

# The Purdy Crawford Chair

In Aboriginal Business Studies

## Case Studies in Aboriginal Business

Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park and  
Siksika Nation

Erin Bragg



Cape  
Breton  
University  
Happen.

**Shannon School  
of Business**

**Purdy Crawford Chair in  
Aboriginal Business Studies**

Shannon School of Business  
Cape Breton University  
1250 Grand Lake Rd, Box 5300  
Sydney, NS B1P 6L2  
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**The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies was established at Cape Breton University in 2010 in response to Aboriginal community leaders' expression of the need for entrepreneurship, business investment, and corporate skills training for the purpose of creating a model of self-reliance.**

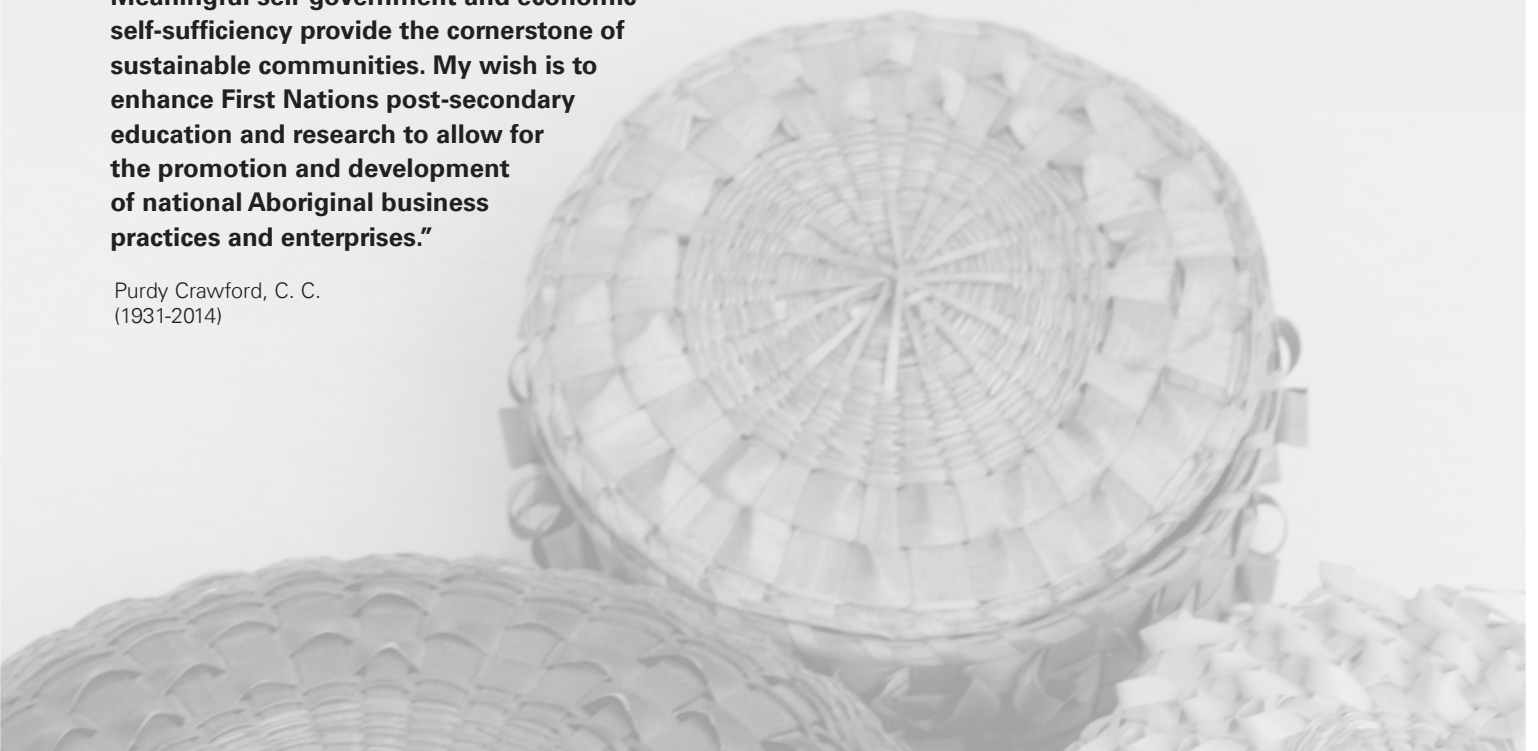
**Named in honour of Canadian lawyer and corporate boardroom leader, the late Mr. Purdy Crawford, the Chair aims to promote interest among Canada's Aboriginal people in the study of business at the post-secondary level.**

The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies focuses its work in four areas:

- Research on what "drives" success in Aboriginal Business
- National student recruitment in the area of post-secondary Aboriginal business education
- Enhancement of the post-secondary Aboriginal business curriculum
- Mentorship at high school and post-secondary levels

**"Meaningful self-government and economic self-sufficiency provide the cornerstone of sustainable communities. My wish is to enhance First Nations post-secondary education and research to allow for the promotion and development of national Aboriginal business practices and enterprises."**

Purdy Crawford, C. C.  
(1931-2014)



# **BLACKFOOT CROSSING HISTORICAL PARK AND SIKSIKA NATION**

Located in southern Alberta, Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park is the largest Aboriginal owned and operated tourism attraction in Canada. The series of sites that make up the park date back to the mid-eighteenth century, with governmental treaties designating the region as a protected historic site. Capitalizing on the Canadian Prairies' growing tourism industry, the Siksika Nation council decided to build the site into a profitable historical park, thereby increasing the economic sustainability of the region while also maintaining the integrity of their traditional culture.

## **SIKSIKA NATION**

Siksika Nation is located on the Siksika 146 reserve in southern Alberta, approximately 95 kilometres east of Calgary. Prior to the 1800s, Siksika Nation was made up 18,000 individuals arranged into 36 clans and three main tribes. With a land area of 696.54 square kilometres, Siksika 146 is the second largest Indian reserve in Canada and has a current population of 3,783. The population of Siksika Nation overall is around 6,800 people. The name Siksika is derived from the words "sik" and "ika," meaning "black" and "foot" in the traditional Algonquian language of Blackfoot.

Siksika Nation is governed by a chief and twelve councilors, with each being elected for three-year terms. Joseph Weasel Child is the current chief of Siksika Nation (Siksika Nation, 2017).

Longstanding land disputes between the Siksika Nation and the Canadian federal government date back to the late 1800s, with tribes arguing that land was illegally taken from them in 1908. In 2017, the federal government settled this claim and agreed to issue \$123 million to Siksika Nation as compensation for the decades-old dispute. Federal Environment Minister Catherine McKenna has stated that Parks Canada is committed to creating eco-friendly tourism opportunities that honour Blackfoot traditions. McKenna views this settlement as a step toward reconciliation and promotion of Siksika Nation as an exciting tourist destination (CBC News, 2017).

## **HISTORIC IMPORTANCE**

Siksika 146 reserve is home to the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park. Situated near the Bow River, the crossing was traditionally a bison hunting area for the Siksika people and their allies within the Blackfoot Confederacy. The nearest towns to the park are Cluny and Gleichen, Alberta.

The area became a significant place in Canadian history when Treaty 7 was signed there on September 22, 1877 between the seven native nations of what is now southern Alberta and the Canadian government on behalf of the Crown. Treaty 7 negotiated reserve land claims, annual payments from the Queen, and hunting and trapping rights in exchange for the tribes' traditional territory rights. Siksika chief Crowfoot is believed to have died and been buried there, while Cree chief Poundmaker, who had been ceremonially adopted by Crowfoot in order to instill harmony between the Blackfoot and Cree, was also buried here before being reinterred at another site in 1967.

In 1925, the traditional hunting site and treaty-signing site were declared National Historic Sites of Canada by the federal government's Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. In 1972, the earthlodge village was also declared a national historic site. Five years later, Prince Charles visited the site to help commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the signing of Treaty 7. Following the success of this event, the Siksika council began planning and fundraising to turn the site into a tourist attraction. The council wanted to strengthen the region's economy without jeopardizing the integrity of their traditional culture and beliefs, so Siksika Nation vowed to make Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park an authentically educational, fully-Aboriginal owned and operated tourist attraction (Blackfoot Crossing, n. d.).

## **BLACKFOOT CROSSING HISTORICAL PARK**

The Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park opened in 2007, featuring an interpretive centre, monuments to Poundmaker, Crowfoot, and Treaty 7, tipi remains, and hiking trails to the earthlodge village site. The park's mission statement outlines its goal of preserving the Siksika peoples' language, culture, and traditions through its world-renowned entertainment and educational centre.

The park's unique earthlodge village is the only known site of its kind in the Canadian Prairies, with archaeological evidence pointing to it having been founded around 1740 CE. The village's first inhabitants are unknown, but archaeologists speculate that the area's settlers may have been a band of Mandan people or their allies, the Hidatsa. Excavations of the area took place in 1875, 1881, 1911, and 1960, the latter of which was led by Dr. Richard Forbis with the permission of the Blackfoot Tribal Council. Decades later, the University of Calgary's Archaeology department undertook another excavation from June to September of 2014, with oral stories and early accounts and archaeology providing some clues to the village's mysterious history. Under the supervision of Dr. Dale Walde, the advanced field school class analyzed a series of circular vegetation patterns and five large pits that resembled pit houses, which would be unique to the Canadian Prairies should they prove to be authentic (Blackfoot Crossing, n.d.).

Blackfoot Crossing also offers guided tours of the 62,000 square foot eco-friendly indoor exhibit hall and museum, with local Siksika guides educating tourists on the cultural history of the region. The environmentally friendly main building encompasses the Siksika peoples' traditional emphasis on the preservation of the natural world, as well as the more modern focus on sustainable energy solutions, such as timed faucets, energy monitoring, and low-voltage switching systems.

Furthermore, Vision Quest Theatre offers performances and shows featuring traditional dancers and drummers, while the Blackfoot Crossing Library is one of the most important centres for Blackfoot research in Canada, complete with an archives system and steadily growing collection of books, magazines, and oral histories.

The park's Tipi Village is yet another educational attraction, offering tourists the opportunity not only to learn about the historical significance of the tipi, but also to experience a night of tipi camping within close proximity to the park's other amenities.

Moreover, a main conference building can seat up to 200 guests and offers full meal catering services from the Blackfoot Crossing Cafeteria. In addition, the park's gift shop features paintings and sculptures by First Nation artists such as Vincent Bomberry, Susan Point, and Maxine Noel, thereby promoting the region's traditional Indigenous art scene.

## **THE FUTURE OF SIKSIKA NATION AND BLACKFOOT CROSSING**

Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park has been expanding since its opening in 2007. With more technological advances being added every year, the park has become increasingly efficient in terms of both convenience and environmental sustainability. Likewise, new exhibits and attractions are added annually, with the performance centre now offering video technology and the gift shop providing a diverse array of artists' works from the Alberta region (Blackfoot Crossing, 2017).

Following the federal government's grant of \$123 million to Siksika Nation, Chief Joseph Weasel Child has expressed a desire to create an international youth hostel as one of the few tourist accommodation sites on Siksika territory in order to educate young people from around the world on Blackfoot values and traditions. This would not only broaden the scope of visitors to the area, but also help to ensure the preservation of Blackfoot culture for generations to come (CBC News, 2017).

## **SOURCES**

Blackfoot Crossing. (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.blackfootcrossing.ca/>.

CBC News. (2017). Siksika Nation, federal government to honour Blackfoot traditions with Castle Mountain settlement. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/castle-mountain-siksika-land-claim-1.3952377>.



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