

February 2025 Speaker, Darin Wybenga

Land Acknowledgements

Darin Wybenga, Culture Manager of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN) and previously its traditional knowledge and land use coordinator and before that a history and geography teacher and vice-principal, began his land acknowledgement talk on Zoom with a personal reference: “I’m speaking to you from Hagersville near Hamilton where we are now. Our original site at the Credit River 15 miles west of Toronto is now the Mississauga Golf and Country Club.”

Toronto, including North York, is on territory lived on in succession by three Indigenous groups – Huron Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and the Mississaugas of the Credit, “still there, the last man standing.” All told, the Mississaugas of the Credit’s territory, land and waterways, encompasses 4 million acres from Toronto to Lake Erie.

“Land acknowledgements were one of the 94 recommendations of the 2008 Truth and Reconciliation Committee to help reconcile settlers [non-Indigenous] and First Nation peoples. But when I started 9 years ago at MFCN there hadn’t been many; now I get 2 to 3 requests a week – from corporations, municipalities, organizations, schools and more – for guidance in writing one.” He gave Trent University’s definition: “Land acknowledgements recognize the Indigenous stewards of a specific territory through ancestors and community.” He added complimentarily, “Your group has done this.”

He went on: “Land acknowledgements are a real challenge to write. They require serious reflection. They should be done for the right motives, not because it’s the flavour of the week, the month, the year. They must be sincere.” There is a “protocol,” he explained. “Acknowledge the treaty holder first, then the traditional territory holder.” Traditional territory is land that has been used for all kinds of traditional purposes. Treaty territory refers to an area defined through historic or modern treaty negotiations. Then current Indigenous communities –First Nations, Inuk, Métis –on the land should be acknowledged. Finally, there should be an expression of good will. It’s not much of an acknowledgement if you don’t specify what you’re going to do such as strive to advance justice for First Nations including the settlement of land claims; call for Indigenous content in schools; seek better health and wellness for *all* on the land.”

Darin said the elements of a good land acknowledgement are: (1) Historical research. “There’s lots online and also contact the First Nation involved.” (2) Don’t leave anyone out. As an example, Darin cited the 2021 Grey Cup held in Hamilton at which the Mississaugas of the Credit were left out of the land acknowledgement although Hamilton is on their traditional territory. There was no public apology. (3) Be precise about the extent of the area involved. (4) “Above all, be sincere. We can tell if you’re not. Nothing is worse than insincerity. We’re tired of lip service. Insincerity victimizes us again.”

“When speaking do your best to pronounce correctly. We Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation aren’t fussy about pronunciation; we give top marks for making an effort.”

As background reading, he suggested *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty Making in Canada* by J.R. Miller. Published by University of Toronto Press in 2009. The book is in the Toronto Public Library system. [Compact, contract, covenant : Aboriginal treaty-making in Canada : Miller, J. R. \(James Rodger\), 1943- : Book, Regular Print Book : Toronto Public Library](#)

Susan Goldenberg