

By John Burchill, Vice President

# EAGLE STAFF



History comes alive when someone is able to read about the past, visit the places, or examine the artifacts or images, from another time. For this reason, it is vital to record the present so that future generations can understand our cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, and economic legacies. As Pope John Paul II so eloquently stated, “the future starts today, not tomorrow.”

With this in mind I wanted to highlight the presentation of the Eagle Staff to the Winnipeg Police Service at the Manito Ahbee Festival’s Pow Wow on May 19, 2019.

An Eagle Staff is a symbol of an Indigenous nation’s identity and principles. Each Eagle Staff is one-of-a-kind to the people who created it, to the people to whom it is given, and to the time and place where it was made. It is a sacred symbol that is held in high esteem and used for ceremonial purposes.

The Manito Ahbee Festival and Pow Wow is one of the largest gatherings of its kind with Indigenous peoples from all over North America travelling to Winnipeg to celebrate Indigenous culture and heritage.

This year the Winnipeg Police Service joined in the celebration and participated in a Transference Ceremony. Chief Danny Smyth was honoured and humbled to accept the Eagle Staff from Regional Chief Kevin Hart who was accompanied by Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Grand Chief Garrison Settee and Long Plain First Nations Chief Dennis Meeches.

Elder Joseph Meconse began the process of gifting the Eagle Staff to the Winnipeg Police in 2018, reaching out to Chief Danny Smyth and members of the Service’s Indigenous Partnership Section to honour and protect present and future members

of the Service and those that have been killed, injured or passed. The Eagle Staff reflects the respect the Indigenous community has for the hard work and caring members of the Service provide to the community, and at the same time honours the Indigenous community the police are sworn to protect.

The journey that led to presentation and Transference Ceremony began long ago with the passing of tobacco and consultation and guidance from many Elders representative of many First Nations communities. This included:

1. Chief Orville Looking Horse a spiritual leader from the Sioux Tribe in South Dakota.
2. Elder Joseph Meconse of the Sayisi Dene First Nation and a past Canadian Forces Veteran and Indigenous Veterans Association member. (He passed on earlier this year).
3. Elder Mike Calder the Director of Indigenous Services at the Behavioral Health Foundation. A Winnipeg based Elder who has provided guidance and teachings to the Winnipeg Police Service for many years.
4. Elder Lisa Meeches, of the Long Plain Ojibway Nation residing in Winnipeg; an Order of Manitoba recipient and film producer.
5. Elder Eric Robinson of the Cree Nation and former member of the Manitoba Legislature from 1999-2016.

The Eagle Staff was created by members of the Blackfoot Confederacy who are renowned for their artisan work throughout North America. The symbolism incorporated within the Eagle Staff is stunning and multidimensional.



The staff is made of Lodgepole Pine which was harvested in the Rocky Mountains. It is wrapped in Otter fur. The panels used on the Eagle Staff are from the same material used in our Uniform Tunics. The panel within the crook of the staff bears the crest of the Winnipeg Police Service. The lower panel includes three yellow and three red hoof prints symbolic of warriors “on the right path”.

There are thirteen Eagle feathers that adorn the panel of the staff. They are black tipped golden eagle feathers and are highly valued. Each feather is dressed with Ermine fur. Thirteen represents the thirteen moons, as well as the thirteen provinces and territories that comprise Canada, and the thirteen municipalities that amalgamated to form the City of Winnipeg.

There is also a red and a yellow black tipped Eagle feather attached to the crook of the Eagle Staff. The yellow feather honours those members who have died or been injured in the line of duty. The red feather honours members of the Service who have passed on before us.

The Eagle Staff is also adorned with several bells to let the spirits know that our Staff is here with the Winnipeg Police Service and announces our Eagle Staff to the spirits at Grand Entries and Ceremonies. At the base of the Eagle Staff is a red medicine tie containing the four sacred medicines to protect our Staff and keep its spirit healthy.



The Eagle Staff was included in the Grand Entry and Eagle Feather Ceremony for the first sitting of the Supreme Court of Canada outside of Ottawa on September 26, 2019, when they heard two cases at the Winnipeg court house.

On October 11, 2019, the Eagle Staff was introduced into the graduation ceremony for Recruit Class #162 at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. It marked the first significant change to the ceremony since 1999 when the Winnipeg Police Colours were

introduced during the graduation of Recruit Class #128. That ceremony also took place at the Winnipeg Convention Centre.

The Colours, which represent the eight Winnipeg Police Service members who have fallen in the line of duty, were originally presented to the Winnipeg Police Service on Feb. 19, 1999, by Lieutenant Governor Yvon Dumont, the Queen's representative in Manitoba.

On both occasions the graduating class marched on the parade square accompanied the Winnipeg Police Pipe Band, a custom that had been carried over from the British system upon which the Service was founded. Including the Eagle Staff recognizes and pays tribute to the Indigenous community which lived, and lives, in the area we call Winnipeg today and who work within the ranks of the Winnipeg Police Service. By incorporating Indigenous ceremony into our police customs as members of Treaty One Territory, we add the traditions of our community protectors.



*Eagle Staff Ceremony (2002)*

*This was not the first Eagle Staff to be carried by a member of the Winnipeg Police. On September 20, 2002, a simple ceremony took place at the St. Norbert Foundation where an Eagle Staff completed and assembled by Constable Ken Anderson under the direction of elders Art Shofly and Luke Arcquette, was blessed.*

*This function was attended by aboriginal elders, leaders from the community and members of the Winnipeg Police Service including Chief Jack Ewatski. While this was an important step toward building a stronger relationship with the Aboriginal community it was not an Eagle Staff created for and transferred to the Service by the Indigenous community.*