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## DEER LODGE, JAMES MCKAY AND BEAR

*an incredible story*

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**As told by Michelle Cherepak, Manager of Care, Deer Lodge Centre**

Deer Lodge Center has a very unique relationship with this Province and the Indigenous people of Manitoba, especially the Metis. Let me tell you the story.

### Deer Lodge Centre

Most of you are familiar with Deer Lodge's current incarnation. Deer Lodge Centre has a long and proud history of providing compassionate care for over a hundred years. We are the largest rehabilitation and long term care facility in Manitoba, with a bed capacity of 418.

In 1916, Deer Lodge was established as a military convalescent hospital for returning WWI soldiers. Today, Veterans continue being served along with a large population of clients, patients and residents. Our services include long term care, chronic care, rehabilitation services and a variety of outpatient clinics that address broad inpatient and community needs.

Our motto, "Making Lives Better" reflects this history and guides our path forward in developing groundbreaking programs to support specialized dementia and bariatric care.

## **The Beginning of a New Journey**

I began a new job at DLC in February of this year as a Manager of Care and one of my portfolios is Spiritual Health. The first project I was asked to undertake was to make the Spirit Room at Deer Lodge Center more culturally accessible for Indigenous residents and families. The Spirit Room is a room that has specialized ventilation and can be used for smudging. This was our opening question and we began this work by pulling together a group of people from DLC and staff from WRHA Indigenous Health. We thought that engaging an Indigenous artist and an elder to assist us on our journey was the next step.

The artist Gayle Sinclair has completed some beautiful art pieces that will be displayed throughout the building. In further discussions the committee decided to do a few other things; redecorate this dedicated space to accommodate Indigenous Ceremonies; celebrate National Aboriginal Day with culturally significant foods; and honor the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation with education and reflection activities.

It was important for both our artist, Gayle Sinclair and elder Wa Wa Tei Ikwe, also known as Louise McKay to meet. On the day they both arrived at Deer Lodge Centre to meet, elder Wa Wa Tei Ikwe stepped off the elevator and as we turned the corner to the Spirit Room, she saw Bear and asked the question that has brought us to today - Why do you have a bear in a cage?

On the second floor of Deer Lodge Centre, between the entrance to the Worship Centre and Chad's Bar, sits a life size taxidermized Bear in a cage with a plaque. Most people would walk by Bear and not even pay attention to it. In fact, until that day, I cannot say that I had paid any attention to it.

And on that note, our journey began. . . we have had several meetings where we have discussed the significance and the history of Bear at Deer Lodge and I would like to share that history with you. It is a story that contains the parallels with Manitoba's history and the history of the Indigenous people on this land.

## **The Honorable James McKay aka Big Jimmy**

The story of Bear begins with the story of James McKay. He was the first person that built a home at Deer Lodge in the 1850's. Interestingly, he is also the ancestor of Wa Wa Tei Ikwe, the elder that we had connected with to assist us with our work.

Wa Wa Tei Ikwe calls James, Big Jimmy which is a name we've come across in some of the literature – and in his culture, then as today, this is fitting because many Metis people are better known by their nicknames. Big Jimmy was a very large and tall man, so this name suited him well.

Big Jimmy was a quintessential Manitoban and his many significant contributions are honored with a Manitoba Heritage Council plaque on Deer Lodge Centre grounds.

He was a Métis politician, interpreter, guide, fur trader, Hudson's Bay Company clerk and postmaster.

He was fluent in various Indigenous languages including English, French, Ojibwe, Cree and Sioux. From what we know today about Metis culture and languages, we can be confident that Big Jimmy would also have spoken his traditional language of Michif.

He was born at Edmonton House, also known as Fort Edmonton, a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) trading post in what is now central Alberta, in 1828. He was the namesake oldest son of a Scottish boat-brigade guide who worked for the HBC, and Métis mother Marguerite Gladu.

With extensive knowledge of the prairies, Big Jimmy excelled as a frontier interpreter and guide.

As a wilderness guide and adventurer, Big Jimmy prided himself on getting people to their destinations on time regardless of weather or conditions. Once, while guiding HBC governor Sir George Simpson, he waded through streams and muskegs with Simpson seated on his shoulders.

The Earl of Southesk, who visited the HBC's territories in 1859, described Big Jimmy as hardy, active and a wonderful horseman .He stated: "Whether as a guide or hunter, he was universally reckoned one of their best men."

Big Jimmy in 1859 married Margaret Rowand, third daughter of John Rowand, who was the HBC's chief factor from 1826 to 1854. This union brought him wealth and social status. After their marriage, they built a grand home called Deer Lodge on these grounds and together raised their family of six children, including three sons, James, John Angus and John Henry, as well as daughters Jane and Marie, and an adopted daughter, Augusta.

In 1860, he began his own business, transporting freight and mail and trading furs. Besides operating a stagecoach from Winnipeg to Edmonton, he outfitted and guided hunters and travelers, including missionary and leisure excursions and high-profile scientific expeditions. It was during this time that Deer Lodge became a meeting place for First Nations, Métis and newcomers from Ontario. His career linked the old fur-trading, buffalo-hunting West to the new business order of farmers, merchants, ranchers and organized government. Imagine that 150 years ago this land we stand on was a place where Indigenous, Metis and settlers met, traded and began relationships. A place where we stand again to reconcile and begin relationship again.

Due to his proficiency with language and culture between Indigenous and settler communities, he helped negotiate Treaties 1, 2 and 3 in the early 1870s. As a treaty commissioner for Treaties 5 and 6, he added provisions to help Indigenous peoples with medical supplies, the medicine chest referred to in Treaty 6. Big Jimmy's life and career characterized bridging cultures, peoples and eras.

James McKay took a fair and open-minded approach and earned a reputation for good judgment. When Manitoba's first government was formed in January 1871, James McKay was appointed to the legislative council. McKay's colleagues elected him council speaker, and he served in that position from 1871 to 1874. For the

following four years, he was minister of agriculture. During this time, he balanced the need to advance agriculture and encourage immigration, while also addressing issues that the Métis and First Nations people faced, such as the disappearance of the buffalo and resulting starvation and displacement.

Conservation was important to James and In 1877, he became president of the Winnipeg Game Club, determined to preserve game in the province.

Some of his bison are ancestors to those that live at the Assiniboine Park Zoo.

Around the 1860s, McKay sold some of his bison (which were cross-bred with cattle) to Samuel Bedson, warden of Manitoba's Stony Mountain Penitentiary. These bison moved through various hands until they were donated to the Dominion government, which, in turn, donated four of the bison to the City of Winnipeg. These bison made their home at the Assiniboine Park Zoo in 1904 and are the ancestors of today's herd across the river from us.

Big Jimmy died at age 52 in his Deer Lodge on December 2, 1879 after a few years of ill health. His wife predeceased him in February of that same year. Their home, built here on the grounds of Deer Lodge Centre then became a country inn and later, in 1916 began its current incarnation as a Veteran's Hospital.

### **Bear's Story**

Back to Bear – how Bear came to be with Big Jimmy is murky. Given his interest in conservation, he may have come across an orphan cub. There are other accounts that he wrestled the bear to save some fellow travelers and once subdued, returned Bear to Deer Lodge. He did keep other animals, described in some places as a menagerie including the herd of bison we spoke of earlier. By several accounts, Bear was very tame and accustomed to people.

After Big Jimmy and his wife, Margaret died in 1879, their home at Deer Lodge stood vacant until it was bought by Homer A. "Chad" Chadwick and converted into a roadside inn. The bear and a menagerie of other animals formerly kept by McKay, were included in the purchase price. Many accounts of Bear from this time refer to him as Chad's Bear.

With Deer Lodge now being turned into a hotel and bar, Bear was now put on display and became a source of amusement to visitors to the hotel.

According to an account in the Winnipeg Tribune, Chad's Bear "used to drink ginger ale, beer, or any other bottled beverage with unfailing evidences of thirstiness."

It was said that he would drink anything offered to him and little children would be angelic in behaviour all week if promised (should they be good) a trip on the weekend to 'Chad's Place,' and a bottle of pop to give to the bear.

The bear performed other stunts for visitors and it "was ready to wrestle all comers and many a match delighted the children. One story, had the bear attending a New Year's Eve party in the Deer Lodge Hotels' ballroom and mingled with the dancers. It was by all accounts, a very unnatural life for a bear.

One natural task performed by the bear was bringing news to Winnipeggers of the impending arrival of spring. As with other members of his species living in the wild, Bear hibernated through the winter months. His eventual arousal from his winter slumber was closely monitored by Chad for the benefit of local newspapers.

A March 7, 1906, report in the Tribune, noted that the bear woke up from his hibernation and left his den at 11:15 a.m. The bear had gone into his retreat on November 28 to doze through the winter.

A year later, in February 1907 there was a great fire that broke out at Deer Lodge, destroying the inn and bar. Among those witnessing the fire that destroyed the Deer Lodge on February 10, 1907, was Bear. According to a February 11, 1907, Manitoba Free Press article, Bear was viewing the fire from the safety of "a lot in the rear" of the hotel. Being aware of Manitoba's chilly winters, it is likely that Bear was roused by the ruckus of the fire and not awoken from hibernation.

Only two months after a fire destroyed Deer Lodge the life of the famous bear, "which amused thousands at Deer Lodge for years," came to a sad and undignified end on April 9, 1907.

The Manitoba Free Press reported that a violent struggle had occurred between Bear and a number of men who tried to prevent him from harming animals at the Deer Lodge zoo. He had been seen trying to get into the pens to attack an old buffalo bull and a moose. His early rouse from hibernation must have left Bear very hungry.

Some local residents initiated a plan to recapture the bear involving the deployment of a rope. After much struggle and difficulty, they lassoed the bear and looped the rope around the tree. Once he was finally tied to the tree, he struggled so vigorously that the rope tightened around his neck and Bear strangled to death. Why this wasn't the end to Bear's already sad story, we'll never know. To add more insult to injury, after he was killed, he was stuffed and displayed at the rebuilt Deer Lodge. He was mounted with a drink bottle placed between his paws.

When the rebuilt Deer Lodge Hotel opened its doors on October 29, 1907, the stuffed bear was on hand to greet dignitaries making speeches during the opening ceremony. Bear was displayed at the Hotel until it became a convalescent home for Veteran's returning from the First World War in 1916. A replica bear remains here at DLC. We have removed the plaque earlier this year as it was not a dignified representation of the bear.

In many indigenous traditions, the concepts of respect and sharing that form the way of life are built around the seven natural laws, or sacred teachings. Each teaching honors one of the basic virtues intrinsic to a full and healthy life. Each law is embodied by an animal to underscore the point that all actions and decisions made by man are manifest on a physical plane. The animal world teaches us how to live close to the earth; the connection that has been established between the animal world and that of man has instilled a respect for all life in those who follow the traditional way.



Traditional teachings mention that we are not the ones who choose a Spirit animal but rather a Spirit animal chooses us. In line with that teaching and in spite of all the trials and tribulations he went through, Bear chose to be with Deer Lodge throughout the last 150 years. The replica reminds us that throughout all those years Bear has been with us no matter what happened to him or to us.

Another teaching from Bear is courage and the ability to face danger, fear, or changes in its life with confidence and bravery. The Bear provides many lessons in the way it lives, though gentle by nature, the ferociousness of a mother Bear when one of her cubs is approached is the true definition of courage. To have the mental and moral strength to overcome fears that prevent us from living our true spirit as human beings is a great challenge that must be met with the same vigor and intensity as a mother Bear protecting her cub. Living of the heart and living of the spirit is difficult, but Bear shows us how to face any danger to achieve these goals.

The courage of the bear is similar to the courage and bravery demonstrated by the veterans that Deer Lodge was initially created to serve. This courage and bravery continues to be exemplified by the staff that provide excellence in care to our residents and clients, especially during our challenging COVID experiences in the last two years.

We don't know why Bear has been with us for the last 150 years, but we are happy and grateful that he chose to stay. We say Thank you, Meegwetch, Ekosi and Marsi to him for being with us, even when we did not acknowledge him. We welcome him home today with this Pipe Ceremony. We will make him a Spirit plate and serve our guests with fish and berries that Bear would have eaten if he was with us in life. We will be playing fiddle music and jig for him, something he must have witnessed many times when he was with Big Jimmy.

Welcome home Mak'wa!

A'ho!



On October 29, 2021 a pipe ceremony was held at Deer Lodge Centre to recognize and acknowledge the disrespect displayed towards Bear and steps were taken to go forward together in a new way.

We moved Bear down from the second floor so that he could be placed in a position of respect and protection with the clients behind him.

This is a first step in our reconciliation journey and we humbly look forward to our path, ensuring that at all times we focus on being kind and good to all our relatives.

