

The whole Canada 150 celebration is difficult for First Nations, Métis and Inuit

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National Aboriginal Day, Aboriginal History Month, Canada Day and Canada 150 are upon us. Guelph is immersed in all of these events.

Guelph Museums is making a great effort to showcase First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture as part of their programming this year.

The city has fully embraced an annual National Aboriginal Day celebration at city hall.

But the whole Canada 150 celebration is difficult for First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Our nations existed long before the British North America Act of 1867. Someone mocked Canada 150 with the phrase “Kanata 15,000.” The word Canada comes from Kanata, a Haudenosaunee word, and first peoples have been on Turtle Island for well over 15,000 years.

Recent discoveries in archaeology continue to push back the date of earliest occupation, consistent with First Nations and Inuit traditional knowledge. As is now well known, history since 1867 was bad news for First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Residential schools, forced adoptions of the sixties scoop, starvation policy of John A. MacDonald, repression of the Métis resistance, assimilation — everyone is at least vaguely aware of these now. Yet First Nations, Métis and Inuit made remarkable sacrifices for Canada. First Nations people, Métis and Inuit volunteered in military defense of C proportion to our small population numbers.

Reconciliation is one of the official themes of Canada 150. Vancouver even calls it Canada 150+ — a small nod to the additional 15,000+ years of history.

Canada 150 has provided a platform to raise awareness about the suppressed and untold history of Kanata.

Anishinabe comedian Ryan McMahan is having some fun with the contradictions of Canada 150 and reconciliation. “I hear Tim Hortons may name a doughnut after [reconciliation],” he jokes. What flavour would a reconciliation donut be?

No one wants to rain on the parade... well maybe some do. But most First Nations people, Métis and Inuit just want to be part of the parade and have Canada acknowledge that Canada 150+ should be a learning event too. And hope that the second 150 years will see true reconciliation and closing the gap in health, education and prosperity for First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

Enjoy your reconciliation donuts and Canada Day fireworks!

Paul Smith, Guelph