

MECCS

A newsletter for Mother Earth's Children's Charter School to share its successful traditional and innovative programming.

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Creating a Museum Classroom

Under the direction of our Governor General's Award-winning teacher Maxine Hildebrandt, and with the help of her husband Mark Hildebrandt, the MECCS Culture Program is now in its third stage: developing a museum classroom.

We began this program by developing an outdoor classroom space known as *Oski Kîsikâw Ena Mahkochih*, or New Day for Mother Earth. Throughout the year, our staff take students there for enhanced learning experiences. Several partner schools have also brought students here for one- to three-day exchange visits. These include Wildwood School, Academy at King Edward, Suzuki Charter School, CAPE Charter School, and Connect Charter School.

The outdoor classroom features three specific areas: an all-weather tipi, a stone fire pit, and a wooden lean-to shelter. Another tipi is set farther back in the woods, an area ideal for teaching how to build shelters and brush beds. The space also includes an all-weather, heated/air-conditioned portable washroom with sink and toilet.

Our school owns 160 acres of bush land that extends down to the North Saskatchewan River, with many walking trails. We used some of this land for the

Starting the classroom's transformation.





Left: Mark Hildebrandt delivering the barn boards.



Right: Classroom walls covered with barn boards.

Below: The fully transformed classroom with displays set up.



second stage of our program, which involved setting up a third tipi in an area with both open field and wooded areas. It is here that we teach traditional Indigenous games and activities such as archery and traditional hide tanning.

For this next stage in the program, we have developed a new cultural interpretive museum classroom. Here students learn about the history of Canada and its relationships with Indigenous peoples. Topics include the fur trade, numbered treaties, the Indian Act, the legacy of residential schools, land claim agreements, models of self-government, and relationships with other cultures that played prominent roles in western Canadian history.

Students and staff also learn about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action. The 94 Calls to Action recognize the lasting, ongoing harm caused to Indigenous peoples by the legacy of residential schools and colonization. They are meant to help the healing process in two ways: by acknowledging the full, horrifying history of the residential school system and by creating systems to prevent these abuses from ever happening again. Part of the work for prevention requires teaching all Canadians the reality of how Indigenous Peoples have been treated.

The museum classroom is designed to enhance learning about these topics in Canadian history. The room features authentic barn wood and weathered corral boards on walls, with moss added for decor. This helps to promote an



Top row, left to right:

Gauntlets made by members of the Dene Nation near Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

Mukluks made by members of the Dene Tha' First Nation in Bushe River, Alberta.

Beaded crow boots made by members of the Dene Tha' First Nation.

Right: Two displays created with artifacts and antiques collected and contributed by MECCS teacher Maxine Hildebrandt and MECCS superintendent Ed Wittchen.



atmosphere for learners to be transported back in time. History is made alive with authentic historical artifacts, display models, maps, timelines and historical photographs, and fur pelts and rugs. Teachings reflect both western European and Indigenous perspectives.

This new space offers educators an ideal location for professional development sessions on

- the historical, social, economic, and political implications of treaties and agreements with First Nations
- residential schools and their legacy
- interactions between Indigenous Peoples and traders during the fur trade
- the Indian Act, including revisions
- the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the Calls to Action for Education found in its final report
- contemporary initiatives by Indigenous Peoples for community revitalization

The museum classroom also offers unique learning experiences for students. The room has displays set up around its perimeter, with a large open floor area for students to sit on the floor or in chairs arranged in a circle. Engaging in circle talks is an Indigenous pedagogical learning approach that invites students to wonder about and explore topics, and to feel free to ask questions.



Clockwise from top left:

The fur trade section of the new museum classroom.

A model log cabin made by a Métis trapper in the 1970s.

Mark Hildebrandt removes weathered boards from a barn near Ponoka.

The residential schools section of the museum classroom.

The treaties section of the museum classroom.



The museum classroom was developed in five steps: preparing and measuring the classroom, obtaining suitable wood, fitting the boards to classroom walls, finding artifacts and antiques for display, and setting up the displays.

First, Mark Hildebrandt removed the bulletin boards, whiteboards, chair rail, Smartboard, and wall-mounted projector. He then located and marked off the studs in the walls and measured the space.

Next, Mark and Maxine connected with Alana Van Der Vegte, who had barnwood available at her farm near Ponoka. They headed over to her farm this summer with a U-Haul trailer, pried off the boards, and brought them to the school. Then they removed all the nails, pressure washed the wood, and let it dry in the hot weather. They followed a similar process to purchase weathered corral boards from Gerald Spicer, who lives on a farm south of Leduc.

Once there were enough boards, Mark measured, cut and fit them onto the classroom walls. He and Maxine also travelled to a spot near Rocky Mountain House to collect fresh green moss to dry and add to the walls for decor. We appreciate the time and effort they spent gathering and preparing these supplies, especially since they did so at their own expense.





Above, left and right:

Baseball gloves from the 1920s and 1930s.



Right: Hockey skates from the 1940s.

We then began to look for antiques and artifacts we could display. Maxine checked Facebook Marketplace, Kijiji and antique stores, and connected with individuals willing to provide items.

- Jack Waller, who lives near Ardrossan, sold us an antique wood stove. Jack also donated two antique treadle sewing machines. One will be used in the museum room. The other will be used to help Maxine's students learn to sew small projects. Jack's mother also donated a few antique items to us.
- Hazel Belisle, who also lives near Ardrossan, donated a quilt topper. Her mother used to make and donate quilts for newborns at the local maternity ward. Hazel had some of the unfinished quilt toppers her mother had been working on before she passed away at age 93. She felt her mother would have wanted to donate them to a project like the museum classroom.
- Jane Bellward, who lives near Rainier, sold us two antique trunks. She also donated some old weathered farming tools that may have been used by pioneers in the region.
- Eve and Joe Kern of Medicine Hat sold us an old scythe that had been in their family for generations. They were happy to know that the scythe would be used in our outdoor education program.
- Travis Corbin of Stony Plain gave us a special price on a piece of live edge wood that will feature prominently in the classroom for our hide tanning display. He also donated several other wooden pieces. Travis previously sold us a beautiful wooden slab that we used for the sign of our outdoor classroom.
- Ed and Vera Wittchen of Spruce Grove donated handmade Indigenous items including moccasins, mukluks, crow boots, gauntlets and mitts, which they acquired when Ed, our superintendent, was starting his teaching career in northern Alberta, and a miniature log cabin model made by a trapper in Fort Vermilion over 50 years ago. Ed also shared some treasured family antiques, such as a pair of hockey skates his father had used in the 1930s and 1940s, and a shoemaker's anvil that his grandfather had used in his shop.
- Brian Rice of Gibbons visited MECCS this spring as a guest instructor. He shared outdoor education skills with our students, including primitive fire-making methods and making brush beds. He gifted Maxine with a doll made from cattail reeds, a wooden spoon he carved and a hand-drill board he crafted to use as a fire-starter. He also shared with her two antique Inuit dolls. These items will all be on display.



Clockwise from top left:

Antique tools and farming implements.

Antique steamer trunks.

A shoemaker's anvil that was used in a shoemaker's shop in Hanna in the 1930s and 1940s.

An antique wood stove.

We have now arranged these items in the new museum classroom. The inside wall immediately to the left of the door features early life in Indigenous communities in North America, or Turtle Island.

Moving in a clockwise direction, the adjacent wall features artifacts that relate to the fur trade era.

Farther down the wall and into the back left corner there are artifacts connected to the numbered treaties, with emphasis on Treaty 6.

The back wall on the right side will include information about the Indian Act. The back right corner will feature information about the Indian Residential School System, including residential, vocational and day schools.

Finally, the wall to the right of the doorway will feature teachings about Truth and Reconciliation and Indigenous cultural revitalization.

We will be ready to host visitors in the museum classroom starting January 2024. We especially welcome students and educators to enjoy this new learning environment. If you would like to arrange a visit, please get in touch with Maxine Hildebrandt. She can be reached at mhildebrandt@meccs.org or 780-993-5983.