



DIGITAL JOURNAL

GENERATIONS

ISSUE 2 | VOL 51 | JUNE 2026



THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN OF ASILE RITCHOT

Shaun Hobson shares her archival discovery from Winnipeg's Misericordia Hospital records.

THE DANGERS OF OBITUARY PIRACY

Explore the issue of 'obituary piracy', as recommended by an MGS volunteer.



MANITOBA GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY INC.

mbgenealogy.com

contact@mbgenealogy.com



[/MBGenealogy](https://www.facebook.com/MBGenealogy)



[@MBGenealogy](https://www.instagram.com/MBGenealogy)



LIBRARY AND RESOURCE CENTRE

Unit E - 1045 St. James Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3H 1B1
Telephone 204-783-9139

HOURS OF OPERATION

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday
10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.



CONTENTS

02 From the Editor

A brief note from *Generations* volunteer, Sheena.

03 In Memoriam

Read a few words about some of our late volunteers.

05 New Periodicals at MGS

Janet Smith shares books available at the Resource Centre.

07 Red River Heritage Fair

Read about this year's Family History winner.

08 A School Project (SW Branch)

See how the SW Branch is bringing family history to schools.

09 Books at the Society

Explore the list of books available at the Resource Centre.

11 The Forgotten Children of Asile Ritchot

Explore research into Misericordia Hospital records.

18 Technical How-To

Want to print part of this journal? Here's how.

16

The Dangers of Obituary Piracy



From the Editor

I joined MGS a couple years ago when I was looking to fill some free time. While I intended to find a short-term volunteer position, when I learned that we were short a journal editor, I figured I'd give it a try.

In my day job, I was writing content, sending out newsletters, editing, and doing much of the same as at MGS, so it wasn't a steep learning curve.

But as much as I've enjoyed creating the journal, my schedule now, working full time, joining a choir,

generally seeking out new creative activities, and planning upcoming UK and Winnipeg weddings(!) means that it's unfortunately time to move on.

MGS now needs help with future issues of Generations, so if you have some spare time and can use a Canva template (with some how-to guidance), please reach out to contact@mbgenealogy.com!

Thank you for your contributions, emails and support!

Sheena Peckham
Volunteer
Member 6699

In Memoriam...

Louisa Jane Shermerhorn née Dobie

1926-2026

Louisa passed away peacefully on April 28, 2026 in Winnipeg, MB, joining her husband, Calvin Luke Shermerhorn (10 August 1930 - 19 July 2024).

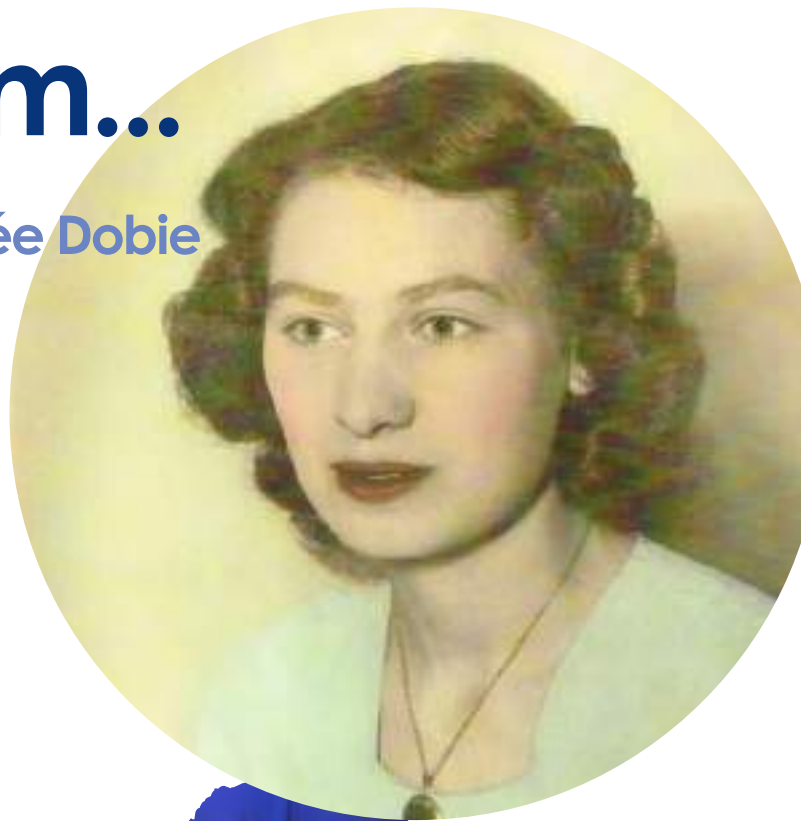
Louisa was born at Paynton, Saskatchewan, daughter of Miller and Ella (Harris) Dobie. Louisa leaves her daughter Marilyn Marie Coulthard-Johnson (Ray) and her son Glen Douglas Shermerhorn; grandsons Ryan (Kristin) and Morgan (Samia) Coulthard; granddaughters Jessi Castillo (Danny), Molly Shermerhorn, and Maggie Shermerhorn (Mike).

Louisa also leaves Nicole Mann (Jamie), Shilo Mann (Jeremy), and Stephanie Letcher (Lenny). Louisa loved as well, her great grandchildren Shaun (MacKenzie), Miranda, Angelique, Tavin, Brady, Lily, Katie, Benjamin, Michael, Blade, Booklyn, Porter, William, Taylor, Lennie, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Louisa is predeceased by an unnamed baby daughter, sister Mildred Ella Creegan (John), brother James Austin Dobie (Lorraine), brother George Miller Dobie (Sheila), brother-in-law Roy Schermerhorn (Marion), niece Linda Joan Creegan Peterson, and granddaughter Tara Michelle Shermerhorn.

Louisa was a very active genealogist and loved her family! In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Manitoba Genealogical Society, or a Shelter for Abused Women.

Source: Bardal Funeral Home and Crematorium



MGS Library Volunteer, Pat Allan (Member #2513) and MGS Librarian Mavis Gray (Member #008) submitted the following:

Louisa (Dobie) Shermerhorn (Member #567) passed away aged 99½. She was the MGS Librarian for more than 20 years (before Mary Bole), and after she retired from that position at the end of 2003, she continued as a library volunteer for many more years.

She took part in the transcribing of at least 14 cemeteries, wrote several works on the history of her Dobie and Shermerhorn families, and compiled a number of indexes and various other books relating to the work of the MGS Library.

According to the MGS membership records, she joined in 1980 and had a Life membership.

Louisa made a significant and much-appreciated contribution to the work of MGS.



In Memoriam...

Richard “Rick” Sheard McLellan

1937-2026

Rick McLellan, aged 88 years young, passed away with his family at his side at Grace Hospital on January 21, 2026. Rick will be dearly missed by Elaine, his wife of almost 67 years, his kids Mark (Arlene Merrick), Kathy Doak (Fred), and Michael; grandchildren Christopher Dempster (Andrea), Scott Dempster (Carina), Andrew Dempster (Janessa), Michelle Tweed (Dylan), and Serena Younger (Tyler); and 8 great-grandchildren Delilah, Violet, Scarlett, Olivia, Malia, Addison, Zachary, and Fynn. He also leaves to mourn his brother-in-law Colin Holbrow (Leslie) and sister-in-law Pat Holbrow, as well as other extended family.

In his earlier years, Rick enjoyed travelling with the family, and later on with Elaine. Hawaii, Europe, many, many trips to western Canada and western United States as well as Alaska were some of the places he visited. He enjoyed spending time at the family cottage at Bird Lake. He was involved as Treasurer in genealogy and volunteered for the Manitoba Genealogical Society (MGS) for many years. He did genealogy searches for people under the name “Life in the Past Lane”. He also volunteered for Friends of the Conservatory at Assiniboine Park.



He enjoyed photography and it was a rare moment that we didn't see a camera hanging around his neck at events and celebrations. Rick was also an avid reader, enjoying mystery and suspense novels the most. He loved to read in the sunroom at home and also at the lake, listening to the loons calling to each other in the evening.

As an accountant, Rick worked for the Bank of Montreal in his earlier years as well as Great West Life, MB Housing, and MB Conservation and Stewardship. He also taught Accounting at RRC for over 25 years in the evenings, helping students to earn their Business Administration Certificate.

We will miss his easygoing nature and natural smile. He loved spending time with his family and we will miss spending time with him and just talking with him. He was proud of his kids', grandchildren's and great-grandchildren's accomplishments. He will be missed at family functions and we will miss the emails he would send us.

Source: [Dignity Memorial](#)

MGS Library Volunteer Angela Fiebelkorn submitted the following:

We were saddened to learn of the death of former Branch member and MGS volunteer Rick McLellan on January 21. Our sincere sympathies to his wife Elaine and his family.

Rick joined MGS in 1996 and was a member of our Branch until 2021. By 2006 he was a member of the MGS Research Committee. He served MGS as Treasurer from 2008 to 2014 and VP Finance from 2013 to 2018. We enjoyed seeing him in the Resource Centre on Thursdays during that time.



New Periodicals at MGS



Kerri James
Library Volunteer
Member no. 520

MGS Library Volunteer, Kerri James, shares the latest periodicals for February 2026 that you can access at the Resource Centre.

We have many digital and hardcopy periodicals available for use in our library. The digital copies are available for viewing on the Resource Centre's computers and the current print copies are available for use within the Resource Centre. The printed copy back-issues are available for members to either review in the Resource Centre or to check out for up to 3 weeks.

During March, April, and May, we have received 39 issues (31 digital, 8 paper) of 32 different periodicals. As MGS is now an institutional member of the Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS), I thought it appropriate to review their Journal.

Featured periodical: *Families*

Families is published quarterly, hardcopy, by the **Ontario Genealogical Society**. The Feb 2026 Volume 65, No. 1 edition is packed with articles and information, some of which are:

- ***Breaking Up is Hard To Do: Ontario's first parliamentary divorce***: Drew von Hasselbach looks at an impulsive 16 year old boy who eloped with a young girl in 1860. The couple each returned to their own homes after the ceremony, with no wedding night and never having lived together. After which they were forcibly separated by their parents. Now 10 years later, he wishes to marry again, but is still officially married with no divorce options in Ontario at that time. Read on to see what he had to go through to enable him to marry again.
- ***Views of Peterborough, and the OPP Keeler Family of 75 Years Ago, photos and compilation by George A. Neville***. The writer and Bob Keeler were best friends living on the same street in Brockville. Bob's father was transferred to Peterborough in 1949. In 1950 at age 13, the writer visited Bob in Peterborough. He saw and photographed many sights in Peterborough. This article includes those photos along with descriptions and some history of the places they visited.
- ***Lilian Julia Tebbitt and Beatrice Tebbitt - British Home Children, and their immediate family, by Alan Campbell***. This article follows Lilian and Beatrice through their early years in England, the events that resulted in them being put up for adoption, sent overseas, and how they fared in Canada. It is followed by an account of their brothers, Alfred, who remained in England with his uncle for a time, later immigrating to Canada and Adolphus, who also remained in England, joined the Army, then later the Air Force. Ending with some final notes on their parents Joseph and Julia.
- ***The Family of Elizabeth Robertson, wife of Sir James Stuart, by Raymond Perrault***. This lengthy article reviews how Katherine Robertson's ancestry can be traced back to Alexander Robertson of Struan (d. 1505), the first to bear the name Robertson. Her husband, James Stuart, was one of the most distinguished lawyers in Canada, was the son of a United Empire Loyalist missionary and official of the Church of England in Kingston.
- ***A New Chapter for Ontario's Historical Photographs by Adina Tuerxun***. Ontario Ancestors [AKA The Ontario Genealogical Society] is embarking on an exciting new project that brings together heritage, technology, and community knowledge in a meaningful way. Beginning in early 2026, the Society will be collaborating with the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information on the development of a new Historical Image Library for the Ontario Ancestors website.
- ***What's in a Name: German Pietistic Naming Traditions by Robbie Gorr***. As the title states, Robbie reviews some of the German naming traditions.
- ***Coral's Corner by Coral Harkies***. Carol reviews several of their branches holdings, resources and offerings. She also describes a few interesting websites: Save Ontario Shipwrecks, Ontario Abandoned Places and Atlas Obscura.
- ***Book Reviews by Heather Oakley***. Heather provides lengthy reviews on two books: *Scattered Bits & Pieces Along the Road - Maynooth Memories, Volume 1* by Katherine Green Cannon and *I Remember Grandma*, Second Edition by Pat Husak.

Here's a list of all periodicals received in the last three months:

Title	Organization	Format
Aberdeen & North East Scotland FHS Journal	Aberdeen & North East Scotland Family History Society	Digital
BC Genealogist	British Columbia Genealogical Society	Digital
Berkshire Family Historian	Berkshire Family History Society	Digital
Branching Out	Twin Ports Genealogical Society	Digital
CADFHS Magazine	Chesterfield & District Family History	Digital
Cariboo Notes	Quesnel B.C.G.S. Branch	Digital
Chinook Arch	Alberta Family Histories Society	Digital x3
e-Zine	Manitoba Genealogical Society - SE & Winnipeg	Digital x 3
Families	Ontario Genealogical Society	Paper
Family Tree Magazine	Family Tree Magazine UK	Paper x 4
Genealogists Magazine	Society of Genealogists	Digital
Generations (MB)	Manitoba Genealogical Society	Digital
Generations (NB)	New Brunswick Genealogical Society	Digital
GFO Bulletin	Genealogical Forum of Oregon	Digital
GWSFHS Journal	Glasgow & West of Scotland Family History Society	Digital
Kingston Relations	Kingston Branch OGS	Digital

Title	Organization	Format
Lambton Lifeline	Lambton County Branch OGS	Digital
Living Connection	Genealogical Association of Nova Scotia	Digital
London Leaf	London & Middlesex Branch OGS	Digital
Mennonite Historian	Mennonite Heritage Archives	Paper
MGS Monthly News	Minnesota Genealogical Society	Digital
Minnesota Generations	Minnesota Genealogical Society	Digital
NDFHS Journal	Northumberland & Durham Family History Society	Digital
New Zealand Family Tree	New Zealand Family Tree	Digital
Nova Scotia Genealogist (The)	Genealogical Association of Nova Scotia	Digital
Okanagan Researcher	Kelowna & District Genealogical Society	Digital
Oregon GS Journal	Oregon Genealogical Society	Paper
PEI Genealogical Society Newsletter	Prince Edward Island Genealogical Society	Digital
Prairie History	Manitoba Historical Society	Paper
Roots Around the World	Abbotsford Genealogical Society	Digital
SGS Bulletin	Saskatchewan Genealogical Society	Digital
SIB Folk News	Orkney Family History Society (The)	Digital

Red River Heritage Fair 2026 Family History Winner

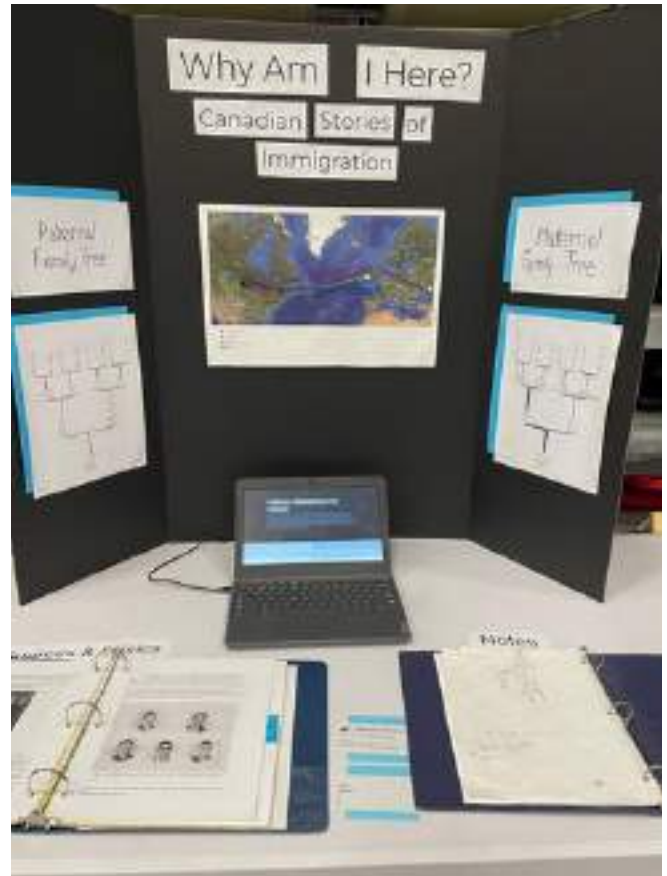
Janice Butcher, Volunteer
Member no. 4499

I attended the 2026 Red River Heritage Fair held at the University of Winnipeg Duckworth Centre on Thursday, April 30.

The Heritage Fair is similar to a science fair where students prepare and present a project on a wide variety of history topics. I was judging the Family History Projects on behalf of MGS.

MGS has sponsored this Family History Award for many years. Although very few students do a project on family history, it is beneficial for MGS to support the Fair along with other historical organizations. The general public was welcome to view all of the projects at the end of the day from 5:30 to 6:30 pm.

The Family History Award winner this year was **Mabel McManus**, a Grade 9 student at General Wolfe School.



Mabel's project was entitled "Familial Immigration to Canada". She had researched the four sides of her family, outlining from where they had immigrated. She and her family had also visited Pier 21 in Halifax. She had researched each family's lineage after they arrived in Canada.

The judging includes listening to a presentation by the student, reviewing their notes on the steps taken to complete the project, and asking questions.

This was an excellent project, well deserving of MGS's Family History Award.

All organizations are asked to present a monetary prize to the winner, which totalled \$50. ■



A School Project: Seniors for Seniors & Our SW Branch

Laura Crookshanks, Volunteer
Member no. 4292

Our South West Branch entered into a partnership with **Seniors for Seniors** to work on an intergenerational project in one of our elementary schools. This came about as Seniors for Seniors and the South West Branch were exploring the possibility of providing an introductory type series of sessions for seniors at their offices.

An introductory meeting was held with representatives from Seniors for Seniors, South West Branch and teaching staff. It was decided to focus on one Grade 7/8 classroom and one Grade 5/6 classroom.

The Grade 7/8 teacher and I met to discuss more specifics about what he wanted the students to learn about and skills he wanted to see them further develop. It was decided the focus would be on finding out about family heritage and cultural customs, by talking with a parent or someone else in family and doing research on their country of origin. The teacher was responsible for developing goals for the assignment and a rubric to evaluate students' work as well as communicating with parents about this unit.

I started the process the first day by making a brief presentation to the class on what genealogy is and sharing some personal history and family artifacts. The teacher shared about a conversation he had with his mother about her growing up years. We both stressed the importance of learning from family members.

Together, the class generated questions they could ask someone in their family. They could report on what they found out by making PowerPoint slides, a book using Canva, a word document or a presentation. Their assignment included time to work in class, researching online with their individual iPads (provided by the school) as well as "homework" to talk to someone in their family, using the questions developed in class.

It was important, in developing the questions and framing the kind of discussion expected with family

members, to be sensitive about the varying nature of families within the student population. This school has students from a wide variety of places with some very specific cultural values. The classroom is a virtual "United Nations" and very typical of the kind of classrooms in many of our schools these days – many different countries of origin, with immigration to Canada occurring over the last several generations, as well as some Indigenous students whose ancestors have been in this area since time immemorial.

Many different cultural values were recognized in terms of religion, food, dress, and customs. The teacher was quite aware of which students might not experience a great deal of support from home and targeted some of his time with those students.

I attended five lessons with the class, mainly connecting with students individually and asking questions to encourage further thought and things they might continue to pursue with their parent(s).

At the last couple of classes several students presented their final product to me.

Given that it was a split class, there was a range in research skills. Overall, I was really impressed with the effort most students put into their project and their grasp of research skills. Some obviously enjoyed learning about their family heritage and appreciated the time talking with their family member.

The plan for Grade 5/6 class is to meet with the Grade 5/6 teacher in September with a view to starting in October. Again, the teacher will be responsible for determining the nature of the unit with goals appropriate for his class and developing a rubric to assess student work. I will introduce the unit in a similar manner as I did with the Grade 7/8 class, tailoring content to Grade 5/6 level. ■

Books at the Society

Janet Smith
Library Volunteer
Member no. 5837

Here are some of the books that have been recently added to the MGS Library.

Researching Your Brickmaking Ancestors: A Solid Trade

Dr. Sadie McMullon, 2025

Location: GBI 666 MCM

This book includes a history of bricks, brickmaking process and the major areas of brickmaking in the U.K. There is a detailed list of information sources to trace ancestors who worked in brick related occupations. If you are interested in bricks you will enjoy this book!

Ancestors Who Worked in the Theatre

Alan Ruston, 2025

Location: GEN 792 RUS

This book provides insight into the theatre industry and provides sources to research ancestors who worked in English theatre. It includes a brief history of theatre and related occupations, and lists of societies, institutions, unions, libraries, collections and archives related to theatre companies, play texts, local entertainers, and productions.

Your DNA Guide: The Book

Diahan Southard, 2025

Location: GEN 929.1 SOU2

This book will show you how to make a step-by-step plan to help identify a specific DNA match and explore what it can tell you about your family. It can help genealogists reconstruct family trees and adoptees identify biological relatives. The process used in the book starts with asking a "good DNA question" and proceeding with a step-by-step analysis.

The Swedish Wave: A Collection of Short Stories

Members of The Swedish Cultural Association of Manitoba, 2025

Location: EUR 948.5 SWE2

This collection contains stories of members, families, and friends of the Swedish Cultural Association of Manitoba. You will find insight into the heritage and family legacies of these pioneers who came to Canada in search of a new life and prosperity. Places include: Riverland/Lac du Bonnet, Sprague, Ostersund/Laclu, Eriksdale, Erickson, Lake Manitoba, Great Falls.

The below is a partial list of recent new acquisitions to the MGS library.

Call number	Title	Author
MAN 370.7 MPNS Mem	Memories of Mackenzie Hall: Manitoba Provincial Normal School 1949-1950	Compiled by Jean Tucker
MAN 971.27 REYN COM2	Commemoration for the homesteaders of twp 9 range 11 ... R.M. of Birch River, Sadlow/Spruce Siding	Compiled by Thelma Findlay
MAN 971.27 WMOU COM	Commemoration for the homesteaders of twp 10 ranges 11 & 12 ... R.M of Whitemouth ...	Compiled by Thelma Findlay
GEN 792 RUS	Ancestors who worked in the theatre	Alan Ruston
GBI 666 MCM	Researching your brickmaking ancestors: a solid trade	Sadie McMullon
REF 929.4 NAMv.2	Name changes published Manitoba Gazette 1920-1970 [v.2]. N-Z	Compiled by Thelma Findlay
GEN 929 PAL	Ultimate guide to mastering FamilySearch	Dana Ann Palmer
GEN 929 TAT	Storytelling for genealogists: turning family lineage into family history	Doug Tattershall
FHB 929.2 DAR	In search of Irish Darlings	Gail Darling
FHB 929.2 WYA2	Wyatt and related families	Compiled by Jean Tucker
EUR 943.8 MAK	The Polish people in Canada: a visual history	William Makowski

John Roy Cake and the Forgotten Children of Asile Ritchot

Shaun Hobson
Member no. 5336

An Archival Discovery from Winnipeg's Misericordia Hospital Records

Genealogical research sometimes reveals lives that were nearly lost to history. While investigating family records associated with Constance Florence Cake (1900–1928), a previously unknown child emerged from archival documents: John Roy Cake, born in Winnipeg in 1920 and deceased five months later at the orphanage known as Asile Ritchot in St. Norbert, Manitoba.

The child's brief life provides a window into the complex history of maternity care, social stigma, and institutional childcare in early twentieth-century Canada. By placing the personal story of John Roy Cake within the historical context of Asile Ritchot and the work of the Sisters of Miséricorde, we gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of unmarried mothers and their children during this period.

Although thousands of infants passed through institutions such as Asile Ritchot, the individual lives of most children were recorded only briefly in institutional registers and vital statistics forms. Recovering even fragmentary stories, such as that of John Roy Cake, helps illuminate the broader human experience behind these historical records.

Constance Florence Cake and her family

Constance Florence Cake was born 31 October 1900 in Plumstead, Kent, England. She later immigrated to Canada with her family and settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

On 4 April 1923, she married Gudjón Olafur "Olie" Einarson, my grandmother's brother. The couple lived in Winniepegosis, Manitoba, where they had

two children:

- John Jabez Einarson (1924–2006), and
- Malcolm Gudjon Collins Einarson (1928–1989).

Constance died 3 July 1928, only thirty-three days after Malcolm's birth. Her cause of death was *ileo-femoral phlebitis following accouchement* (childbirth).

Until recently, however, no documentary evidence suggested that Constance had given birth to a child prior to her marriage.

It is possible that Constance continued to carry the emotional weight of losing her first child, John Roy Cake. One possible clue lies in the name she later gave to her son John Jabez Einarson. The biblical figure Jabez is associated with a passage describing a mother's relief of finally holding her baby in her arms after a difficult birth.

Discovery of John Roy Cake

A search of genealogical databases revealed a birth registration indicating that Constance Florence Cake gave birth to a child in Winnipeg on 18 April 1920.

Copies of the Registration of Birth and Registration of Death were obtained from the Manitoba Vital Statistics Agency, confirming the following:

- **Name:** John Roy Cake
- **Date of birth:** 18 April 1920
- **Place of birth:** Misericordia Hospital, Winnipeg
- **Mother:** Constance Florence Cake
- **Residence:** 942 Lipton Street, Winnipeg
- **Occupation of mother:** Office clerk at T. Eaton Company

The birth record described the child as "illegitimate," reflecting the terminology used in vital statistics records of the era.

His early life and death

The death registration indicates that John Roy Cake died:

- **Date of death:** 22 September 1920
- **Age:** Five months
- **Location:** Asile Ritchot, St. Norbert
- **Cause of death:** Enteritis and diarrhea

The record notes that the infant had resided at Asile Ritchot for four months and eight days, suggesting that he had been transferred to the institution shortly after birth.

John Roy Cake was buried 24 September 1920 at the cemetery associated with Asile Ritchot.

Although only fragmentary records survive, it is possible to reconstruct aspects of his final months through the known practices of the institutions involved.

Misericordia Hospital and institutional care

John Roy Cake was born at 3:00 a.m. on 18 April 1920 at Misericordia Hospital in Winnipeg. His mother was twenty years old and living with her parents on Lipton Street.

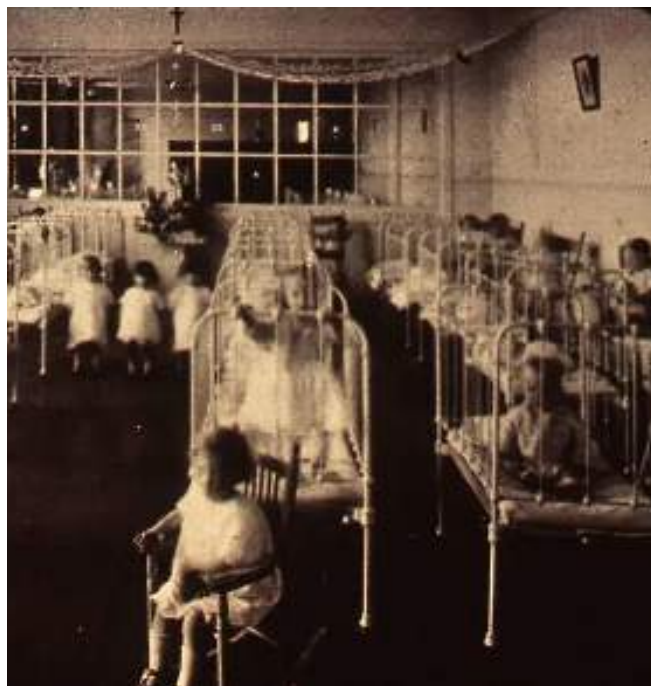
Misericordia Hospital had been established specifically to care for unmarried pregnant women, many of whom arrived quietly and departed discreetly in order to avoid the severe social stigma attached to illegitimacy during this period.

For nineteen days following the birth, Constance remained in the hospital's maternity ward. Newborn infants were typically housed in communal nurseries supervised by the Sisters of Miséricorde and nursing staff.

When Constance was discharged on 6 May 1920, the infant remained in institutional care. Records indicate that he was transferred on 14 May 1920, at the age of 26 days, to Asile Ritchot, an infant home located several kilometres south of Winnipeg in the parish of St. Norbert.

Life at Asile Ritchot

The journey to St. Norbert was short but significant. The child was likely transported by carriage or motor vehicle along the Red River Road to the large frame building



Infant nursery at Asile Ritchot.

Source: Winnipeg Free Press

that had once been the residence of Joseph Lemay. By 1920, the structure had been expanded to house a growing number of infants, many of whom had been born at Misericordia Hospital under similar circumstances.

Upon arrival, John Roy Cake would have been admitted into the nursery wards that housed dozens of infants of varying ages. Contemporary descriptions suggest that rows of small cribs filled these rooms, with several infants assigned to each caregiver.

The Sisters of Miséricorde, assisted by a small number of lay workers were responsible for feeding, cleaning, and supervising the children.

Infant care followed strict routines. Feeding was typically scheduled every few hours using bottles of cow's milk mixtures prepared in bulk. Although these practices reflected contemporary medical knowledge, sterilization techniques and refrigeration were imperfect, and gastrointestinal infections were common in nurseries where many infants lived in close proximity.

Daily life for the infants consisted largely of eating, sleeping, and being attended briefly by the caregivers as they moved from crib to crib to provide the needed attention. With limited staff caring for large numbers of children, individualized attention was difficult

to provide. While the Sisters were motivated by religious devotion and charitable intent, the sheer scale of the task created an environment where illness could spread rapidly.

Historical records from Asile Ritchot show that many infants admitted there were already medically fragile. Some were premature, others had been separated from their mothers shortly after birth, and many suffered from the nutritional and sanitary challenges typical of early twentieth-century institutional childcare.

During the summer months of 1920, John Roy Cake spent his days in this environment overlooking the wooded riverbank that would later become known as Lemay Forest. The building stood near the Red River, surrounded by fields and trees that formed a quiet rural setting.

At some point in late September his health deteriorated. The death registration lists the cause as enteritis and diarrhea, illnesses that were among the most common causes of infant death during this period. Such conditions could develop rapidly, especially in environments where contaminated food or water allowed intestinal infections to spread.

Despite the efforts of caregivers, the infant died on 22 September 1920 at 9:35 p.m., just over five months after his birth.

Two days later, on 24 September, he was buried at the Asile Ritchot cemetery. The burial was conducted by the local undertaker, Joe Larocque of St. Norbert.



Infant nursery at Asile Ritchot.
Source: Joyal-Tellier Collection

Like many children who died at the institution, he would have been interred in the communal burial area of Section 3. Records from Asile Ritchot that are kept at Société historique de Saint-Boniface indicate that little Johnny had been baptized at Asile Ritchot. However, if he had not been baptized Catholic, he would have been buried outside the main cemetery boundary in accordance with religious practice at the time.

The surviving archival record preserves only these sparse details. Yet when placed within the broader context of institutional childcare in early twentieth-century Canada, they reveal a life shaped by social expectations, charitable institutions, and the medical limitations of the time. For most of the children who passed through Asile Ritchot, little trace remained in the historical record beyond brief entries in registers and vital statistics forms. The rediscovery of John Roy Cake's story more than a century later restores at least a fragment of his life and connects one family's history to the larger narrative of an institution that cared for thousands of vulnerable infants -- *The Forgotten Children of Asile Ritchot*.

The history of Asile Ritchot

In the late 1890s, Winnipeg was rapidly emerging as a major urban centre, bringing with it the social challenges common to growing cities. At the invitation of Archbishop Adélarde Langevin of St. Boniface, the first Misericordia Sisters (*Sœurs de Miséricorde*) arrived from Montreal to address the needs of single mothers. The Archbishop recognized the importance of their work in Montreal, where they provided spiritual and medical care to women and infants often marginalized by society.

The Sisters' mission was rooted in the work of their founder, Sister Rosalie Cadron-Jetté, who, at the request of Bishop Ignace Bourget, established a home for unmarried mothers in Montreal in 1848. Inspired by this legacy, the Sisters came to Winnipeg to continue these works of mercy.

On October 28, 1898, Mother Marie-de-la-Miséricorde, Superior General of the Montreal order, and Sister St. Marie-Madeleine arrived in Winnipeg to assess the feasibility of opening a new home. Although Mother Marie-de-la-Miséricorde was apprehensive about the hardships of establishing a mission in a frontier city, she was equally struck by the urgent need for their services.



After returning to Montreal, she authorized the foundation. In early December, Sister Ste. Marie-Madeleine, who would become the first Mother Superior in Winnipeg, arrived with Sisters Marie du Bon-Pasteur, Ste. Lucie, Marie du Carmel, and lay nurse, H  l  ne Rioux, to establish the new home.

Prior to their arrival, the Grey Nuns had opened a temporary residence, Maison Sainte-Marguerite, near St. Boniface General Hospital for unmarried mothers and their infants. As this work fell outside their primary mission, the Grey Nuns transferred the home and its contents to the Misericordia Sisters, who assumed care of the residents. Renamed Les S  urs de Mis  ricorde de St. Boniface, the institution was formally blessed on December 7, 1898, by Father Gravel, its first chaplain.

The Sisters supported their operations through charitable donations, private payments, and by taking in boarders. Financial hardship was constant; at times, they struggled to provide even basic necessities such as food and heat. Recognizing their plight, J.A. Senecal (later the architect of the Misericordia Hospital) donated essential supplies of wood and coal.

The original residence soon proved inadequate. In January 1899, two houses on the south side of Broadway, between Edmonton and Carlton Streets, were purchased from the Jesuit Fathers for \$9,500. By February, the home was already caring for about twenty mothers, and additional Sisters had arrived to help. Their work expanded rapidly because demand was much greater than anticipated. The Sisters' presence met resistance from local residents, who objected to the nature of their work and in May 1899, neighbours submitted a petition accompanied by an offer of \$1,000 requesting that the Sisters relocate.

Rather than discouraging them, this opposition prompted expansion. The Jesuit Fathers agreed to repurchase the Broadway properties, and the Sisters acquired two and a half acres of land — now the site of the Misericordia Health Centre — for \$3,900. Construction of the new facility began in July 1899.

The Misericordia Maternity Hospital opened in February 1900 and was formally incorporated on July 19, 1900, as the "Winnipeg Maternity Hospital." The four-storey wooden structure, built at a cost of approximately \$16,000, contained a large maternity ward on the third floor and accommodated up to 50 patients. It was staffed by eight nursing Sisters and two student nurses.

The hospital focused primarily on obstetrical care, but it also assumed responsibility for a growing number of infants where orphaned, abandoned, or unable to remain with their parent(s). Patients were encouraged to contribute to their stay when possible, often through domestic labour, though no woman was ever refused admission regardless of her means.

By 1903, the hospital was overwhelmed by the number of abandoned and orphaned children. In response Father No  l-Joseph Ritchot of St. Norbert donated land and a house to establish an orphanage and adoption agency known as Cr  che Asile Ritchot ("cr  che" meaning nursery in French). Mothers often remained with the Sisters for up to six months after childbirth, recuperating and assisting with domestic work. Abandoned infants were not uncommon, sometimes left at the institution's doorstep.

In 1904, the Sisters opened the orphanage in St. Norbert, naming it Asile Ritchot in honour of Father Ritchot. The building, originally constructed in the 1870s, had been the residence of Joseph Lemay, a Manitoba politician and businessman.

The institution functioned primarily as:

- A nursery for infants born at Misericordia Hospital;
- A residence for some unmarried mothers; and
- A temporary home for abandoned or orphaned children.

Demand quickly exceeded expectations. Although the Sisters initially anticipated caring for approximately thirty infants, admission rose far beyond that number.

Overcrowding and disease

Overcrowding, limited staffing, and the prevalence of infectious disease created extremely challenging conditions. Research by the Société de Saint-Boniface has identified 3,383 deaths among children admitted to the institution between 1904 and 1948.

The most common causes of death included:

- Gastrointestinal disease;
- Syphilis;
- Malnutrition;
- Respiratory infections; and
- Complications of prematurity.

While tragic, such conditions were not unique to Asile Ritchot; they were characteristic of institutional childcare environments during this period.

The Asile Ritchot Cemetery

A cemetery was established in what is now known as Lemay Forest, adjacent to the orphanage.

Burial registers show that 726 infants were buried between 1907 and 1912.

The cemetery appears to have contained several sections:

- **Section 1** - Graves for the Sisters;
- **Section 2** - Graves for the Madeleines (mothers who remained at Asile Ritchot and worked);
- **Section 3** - Communal burial pits for infants who did not have family who could pay for individual plots;
- **Section 4** - Private infant graves.

The burial location of many of the children remains unknown, as existing burial registers are incomplete.

Modern investigations of the site

Recent historical and archaeological investigation have brought renewed attention to the cemetery.

A LIDAR survey conducted in 2020 detected surface anomalies consistent with burial pits.

Public debate intensified when development proposals

threatened the forested site. Community advocates, historians, and Indigenous groups raised concerns about:

- Unmarked graves;
- Cultural heritage; and
- Ecological preservation.

Research continues to determine the precise extent of the cemetery and the number of individuals buried there.

Conclusion

The story of John Roy Cake represents a single life among thousands of children whose experiences remain largely undocumented.

Although his life lasted only five months, the surviving records reveal the social realities faced by unmarried mothers and their children in early twentieth-century Canada.

Through genealogical investigation and historical research, it is possible to recover fragments of these forgotten lives and place them within the broader history of institutions, such as Asile Ritchot.

Remembering them restores dignity to children who otherwise might have remained lost to history, and ensures that the forgotten infants of Asile Ritchot are not entirely erased from the historical record.

Each recovered name reminds us that behind the statistics of institutional records were individual children whose lives, however brief, formed part of Manitoba's shared history. ■

The Dangers of Obituary Piracy

Why it's important to pay attention to the source of information

Sheena Peckham

Member No. 6699

When tracing your family tree, finding an obituary of the right person can feel like winning the lottery, especially if you find more than just dates. However, a growing trend known as 'obituary piracy' is creating serious pitfalls for family history researchers.

Websites like [Echovita](#) have generated massive controversy by publishing thousands of unauthorized death notices. For genealogists, these platforms are a double-edged sword: they offer clues, but they are frequently riddled with errors.

What is 'obituary piracy'?

Obituary piracy is the practice of taking death notices from official sources, like funeral home websites or local newspapers, and republishing them on a third-party site without the permission from the family or funeral home.

Echovita is a prominent Canadian company based in Quebec that operates using this model. Every day, automated software programs (often called "scrapers" or "crawlers") scour the internet for newly posted obituaries. Echovita takes the basic facts from these notices (names, dates, and locations) and uses algorithms or freelancers to quickly rewrite them into a summary that is then posted on their site.

Echovita doesn't charge people to read these basic notices but instead makes money by turning the page into a storefront. For example, next to the obituaries, you can buy physical flowers, plant memorial trees or light digital candles with prices ranging from \$90 to a few

hundred, where Echovita keeps a percentage of the profits.

What are the controversies?

Echovita and similar companies face fierce backlash from the public, funeral directors, and legal experts. The controversy boils down to three main issues:

- **Lack of consent:** Families are often shocked and distressed to find a stranger is hosting and profiting from their loved one's death notice, often during their deepest time of grief.
- **Legal grey areas:** In 2019, a previous website called Afterlife was hit with a \$20 million judgment by a Canadian federal court because it illegally copied full text and photos verbatim. To bypass copyright laws, Echovita only takes "tombstone data" (basic, uncopyrightable facts like dates and names) and rewrites the rest. Because facts cannot be copyrighted, their business model is currently legal, despite being widely viewed as unethical.
- **Frequent errors:** Because the summaries are mass-produced by software or fast-moving writers who don't know the deceased, details are frequently incorrect. Families have reported seeing names misspelled, locations mixed up, and living relatives mistakenly listed as dead.



What this means for your research

If you're researching a relative who passed away within the last decade, you'll probably encounter a page on Echovita or a similar site. For a genealogist, an unverified source is dangerous.

Here is how you should handle these pages to ensure your family tree remains accurate:

1. Treat it as a 'hint', not a fact

Never use these summaries as a primary, proven source in your genealogy software. Think of it as a clue that points you in a general direction. For example, if it says a relative died in a specific town in June 2021, write that down as a lead to investigate, not as a confirmed truth.

2. Hunt for the original source

Because automated rewriting tools scramble sentences, names and relationships get confused easily. You must find the original source.

- Take the name, exact death date, and town from the Echovita page.
- Plug those details into a search engine alongside the phrase 'funeral home' or 'newspaper'.
- Look for the original text written by the actual family. The original text will be far more detailed and significantly more reliable.

3. Cross-check with official records

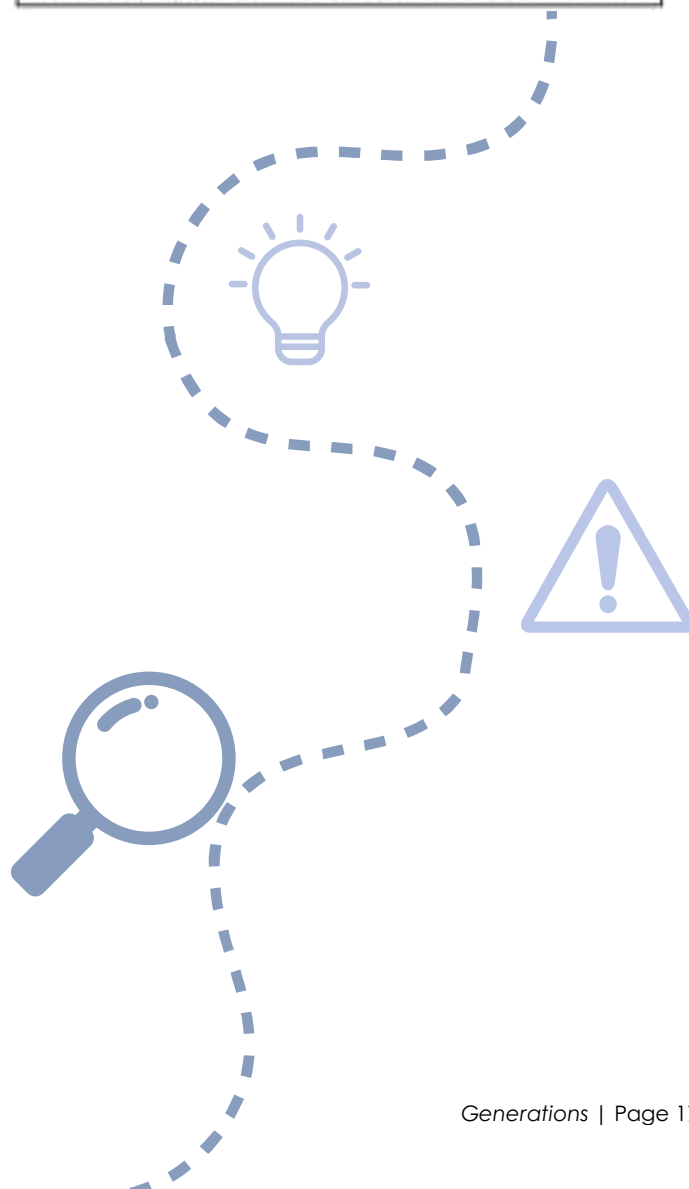
If you can't find the original online obituary, you will need to verify the facts using standard genealogical records. Look for government death indexes, cemetery records, or library archives to confirm that the dates and spellings match what the third-party site claims.

4. Understand the limitations of recent data

Genealogy requires serious critical thinking. When evaluating any modern online record, look at who published it. If the page features generic links to buy flowers and has no direct ties to a local funeral home or newspaper, proceed with extreme caution. Your family tree is only as strong as the evidence backing it up!

Further reading

- [Distasteful Yes, But Not Copyright Infringement](#) (Hugh Stephens Blog)
- [Obituary Piracy](#) (Wikipedia).
- [Canadian funeral directors warn of unauthorized obits](#) (CBC). ■



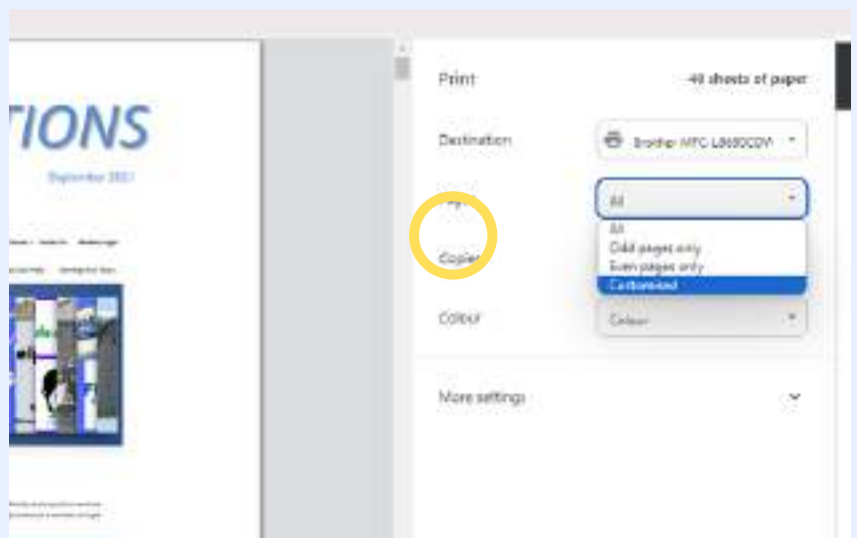
Technical How-to

If you'd like to print one of the articles, the crossword or anything else without printing the whole journal, here's how.



Step 1 - Find the print option as normal. In Google Chrome, it will look like this.

Step 2 - Find the option that lets you choose the Pages. Select 'custom' or similar. In some cases, you can simply go to step 3. This is what it looks like in Google Chrome.



Step 3 - In the pages space, enter the page numbers you'd like to print. You can enter a single number and/or a range. Separate different page ranges or single pages with a comma. Then, print.

Note: you must use the page number that the document identifies, not the number written on the page (see example).

The page shown here has Page 1 written on the page. However, the document identifies this as Page 3. Make note of the page number that the document identifies before printing.

MGS Council Information

MGS President

VACANT

Governance Officer (advisory)
Chair, Constitution & By-laws

Bob Allebone
Martha McLeod

se-winnipeg@mbgenealogy.com
constitution@mbgenealogy.com

● **Senior Advisor (advisory)**

VACANT

Secretary

Martha McLeod

secretary@mbgenealogy.com

● **Treasurer**

Gloria McNabb

treasurer@mbgenealogy.com

Director, Finance & Administration Division

Kathryn Blair-Colbert

dir-finance-admin@mbgenealogy.com

Chair, Financial Review
Chair, Fundraising
Chair, Grants & Applications
Chair, Honours & Awards
Chair, Membership & Volunteer Administration
Chair, Nominations & Elections
Chair, Office & Building Administration
Chair, Volunteer Recruitment

VACANT
Angela Fiebelkorn
Kathryn Blair-Colbert
Jessica Burleson
Martha McLeod

volunteer5795@mbgenealogy.com
grants@mbgenealogy.com
mall@mbgenealogy.com
membership@mbgenealogy.com

Bob Allebone
Doug Hutzel

se-winnipeg@mbgenealogy.com
director-3@mbgenealogy.com

VACANT

Director, Technology

Bruce Popham

dir-technology@mbgenealogy.com

Chair, Manitoba Name Index Management & Operations
Chair, Computer & Network Operations

VACANT

contact@mbgenealogy.com

VACANT

contact@mbgenealogy.com

Director, Communications Division

VACANT

contact@mbgenealogy.com

Chair, Communications
Editor, *Generations* Journal

VACANT

contact@mbgenealogy.com

VACANT

contact@mbgenealogy.com

Director, Education & Research Division

VACANT

contact@mbgenealogy.com

Chair, Cemeteries
Chair, Community Education & Outreach
Chair, Library
Chair, Programming
Chair, Projects
Chair, Research

Rick McCorrister
Bill Curtis

contact@mbgenealogy.com
outreach@mbgenealogy.com

Mavis Gray

library@mbgenealogy.com

VACANT

projects@mbgenealogy.com
research@mbgenealogy.com

Rick Brown
Kendra Gaede

South West Branch Rep

George MacKay

sw-treasurer@mbgenealogy.com

SE & Winnipeg Branch Rep

VACANT

se-winnipeg@mbgenealogy.com

Director at Large 1

Gord McBean

director-1@mbgenealogy.com

Director at Large 2

Aleta Foreman

director-2@mbgenealogy.com

Director at Large 3

Doug Hutzel

director-3@mbgenealogy.com

Positions in **bold** are MGS Executive positions

● = position is appointed rather than elected

Official Land Acknowledgement adopted by the Manitoba Genealogical Society

"The Manitoba Genealogical Society would like to honour the ancestral people of Manitoba. The land we recognize as the Province of Manitoba has been home to Indigenous Peoples for countless generations: Anishinaabeg, Cree, Anisininew, Dakota, Dene, and Inuit. Our Resource Centre is located on Treaty 1 Territory as well as the birthplace and homeland of the Metis Nation. As an organization situated in Manitoba, our services extend through Treaties, 2, 3, 4, and 5 Territories.

Many of us are descended from settlers. Those people came from elsewhere and settled here in Manitoba, perhaps generations ago. For our people to settle here, others were unsettled, and during that process, harm did occur to Indigenous Peoples.

As Manitoba genealogists, it is important to be aware of the lives, traditions, and cultures of the various Indigenous Peoples of Manitoba and to recognize and appreciate their contribution to the land. We pay our respects to all First Nations, Metis, and Inuit ancestors of this land."

NOTE: Oji-Cree was updated to Anisininew. 2024-03-18