

BACKGROUND on QUEBEC BRIDGE

On August 29, 2007 the community of Kahnawake celebrated the 100th anniversary of the collapse of the Quebec Bridge, a tragic event that took the lives of seventy-five (75) men; twenty-five (25) Canadians, seventeen (17) Americans and thirty-three (33) Mohawks from Kahnawake.

Through Education, Commemoration and Celebration, Kahnawake celebrated this tragic yet historic event in a positive way as a testament to the resiliency of the Kanienkeha'ka Nation; as an honor to the men who died and as a tribute to their landmark contribution to the industry of ironwork.

A ceremony took place at a Memorial site chosen by the community. A 40ft replica of the steel structure that fell had been erected and descendant family members planted 36 tree markers commemorating the thirty-three (33) men that died and the three (3) men that survived. The oldest Kahnawake ironworkers unveiled a monument displaying the names of the fallen with a memorable inscription in Kanienke'ha. At 5:36pm church bells in Montreal and in Quebec rang for 5 minutes as a remembrance to all the men who died that day.

This ceremony and other activities was the result of a 2 year community grass roots movement led by the Quebec Bridge 100th Anniversary Committee to raise awareness about the disaster, to commemorate the men with a living memorial and to celebrate the resiliency of the Mohawk people. The Quebec Bridge Anniversary Committee has been congratulated for the tremendous success and positive impacts of this major undertaking and is still experiencing the many ramifications and aftereffects. Every child, adolescent and adult were knowledgeable about the Quebec Bridge and recognize the memorial as a place of honor.

The memorial was based on input from the community. It is a living memorial that is culturally representative of Kahnawakeronnon.

It is more than a memorial.

It is the story about the building of the Quebec Bridge, about the travelling and the life away from the community, the grave concerns and questions about the safety of the Bridge, about that fateful day of August 29, 1907, about the loss of life, the days of mourning, the devastation felt by the community, the after effects on the families.

It is a story about who we are as Mohawk people, our history, and our connection to our ancestors. It is a story about our connection to each other, our Elders, our women, our children, the importance of families. Many Kahnawakeronnon were extremely honored to find out that they were related to these men and began to research their own stories within their families.

Some were joyous, some were heartbreaking but all acknowledged comfort and pride in the ties to their descendants.

It is a story about our resiliency in the face of tragedy, to accept our challenges, work with courage and move forward.

It is a story about healing and coming to terms with the loss of our ancestors who had to attend residential school because of this tragic event.

It is a story about the industry of ironwork, our primary trade and our contributions to the world of construction throughout the world. Our men have built the many bridges and structures that grace the skylines of many Canadian and United States cities.

It is a story about our external relations with other people. In speaking of this tragic event in Montreal and Quebec, descendants of other men who died related their stories that had been passed down through the generations. One story was heart wrenching yet really demonstrated the kindness of our people. A pregnant woman with two small children, who lost her husband that day, was cared for by the people of Kahnawake till her family came for her from Connecticut. Her family came to Kahnawake this August 29th 2007 to personally thank the community.

It mobilized the community to become active and vocal in their support of this memorial. Many Kahnawakeronon voluntarily gave their time and/or financial contributions to ensure the realization of this project.

The Quebec Bridge Committee is now continuing the momentum through a Mohawk Trade Council to bridge Onkwehonwe people to new alliances and partnership for economic prosperity.

It is an opportunity for bridging with other governments, communities and organizations to network and develop relationships. It is about dialoguing with our outside relations to resolve problems through trade.

It is an opportunity for bridging with other First Nations in Turtle Island. It is about dialoguing with ourselves and each other to resolve problems.

It is an opportunity to use the Quebec Bridge memorial as a trademark, a symbol of our attitude to bridging and dialogue.

It is an opportunity for developing tourism that will educate mainstream society about who we are; our resiliency; our connections to our ancestors; our connection to the Earth and each other; stories about our families and values.

It is an opportunity to build on the memorial and develop the memorial site area as a natural theatre for education.

It is an opportunity for all artists; our writers, film makers, musicians, painters, bead workers, singers etc. to tell our story and our history using their individual medium.

The Quebec Bridge 100th Anniversary Committee plans to continue fundraising to complete other projects, a docudrama about the disaster from the descendants' perspective; a permanent exhibit to honor the industry of ironwork; a fictional play in French to educate non native communities about the Mohawk people; an educational booklet and a website. These projects will complement the industry of ironwork, the history of the Mohawks and most importantly the resiliency of the Mohawk People.

Memorial Design

In tribute to the 100th Anniversary of the collapse of the Quebec Bridge a living memorial, designed by community now exists in Kahnawake on the bike path near the Elders' Lodge.

The memorial honors the 33 men who died that fateful day, August 29th 1907; the 3 men who survived; the industry of ironwork and the resiliency of the community to move forward. It is strategically located on a bike path that borders the St. Lawrence River. This is one of the few areas in the community where you can see the St. Lawrence River unobstructed by the St. Lawrence Seaway where many of the men's bodies still remain.

The memorial consists of a four sided granite monument that lists the names and depicts the faces of all the men. An eagle atop the monument completes this sculptor. The eagle sacred to the Kaniekehaka people, protects the people as it continuously scans the airways to ensure no predator will bring harm. Continuing your walk on the stoneway path will lead you to a 40ft. steel replica of the bridge that was completed before it fell, authentic to 1907. The highest part of the bridge will extend to a flag pole with a Kahstowa on top of the flagpole.

As you continue, you will see a granite storyboard that complements the shape of the steel bridge replica. On one side of the storyboard is a logo representation of the bridge made by native artist Peter Montour honoring the 33 men. The second side will depict the Mohawk clans with an inscription in Mohawk, English and French. The memorial area will be encompassed by a circle pattern of 33 pyramidal oak trees. There will be 18 trees on one side facing the road, symbolizing the men whose bodies were recovered and brought home and 15 trees on the side facing the river, symbolizing the men whose bodies were never recovered and are still in the river.

Plaques with each man's picture and their family particulars will be placed inside the perimeter surrounding the granite storyboard. It includes the 3 men who survived the fall with their plaques at the entrance of the memorial path.

The path continues on to connect with the bike path, and along this section of the path are two granite benches.