

For more information on the Saskatoon Afforestation areas:

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**Friends of the
Saskatoon
Afforestation
Areas Inc.**



**City of
Saskatoon**

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Land Acknowledgements

References:

1. Gridley, K. (1989). *Man of the Trees: Selected Writings of Richard St. Barbe Baker*. Willits, California: Ecology Action of the Midpeninsula.
2. Hanley, P. (2018). *Man of the Trees: Richard St. Barbe Baker - the First Global Conservationist*. Regina, Canada: University of Regina Press.
3. Saskatoon Public Library Photo ID# LH-5196
4. University of Saskatchewan, University Archives & Special Collections, Richard St. Barbe Baker fonds, MG 71, Box 33 M1 12 In Garden 1977

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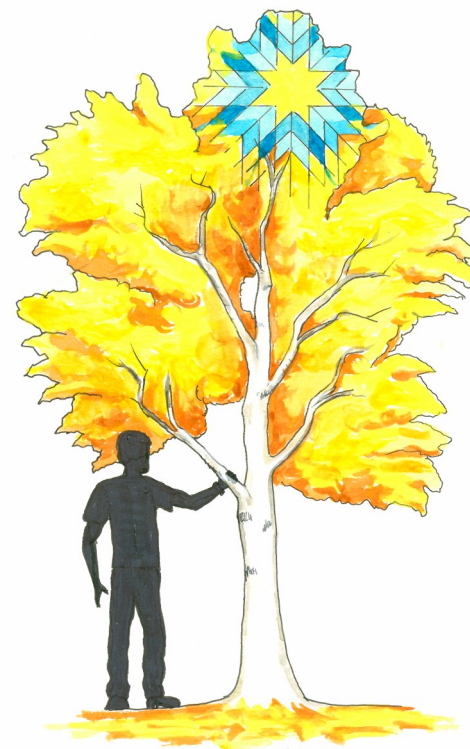
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Canada

SaskEnergy

Booklet 4

Elders and Lessons from Nature



Before felling a tree, a Maori asks permission
from the spirit of the tree, and afterwards
covers up the stump with foliage to protect it
from harm. In the hands of such people it is
no wonder that the original forests were so
well preserved.

~ Richard St. Barbe Baker^[1]

Land Acknowledgement:

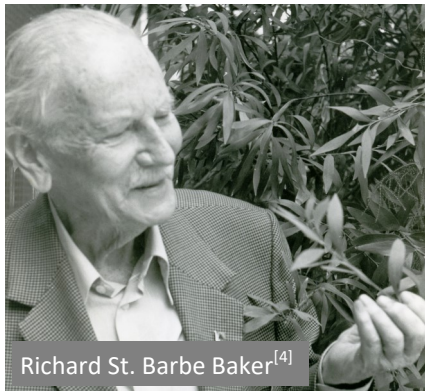
The afforestation areas are situated in the West Swale Yorath Island Glacial Spillway, a sacred site in Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Métis. Those who entered into Treaty 6 are the *Nêhiyawak* [neh-HEE-oh-wuk] (Cree), *Nakawē* (Saulteaux), and *Yankton and Yanktonai* (Nakota) people.

May our relationships with the land, standing peoples, forests, and waters teach us to honour and respect the past and invite us to move forward in harmony. May we all come together as friends, to find inspiration and guidance from histories, languages, and cultures which broaden our understanding and community collaboration for the present and future.

Season: Winter

Introduction:

Have you ever heard of the Man of the Trees? He was born on October 9th, 1889, in England. He travelled the world, promoting tree planting, good forestry practices and the protection of special forests like the



Richard St. Barbe Baker^[4]

redwoods. His greatest ambition was to reverse the growth of deserts and he worked out a plan to reclaim the world's biggest desert, the Sahara, through tree planting. He understood 100 years ago that trees and forests influenced climate, protected soils and by holding water, prevented flooding.

Why is he so important to Saskatchewan? He studied at the University of Saskatchewan, lived near Beaver Creek, spent time in the forest near Prince Albert, and planted his last tree on the U of S campus before passing away at the age of 92. The afforestation area we describe here was planted in 1972 and named in his honour in 1978.

2. How much carbon were you able to sequester?

3. Which species took in the most carbon over time?

On-site or Outdoor Activity:

Visit your tree and spend time watching from further away. If everyone is still and quiet you will start to see the community of creatures that call your tree home.

List or draw them here:

Does your tree look different from last time you visited?
Describe or draw the difference.



The 'dust bowl' of the 1930's, North America

Reflection:

1. If removing the plants that grow year after year (perennials) dries out the land, what helps to bring back that moisture?

Activity:

Richard St. Barbe Baker was called an “Earth Healer” by those who knew him. He knew that perennial plantings (plants that grow year after year) help maintain healthy soil and regulate the flow of water through the ecosystem.

You are now on Richard’s team and you have set out to design perennial plantings that will help take carbon out of the atmosphere, slow the wind, and provide habitat for wildlife.

1. In groups of 3, design a shelterbelt (rectangular) or bluff (circular). Draw out a design that includes 3 species of trees and 2 species of shrubs. Then use the following shelterbelt planning tool to know how much these trees will be worth in dollars and carbon sequestration potential.

Shelterbelt planning tool—www.shelterbelt-sk.ca

Story: Elders and Lessons from Nature

Note: Anything written in italics was written by Richard himself and quoted directly from his texts.

Have you ever experienced or witnessed something that seemed unjust? How did it make you feel? What if the experience was part of the rules that you were following?

By the time Richard arrived in Saskatchewan, in 1909, the bison herds were gone. Their populations, once in the millions, fell to the hundreds due to disease, drought, and slaughter. The Indigenous people had already signed the Treaties in their state of starvation and desperation. Unfair and unjust rules, that were not part of the original treaties, were inflicted upon them. These rules were not part of the treaties themselves.

For instance, the Indian Act of 1876 made it illegal for Indigenous people to vote until 1960. Between 1885 and 1951 Indigenous people couldn't leave the reservations without a pass given to them by the Indian agent. During this time it was also illegal to practice the cultural ceremonies that connected them to each other and to the land.

At the same time, according to the Dominions Land Act of 1872, people who applied for a homestead were granted 160 acres for free as long as they agreed to clear 10 acres per year and build a house within three years. If they failed to do so, the land was taken and given to someone else who would. The prairie ecosystem was quickly lost.

In the autumn of 1910, while crossing the prairies of Canada, I recognized for the first time a desert in the making... The country had been divided into townships with sections of 640 acres. In those days anybody could file on to a quarter section of 160 acres for nothing, and if needed more, that could be acquired.

The first things they did was to plough as much of it as they could, then sow wheat and oats to feed the horses.

With no sheltering trees, the soil began to drift and blow away; up to an inch of soil would be lost in a year.^[1]

Richard connected mystically with trees in his Father’s tree

nursery. Richard connected trees with the changes observed on the prairies.

It is now understood how important the deeply rooted native grasses and flowers are to the balance of this ecosystem, in addition to trees. His predictions for the consequences of mass tilling of the land would come true in the 1930s.

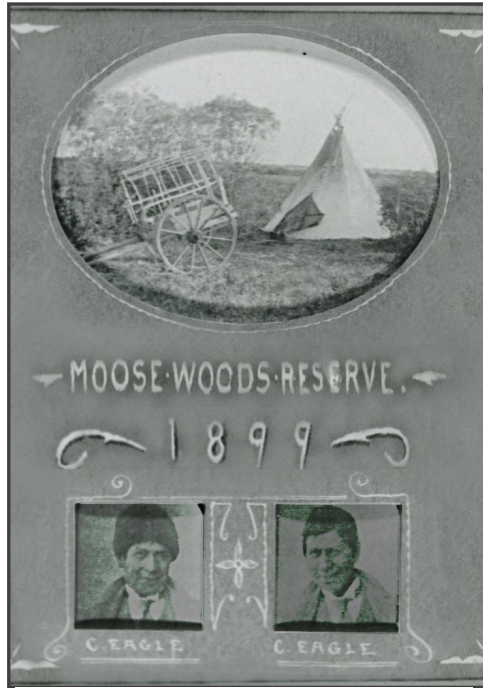
Ploughing up the native grassland has resulted in much loss of topsoil and species diversity. Only between 2 and 3% of the original native prairie grassland remains in North America.

Richard spent a year homesteading near Beaver Creek, just south of Saskatoon. During this time, he came to know the prairie and his neighbours at Moose Woods Reserve (Whitecap Dakota First Nation). He became friends with Charlie Eagle and was invited to visit.

During these visits, Richard sat around the fire with Charlie's family to listen to the stories that the Elders told the children. Embedded in these epic tales were teachings of morality, relationships with nature, hunting techniques, and humour.

I learned much as I sat by the fire with the children of Charlie Eagle's tribe...I felt at home with them.^[2]

He came to love the prairie very much, learning to hunt, trap and live off the land with his Indigenous neighbours. For most of his life though, he was a vegetarian and mentioned living on mostly wholemeal bread and dates as a student here.



Charlie Eagle, Moose Woods Reserve^[3]

Richard travelled to Indian Head, Saskatchewan, where a government tree nursery had been started in 1901. Many people who understood the connection between plant cover, soil health, and the water cycle could see that the ploughed land was drying out quickly.

Planting shelterbelts of trees around the farms helped to slow the wind and reduce erosion. The federal government supplied free trees for farmers until 2012. The former tree nursery is now being revived by Carry the Kettle First Nation.

Even now, the best way to help hold water on croplands, sequester carbon, and save the pollinators on the prairies is to have diverse ecobuffer shelterbelts as pockets or bands within or around croplands. In addition, these areas require healthy wetlands and areas that are habitat for indigenous prairie grasses, flowers, shrubs, animals, and people.

Prince Albert Bound

Richard spent some time as a lumberjack north of Prince Albert. He witnessed the clearcutting of the boreal forests and was deeply concerned about the impact. He was upset by the waste he saw, and he was inspired to understand nature's ways.

In my opinion, there should be no clear-cutting at all. Felling should be by selection of the best stems, the mature trees, or by a group selection method where a cluster of trees is removed to enable the surrounding trees to regenerate the land. Planting should be a last resort.

The ideal system is one which will keep the land constantly covered with a forest consisting of uneven-aged trees of various species. What is gained by clear-cutting is often gained at the expense of the future, for it entails the cutting of many small trees which would have eventually grown into profit.

He returned to Saskatoon, determined to study forestry and afforestation. His respect and love for Indigenous people would also influence his humanitarianism worldwide.