

About Land Acknowledgments

Indigenous peoples occupied the land that became Canada for thousands of years before the arrival of white settlers. In the late 18th century, the British Crown began to negotiate treaties with First Nations, resulting in the surrender of their lands for settlement. In return, First Nations received reserves and small annual payments. The Ojibwa or Anishinaabe people ceded the land on which we meet in the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850.

Recently, abuses that took place in many of the Indian Residential Schools came to light. The schools, established in 1882, were funded by the Government of Canada and operated by the Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United Churches.

In 1986 the United Church apologized to Indigenous people for failure to receive the gifts of their culture. Later it apologized to students who suffered abuse in the schools and paid its \$6.45 million share of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement with the Canadian Government. Since 1994 the *Healing Fund* and the *Justice and Reconciliation Fund* have supported cultural restoration and survivor community programs.

In 1993 the Anglican Church of Canada apologized to survivors for the Church's role in residential schools. In 2019 it apologized for the spiritual harm caused by the Church's dismissal and suppression of Indigenous identity, language, and spiritual practices.

In 1994 the Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted a confession recognizing the Church's role in operating residential schools and the harm those schools caused to Indigenous children, their families and communities. In

2024 they formally apologized for their role in colonization and operating residential schools for Indigenous children.

In 2011 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada committed to promote right and renewed relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. In 2015, it renewed its commitment to truth and reconciliation by repudiating the "doctrine of discovery," the 15th century papal decree that granted Christian nations the right to claim land inhabited by non-Christians.

Land acknowledgements serve to:

- remind us of Indigenous peoples longstanding relationship with the land and water of our shared country,
- challenge erasure of the history of Indigenous occupation and stewardship of the land,
- promote knowledge of the treaties and their obligations,
- inspire present-day action to achieve more just relationships with Indigenous people.

Inuit, Métis, and First Nations each have distinct cultures, histories, languages, and laws. However, widely shared is the creation story associated with Turtle Island.

Turtle Island is the name many Indigenous peoples use to refer to the continent of North America. The name originates from oral creation stories that describe the landmass being formed on the back of a giant turtle. Because it encompasses the entire continent, "Turtle Island" includes all modern-day Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

As treaty people we seek right relationships with our Indigenous siblings.



News and Resources: October

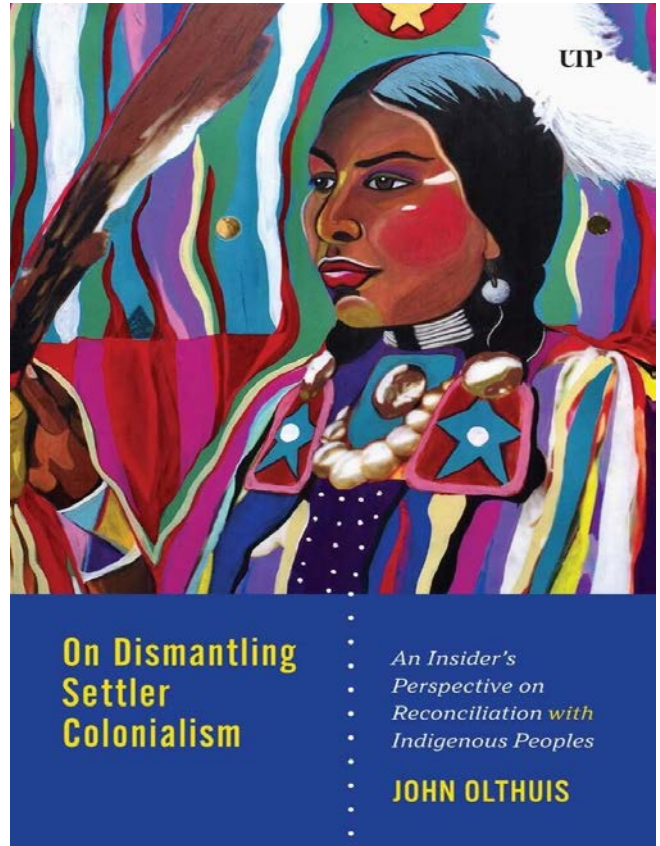
Joint Truth and Reconciliation Action Group



Beyond Land Acknowledgements: John Olthuis' Tour

Tour Overview

- **Thursday Sept 24:** John delivered the annual Tom Courchene Lecture sponsored by the School of Policy Studies at Queen's. About 70 faculty members, students and members of the general public attended. John's lecture was very well received and a number of participants expressed interest in connecting with JTRAG. In the evening, members of the planning committee and JTRAG members shared dinner and a rich evening of conversation and relationship building. 18 people attended.
- **Friday Sept 25:** John was hosted by the Limestone District School Board and spoke to an estimated 120 students and 20 teachers and administrators. Two adult Knowledge Keepers both from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, Crystal Loft and Mandy Smart, offered a wonderful land acknowledgement, spoken in Mohawk, celebrating Indigenous love for nature. Over 100 students (grades 8-9) from LCVI and KLC and two teachers attended. John's discussion on Canadian history was right on track for this student group.
- **Sat Sept 26:** Sheldon Traviss and members of All Our Relations Land Trust hosted a gathering, conversation and feasting. About 20 people participated.
- **Sunday Sept 27:** 150 people attended a joint service at Sydenham Street UC with participation from Edith Rankin Memorial UC, Faith UC, Chalmers UC and St Andrew's By The Lake UC. This was followed by a brown bag lunch and much conversation. The service can be viewed on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3guFHW0NEQ&t=4905s>
- **Sunday Sept 27:** JTRAG partnered with the City of Kingston and The Spire to host a public dialogue between John and Lindsay Borrows, professor of Indigenous Law at Queen's. 130 people attended. Lindsay and Brett Ballinger did a superb job of facilitating and nurturing the energy in the room. The Q+A was very animated and many of John's books were sold. A number of people asked to be added to the JTRAG mailing list.



- **Monday Sept 28:** John spent the day at St Lawrence College. His morning talk was broadcast to the campuses in Brockville and Cornwall. An estimated 100 students, faculty, staff and administrators participated. This was followed by a lunch with much conversation and rich dialogue.
- **Tues Sept 29:** John addressed students in the Law program at Queen's, shared lunch with an interested group of students and faculty and spoke to Anya Hageman's economics class in the afternoon. An estimated 85 students and faculty participated.

Evaluation

- An estimated 750 people participated in the tour and were exposed to John's stories, his analysis, his deep faith and his book. At least 80 of John's books were sold.
- There was a heavy focus on the question of how we live with the challenges and the pain, on the need to centre ourselves in love and on continuing to ask "who is my neighbour and how can I be a good neighbour?"
- The tour helped connect individual and organizations across well-established silos and foster new relationships among people that share a common concern about reconciliation.
- We were reminded that **we are all treaty people** and we all have a role in understanding our obligations as treaty people and in working toward just fulfillment of those obligations by individuals, organizations and government.
- There was positive energy in each of the events and lots of opportunity to nurture relationships and generate new/deepen engagement.



Reflection on John Olthuis' Tour by Kip Ip

I listened to John A. Olthuis at Sydenham Street United Church on September 27, 2026. His message at the joint Sunday service moved me. The theme was "Truth and Reconciliation: Beyond Land Acknowledgements." I am sharing what I heard, along with my own reflections, for those who could not attend. Some stories were familiar. Hearing them in worship made me consider how to put that reading into practice.

He began with church connections. His congregation's work resembled ours in the Joint Truth and Reconciliation Action Group. Both churches had heart gardens. At Trinity-St. Paul's United Church in Toronto, visitors could find Indigenous plants and information about treaties, "residential school survivors and intergenerational harm." His father suggested he pursue a career in law because doing justice was "a way of loving your neighbour."

John followed his father's advice and found that In conventional law practice, people on the margins received little attention. He left that work and helped create Citizens for Public Justice. Love had shaped his choice of work. One story concerned a pastor imprisoned after a congregation member reported him for speaking out against the Nazis. On his deathbed, that person sought forgiveness. The pastor "forgave him," John Olthuis said. That generosity moved me.

Concern for the Earth also shaped John Olthuis's path. He recalled warnings that production must respect "the carrying capacity of the Earth." He then encountered plans for a pipeline through Dene territory. Questions about energy use had become questions about people's homeland.

Georges Erasmus, a Dene leader, challenged him to "concentrate on working to dismantle settler colonialism." The aim was Indigenous control of land and resources, with freedom to live by their own

cultures and teachings. He had arrived offering help and received a different task. Project North, an interchurch coalition where his wife, Lois, worked, joined labour and other groups. He recalled 183 groups seeking a pipeline pause. He described a “10-year moratorium” to allow Dene discussions with government and protection of the environment. With the Innu of Labrador, the message was “This is not uninhabited land.” He described low-level military flights harming people and wildlife. Church coalitions supported their efforts in Europe. He credited that pressure with the withdrawal of a proposed North Atlantic Treaty Organization base.

The doctrine of discovery, he said, helped justify treating inhabited land as empty. Discussing Pope Francis, he distinguished “renounced” from “rescinded.” His concern was whether rejecting the doctrine had undone its consequences. As I listened, I noticed how often he returned to words of regret and practical change. He also described clergy explaining numbered treaties as agreements to “share the land.” The written terms, he said, required land surrender in exchange for small reserves. The difference between those explanations and the written terms was central to his account.

The government’s 1969 White Paper was another example. He described its aim as “complete assimilation by getting rid of the Indian Act.” He recalled Indigenous opposition, the proposal’s withdrawal, and a later Liberal Party acknowledgement that it was a mistake. He and his Christian companions often read Amos 5:24: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.” These words had accompanied their efforts. Hearing the verse in worship, I wondered how we would keep our commitments during the week.

John Olthuis remembered governments calling section 35 of Canada’s Constitution “an empty box.” Indigenous representatives answered that it was “a full box.” In their view, the rights already existed. The work was to recognize them, not create them. He called for “a harmonization between three levels of government.” This meant working out how First Nation, federal, and provincial powers fit together. He offered it as an approach to their constitutional relationship.

The proposed Charlottetown Accord had included “the inherent right of self-government,” he recalled. Voters rejected the wider constitutional package. That ended the proposal, not the questions it raised about Indigenous authority. His distinction was “reconciliation to or reconciliation with.” He argued that requiring Indigenous peoples to accept the Crown’s position diminished their agency.

Reconciliation with them meant respecting their own authority. I kept thinking about how much those two small words changed the meaning. Turning to law and love, he described a “low bar.” Lawyers should seek stronger protection, he said. Governments and churches should go further through “loving and caring for our neighbour.”

There was no shortage of proposals. He referred to “700 recommendations” in reports on Indigenous rights and reconciliation, many still “gathering dust.” His concern was implementation. I thought about the reading we already have, and the gap between knowing a recommendation and responding to it.

He challenged reassuring accounts of improved conditions, citing health, housing, and imprisonment. He described the size of reserves as “frozen by the treaties.” In his account, limited space and opportunity contributed to hardship after people moved to cities. The land return he described concerned Crown land, held by governments, rather than private homes. With land and funding, people could “return to their communities and heal on their land.” He believed this would also benefit other Canadians.

He said his firm had negotiated more than 700 “impact benefit agreements.” These involved Indigenous consent, environmental protection and ongoing monitoring. They also included access to a share of jobs and contracts. He offered them as examples of development shaped by Indigenous decisions.

The United Church of Canada, my own church, was part of this history. John Olthuis referred to 16 residential schools it had run. He recalled a minister’s 1903 warning about efforts to “educate and colonize the people against their will.” This was painful for me to hear.

Drawing on the booklet *Why Our Church Apologized*, he recalled an Elder welcoming the 1986 apology. She did not say, “We forgive you.” She and the Elders wanted repentance: “to turn away from harmful activities.” He also discussed the 1998 apology and responsibility towards all Indigenous peoples. To me, regret alone could not settle that responsibility. The booklet recalled Jesus’s teaching that “the truth will set us free.” In Sudbury, a gathering marked forty years since the 1986 apology. Many had chosen actions from those recommendations. Closer to home, John Olthuis called the All Our Relations Land Trust “a healing action.” His examples showed what repentance could look like in practice.

Near the end, he recalled people whose ten letters to their member of Parliament had gone unanswered. His faith was that the Creator sustains loving acts and “nothing is futile.” That reassurance comforted me. It encourages me to keep going while staying open to a different approach. After reading a poem he attributed to Hafiz, John Olthuis invited us to “get loose with our compassion.” I left the service grateful for his message. For me, as a writer, this means continuing to listen after an article is finished. It also means accepting corrections.



You Are Invited To An Evening with Dr. James Raffan, Speaker, Writer, Explorer

Topic: Telling Tales from Arctic Trails

Date: Friday October 16th 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Place: Wall Street United Church, 5 Wall Street, Brockville, Ontario

Dr. James Raffan is one of Canada’s most respected writers, explorers and storytellers. He is the author or contributor to more than 20 books and hundreds of articles about the north. He is a former geographer, an educator, Professor and Director of Outdoor Education and Experiential Learning at Queen’s University and Executive Director of the Canadian Canoe Museum.

His presentation “Telling Tales from Arctic Trails” will explore what the Arctic has to teach us about resilience, imagination, reconciliation, and our relationship with the land. Following his presentation and a Q+A period, attendees will be invited to a reception to meet Dr. Raffan and enjoy a chat with him. When asked about his desire to explore the northernmost regions of our country, he humbly said “I just wanted to meet my neighbours”. This is an opportunity to see our country and ourselves with fresh eyes, curiosity, humour, and a deeper sense of connection.

Everyone is Welcome! Admission is Free! Refreshments are Provided!

For further information, contact Donna Greenhorn at

greenhj@ripnet.com



Message from Rainbow Eyes, Deputy Leader of the Green Party

This past week, I stepped in for my mother to lead tours of our Glendale family Big House in our village of Tsatsisnukwomi on Harbledown Island. Walking through those doors, sharing our stories, our ancient wisdom, and our ancestral history with visitors made me reflect deeply on our shared path of truth, remembering and learning what it means to reconcile. The truth needs to be retold openly so we never forget, and so this vital knowledge passes safely down to the next generations.

The truth is that Canada's historic policies toward our people through enforced residential school and the potlatch ban were a deliberate act of cultural genocide. For nearly 70 years, from 1884 to 1951, the Canadian government added the Potlatch Ban to the Indian Act. This law did not just ban a celebration; it was a targeted attempt by the state to force assimilation and dismantle the legal, economic, political, and cultural foundations of coastal First Nations in British Columbia and across Turtle Island.

Our culture did not die. It survived because of the fierce resistance and ultimate resilience of our ancestors. When the government made our sacred traditions illegal, our families, elders, and hereditary leaders drove the potlatch and powwow underground. They disguised our sacred feasts and cultural sharing as ordinary holiday celebrations or family visits just to avoid police notice. In the quiet, elders kept our songs, dances, and histories, just barely alive, by teaching the younger generations in absolute secret.

Even when the state cracked down with violence—like the infamous raid on Chief Dan Cranmer's massive six-day potlatch at Village Island during Christmas in 1921—our people refused to break. After that raid, police arrested 45 people and forced the community to choose between prison or surrendering hundreds of our sacred coppers, masks, and regalia. Twenty-two of our people still went to jail, members of my family included, and about 600 ceremonial objects were stolen, sold and shipped to global museums. Despite the deep trauma and silencing caused by laws, relentless Indigenous activism finally forced Canada to lift the ban in 1951. Decades later, our communities worked tirelessly to build spaces like the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay to bring stolen treasures back home where they belong.

When we talk about Truth and Reconciliation today, it means recognizing that our culture is alive because of these deliberate acts of rebellion. Our ancestors were not just victims of history; they were active resistance fighters who broke unjust colonial laws to save our heritage for us. The potlatch was—and always will be—the foundation of traditional Pacific Northwest governance. It is where our titles are passed down, our laws are witnessed, our disputes are settled, and our wealth is shared...never hoarded. Reconciliation requires the Canadian government to fully recognize Indigenous sovereignty and legal orders today within the traditional ways we have always lived our lives, one with Nature. With Maya'xala a Kwakwaka'wakw word meaning equal respect for self, each other and nature.

***Rainbow Eyes, Member of the Da'naxda'xw/Aweatlala First Nation
Deputy Leader, Green Party Canada***



Update from Lodge Pole Arts

LodgePole Arts is a national, Indigenous-led arts charity based right here in Ka'tarohkwi (Kingston), and it's dreaming big. It hopes to buy Lemoine Point Farm, 82 acres of Kingston waterfront, from the City for what the City paid, and build Canada's first Indigenous-led, land-based arts centre there: studios, residencies, performance space, trails open to the public, and a museum for ancestral items coming home.

Executive Director Dr. Terri-Lynn Brennan led a spring Jane's Walk at Lemoine Point, where she held up the Two Row Wampum and walked participants through the land's history. Read more at <https://kingstonspotlight.ca/.../lodgepole-arts-alliance...>



Pew Card

Rev. Peter Wyatt is working with the congregation in Magnetawan to increase awareness of our debt to Indigenous people. They are planning to produce a plasticized card in the pew racks that gives a brief primer on Indigenous peoples and the need to recognize their stewardship of land and water. Find a copy of the draft document attached to the email that included this issue of the JTRAG enews. For more information, contact Peter at peter.wyatt@utoronto.ca



2026 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is over : Now What Do We Do?

Reconciliation is an ongoing responsibility. It requires continued learning, reflection, and action from all of us. We are encouraged to take part in the work of reconciliation every day:

- *Learn about the history and ongoing legacy of residential schools in Canada.*
- *Listen to Survivors and Indigenous voices and make space for their knowledge and experiences.*
- *Support Indigenous-led organizations, initiatives, and community priorities.*
- *Take action in your own community and continue learning beyond September 30.*



Shift Action Calls on CCPIB (<https://www.shiftaction.ca/>)

It's been a summer of extreme heat, flooding, and wildfires around the globe. Closer to home, the daily news keeps showing us that Indigenous communities often bear the brunt of the climate crisis. We're thinking of members of the Okanagan Indian Band, for example, who [lost homes and artifacts](#) during the Bradley Creek wildfire and now see their land turned to ash.

Against this heartbreaking backdrop of worsening climate impacts, we've published a new report about the role of our pensions. [Indigenous Rights and Canadian Pension Funds](#) finds that none of Canada's large pension managers - including the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB) - has a public investment policy aligned with Indigenous rights.

This won't be the first time CPPIB hears that it needs to make this change. Back in 2023, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) called on CPPIB "to recognize that First Nations title and rights are not adequately considered in CPPIB's human rights due diligence" and to improve its policies.

"Respecting First Nations title and rights by embedding free, prior and informed consent into investment decision-making at the Investment Board, which impacts all Canadians, and other investors to demonstrate that free, prior and informed consent is obtained from the Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President, quoted in the media release for Shift's new report. In 2024, We will for CP and implement an Indigenous rights policy that ensures our national pension manager obtains informed consent from affected by its investment decisions.

As stewards of lands and waters for millennia, Indigenous peoples are critical to addressing urgent environmental and climate change.

Will you call on CPPIB to ensure its investment policies align with Indigenous rights?

Send a letter to CPPIB



Indigenous student artist explores remembrance through design

This year's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation observances at Queen's focus on community and relationship building. Mazinibii'ige (Kaiya Mongrain) smiles when she envisions an audience observing her artwork. The idea of viewers whisking away on their own creative journey while exploring her art draws a connection between the Queen's student and spectators.

Mongrain created the artwork that will appear on orange T-shirts for the university's 2026 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation activities. Her design, Rooted Remembrance, was selected after the university's [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Working Group](#) invited local Indigenous artists to submit original work.



Rooted Remembrance incorporates cherished aspects of Indigenous culture. At the bottom of the design, hands hold a smudge bowl, representing cleansing and good thoughts. Smoke rises from the bowl to form the outline of a tree, symbolizing growth. Handprints of various sizes within the tree represent survivors and victims of Canada's residential school system. An image of a mother holding a child conveys the harm caused by the system's separation of children from their parents. A circle representing the medicine wheel and the cycle of life expresses how everyone is interconnected.

"The fun in it is once I put a piece into the world and it's public, people can see it and view it," says Mongrain, who began drawing in middle school. "It changes in a way that is beyond me, because it becomes something different for somebody else. No one's going to look at my art the same way; I think that's the beauty of it."



Mongrain, who grew up on Mko Mnising, or Bear Island, in the heart of Teme-Augama Anishnabai, or Lake Temagami, allows the influence of the land and the relationships she observes within it to shape her art.

When we observe things through nature, we see those relationships between other beings and ourselves,” she says. “I think it can play a good part in practicing gratitude and recognizing and appreciating those smaller things.”

Mongrain completed her Bachelor of Education through the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (ITEP) at Queen’s this summer and is now pursuing a Master of Science in Biology. Her detailed drawings reflect her love of reading, scene-setting, and storytelling. She often gathers ideas while spending time outside, capturing them in photographs or holding them in her memory until they find their way into her work.



JTRAG’s Online Reading and Audio Resource List

JTRAG’s annotated reading and audio resource list includes a wide range of reading and audio resources to support your self-education efforts. Read about our book of the month: ***Unreconciled: Family, Truth, and Indigenous Resistance*** (2021) by Jesse Wenté, member of the Serpent River First Nation, writer, broadcaster, and arts leader. The list provides practical, widely available resources that support learning, reflection, and group discussion. It is updated monthly. Where available, it includes links that you can use to access the resources. Thanks to JTRAG’s volunteer Library Coordinator, Kip Ip. If you have any questions about this book list, please get in touch with Kip at (kip.ip@Queen’su.ca).

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1zRninf0svLBSYcHHeb1cSGj10TFsxbi?usp=sharing>

PLEASE share this information in your networks so that it is available to a wide range of interested individuals and groups. Kip also welcomes your suggestions of other print or audio resources that should be added to the list.

Let us know what you think

We invite/need your comments and suggestions. We welcome material from our readers and are pleased to include comments and reflection pieces here as catalysts for more reflection and dialogue. The submissions we include do not represent any official position of JTRAG members or our readers.



JTRAG Members: Rear: Bill Spencer, Juliet Huntly, Susanne Savard, Monika Holzschuh, Bruce Elliott. Kip Ip.
Front: Pat Roebuck, Joan Egnatoff, Michael Cooke, Bill Egnatoff.
Missing: Lynne Freeman, Laura Hallman, Anya Hageman, Jim Leake