



River Landing Interpretive Elements

Tree Grate Design

- December 1, 2006 -



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River Landing Urban Design Elements: Tree Grates

The detailed design of the River Landing Urban Design elements has been informed by interpreting and highlighting the distinct local site features. Our goal is to tell the stories of the River Landing location, to draw attention to its unique character, to interpret its rich history, and most importantly, to express the genius loci or spirit of the place.

Using the Aldrich Pears River Landing Interpretive Plan (April 14, 2005) as a setting off point, some themes and site elements have been identified for placemaking and interpretation such as:

- The River Landing paths – A site network
- Geography – The river’s edge
- Weather
- Flora and fauna
- History – Early Western settlement
- Transportation – Trains and trams
- Future vision

One of the key themes that Urban Design has explored is the site’s rich history relating to its First People. Working with a community group made up of First Nations Elders representing the Sioux, Cree, and Dakota nations in Spring 2006, we collaborated to create designs for the tree grates for Phase 1 of River Landing. The tree grate structures are decorative metal plates that are placed around the trunk of trees to protect the young tree roots and the tree base. A relatively new manufacturing technique allows our office to create intricately detailed tree grates.

The local Elders have provided us with valuable Indigenous stories and themes relating to this site and the area, and relating to the lives of the first people prior to settlement of the City of Saskatoon. The primary objective of this design exercise is to recognize the First Nations that gathered at the River Landing site, to honour their lives, and to commemorate the stories that provide inspiration for the designs. Ultimately, these narratives will add to the richness of our social identity, our history, and the nature of place.

Four themes have been established from the stories that were shared through the consultation process. The themes are as follows: 1) Home; 2) Stories; 3) Play; and 4) Ceremony. The tree grates contain visual elements to accompany and acknowledge the Elders’ stories. The stories will continue to be told and shared by the people to whom they

belong and it is the hope of the City of Saskatoon that the tree grates will provide a lasting legacy and establish River Landing as a landscape where “stories take place”.

The following elders and individuals have made significant contributions to the tree grate design process.

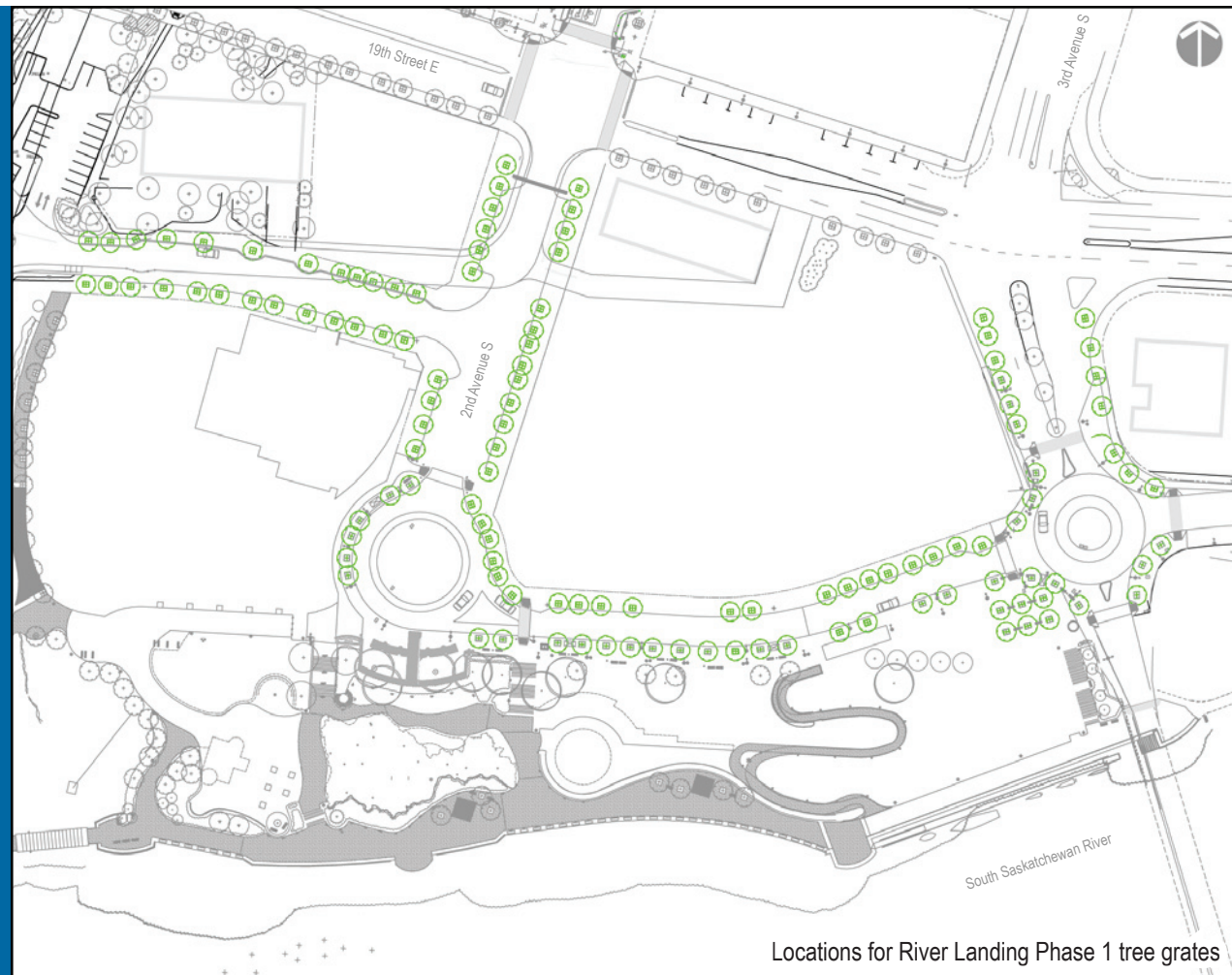
Stan Cuthand, Elder
 Malvina Eagle, Elder
 Simon Kytwayhat, Elder
 Katy Poundmaker, Elder
 Eliza Swimmer, Elder

Gilles Dorval, Human Resources Consultant
 Monica Goulet, Cultural Diversity & Race Relations Coordinator
 Priscilla Settee, University of Saskatchewan Extension Division

Chris Dekker – Special Projects Manager - City of Saskatoon
 Brock Dergousoff – Landscape Architect – City of Saskatoon
 Ludwig Lee – Urban Design Intern – City of Saskatoon
 Jeanna South – Urban Design Manager – City of Saskatoon
 Donna Thiessen – Design Assistant – City of Saskatoon

Funding sources:

Funds for tree grate production and installation are from the River Landing Phase 1 Streetscape budget. Consultation and facilitation costs are funded in part from the Cultural Capitals of Canada funds. This funding is provided by the Government of Canada through the department of Canadian Heritage. The objective of the Cultural Capitals of Canada program is to promote the arts and culture in Canadian municipalities, through recognition of excellence and support for special activities that celebrate the arts and culture and integrate them into overall community planning. This designation enables our community to invest more in arts and culture, increase and improve cultural services, and strengthen connections with other communities through shared cultural experiences.



Visual Concepts

All of the tree grates incorporate the form of the circle and the number four into the design, both of which are highly symbolic for the First Nations people. The circle is very important to the culture and is evident for those seated inside a tipi. In a circle, each person would be equal. No one person is above or below anyone. The First Nations, according to the elders and Wanuskewin, also attribute great significance to the number four. Some associations include:

- The four seasons
- The four directions
- The four elements of nature
- The four stages of human development

In developing the tree grates, Urban Design has incorporated the circle and some of the elements of four as a repeated motif throughout the four themes of home, stories, play, and ceremony.



Home



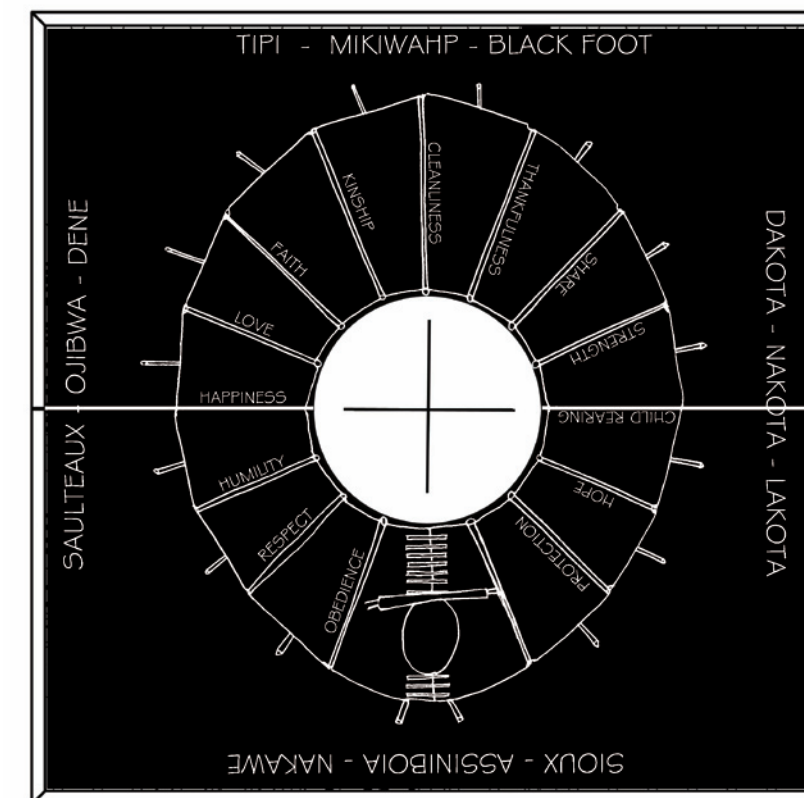
Source: E. Curtis (2001). *The North American Indian: The Photographic Images*. Chicago: Northwestern University Library.



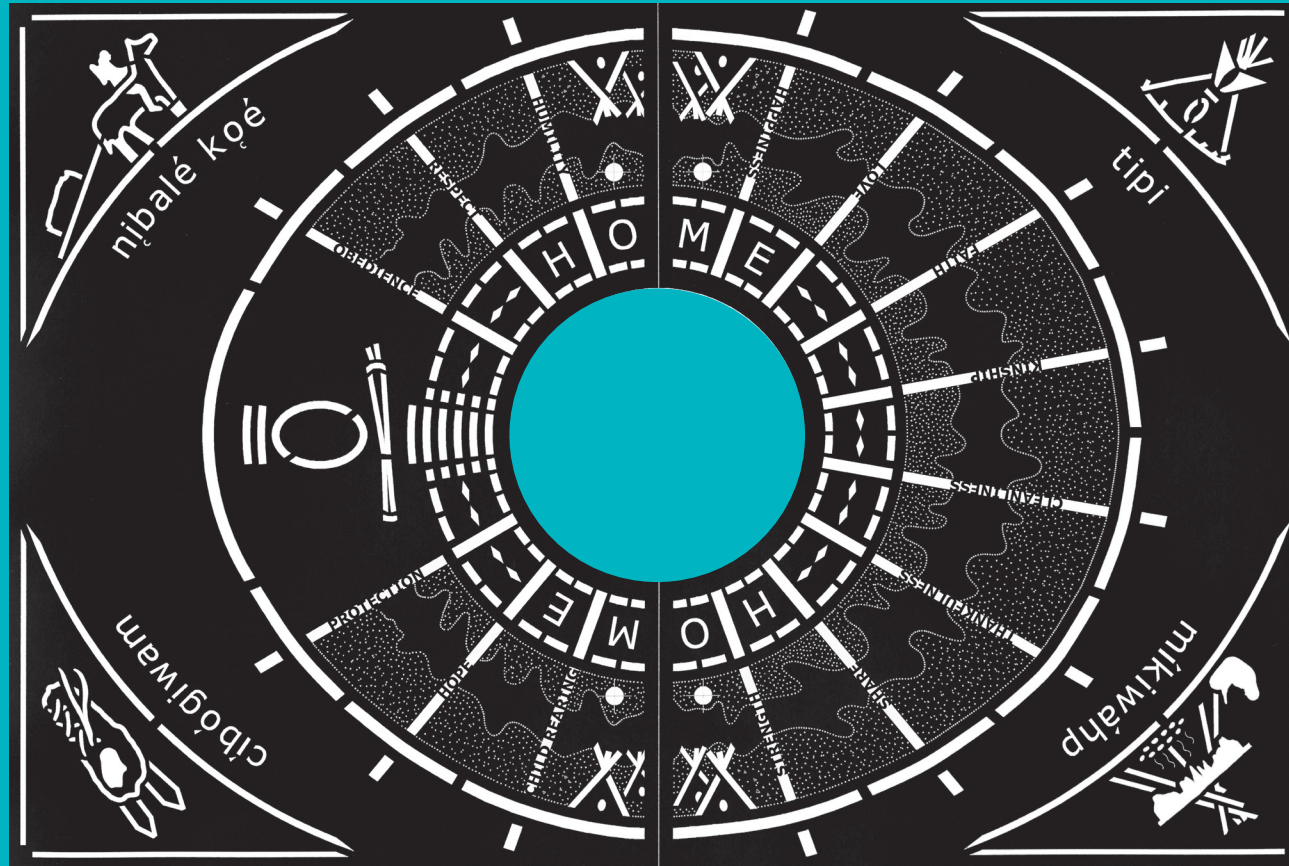
Source: E. Curtis (2001). *The North American Indian: The Photographic Images*. Chicago: Northwestern University Library.

Concept: Home

Tipis were the dwelling for the Northern Plains peoples and according to the Elder council, a tipi would traditionally have belonged to a woman. It was the responsibility of the women to set up the tipi and to decide where it was to be pitched in a camp circle. Research done with Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre has suggested that there are eight tribes which may have passed through the River Landing area or rested there. These include the Swampy, Woodlands and Plains Cree, the Nakawe or Saulteaux, the Dene and the Dakota, Lakota and Nakota Nations. The concept of the tipi tree grates will be to express home and the domestic realm. The grates will represent the exterior and the interior of a tipi in plan with images on each corner of the grate to represent different aspects of the domestic life and interior circular floor plan.



Early Tipi Exterior design concept



1.1 Tipi Exterior

The tipi exterior grate represents a tipi plan and the symbolic importance of each pole. Each of the fourteen poles has a special significance and the key values are etched into each pole in the tree grate - obedience, respect, humility, happiness, love, faith, kinship, cleanliness, thankfulness, share, strength, good child rearing, hope and ultimate protection. The tipis for the Cree would have faced the rising sun. The designs on the exterior of a typical tipi were based on symbols and stories. The specific design on this tree grate represents the Northern Lights which are a significant cultural symbol. Elder Stan Cuthand suggests that the Northern Lights are representative of the dancing ancestors who have passed on to the spirit world.

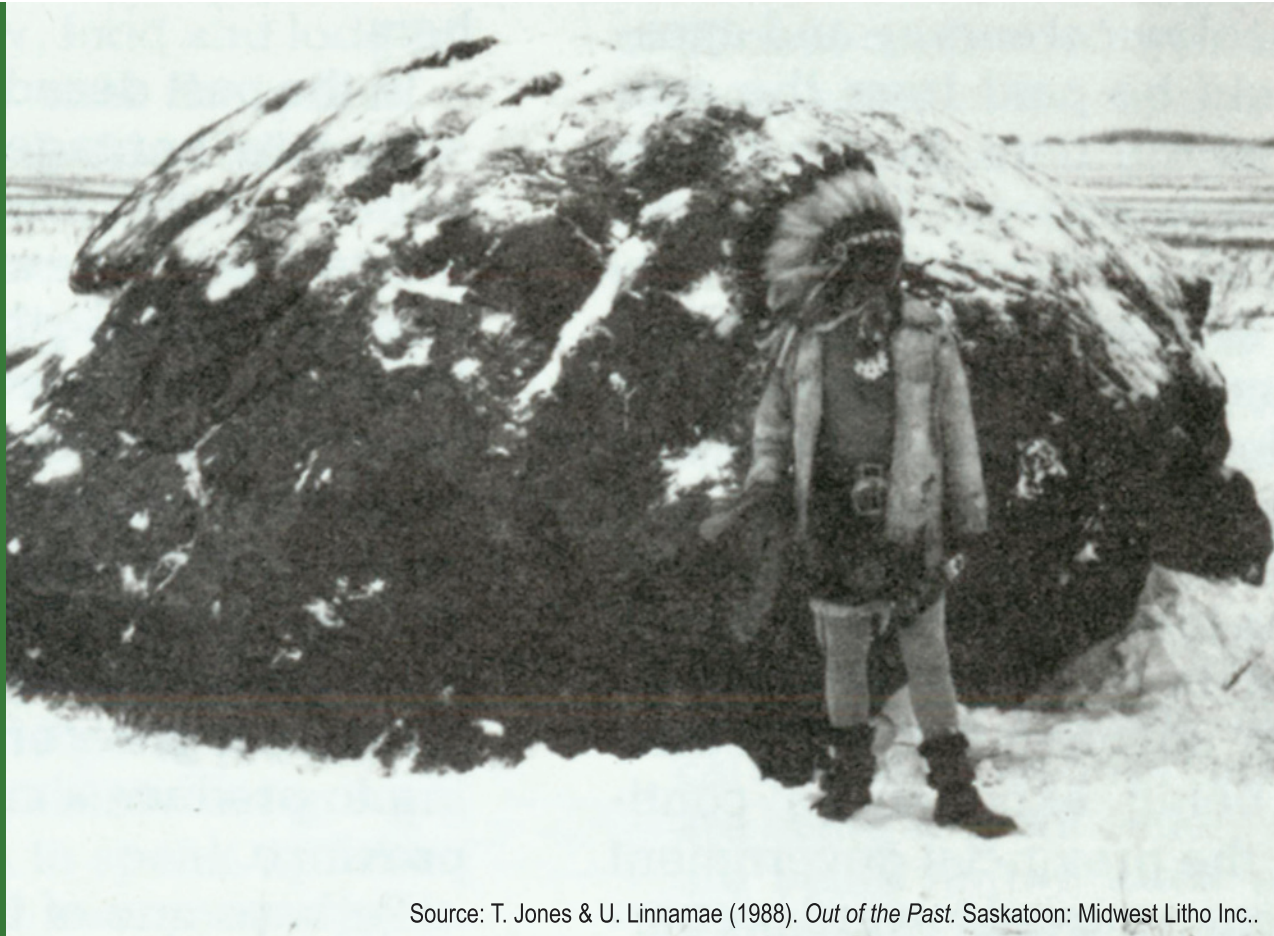
The domestic realm is illustrated on the corners of the grate through text and images that have been generated following discussions with Elders Malvina Eagle, Katy Poundmaker and Eliza Swimmer. When camps moved to follow the buffalo herds, it was the women who would take down the tipis and pack their possessions on horses and travois. This image is portrayed on one of the corners of the tree grate. Another image shown on the corner is the cradleboard. This was a necessity for mobile tribes since it allowed them to carry infants on their backs and perform other tasks.

Although buffalo hunting was the responsibility of the men, the processing of meat and the tanning of the hide was the women's responsibility. One image on the corner of the tree grate shows how the women cut meat into thin strips and hang it to dry in the sun. The stone maul that the woman is holding is used to pound dried buffalo meat and berries into pemmican. The final image shows a tipi in elevation view, looking toward its entry. Closable flaps are shown at the top of the tipi. These were opened to allow smoke to exit when fires burned and to allow cool breezes to come in during hot weather. The names for "home" are shown on each corner in the languages of Dakota (tipi), Cree (mikiwahp), Saulteau (cibogiwam), and Dene (nibale koe).

1.2 Tipi Interior

To complement the tipi exterior tree grate, the concept for the tipi interior grate will be to illustrate some of the items that may be found in a typical tipi. This grate will illustrate the items that are often packed into tipis. Since beliefs are important in the design of the tipi, the interior circular floor plan of tipis often contain a strong connection with the cycles and elements of nature. Symbolizing the surroundings outside the tipi are the bison and grass patterns on the four outer corners of the grate.

Stories



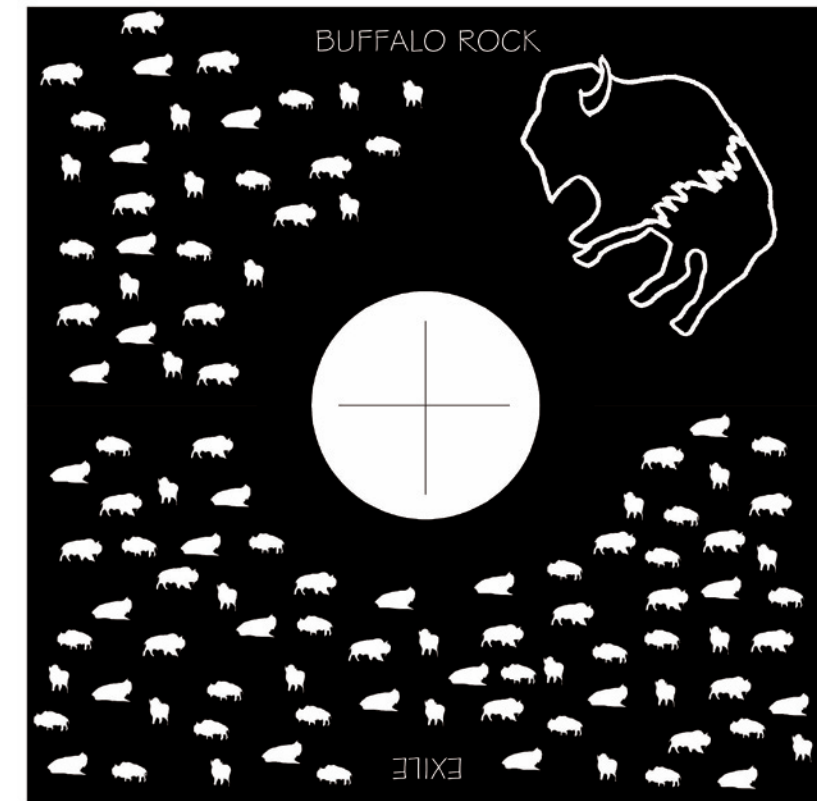
Source: T. Jones & U. Linnae (1988). *Out of the Past*. Saskatoon: Midwest Litho Inc..



Sculpture of a rock transforming into a buffalo at Wanuskewin Heritage Park

Concept: Stories

Stan Cuthand, one of the elders who participated in the tree grate elder council, related a number of stories to the Urban Design team. Through the telling of stories, one can learn the ways of the First Nations people. In the past, this was the means through which elders shared their wisdom with others and reinforced their values. As previously stated, the concept behind these grates will be to illustrate some of the stories unique to our region to add to the richness of the River Landing site.



Early Buffalo Rock design concept

Stories



2.1 Buffalo Rock

The bison were of high importance to the First Nations people in this area. Bison were a source of food, clothing and shelter. They were also a source of many stories and legends. The story this tree grate accompanies involves a young boy, two old bachelor buffalo, and a fierce white buffalo. Stan Cuthand's story tells how the young boy is lost by his people, adopted by two old bachelor buffalo, later transformed into a young buffalo bull, challenged in a battle with the great white buffalo, and eventually transformed into a rock.

This tree grate addresses a particular part of the story where the Young Bull Buffalo kills the old white buffalo in a great battle. After the fight, the young bull could no longer be with the rest of the herd. This is represented in the large buffalo figure being set apart from the rest of the buffalo figures on the grate which manifests the isolation of the young buffalo bull from the rest of the herd.

The four images in the corners of the tree grate represent four pivotal moments in the Buffalo Rock Story. One image represents the two old bachelor buffalo's discovery of the young boy; the next image represents the transformation of the young boy, to a young man, to a young buffalo bull; the next image represents the battle between the young buffalo and the great white buffalo; and the final image represents the transformation of the young buffalo bull into a rock.

2.2 Horse

Horses were a symbol of wealth for the First Nations people. They made hunting more efficient, allowed trade routes to be extended, and helped in transporting goods when harnessed to a travois. This tree grate illustrates Elder Stan Cuthand's story of Sweetgrass during a time when horse raiding was common.

As a little boy, Sweetgrass was captured by Crees when his camp attempted to raid the Crees for their horses. Over the years, Sweetgrass was raised as a Cree. Later on when he became a young man, he set out south to a camp. There he saw many horses and escaped with them back to his home. When he reached home, he gave the horses to the poor. He was praised by many and was soon after proclaimed a hero and chief of the camp.

Concept: Play

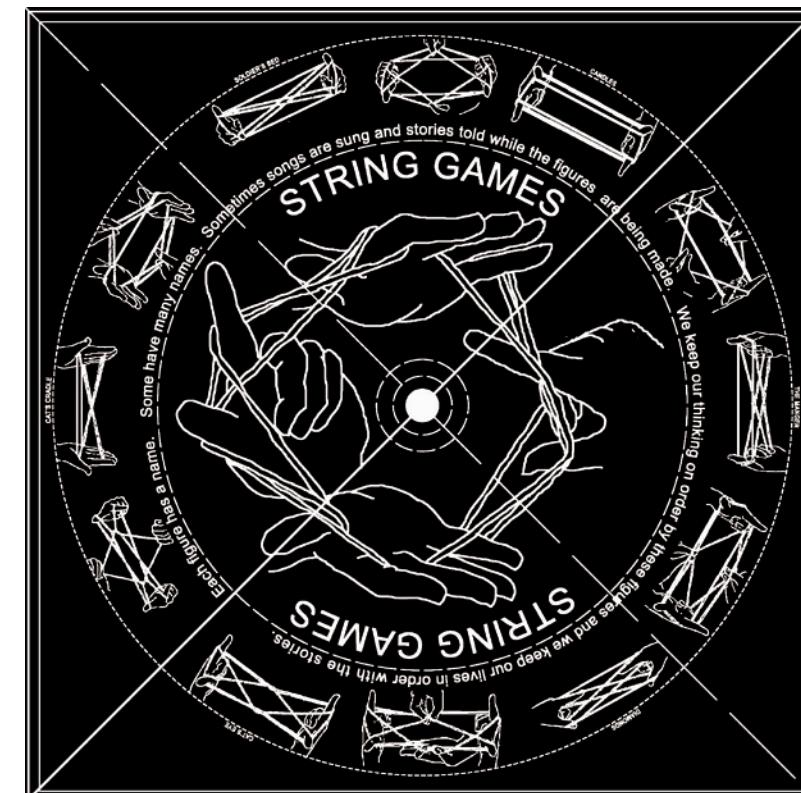
In the meetings with the elders, an important aspect noted in the life of the children and adults were games. Some games were played to pass the time in cold winters while others kept children active and in shape. For young men in earlier times, playing games meant practicing to become hunters. Such games would teach them to be quick and to have good aim. Some research was also done on the games that the Plains Indians participated in and one that resonated was that of the string games. One reference that was used in the creation of the tree grates was the book *Nehiyaw Ma Tow We Na* which translates to *Games of the Plains Cree* compiled by Pat Atimoyoo and with contributions by Stanley Cuthand. This book describes the games played by Cree people during times of peace and war. The notion of game playing will be an underlying concept for the production of two tree grates.



Source: P. Atimoyoo (1980). *Nehiyaw Ma Tow We Na*. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College.



Source: P. Atimoyoo (1980). *Nehiyaw Ma Tow We Na*. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College.



Early String Games design concept



3.1 String Games

String games were mentioned as a popular activity for girls, teaching dexterity and focus. Indeed, Malvina Eagle recalls playing this game as a young girl, as did our facilitators Gilles Dorval and Monica Goulet, and some of the design team. The associated tree grate draws on the perhaps universal children's game of creating shapes using string. Children who see the grate may be interested in trying out the instructions that the grate provides to create their own string games. This tree grate depicts various forms that can be created during the string game and they are arranged to convey a sense of playfulness. Sometimes songs are sung and stories are told as these figures are being made. These figures can be made in clockwise order as shown on the grate or it may also be possible to jump from one figure to another. The four large hands bordering the tree grate are entangled in string and illustrate the stages engaged in between each of the figures. On the corners of the tree grate is a girl holding out the well-known Cradle position.

3.2 Hoop Games

The hoop game was one of the many games used to train young men into hunters and warriors. This tree grate design will incorporate the hoop game. This game was mostly played in the spring when the ground was hard. It was good practice for hunting. The game involves two teams. Each team takes turns throwing a hoop made of willow along the ground for the other team. As one player rolls the hoop by, others will attempt to knock it down with their poles, sticks, arrows or long darts.



Source: P. Atimoyoo (1980). Nehi yaw Ma Tow We Na. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College.

Ceremony



Source: C. Humbler (1988). *Canada's Native Peoples*. Mississauga: Heirloom Publishing Inc..



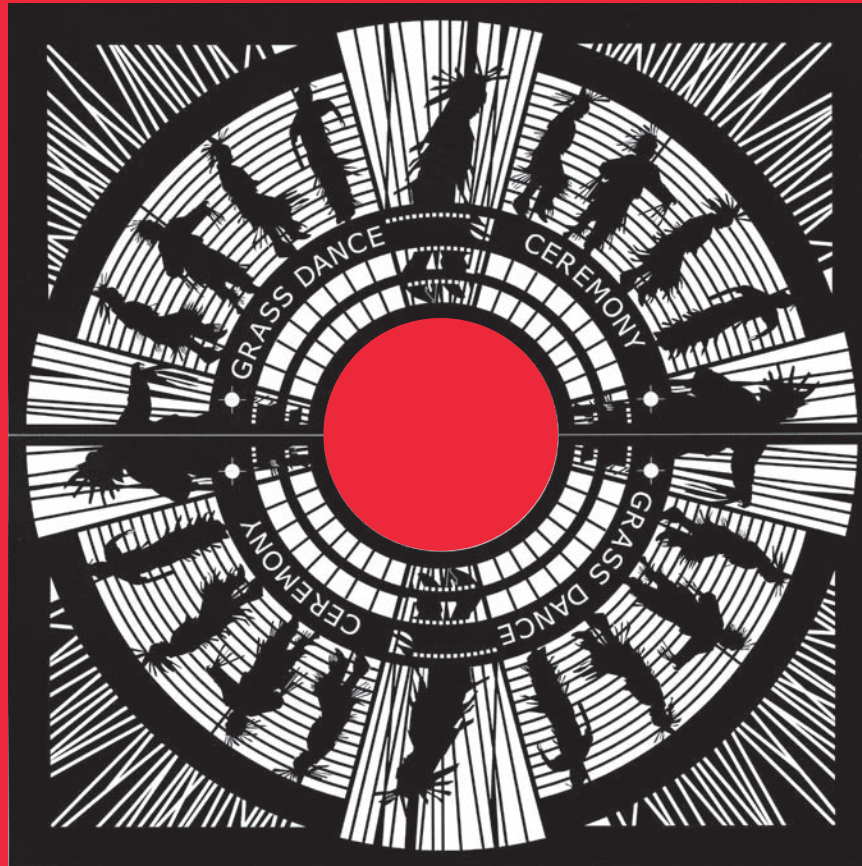
Source: http://www.nativenationsdanceco.homestead.com/files/Delwin_Urbana_1st_2000.jpg

Concept: Ceremony

The concept of these grates is to commemorate some of the rituals and ceremonies of the First Nations people. By performing ceremonies today, the First Nations people are able to preserve and pass on the ancient ways and teachings of the past. Ceremonies may be activities with ritual significance and physical components such as ceremonial dances, or they may be times of celebration with feasts and festivities.



Early Grass Dance design concept



4.1 Grass Dance

Stan Cuthand told the story of the origins of the Grass Dance, a ceremony which is still performed by the aboriginal people today. This dance is one of healing and renewal. During the ceremony, the grass dancers wear a costume with long threads. They attempt to mimic the movement of the tall prairie grasses as they sway in the wind. The outfits are designed to move with the motions of the dancers as they move their hips, arms, head and shoulders.

This tree grate incorporates the form of the circle in its design. The tree grate attempts to recreate the vibrancy and the splendour of the grass dance. The image of four dancers alternate as they make their way around the tree grate and create a very dynamic image out of a static object. The rhythm of the dancers around the tree grate represents the importance of the circle and further enhances the sense of movement.

4.2 Feast

This tree grate design will illustrate the celebration of feasts. It is believed by some that the origin of the Grass Dance is a ceremony that took place prior to special feasts and events. In earlier times, feasts often took place when there was plenty of food. The Elders recalled that during these feasts, there would be dancing and hunting songs sung. Among the food eaten would be chunks of buffalo and other game roasted on sticks hung over a fire. Cooking pots made from the stomach of the buffalo would be filled with meat, water, wild onions, and spices. Berries and roots were especially popular in the summer and were dried on hides.



Source: http://www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/EN/html/our_campsite.htm

Conclusion

The first tree grates are to be installed at River Landing in the spring of 2007. The City of Saskatoon Urban Design looks forward to coordinating this work with the interpretive programming of the Meewasin Valley Authority and other historic tours in the core BID areas. The City of Saskatoon Urban Design would like to once again thank our elder council for generously sharing their time, stories, and wisdom. It has been our privilege to work with this team.

