



September 30, 2021

MEDIA RELEASE REGARDING THE INVESTIGATION OF MT. ELGIN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

It is with solemn hearts that we mark the arrival of September 30th, Orange Shirt Day. Each year on this day, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation honours our residential school survivors, and those who never came home, by holding a memorial event at our Mt. Elgin monument. The monument is located on the site where the Mount Elgin Institute operated for a total of 141 years: first, as a boarding school from 1851 to 1946, then as an Indian Day School from 1946 to 1992. Attendance numbers varied through those years, but peaked in 1924, with 160 children enrolled. In addition to Chippewa, Munsee and Oneida, children were sent there from First Nations across Ontario.

While little remains of the imposing structures of the Institute's buildings, its role in Canada's program of colonial violence and genocide haunts our family memories and lingers in today's generations in ways that we have yet to fully identify.

Following the uncovering of a mass grave in Kamloops, and as more and more children are located in unmarked graves associated with Canada's Indian Residential Schools, we also take this time today to acknowledge the beginning of another difficult journey. Deshkan Ziibiing (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation) has initiated activities to guide us in an investigation of the Mt. Elgin Institute. Many offers of assistance have been made to our Nation, and for these we are grateful, though we are determined to ensure that investigative activities will be led by Chippewas of the Thames and open to involvement by the other associated First Nations as they see fit.

Throughout this process, several Administrative departments will be essential in contributing their expertise and insight:

- Treaties, Lands & Environment's (Research Team & Lands Manager)
- Health
- Culture & Heritage
- Social Services

In addition, we are making use of previous work done by survivors here within our Nation, whose work culminated in the creation of the Mt. Elgin monument.



We have also begun preliminary discussions to involve professionals in the fields of archaeology, anthropology and pathology. It is estimated that the entire investigation will take between three and five years to complete. Should our research indicate that unmarked burial sites are present, we will have access to modern technology to thoroughly investigate.

Communications, like this one, are also an essential aspect of the activities we are contemplating. Letters introducing the intention of our efforts have been sent to the home communities of the 20 other First Nations whose children attended Mt. Elgin. Respect is our guiding principle: respect for the children and parents whose consent was violated, and respect for individuals and families today who are at various points of healing and may have different needs in that process. However it unfolds, it will be difficult for us all; let's be kind to one another.

For media inquiries, please contact Chief Jacqueline French (519) 694-0822