

The Living History Project (LHP) is a summer theatre project run by TryLight Theatre Co. It serves to further TryLight's desire to establish summer semi-professional theatre in Kenora as well attempting to appeal to tourists in trying to tell the stories of our history.

The goal was also to see our history through both the eyes of First Nations as well as settlers. In our first year we struggled to find that synthesis in part because the First Nations stories played only a small part in the overall storytelling as well as having difficulty attracting First Nations young people to apply and participate in the project.

For the 2012 version of the project we, with the help of Common Ground Research Forum, contracted a Toronto based playwright who has had good success in translating stories from various ethnic groups into theatrical form. Dennis Hassell visited Kenora in February 2012 and spent a week interviewing First Nations people to find stories that reflected the importance of water in the area. The result was Waterways, or as we renamed it Lake Stories, a powerful theatre piece that incorporated First Nations deep regard for the water and the importance of protecting the resource both through personal stories but also through First Nations creation stories.

The LHP has a policy that we will not use non First Nations actors to play First Nation characters and so we were pleased when, along with 6 non First Nations young people we were able to hire a young Metis woman and a First Nations young man. Both carried their parts very well.

The Lake Stories were performed in the courtyard of the Lake of the Woods Museum which was a good venue for the show. With the use of simple representational props the show was also relatively easy to move to different locations and in at least a couple of instances this was done.

Throughout the summer walking tours were also conducted through the downtown core of the city. A tour guide lead the tours giving historical information and answering questions between historical vignettes acted out by our troupe. The tour began at the Thistle Pavilion and ended at the Lake of the Woods Museum.

The Lake Stories and the tour played to critical success being appreciated by those who participated. We did not see the increase in audiences that we had hoped for, however, feel that the project has enough merit to attempt again in 2013. We are in the process of evaluating the project and consulting with interested parties to see how we can raise the visibility of the project both in the local community and in the cottage and tourism sector. We also are hoping to further the cross cultural aspect of the project.

We are grateful for the support we received from CGRF and look forward to further participation in the coming year.