

# Eagle Feather NEWS

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FREE

## Symbolic burn rekindles spirits

Two children reflect as they watch the boat burn away many of the communities bad memories of residential school. Former Chief John Cook encouraged young people to take advantage of opportunities to better themselves. (Photos by Carmen Pauls Orthner)



By Carmen Pauls Orthner  
For Eagle Feather News

Normally, the sight of a large boat engulfed in flames might be cause for alarm. However, on an August afternoon in Lac La Ronge Indian Band territory, that sight was met with relief, and even celebration.

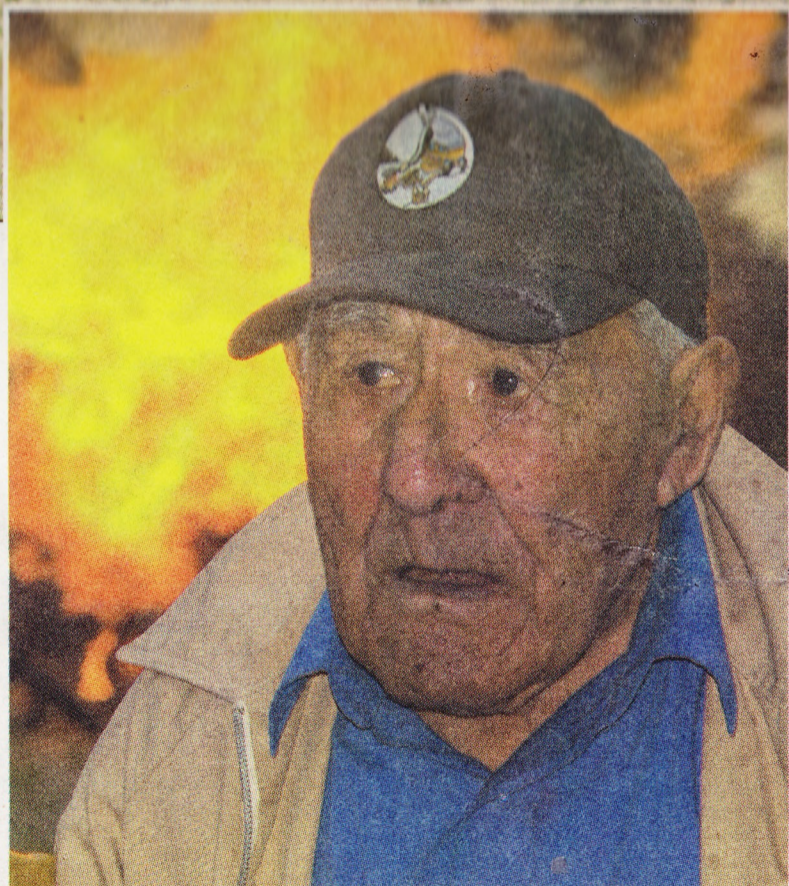
The boat was the centerpiece of a two-day healing event organized by the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, under the auspices of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Inspired by an archival photo depicting a wooden barge full of residential school students coming ashore in 1935, the band commissioned Pinehouse craftsman Eric Natomagan to build a re-construction of that boat.

On August 8, youth representing the Band's six communities paddled the boat for a short trip along the shore of Lac la Ronge, accompanied by several former residential school students. Seated in the middle of the boat was elder Elizabeth Charles of Stanley Mission, who had recognized herself as one of the passengers in the 1935 photo, and inspired the re-creation project.

"You think about their experience in being lonely, and having no power, no say. They couldn't turn back even if they cried," said Chief Tammy Cook-Searson, who sat next to the elders in the boat.

"It's really emotional, but it's good to feel, because in order for us to move forward, we need to feel, to let in what happened."

After the short trip, the boat was hauled to the rear of the band's Senator Myles Venne School, while a funeral procession of sorts filed through the town of La Ronge and out to the band's cemetery. This gave people an opportunity to remember those who died at the residential schools, before heading to the school for a lunch of moose stew and bannock.



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### METIS BLUE

This youngster showed his Métis pride at Back to Batoche held in July.

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### FACING CHALLENGERS

Métis people in Saskatchewan will be going to the polls in Sept. President Robert Doucette has five challengers.

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### SHANNEN'S DREAM

Grade 5 teacher Karen Goodon helped organize a Regina walk in support of education.

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### LETTERS FROM INSIDE

In this annual feature we hear from inmates who tell us about their mistakes and their hopes for the future.

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### GOLDEN BOY

Angus McLean Jr. struck gold at the Saskatchewan Summer Games held in Meadow Lake.

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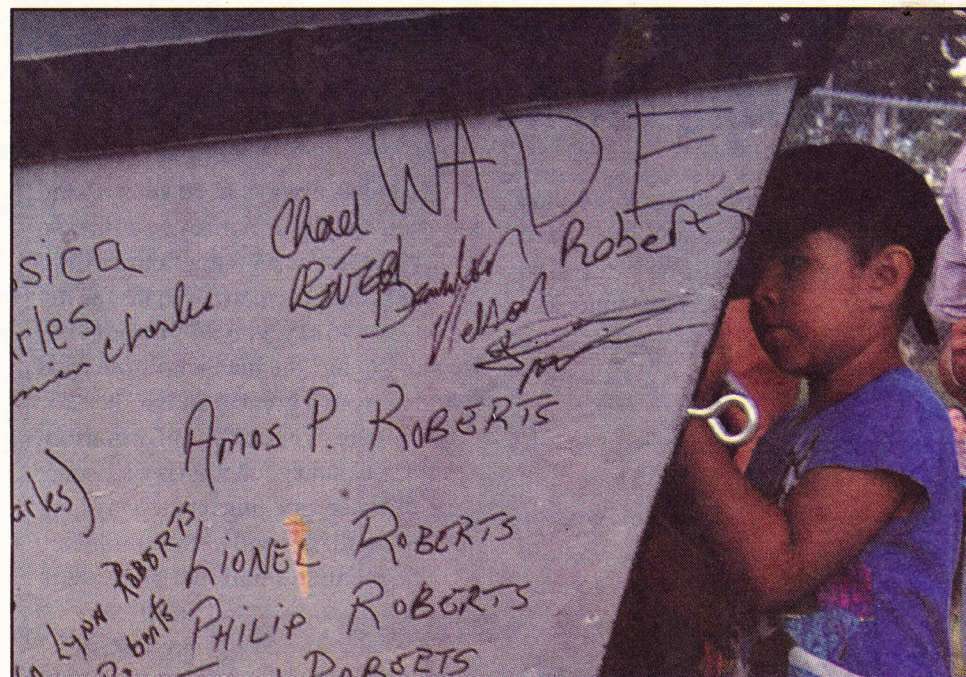
Welcome to our Justice Edition

Coming In September -  
Back to School Issue

CPMA #40027204



A wooden barge carries youngsters to residential school in this 1935 photo.  
(Photo credit Northern Saskatchewan Archives)



Youngsters were encouraged to sign the boat before it was set afire.

## Ceremony will lead to era of friendship predicts La Ronge elder

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The following day gave the elders and other residential school survivors a chance to share their own stories, before gathering in the school's outdoor rink. There, the boat was heaped with dry branches, with freshly-hewn logs set around its base. Those who wished to were invited to sign their names on the boat's painted sides.

The boat was then smudged with sweetgrass, and a medicine bundle representing former students who had died or were unable to attend was placed inside. Four handmade torches – representing the four directions – were then lit and used to start the fire.

As the smoke and flames rose higher and higher, a group of musicians chanted and drummed, while the crowd watched with solemn faces, some using smartphones or digital cameras to record the moment. The boat was nearly a charred skeleton when the first drops of rain began to fall, and within minutes, the rain's soft splats had turned into a torrential downpour.

Listening to the crackling of the fire, the thrum of the drums beating, and the voices clamoring about the rain, former band chief John Cook pondered aloud about the day's events.

Cook, a residential school survivor himself, dropped out of school at 16, but he now encourages young band

members to take advantage of the opportunities they have been given.

His successors as chief, notably the late Myles Venne and Cook's own son, Harry Cook, helped ensure that the vision of band-controlled education became a reality in each of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band's six communities.

And now, with the help of events like this one, he reflected, the painful history of the residential school won't ever be repeated.

"Now we'll work together – Indians and whites, whatever colour you are, we'll all be friends here in La Ronge."