

MHR Connections

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THE MANITOBA
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION



LA COMMISSION DES
DROITS DE LA PERSONNE
DU MANITOBA

Visit our Website www.gov.mb.ca/hrc
Check out our Women's Rights Quiz
coming in March - see page 2

Black History Month

Every year Canadians take part in activities commemorating Black History Month. At this time we celebrate the achievements and contributions of Black Canadians throughout our history. It is also a time to learn about their experiences in Canadian society today.

The Parliament of Canada recognized February as Black History Month in 1995. The first African Canadian woman MP, Jean Augustine introduced a motion to make February, Black History month acknowledging the important contributions of Black Canadians to the settlement, growth and development of Canada.

This recognition was long overdue. People of African descent are conspicuously absent from our history books.

For example, Mary Ann Shadd arrived in Canada at the time of the Underground Railroad. She would go on to become the first woman in Canada to become a publisher, publishing the Provincial Freeman. She was a woman of many talents. She earned her law degree at the end of the American Civil War and worked as a lawyer, teacher, lecturer, suffragette and, of course, publisher.



Mary Ann Shadd
(1823-1893)



Portia White (1911-1968)

Portia White, on the other hand, made her name through entertaining. In her younger years, she sang at her father's Baptist Church in Halifax. Later she taught in rural Black schools in Halifax County to support her musical aspirations. Eventually she gained international attention and performed throughout the world including a command performance before Queen Elizabeth II.

One of the most intriguing figures in Canadian history is Mathieu Da Costa. He was a navigator and interpreter of African descent who probably travelled to Canada in the late 1500's and early 1600's. His interpreting skills were instrumental in helping the early French explorers and the Mi'kmaq people bridge cultural and linguistic barriers.

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The Rights Connection

By Janet Baldwin - Chairperson

"Tolerance is always Age-Appropriate"

The Supreme Court of Canada recently released its decision in the case of *Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36*. At issue was whether the School Board had acted properly in refusing to approve three books featuring children with gay parents for use in kindergarten and grade one classes as supplementary resources. Trustees had been concerned that the use of the books would offend the religious beliefs of some parents and residents in the district.

The Court held that the Board's decision was unreasonable. Chief Justice McLaughlin, writing for the majority of the court, said that a school board must promote respect and tolerance for all whom it represents and serves. "The last word – indeed the only word that counts – is the word of the legislature and the curriculum. It stresses tolerance and inclusion, and places high importance on discussion and understanding of all family groups. The Board's rejection of these values must be seen as serious."

Chief Justice McLaughlin dismissed the suggestion that the books might cause children to ask their parents difficult questions inappropriate for their early grade level. She noted that the presence of children of same-sex parented families in those grades and the broader world would already raise any questions the books might elicit. "The only additional message of the materials appears to be the message of tolerance. Tolerance is always age-appropriate."

In Manitoba, *The Human Rights Code* prohibits discrimination in services, including schools. The Manitoba Human Rights Commission's guidebook "Human Rights in the School – Guidelines for Educators, Students, Parents and other School Participants (1991)" encourages protection of human rights in the school setting. It includes a checklist to help schools evaluate whether the learning environment is respectful and inclusive of students, staff and their families, regardless of sexual orientation. For more information, find the document under "publications" on our website, or contact us at 945-3007.

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In February 1996, the Canadian Department of Heritage recognized the achievements of Mathieu Da Costa's work by holding the Mathieu Da Costa



Mathieu Da Costa

Challenge. This challenge gives students across the country an opportunity to research, discover and celebrate the contribution of Aboriginal peoples and Canadians of all ethnic and racial backgrounds. In 2002, Manitoban

Erin Braun Janzen of Winnipeg was one of the nine proud recipients of the Mathieu da Costa Award. This year Alana Poon, from Winnipeg won the best English essay for 9-11 year olds.

Source: Canadian Heritage

WWW World Wide Women

March 8 is International Women's Day and Canadians will be celebrating International Women's Week from March 2 to March 8, 2003. This year's theme is **World-Wide Women (WWW): Surfing the Digital Revolution!**

This theme allows Canadians to take a closer look at the impact of information and communication technology on women and its use as a tool for empowerment and the promotion of women's equality. New technology has revolutionized the way people communicate, access information, create networks and develop business opportunities.

In Winnipeg on March 7, The Honourable Diane McGifford will host a reception for International Women's Day at the Manitoba Legislature from 11:45 a.m. - 1:15 p.m. The reception emcee is Kim Clare of the Women's Advisory Council. A number of organizations will have displays providing women with information on such topics as health, education, violence against women and women's rights. The Commission will be at the legislature with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Everyone is invited. For more information, call the Manitoba Women's Directorate at 204-945-3476.

Test Your Knowledge - The Manitoba Human Rights Commission Launches a Women's Rights Website Quiz

In celebration of International Women's Day 2002, The Commission will launch a women's rights quiz on its website on March 3. To take the quiz visit

www.gov.mb.ca/hrc

Black History Month Events

Friday February 21: Multicultural Panel Discussion

"The importance of Black History in a Multicultural Society"

Jamaican Cultural Centre

1098 Winnipeg Avenue at 7:30 p.m.

Admission Free

Saturday February 22: The Annual Gospel Concert, "Heart and Soul"

Featuring George Banton, International Reggae Gospel recording artist

Place of Peace Family Church, 1296

Main Street, at 7:00 p.m.

Admission \$12.00

\$10.00 (children under 12 and seniors)

Sunday February 23: Community Business Expo

at the Jamaican Cultural Centre,

1098 Winnipeg Avenue 2:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Registration: \$25.00 per table

Annual Black Community Awards Banquet and Closing Ceremony

March 1, 2003, 6:30 p.m.

at the Jamaican Cultural Centre,

1098 Winnipeg Avenue.

Guest Speaker: Mr. Arnold Aguste

Editor/Publisher of Share Newspaper

\$20 Adults / \$17 Children&Seniors

National Human Rights Conference Coming to Winnipeg

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is proud to host the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies (CASHRA) in Winnipeg this spring.

Human rights practitioners, human resource professionals, educators, union representatives, and advocacy group representatives could benefit from attending this informative and educational conference.

The theme of the 2003 Conference is "Meeting at the Forks", a reflection on the history of the area where, for centuries, the forks of the Red and the Assiniboine Rivers served as a place to gather together. First Nations people used the site as a sacred meeting ground and to this day, the Forks is still considered a place to meet. The 2003 CASHRA Conference will address issues that require a meeting of open minds and will focus primarily on the human rights issues facing Aboriginal people.

Mr. Justice Murray Sinclair will deliver the keynote address. Workshop topics include, Healing Circles: Are they Applicable to Resolving Human Rights Disputes; Perspectives from the North; Human Rights and the Metis Experience; and Living with the Many Faces of Discrimination.

The CASHRA Conference takes place May 25 to 28, 2003 at the Fort Garry Hotel. For more information, visit the CASHRA Website at www.cashra.ca or call the Event Coordinator Carmen Neufeld at 204-257-5205.

UPCOMING SEMINARS - CHECK THEM OUT

Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace

This half day seminar offers advice on how to navigate the tricky road to reasonable accommodation.

February 27, 2003 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM

175 Hargrave Street, Winnipeg

\$50.00 (lunch and coffee break included)

CALL 945-3007 FOR MORE INFORMATION

Harassment in the Workplace

This half day workshop focuses on what is harassment in the workplace and how to develop a harassment-free workplace.

March 5, 2003 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM

175 Hargrave Street

\$50.00 (lunch and coffee break included)