Did You Know?

National Indigenous History Month 2021

Did You Know? is a series run by the University of Waterloo Indigenous Initiatives Office for the duration of Indigenous History Month 2021. “Did You Know” posts were uploaded weekly on Mondays and Wednesdays, featuring information on various topics pertaining to Indigenous histories in Canada. Please share this resource widely.

THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

National Chief Perry Bellegarde
Credit: Assembly of First Nations

First Nations is a term used to describe Indigenous Peoples in Canada who are not Métis or Inuit. They are the original inhabitants of the land that is now known as Canada, and were the first to encounter sustained European contact, settlement and trade. There are 634 First Nations in Canada, representing more than 50 Nations and 50 distinct Indigenous languages.

First Nations culture is rooted in storytelling. Since time immemorial, First Nations have passed on knowledge from generation to generation through their Oral Traditions to teach their beliefs, history, values, practices, customs, rituals, relationships, and ways of life.

First Nations culture and teachings of their ancestors are preserved and carried on through the words of Elders, leaders, community members and young ones. These teachings form an integral part of First Nations identity as nations, communities, clans, families, and individuals.
The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) was founded in April 1982 as a result of movements to restore Chiefs as the voice of First Nations in a Canada-wide deliberative assembly.

In the late 1970s, First Nations increasingly pushed for the rights of self-government. Furthermore, by the late 1970s, First Nations communities needed direct representation in order to respond to the federal government's constitutional proposals, including the proposed patriation of the Canadian Constitution.

First Nation leaders (Chiefs) from across Canada direct the work of AFN through resolutions passed at Chiefs Assemblies held at least twice a year. AFN's National Executive is comprised of the National Chief, 10 Regional Chiefs and the chairs of the Elders, Women's and Youth councils.

As directed by Chiefs-in-Assembly, the responsibility of the National Chief and the AFN is to advocate on behalf of First Nations.

This involves launching and coordinating national and regional conversations, lobbying initiatives and campaigns, legal and policy analysis, and communication with governments, which includes promoting the development of relationships between First Nations and the Crown.

Find more resources by browsing the Indigenous History Month resources webpage.