

June 8th, 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Re: Alexander Wood Statue

We acknowledge the land that we are on in The Church-Wellesley Village is the Traditional Territory of the Mississauga of the New Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Metis People. This land is also the place of the struggle for 2SLGBTQ+ rights. We must continue to fight for the queer community while bringing Indigenous issues to the forefront. This is a time of awakening and we are answering the call that has long been there but has until this time been largely ignored.

In May 2005, a bronze statue was erected in The Village of Alexander Wood. Information has come to light that Alexander Wood spent years as the Treasurer and was a founding board member for the “Society for Converting and Civilizing the Indians and Propagating the Gospel Among Destitute Settlers in Upper Canada”.

Facing problems of the past and the truth of what we as settlers have done is difficult. In order to begin to heal we have to stand in the truth and feel uncomfortable. This is where we are today – with a statue in The Church-Wellesley Village of Alexander Wood, who was a founding board member and for many years, the Treasurer of the “Society for Converting and Civilizing the Indians and Propagating the Gospel Among Destitute Settlers in Upper Canada”.

The Society’s actions resulted in the ‘St. John’s Missionary to the Ojibway 1832’ which in 1873 became Shingwauk Industrial Home, a large 2-story wooden structure in Sault Saint Marie, later the Shingwauk Residential School. These are early examples of the residential school system whose purpose was to stop Indigenous people from hunting and gathering, forcing them to take on more European conditions. These actions contributed to the cultural genocide of Indigenous People in Canada. The school was closed in 1978.

This is not a myth. This part of The Toronto Public Library Archives and is easily accessible information. It is fact and it is the record. We, as a BIA need to look long and hard at ourselves as we examine our next steps and how we got to this place. With the finding of 215 Indigenous children in unmarked graves on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, Indigenous issues are rightly being amplified and we are finally waking up.

The reality we’re waking up to is a hard truth about how the actions of Alexander Wood contributed to the genocide of Indigenous People in Canada.

Regarding Alexander Wood, we recognize the Indigenous issue as being on the forefront. There is also the issue of this “Society” targeting the “destitute”. With many in the 2SLGBTQ+ community suffering from poverty and homelessness finding refuge in The Village this needs to be examined. As the community, we need to support and not stigmatize people based on their income.

We would also like to acknowledge the problem of the myth of Alexander Wood using his position of power to sexually assault soldiers. This is especially relevant at a time when sexual assault and harassment is coming to light in Canada’s military.

Though the current staff and Board of Management were not in place at the time of the installation of the statue, we hold ourselves accountable for what happens next.

June is Pride Month and it is also National Indigenous History Month. Though we as a BIA were not having this conversation 16 years ago, Indigenous people were. We are here now and will do better.

How will we be accountable?

- 1) The Church-Wellesley Village BIA is calling for removal of the Alexander Wood statue [see attached letter]
- 2) The Church-Wellesley Village BIA Board commits to addressing racism in The Village by
 - a) The full Board receiving the City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Training to be completed by December 2021
 - b) The full Board to receive Indigenous teachings around the history of Anti-Indigenous racism and the treatment of Indigenous Peoples in residential schools in Canada to be completed by February 2022
- 3) Continue to uncover the truth of this situation and share our findings with the community (ongoing)
- 4) Publicly acknowledge the damage done to Indigenous culture and apologize for putting this monument in place
- 5) Use the space for a project that is 2 Spirit-advised with the cost shared by the Church-Wellesley Village BIA and The City of Toronto and begin the planning stages by October 2021
- 6) Encourage other BIAs, towns, and cities across Canada to question what is in their community and to learn about those stories in light of the truth of Canada's history
- 7) Create sexual assault and bystander intervention awareness literature to distribute and post publicly this summer

Can we celebrate queer history without further contributing to the trauma of Indigenous People? We believe we can and we know that we will.

For media requests please contact office@churchwellesleyvillage.ca or call 416-321-1351