

What's Behind Your Land Acknowledgement?

by Wendie Wilson, Executive Staff Officer, BIPOC Advocacy and Engagement

Land acknowledgements are something I've been thinking about a lot lately. In particular, the impact they have, if any impact at all. Most land acknowledgements I've observed have been at the top of a meeting or an event and are usually short-lived and read verbatim. Most offer recognition that we are on ancestral and unceded territory, while acknowledging this truth, there is often no acknowledgement of reconciliation. How do we reconcile this obvious truth or create the awareness that there needs to be acknowledgement of both truth and reconciliation?

The most authentic and meaningful land acknowledgments I've observed have positioned the deliverer within the message. In moving forward, I have felt the need to position myself somewhere within my acknowledgement to feel some sense of responsibility to act or at the very least reflect.

My land acknowledgement is as follows:

Respectively, I would like to acknowledge that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq (L'nu) People. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq (L'nu) and Wolastoqiyik Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725.

This is the truth part of my land acknowledgement, but I would also like to acknowledge the reconciliation piece as well. Now that the obvious truth has been stated and acknowledged, that being that we are on unceded territory—stolen land. What do we do about it? How do we make this right? I do not have a single answer, solution, or remedy to adequately respond to all the harms done to Indigenous Peoples since colonization, but I think that it is important to not just mention the truth about this being stolen land, but to also mention the reality of us (as a collective) not doing enough if anything to remedy this truth. At the very least, we can begin creating awareness about the lack of attention brought to this issue of reconciliation.

As a person of African descent, I would like to offer this land recognition in solidarity with the Indigenous People of Turtle Island in the efforts and deliberate intentions toward true and meaningful reconciliation and actionable decolonization.

Also with respect, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and thank my ancestors. Many African Nova Scotians came to this province through enslavement or through fleeing enslavement and continue to experience all manner of structural, systematic, and individual discriminations and inequities here on Turtle Island.

We have settled in over 50 Black communities throughout Mi'kma'ki and were fortunate to have had the Indigenous People of this land help us navigate this new place when we first arrived over 400 years ago. African Nova Scotians call this place home. Our last names

are used as a map to connect us to the communities our families are from. Many of our ancestors are buried here and many more rest in places unknown to us. Not knowing the specific place my ancestors were born has given me cause to locate, bring to life, and grow the rich and vibrant culture that my ancestors have practiced from time immemorial. I ask that the ancestors be with us today as we navigate our way through our time together in this place with authenticity.

This acknowledgement is by no means perfect. As I deliver my land acknowledgement, I will always take the opportunity to pause to reflect and offer my sentiments in the moment to the people I am engaging. This is a passage I will strive to improve. It is a passage that I hope will evolve as I gain more knowledge, learn from those who know more than me and most importantly stand to be corrected. I can't help but think of a quote by Maya Angelou: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better".

Lastly, as "allies" let us make an effort to be a voice of advocacy in every room where first voices are absent and also make room to amplify those voices that are present.