

**A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS PHOTO JOURNAL NOTE ABOUT WILLIAM COMMANDA'S
ASSOCIATION WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA**

Algonquin Elder William Commanda had a lengthy association with the University of Ottawa. He was presented with his first honorary doctoral degree by the University in 2005. He offered the opening blessing at the Convocation, and delivered a speech on the importance of the acknowledgement to him in Algonquin, French and English. William Commanda was an avid lifelong learner and teacher, to the end using a magnifying glass to study things, and the work the Universities are involved in was very important to him. This note highlights the linkages of his work with the University of Ottawa during the past two decades.



In the early days, when the University was engaged in the development of the Aboriginal Studies Program, William Commanda supported the efforts of Dr. George Sioui, an Indigenous academic, in the initiative; the program was launched from his own teaching lodge at his home in Kitigan Zibi. We participated in and made presentations at classes over the years. He also brought students on field trips to Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg and to William Commanda's teaching lodge each year. I accompanied Elder Commanda to many steering committee sessions in the University's Department of Education, as they began engaging in the development of a new program inclusive of Indigenous peoples and their views.



In 2001, William Commanda blessed the opening of the Community Legal Clinic. In 2002, he was presented with the first University of Ottawa Legal Studies Program Justice Award by the former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, James Bartleman, as they launched their inaugural fundraiser; he was presented with an Inuit soapstone sculpture that epitomizes the Dancing Bear asserting

balance. He offered blessings and welcome at several school year commencement ceremonies in the Legal Studies and Medical School programs.



In 2005, he was deeply honoured to receive his Honorary Doctoral Degree from the University of Ottawa. I recall that he had shingles at the time of the convocation and was in great pain. He was scheduled to do the opening prayer, offer a convocation address, as well as receive his degree. I thought, surely, we should cancel, and just send a greeting, in view of his health. But he was determined to follow through. And in fact, the gracious attentiveness of the university colleagues contributed to his strengthening; it really became his party. Just last year, I by chance met a young student who had graduated at the time of William Commanda and who still remembered his presence there.



We also participated in a grassroots initiative hosted at the University of Ottawa, *Organizing for Justice*. I recall bringing this very old man to the University of Ottawa, having managed the challenges of distant parking, manoeuvring between buildings and up and down stairways in the early morning of a cold fall, so that he could honour the request that he share his *Circle of All Nations* views about social justice. That event has evolved considerably over the years.

University of Ottawa created the Dr. William Commanda Scholarship for Aboriginal Medical Students and this is the note on the website:

The [William Commanda Aboriginal Medical Scholarship](#) is available for Aboriginal students of all years from the Faculty of Medicine who are in the UGME Program.

The great-great-grandson of the legendary Algonquin Chief, Pakinawatik, Algonquin Elder William Commanda from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, was imbued with a sense of leadership from a very early age. Born under the morning star on November 11, 1913, his mother was inspired to call him Ojigkwanong

(Morning Star). She chose well as Elder Commanda followed in Pakinawatik's footsteps to become chief of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, a greatly revered leader in his own right and an honoured representative for all Aboriginal people. As a traditional guide, trapper and woodsman for much of his life, he was also passionate about promoting environmental stewardship and respect for Mother Earth. He worked with the elements of the earth as a birch bark canoe maker and became a craftsman of international renown. He built a canoe for Queen Margrethe of Denmark, helped Pierre Trudeau repair his famous birch bark canoe and has a special display dedicated to his work at the Canadian Canoe Museum of Peterborough. At the age of 90, his canoe making skills and philosophy were celebrated in Valerie Pouyanne's documentary, *Good Enough for Two*.

Separately, William Commanda was also appointed Officer of the Order of Canada and during his years of engagement with the office of the Governor General (first with Her Excellency Adrienne Clarkson, who attended his International *Circle of All Nations* Millennium Gathering, and later with Her Excellency, Michaëlle Jean, when he received his OC honour and was invited to the visits of the Queen and Prince Charles, greater understanding of his work developed. Later, this manifested in the posthumous creation of the William Commanda Hall at the University of Ottawa during Her Excellency Michaëlle Jean's term as Chancellor.



Beyond this, and more recently, in 2017, I was invited to make a presentation on our work at the Indigenize and Decolonize Symposium organized at the University of Ottawa. I was also invited to assist with the organization of the CASCA-IUEAS International Anthropology Conference hosted by University of Ottawa in 2017 under the leadership of Professor Scott Simon; and I served as research assistant in an associated SSHRC project. In his keynote address at the conference, Dr. Georges Sioui affirmed the relevance of the *Circle of All Nations* contribution to the University's Aboriginal Studies program; after the formal conference, fifty international academics participated in an excursion to Kitigan Zibi and also visited William Commanda's teaching lodge, for many, this being the highlight of the week. Also, in 2017, Commanda/Thumbadoo's *Learning from a Kindergarten Book* is profiled in the University of Ottawa Library's Commemorative Poster.

Finally, I would like to say that when I defended my thesis, entitled, *Ginawaydaganuc and the Circle of All Nations: The Remarkable Environmental Legacy of Elder William Commanda*, on January 15, 2018, Lucie Ouimet, director of the National Film Board documentary on William Commanda, *Ojigkwanong Encounter with an Algonquin Sage*, attended my examination, accompanied by her current doctoral supervisor, University of Ottawa Professor, Donatille Mujawamariya. While I do not know the professor myself, I mention this to acknowledge William

Commanda's reach over time and space. Lucie is doing some of her research in France and I understand that William Commanda figures in it in some way.

There are of course also some sensitivities around the radical work of William Commanda. Yet, many of us also believe that his ground-breaking and bridge-building ideas are of critical importance today. He affirmed Algonquin presence across the Ottawa River Watershed, and indeed across the American North East as well as the continent.

But with respect to the University of Ottawa, it was his own great, great grandfather Luc-Antoine Pakinawatik (who had negotiated the first reserve in Canada, at River Desert/Maniwaki/Kitigan Zibi), who was also involved in identifying Algonquin territory in the National Capital Region, some of which fell to the priests, and which Bishop Gigués later bequeathed to the University of Ottawa. Bishop Gigués had accompanied Pakinawatik to Toronto (then Upper Canada) in the land assertion discussions of the mid 1800s. It seems very fitting that William Commanda's energy and ideas are now integrated at the University of Ottawa, in the heart of his Algonquin homeland.

PS Beyond the University of Ottawa, With respect to the presence of William Commanda in the Academy, I note that received In January, 2010 Willis College announced the Dr. William Commanda Scholarship; in November 2011, he was presented with a doctorate honorifique by l'université du Québec-Outaouais posthumously; and that Carleton University named the Indigenous Students Resource Centre Ojigkwanong, after him. I completed my doctoral thesis on William Commanda's work at Carleton University, and I am creating a Circle of All Nations cybercartographic atlas on his work at its Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre.

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