

The Purdy Crawford Chair

In Aboriginal Business Studies

Case Studies in Aboriginal Business

Membertou Museum A

Mary Beth Doucette



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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www.cbu.ca/crawford

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.

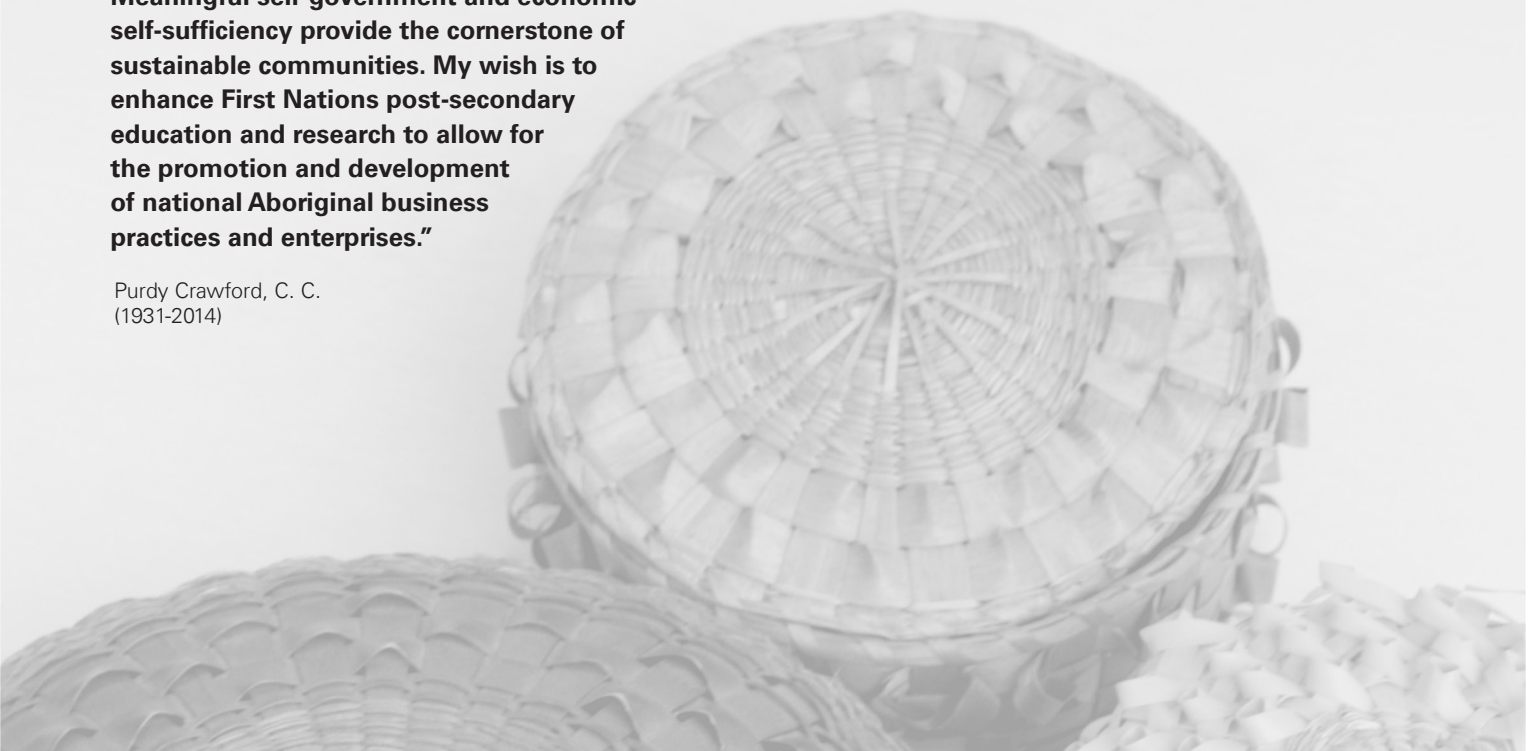
Named in honour of Canadian lawyer and corporate boardroom leader, the late Mr. Purdy Crawford, the Chair aims to promote interest among Canada's Aboriginal people in the study of business at the post-secondary level.

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)



MEMBERTOU MUSEUM A

In 1999, after more than a decade focusing on community economic development activities in Membertou, the chief and council were facing criticism from band members who asserted they were neglecting culture and identity. A museum was suggested in response, but a study revealed the proposed facility was not economically feasible. The chief and council had to decide how to proceed.

MEMBERTOU

The Mi'kmaq traditionally inhabited northeastern North America, in areas now known as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, the southwest coast of Newfoundland, the Gaspé Peninsula in Québec, and northern Maine. There were five primary settlements in the district of Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island), one of which was in present-day Sydney. During the early years of colonization, this settlement – located on the harbour shores of a major trade route – was maintained along the main thoroughfare (King's Road) to facilitate communications and trade with European settlers. In the 1920s, the Government of Canada relocated the community of 125 members to a less desirable location one kilometre inland. On the new reserve, referred to as Membertou, infrastructure was built by the federal government's Department of Indian Affairs to support the growing community (a school house, an Indian Affairs office, and some housing) and some was built by the community members themselves (a church and additional housing).

For decades, Membertou experienced social challenges not unlike those faced by many other First Nation communities across Canada. They had been relocated to unfertile land, without harbour-front water and fishing access. Throughout most of the twentieth century, life in Membertou was difficult. Under the watchful eye of Indian agents the community suffered levels of racism and poverty, inadequate housing conditions, high unemployment rates, low levels of education, and restricted access to municipal services. The goal of many community members was to attain a skill and move away. In the early 1970s, the chief and council started to take managerial control of federal programs and services. At that time, federal programs were starting to change after many years of activism led by community leaders and groups, such as the Union of Nova Scotia Indians, the Indian Brotherhood, and Nova Scotia Native Women's Association. In 1994, elected council and administration started to make an organized attempt to address the legacy of social and economic problems faced by the community.

MEMBERTOU DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

In the 1990s, the Membertou band council decided they needed to adopt a new business-minded approach. They established Membertou Development Corporation (MDC) as a means of branding themselves as a respectable business partner and implemented a series of standard business practices, including recruiting and hiring a chief executive officer (CEO) and establishing a quality management system. Their goals were to achieve ISO 9000 certification and develop a central office in Halifax, the provincial capital.

The Membertou band council, a group elected by the community, serves as the board of directors for MDC. As a result, there has been a conscious effort to ensure members are trained appropriately and that techniques are adopted not only to help manage the business of Membertou, but also distance individual councillors from the day-to-day operations of Membertou businesses. Nevertheless, the chief and council are still first and foremost a band government and are accountable to the community.

Over several years, MDC worked on the establishment of a corporate head office in Halifax, the development of a commercial fishery, and the creation of commercial partnerships with established companies, such as SNC Lavalin and Freshwater Foods. The community also organized a variety of projects to help improve the quality of life for band members through support for education at all levels, increased employment options, support for the use of traditional language, and other similar initiatives.

Membertou was successful in designing and implementing a community-based development plan that has enabled them to strategically build capacity in the form of infrastructure and human resources, while improving the quality of life of community members. In doing so, the community significantly improved their financial situation. In 1996, the band had a steadily growing government deficit of \$4.2 million, but by 1999 it was moving towards a balanced budget.

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

As Membertou began to achieve economic successes, many community members started to voice their concerns that Membertou's chief and council were neglecting the social and cultural needs of the community. Some of the older people in the community requested the development of a seniors' centre, while the youth asked the council to consider building a youth centre. Both groups expressed concern that there was not enough effort being put forward to maintain and restore a sense of community. Families were no longer participating in community activities or supporting one another as they once did, for example, in construction projects or cultural ceremonies. Some said that community members were losing their culture. The so-called "Membertou Model" was dangerously close to being too focused purely on economic development at the expense of community connectedness. In response to this feedback, the band

council started to consider undertaking projects that would help them to foster a feeling of community and protect and share the culture and history of Membertou.

A COMMUNITY MUSEUM

In response to the community's desire for a focus to be placed on heritage and cultural preservation, the chief and council considered building a museum. A feasibility study was commissioned and received in the spring of 1999 for an Aboriginal heritage centre and museum. It would be located on the Sydney waterfront and would present the history of the Mi'kmaq of Unama'ki. They saw the initiative as an opportunity to build an institution that could heighten cultural awareness and strengthen a sense of confidence in the community's identity. If Membertou were to create their own museum, it would educate the local community, but could also be marketed to tourists and educate a broader audience in the country and world about Mi'kmaw history and culture in a way that had never been done before. It would also create jobs indirectly and support other service related development initiatives in the area, while also being a centre for scholarly research and secure location to store and preserve cultural artifacts.

The feasibility study showed that, if the envisioned museum was created using a business model that resembled that of a typical Canadian museum, it would be very expensive. The proposed facility would cost \$25 million to build and, like many other museums, would not be self-sufficient, requiring external (public) funding to be viable. Museums and heritage centres tend to be heavily subsidized by governments because of the perceived value they add to the culture and history of an area or community. If Membertou were to build such a museum, the band would likely be forced to subsidize its operations well into the future.

CONCLUSION

Membertou's chief and council were facing criticism in 1999 after more than a decade of successful community economic development activities. Band members asserted that chief and council were neglecting culture and identity. In response, a museum was proposed; however, a study revealed that it was not economically feasible. The chief and council had to decide how to proceed.

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