Mount A professor named honorary member, elder of Aboriginal People of the Maritimes

In recognition of her work and studies with indigenous communities, Mount Allison University anthropology professor Marilyn Walker was made an honorary member and elder of the Aboriginal People of the Maritimes in a recent ceremony held in Sackville.

The ceremony was conducted by aboriginal elder and spiritual leader Emile Gautreau, assisted by elders Roland Surette, Norman Robichaud and Adrian Speck on behalf of Mary Lou Parker, chief of Eastern Woodland Métis nation. Members of the Métis nation from across the Maritimes came to campus to attend the traditional ceremony in Walker’s honour.

The Métis nation is made up of Aboriginal People of the region of mixed descent, usually Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy intermarried with French/Acadian and British.

Walker is the first person in New Brunswick to receive this honour, and only one other individual in the Maritimes (Acadia University’s Alan Warner) has been named an honorary member and elder of the Eastern Woodland Métis nation.

“This is a great honour for Marilyn Walker and for Mount Allison University,” said university president Robert Campbell. “Marilyn’s work and research with the aboriginal community in Canada illustrates so many aspects of what Mount Allison strives towards, in particular, engaging our students and staff in various activities of public service and citizenship, providing an enriched academic experience for our students and enriching the faculty experience through unique teaching and research opportunities. I would like to congratulate Marilyn on this honour and look forward to working with the Métis nation in the future.”

Walker’s aboriginal name is Kipou, meaning eagle. All Aboriginal Peoples honour the eagle; its feather was used throughout the ceremony. Traditional drumming and honour to the seven directions (north, south, east, west, sun, moon, and creator), as well as a traditional native offering of sacred herbs and smudging, were part of the ceremony.

Gautreau also presented Mount Allison with a traditional talking stick, made by River Hebert, N.S. artist Bruce Hobert. Talking sticks are passed from one person to another in a group situation, allowing everyone to be heard as an equal and are used in conflict resolution and other types of events.

Over the years, Walker has worked to further the academy’s and community’s understanding of Aboriginal People to reduce discrimination and misunderstandings and celebrate the rich heritage of Aboriginal People of the Maritimes.

Since coming to Mount A, she has invited members of the aboriginal community into her classes in recognition of community expertise and the invaluable contribution that this community has made and continues to make to the region.

Walker’s research interests are in ethnobotany and traditional medicine (in Siberia, Mongolia, southeast Asia, and North America), and she teaches courses in introductory anthropology, health and culture, indigenous knowledge systems, ethnobotany, and cultural ecology. Her forthcoming book, “Wild Plants of Eastern Canada,” on plants and people of the Maritimes, will be released this month.