF NIAGARA WITH TWO DAYS OF EVENTS

TORONTO, ON (August 1, 2014) — First Nation leaders, Elders and citizens from across the region will gather along the Niagara River for two days to commemorate, celebrate and discuss the 250th Anniversary of the Treaty of Niagara.

To mark the 250th anniversary of the signing of this Treaty there will be a gathering of representatives of the Indigenous Nations which made a Treaty of Peace with Sir William Johnson on behalf of the Crown.

The Treaty of Niagara was both historic and significant as a turning point in relations between the Indigenous Nations and the Crown. It was 1764 when at least 24 Indigenous Nations from across the region gathered at Niagara Falls to make a Treaty of Peace with the Crown. Better known as the Treaty of Niagara, the 250th anniversary and commemoration events will occur the first weekend of August.

It was on August 1, 1764 that Sir William Johnson who represented the Crown gifted silver peace medals to First Nation leaders, and the Great Covenant Chain belt as evidence of the newly defined treaty relationship. The Covenant Chain that Great Britain held with the Haudenosaunee and the other Nations was extended to the Western Confederacy. It also restored peaceful relationships between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabek.

At the 1764 gathering Nations included the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Some of the other Nations included Wyandot of Detroit; Algonquin, Nipissing, Mississauga, Odawa, Ojibway and other Anishinaabe Nations; Menominee, and others who were part of the Western Lakes Confederacy. More than 2,000 people attended.

The British were represented by Sir William Johnson, who offered solutions to problems between them. This Treaty grew out of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which proposed fair and equitable land dealings between the British and the Indigenous Nations.

This Treaty is significant, according to Rick Hill, historian and one of the coordinators of the events. It reaffirmed the political foundation for the Covenant Chain relations between the Britain and the Indigenous Nations. It also guaranteed the Indigenous Nations of an annual flow of goods and gifts to ensure that the ongoing Treaty was still valid.

Promises made by Johnson during this congress were preserved on wampum belts that were woven with hundreds of coloured shell beads. Johnson promised these presents for "as long as the sun shone and the grass grew, and the British wore red coats."

"This is the history of our country and a turning point for relations with the Crown that are valid today as they were 250 years ago," Ontario Regional Chief Stan Beardy said. "We want to commemorate this significant Treaty with events that will rekindle our treaty relationships and shared history with the Crown and our various Nations. We expect respect, recognition and implementation of our mutual perspectives and interpretation of our Treaty relationship with the Crown on an ongoing basis, as intended by our ancestors who originally entered into Treaty 250 years ago."

Events include a display of replicas of the various wampum belts that were held by Sir William Johnson at Fort Niagara at that time. Documentary evidence speaks of a belts hung on the walls in the Commandants quarters.

In addition to the speakers, there will be a gathering of the representatives and Indigenous protocol offered to honour the ancestors and celebrate the making of peace. People are asked to wear their traditional clothes and join in this Indigenous protocol to honour this Treaty. This will be followed by light refreshments. Please bring a dish of food to share.

Gord Peters, Grand Chief of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians (AIAI) said, "Due to the pivotal nature and significance of the agreement, this conversation has to be ongoing for treaty relations and commitment by all peoples."

The gathering will continue on August 2, 2014 across the river at Fort George, at the site of the old Indian Council House that stood from 1797 to 1828. This is the where the King's Fire had been transferred from Fort Niagara after the American Revolution. The Six Nations Legacy Consortium and Parks Canada have been collaborating on creating a raised bed garden that will mark the foot print of the old council house, and have been active an bring Indigenous youth to this site to learn more about this history of this place.

Prior to and during the War of 1812 many treaty council meetings were held here, some attended by several thousand people. This was the place where the annual gifts from the Crown were distributed. It is also the location where the end of the War of 1812 was concluded and a special ceremony took place in August 1815 to bring an end to animosities between Indigenous Nations that had been created by that war. So it is fitting location for the descendants of those that gathered here in the past to meet once again and rekindle their treaty relationships, cultural ties and shared history.

This summer Indigenous youth from across Ontario will experience the historic site of the Council House and tour nearby Fort George. Working with Mohawk College of Hamilton, the youth will work with Mohawk architect William Woodworth to help in making scale models of the Council House.

"The education and awareness of Treaties made with First Nations will help Canadian citizens understand their own obligations as subjects of treaty conditions in this country," Patrick Madahbee, Grand Council Chief, Anishinabek Nation said. "Canada wouldn't be a country without a formal treaty process with First Nations and those treaties are just as valid today as they were the day they were signed."

The August 2 gathering will introduce the Indigenous Nations representatives who attend the previous day commemoration to the site, and open up the dialogue on the meaning of our Covenant Chain Relationship. The Six Nations Legacy Consortium will provide a historical overview of the site and invite leaders, elders and historians to share what they understand about the workings of the King's Fire that was kindled here.

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DETAILS:

For agenda and detailed info available at www.chiefs-of-ontario.org

Friday August 1 - A gathering at Fort Niagara (Youngstown, NY) 7pm to 9 pm

Saturday August 2 – A gathering at Fort George, the site of the old Indian Council House, starting with a sunrise ceremony and knowledge sharing

For more information:

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