
KINGS ROAD RESERVE 100 YEARS LATER

The Journey On...

THE STORY OF MEMBERTOU'S RECONCILIATION





Kun'tewiktuk - Kings Road Reserve

Members of our present and previous generations often miss out on knowledge from the past. With these losses go the missed opportunities to learn pieces of history that could - in fact - impact the way we, and others, live our and their lives. It is not necessarily 'unawareness' or disinterest; instead, these thoughts are often met with the classic questions, 'how does that affect me' or 'why should I care?'

The point is - our past, whether personal or shared - holds so much important teachings about topics such as the places where we lived, the people we worked with, how we earned our living,

who we lived amongst, and the communities we call home. Some of this ageless information is relayed in stories; some of tragedy, some of love, some of hope, and some are stories of perseverance and reconciliation. In order to understand the present, we must first look at the past and acknowledge the different events and phenomena that shaped our collective present.

Here in Unama'ki, or Cape Breton, one does not have to look any further than the story of the Kings Road Reserve. As a reader, you may or may not have ever heard of the Kings Road Reserve, but you certainly are aware of Membertou.

An often unknown fact, and an often untold part of our collective history, is that Membertou is

the former Kings Road Reserve, and was once situated along the banks of Sydney Harbour.

This is a story that honours our Mi'kmaw ancestors and our home. It also impacts the residents of Sydney. This story impacts you.



Kun'tewiktuk - Kings Road Reserve

The Kings Road Reserve was located along Sydney Harbour. The Mi'kmaq knew the area as Kun'tewiktuk, meaning "at the rock" when translated. Kun'tewiktuk was the smallest 'reservation' in Nova Scotia at the time, approximately two-and-three-quarter acres.

Today a two story office complex occupies the land, the Sydney Medical Arts Building, a well-known piece of infrastructure in the city. However, from 1847 to 1926, that same plot of land where the Medical Arts building now sits was home to dozens of Mi'kmaw families.

From 1847 to 1914, many homes were built and our ancestors called this area "home." Houses were situated close to the Kings Road frontage, establishing it as a visible neighbourhood for commuters entering the booming city from the other Indigenous communities and towns in Unama'ki.

Residents of Kun'tewiktuk used the harbour as a source of plentiful natural resources, even after the development of the Cape Breton Railway rail line in 1887. The harbour was a source of food, water, and method of transport, with the on-shore area used for wood, medicines and other means.



With new times, new innovations and new generations – society experiences change.

As an urban-based Indigenous community, few – if any families continued to rely solely on hunting, fishing and gathering to earn their living. By the early 1900s, Kun'tewiktuk was home to 22 houses, a school, and a community sanitary closet. Most of the men worked in the summer as plasterers, builders and excavators. Some men were employed by the Tramway Electric Company. In winter, the men shoveled snow and engaged in other seasonal activities, and also working as general labourers, cleaners and worked in other services.

The women of Kun'tewiktuk were employed as office workers and general cleaners in local stores and shops. Others made baskets, a traditional

practice that was – and still is – passed down through the generations. The children were being educated at the school located near the family homes of the community; its name is not known.

The harbour provided food for the community. Fishermen would dive for some species, trap lobsters, and then cook them on the shore. Seafood staples of long-time Mi'kmaw diet - clams, oysters and eels were plentiful. The community worked together to gather and haul hardwood to all the homes for firewood. Groups of people would go into the woods; some cutting, some splitting and some hauling wood so that everyone in the community had a wood supply for winter. As you can imagine, the Kings Road Reserve was a prosperous community, significantly contributing to and building a progressive society.

These supposedly-“new” professions, combined with pre-colonial practices, demonstrated how Indigenous people could efficiently adapt to the rapidly changing dynamics that surrounded them. It also demonstrated that Mi'kmaw people were workers the year round, and dedicated themselves to establishing a high quality of living for families. Men worked, women worked, and children were formally educated.



THE REMOVAL OF THE KINGS ROAD RESERVE MI'KMAQ

In 1914, when conflict erupted across Europe and ‘The Great War’ (later known as ‘World War I’) was declared, every single eligible man from the Kings Road Reserve volunteered his allegiance to serve the Crown and went to the frontlines. One year later, the families of the same men were in court valiantly trying to save their community from the very Crown that their relatives pledged to serve.

In 1877, a man by the name of Joseph A. Gillies, a wealthy lawyer-turned-Member-of-Parliament, purchased the land next to the reserve and started a campaign against the Mi’kmaq of Kings Road. Throughout the late 1800s and into the early 1900s, Mr. Gillies and Sydney municipal officials tried to force the Department of Indian Affairs to remove the Mi’kmaq from their Kings Road home to somewhere else, preferably outside of the city limits, away from the general public.

On August 28, 1899, Gillies wrote to the Department of Indian Affairs, complaining of the Mi’kmaq on Kings Road and seeking their removal or relocation from their land. Father Cameron, the Cape Breton County Indian Agent, was directed to report to headquarters three (3) things:



Whether the Mi’kmaq of Kings Road would consent to surrender their land;



Whether Caribou Marsh, or Eskasoni, would be suitable places to relocate the Mi’kmaq of Kings Road, and;



Whether Indian Affairs would be able to sell the land once surrendered to compensate the community residents for the loss of their homes.



The residents of Kings Road Reserve refused to move, but offered compromise through certain conditions which Indian Affairs was unwilling to meet. In 1899, Kji Saqmaw (Grand Chief) John Denny stated clearly that his position was that the Mi’kmaq get a new ‘reservation’ on the main road that lead from Eskasoni to Sydney, and that it be within one mile of their current home on Kings Road. He advised that the soil in Caribou Marsh was very poor and unsuitable for settlement. In January 1900, Father Cameron again tried to manage a surrender of the Kings Road Reserve. The documents were returned to him – unsigned.

Later in February 1900, The Honourable Clifford Sifton, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, responded to a letter from W. Crowe, Mayor of Sydney, seeking the removal of the Mi’kmaq from Kings Road. Mr. Sifton assured the Mayor that

while he understood the city’s objections to the Kings Road Reserve, the law explicitly stated:

that ‘no land set apart as a reserve for Indians would be alienated without their consent’

He also assured Mr. Crowe and Mr. Gillies that the quantity of land that the Mi’kmaq requested could not be secured anywhere near Sydney for what the department would obtain for the small community.

From 1901 to 1915, the City of Sydney and Mr. Gillies aggressively worked to remove the Mi’kmaq of Kings Road by petitioning all levels of government, but were continuously rejected due to the fact that the Mi’kmaq refused to surrender their homes. In November 1902, the Inspector of Indian Agencies and Reserves reported to Ottawa that the present and former Indian Agent believed the Mi’kmaq should stay on Kings Road. Their concern was that if relocated, the community would “degrade” at a rapid rate.

In 1910, following another ‘unfavourable’ response from the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Gillies voiced that legislation should be enacted so that the Department can deal with this case, in the event that the Mi’kmaq proved unreasonable in their consent to surrender the land.

Meanwhile, the residents of Kun’tewiktuk continued life and made more communal improvements. The community spirit gave everyone strength and courage to succeed, despite the negativity surrounding them. The community members created a thriving society and had other Mi’kmaq who wished to move to Kings Road so that younger and future generations may attend the community’s school.

1877-1926



THE REMOVAL CONT...

From 1911–1912, and Indian Agency inspectors and superintendents visited Kun'tewiktuk and attempted negotiations with Chief Joe Julien to find a 'suitable solution for everyone.' No resolve was found. Amendments to the Indian Act that same year, which now permitted the 'removal of Indians, whose reserve was located within the city, and had a population of less than 8,000 people,' forecasted a harsh reality for the Kings Road Mi'kmaq.

On April 11, 1913, Frank Pedley, the Deputy Superintendent General Indian Affairs, sent surrender forms to Father R.L. MacDonald, the Indian Agent at St. Peter's, instructing him to take a surrender of Kings Road from the Mi'kmaq. No explanation was given as to why the forms were not sent to the local Agents in Sydney.

In 1915, after 37 years of lobbying the government to relocate Kun'tewiktuk, Joseph Gillies took his campaign to the Sydney City Council. On February 11, 1915, city council passed a resolution requesting the federal government to immediately take the necessary steps to remove the Mi'kmaq, declaring:

“...the said reservation, occupied as it is by over 20 families of the Micmac Tribe, has the most damaging and injurious effect upon all properties adjacent thereto.

...Therefore resolved that the Government of Canada is hereby respectfully requested to immediately take the necessary steps for the removal of the Indians from their present location upon Kings Road.”

Mr. Gillies appeared before the council in support for the resolution. Only one voice was raised in favour of the position of the Mi'kmaq of Kings Road, - the Deputy Superintendent General.

“I am afraid I cannot agree with Mr. Gillies that this band of Indians, who do not want to move, should be evicted to suit him.”

On April 24, 1915, relying on the amendment to the Indian Act, the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs recommended to the Governor General that the Kings Road issue be directed to a judge of the Exchequer Court. The files were sent less than one month later to the court, and Justice Audette was assigned the case. The matter was heard in Sydney from September 20 – September 25, 1915 (5 days) and the decision of the court was rendered on March 15, 1916.

Counsel for the Mi'kmaq, G.A.R Rowlings tried valiantly to demonstrate it was not in the interests of either the Kings Road Mi'kmaq or Sydney to force the community from Kings Road but ultimately the Mi'kmaq were unsuccessful. The Court recommended the community be moved, the government agreed, and it ordered the Kings Road Mi'kmaq be moved from their homes.





THE CREATION OF MEMBERTOU

For the next four years following the Exchequer Court's decision, the Mi'kmaq remained at Kings Road, as a suitable new location was not identified, and the cost was deemed a burden for the government until the end of the war. It wasn't until 1920 that \$20,000 was placed in the Indian Affairs estimates for the purchase of a new 'reserve.'

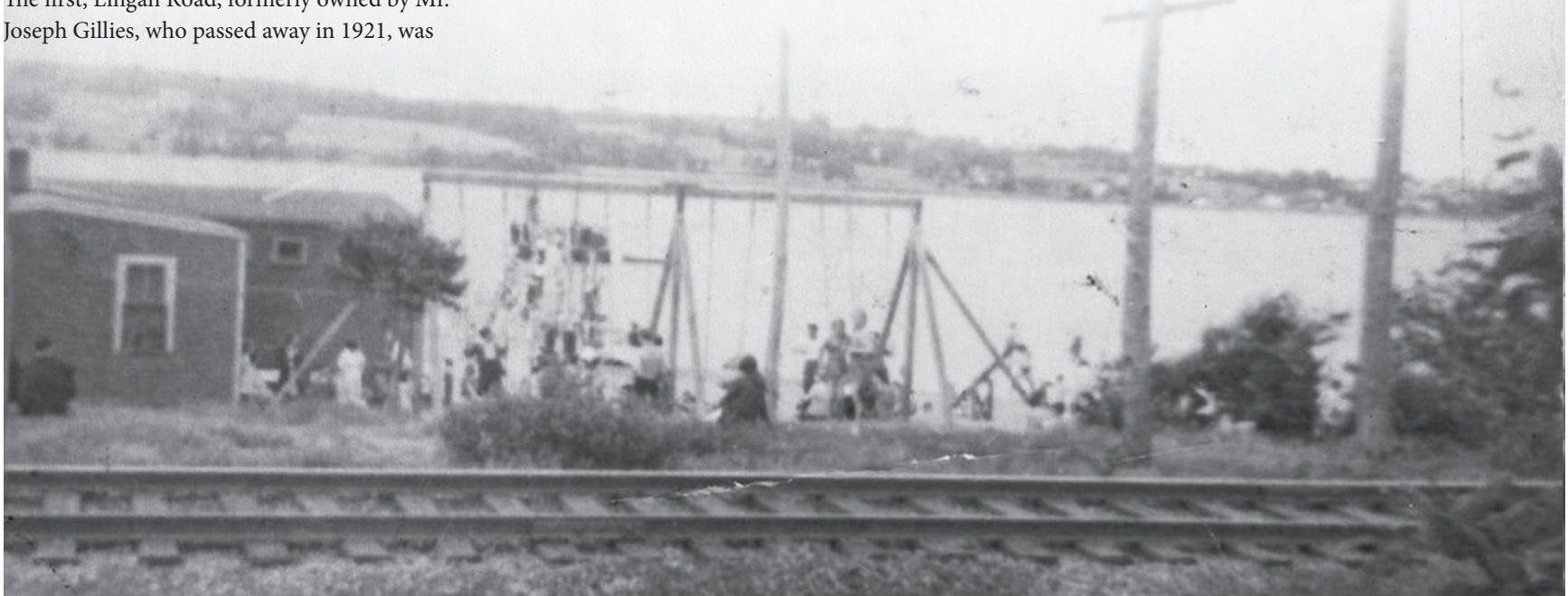
From 1920–1926, two properties were purchased. The first, Lingan Road, formerly owned by Mr. Joseph Gillies, who passed away in 1921, was

purchased from his widow. This property was unacceptable because it was outside of the city limits. The second, a piece of property consisting of 65 acres from Dr. Arthur Kendall on St. Peters Road in Sydney. The Department of Indian Affairs purchased the land for \$5,000 in 1925. Housing construction began in 1926 and the families began to move to what is now known as Membertou. The last family moved in 1928.

THE KINGS ROAD RESERVE 1926 - 1964

From 1926–1964 Kun'tewiktuk sat vacant. During that time, the City of Sydney tried many times to lease the land but Indian Affairs would never approve it. In 1929, 13 years after the Exchequer Court ruling, Indian Affairs made the sale of the land a priority, and put it up for sale in the *Sydney Record*. The attempted sale received no interest, and the land sat vacant for another four decades, with the exception of it being used for parking during one summer festival.

Finally, in 1946, after 20 years of requesting the land and threatening Indian Affairs about unpaid municipal taxes, a lease was signed between the Minister of Mines and Energy and the City of Sydney leasing the Kings Road Reserve to the city for 10 years starting October 1, 1946, at a price of \$1.00 per year. The land was to be used solely for playground and recreational use. The lease was renewed after 10 years, but with changes to the policy; the City of Sydney now had to pay a rental fee of \$160 and commit to a year-to-year lease.



THE SURRENDER AND SALE OF THE KINGS ROAD RESERVE 1964

In 1963, for the first time since the 1929 instruction to place an advertisement in the *Sydney Record*, efforts were attempted to sell the Kings Road Reserve property. The Sydney Band Council had received an offer from Dr. F.J. Kelley to purchase the Kings Road property for \$6,500 for the construction of a medical clinic on the site. F.B. McKinnon, Regional Director Maritimes, was concerned that the 1957 appraisal conducted of the land was out-of-date because the land had improved and was now surrounded by commercial properties; \$6,500 seemed inadequate. The land was reappraised at \$7,600, and the questionable surrender of Kings Road Reserve was accepted by Order-in-Council on May 14, 1964.

On November 18, 1964, the patent for Indian Reserve No.28, as it was known, was issued to Dr. Kelley. He constructed what we know today as the Medical Arts Building.



MEMBERTOU'S RECONCILIATION

In the years since our community and ancestors were removed from Kings Road, we have persevered and built what our ancestors knew would be a thriving Mi'kmaw community. The strength and spirit of our people who endured this tragedy continues to guide our vision even now, 100 years later.

Today, we live and work in unity, cooperation and understanding with Sydney and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. It has been a healing process, one that arguably genuinely started in 1999 after a public apology from the then Mayor of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, David Muise.



Now with the purchase of the Kings Road property by Membertou this past December, we find comfort in knowing we have reconciled a piece of our true history. Kun'tewiktuk is where we came from; Membertou is where we now call home; where our future generations will call home while having the knowledge of where our families came from.

*Our community journeys on.
We continue into our future with
a reconciled piece of our history...*



**WE HONOUR OUR MI'KMAW FAMILIES
WHO ENDURED THE RELOCATION**

Harriet Bernard
John & Angelina Bernard
Michael & Julia Bernard
Noel & Susie Bernard
Richard & Cecelia Bernard
William J. Bernard
Ben & Jane Christmas
Joe & Madeline Christmas
Thomas Christmas
Albert & Mary Doucette
Charles & Mary Jane Doucette
Peter & May Martha Doucette
Stephen Doucette
Peter & Theresa Googoo
Stephen & Bridget Googoo
Frank J. & Annie Gould
John J. & Lena Gould
Stephen & Mary Ann Gould
Thomas & M. Gould
Frank & Julia Herney
John & Madeline Isaac
Andrew & Mary Susan Marshall
Joe C. & Margaret Marshall
Joe M. & Susan Marshall
Joe N. & Mary Anne Marshall
Martin & Alice Matthews
John & Elizabeth McEwan
Noel Moore
Christopher Morris
Maurice & Caroline Morris
Noel Morris
Solomon & Bessie Morris
Mary Ann Noel
Angelina Paul
Percy & Isabel Paul
Peter Paul
John W. & Nancy Paul
William M. & Annie Paul

The Journey On...

Reconnecting with our ancestors

On **Sunday, October 23rd 2016** we invite you to join us in honouring the Mi'kmaw community of Kun'tewiktuk, or the Kings Road Reserve, the former home of Membertou.

5:00PM Open House

6:00PM Monument Unveiling by Chief Terry Paul

6:15PM Community Walk

**All events are taking place at the Sydney Medical Arts Building.*

For more information on the event, please contact:

Membertou Communications
Phone: 902-564-6466 ext. 5025
Email: communications@membertou.ca



Kun'tewiktuk - Kings Road Reserve