

Companions in Decolonial Praxis: Revisiting “Other Materials”— Traitorous Love and Decolonizing the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation*

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Companions in Decolonial Praxis: Revisiting “Other Materials”—Traitorous Love and Decolonizing the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation*

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IN THIS ARTICLE, the author—a Red River Métis legal scholar—revisits questions of decolonization of legal citation practices first considered in an *Ottawa Law Review* article she coauthored in 2022. Following a gathering of Indigenous knowledge keepers, legal academics, practicing lawyers, law students and other thinkers at McGill’s Indigenous Legal Citations Symposium in the winter of 2025, she reflects on the future of legal research and decolonial citation practices, and processes for advancing in the work. In the second part of the article, she shares the context around public art practice she engaged in during the symposium and offers a written translation of the visual legal knowledge held in the resultant material object. In closing, the author renews her call for acts of traitorous love and making (appropriate) space for Indigenous Knowledges in legal writing and research.

DANS CET ARTICLE, l’auteure, une juriste Métisse de la rivière Rouge, fait un retour sur la question de la décolonisation des pratiques de citations juridiques, abordée pour la première fois dans un article de la *Revue de droit d’Ottawa*, qu’elle a elle-même corédigé en 2022. À la suite d’un rassemblement des gardiens et gardiennes du savoir autochtone, des professeurs et professeuses de droit, d’avocats et avocates en exercice, d’étudiants et étudiantes en droit, et autres penseurs et penseuses lors du Symposium sur la citation juridique autochtone de l’Université McGill en hiver 2025, elle réfléchit à l’avenir de la recherche juridique et aux pratiques de décolonisation des pratiques de citations, et des processus à suivre pour faire avancer ce travail. Dans la deuxième partie de l’article, elle explique le contexte de la pratique de l’art public, à laquelle elle s’est adonnée durant le symposium et partage une traduction écrite du savoir juridique visuel représenté dans l’objet matériel résultant. En conclusion, l’auteure renouvelle son appel pour la pratique d’actes commis dans un esprit d’amour traître et à la création d’un espace (approprié) pour donner la place au savoir autochtone dans la rédaction et la recherche juridique.

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Companions in Decolonial Praxis: Revisiting “Other Materials”— Traitorous Love and Decolonizing the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation*

*Danielle Lussier**

I. INTRODUCTION

Early in my career, I would resist offering an “introduction”—in the sense of the Western academy—in my written work, as my research and writing take non-linear paths with many detours. I insisted then, as I do now, on writing in my own voice, and in the past my “introductions” focused on statements of relationality and situating myself within the communities to whom I am accountable. Insofar as the research itself, I often wrote as if a reader were joining me at my kitchen table mid-conversation.

As time has moved forward and I have lived a little and learned a little more, my scholarship has been shaped by my privileged positions within the academy and the legal profession, and by the need to act as a translator between knowledge systems that struggle to exist in good relation to one another. While the notion of setting starting points and ending points in a piece of writing that I understand to form only a small part of a web of thinking and learning continues to feel uncomfortable, I now try to offer a gentler on-ramp to conversations for readers of my work. Including these paragraphs of wayfinding is an effort to bridge gaps in our ways of reading and engaging with knowledge.

Therefore, I will welcome you to this article, wherein I will revisit questions of decolonization of legal citation practices first considered in research I co-authored in 2022 with collaborator Steven Stechly. The

* Dr. Danielle Lussier, Red River Métis and citizen of the Manitoba Métis Federation, was born and raised in the Homeland of the Métis Nation on Treaty 1 Territory. She is a bead-worker and mum to three young people, and she currently serves as Queen’s National Scholar and Chair in Indigenous Knowledges and Perspectives at Queen’s University.

drafting of this article followed a gathering of Indigenous knowledge keepers, legal academics, practicing lawyers, law students and other thinkers held at McGill's Faculty of Law. The law learners who lead the McGill Law Journal hosted this diverse group of folks working both within and beyond the legal academy to the *Indigenous Legal Citations Symposium* in the winter of 2025 to discuss proposed changes for the upcoming 11th edition of the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation (McGill Guide)*. The invitation encouraged me to return to my previous reflections on the future of legal research and decolonial citation practices.

The original work that prompted the learner-editors to save me a seat at the table is where our time together in this article begins. I will then offer some thoughts on the current state of the *McGill Guide* as it relates to Indigenous Legal Knowledges, pausing for a few moments to explore the ongoing struggles around properly honouring material objects that carry law. Through these sections, readers can expect short detours as I think out loud about motherhood with/in the legal academy and the legal profession, because all of these things are related.

In the second part of the article, I will unpack the wherefores and whys of an (almost) accidental public art practice that emerged during the symposium, and I will offer a written translation of the visual legal knowledge held in the resultant material object. In other spaces, I have termed this process as one of “reading the beads.”¹ To read the beads, one must also consider the context around them; as such, in this section I will also reflect on the Symposium itself, and some of the many themes that emerged from my personal perspective. For full transparency, this article is not a space where I will summarize the contributions to the circle made by my colleagues, nor will I delve too deeply into all of the themes captured in the beadwork. That collaborative work will, I am sure, find space in other forums, at other times and other places.

When it is time to part ways, please be forewarned: I will renew my previous call for acts of traitorous love and making (appropriate) space for Indigenous Knowledges in legal writing and research.

1 Danielle Lussier, “Reading the Beads: Legal Education, Métis Motherhood, and Reclaiming the Visual Record” in Maria Daschsel & Nancy Lee, eds, *Sharp Notions: Essays from the Stitching Life* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2023) 157.

II. LOVE AND LOATHING IN CITATIONS

A number of years ago, when I was a marginally younger woman in the throes of birthing my doctoral dissertation, I became quite frustrated with the *McGill Guide*. Bringing doctoral studies to completion is a process that, for many people, represents something of a crisis or a traumatic time. Even for those who are not engaging in “heartwork”—work that I understand to rise above matters of simple, intellectual cognition, and enters realms of deeply emotional and holistic understandings of knowledge production and mobilization—the final sprint to finalize the draft to be publicly defended is stressful. After many years of study, research, and developing profound relationships to the ideas captured in one’s doctoral work, the final tears are often shed over some of the many “Fs” of research: figures, formatting, and footnotes.²

In the case of my dissertation, timing was everything. It was the early days of COVID; so early in fact that we had not yet even reached the early days of online education for my children.³ At the university level, meanwhile, we were still living in “reaction mode” and not “future planning mode” as we worked to support learners and shift to online learning. The days were seemingly endless streams of Zooms while cuddling children, with evenings reserved for the thesis. By the time I arrived at footnoting, I was completely exhausted. The long dashes and commas and *ibids* and *supras* almost put me over the edge, and I enlisted the help of a young scholar named Steven Stechly for what I thought would be a rather straightforward process of footnoting “Law with Heart” and finalizing the draft.⁴

As it turned out, I underestimated the investment of the legal academy in the colonial status quo. Shame on me, really, given that it was one central focus of the dissertation itself. I ought not have been as surprised as I was. And yet, as we moved through the footnoting of the document, it became clear that the *McGill Guide* left very little space, if any at all, for the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges, whether that be knowledge held by Elders, dreams, or material objects—including the beadwork that my own legal research engaged with. The vast majority of these sources were

2 Amongst others.

3 The failing of provincial education systems vis-à-vis early childhood and elementary education ultimately led to several years of homeschooling in the case of my family, but that’s a story for another day.

4 Danielle Lussier, *Law with Heart and Beadwork: Decolonizing Legal Education, Developing Indigenous Legal Pedagogy, and Healing Community* (PhD Dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2021) [unpublished].

lumped under the heading of “Other Materials”, and ranked as subordinate to literally every other imaginable source of law and legal knowledge.

Ultimately, compromises were made in order to bring the manuscript to completion. As I often say to my learners in the context of completing academic assignments with a view to earning their credits so that they can turn to other priorities, “done” is sometimes better than “perfect”. However, long after I successfully defended my PhD, Steven and I continued to think and talk about the shortcomings we perceived in the *McGill Guide*. While most researchers and lawyers seemed to rarely spare a thought for this document that is often only viewed as a tool to facilitate the more serious work of researching and drafting, we believed that it exercised subtle and profound influence over both.

We just could not let the subjugation of Indigenous knowledge go, and we eventually put pen to paper to share some of our reflections with the broader legal community. With our article, “‘Other Materials’—Traitorous Love and Decolonizing the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation*”, that appeared in the *Ottawa Law Review*, we hoped to contribute to—and spark—conversations around decolonization of legal citation practices.⁵ I also hoped to encourage our colleagues, both in legal practice and labouring within the academy, to confront and interrogate complicated notions of systemic racism and oppression as they manifest in the *McGill Guide*.

In the years that followed, the article took on a life of its own. It was featured on legal blogs, such as *Slaw*,⁶ and was the subject of professional development sessions in some law firms.⁷ Some reported that it was assigned reading in their legal research methods classes in various law schools across Canada, and Indigenous scholars in other disciplines cited our article in their own efforts to push forward change in their fields of expertise.⁸ The work was even cited in a number of “best practice” research

5 Danielle Lussier & Steven Stechly, “‘Other Materials’—Traitorous Love and Decolonizing the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation*” (2022) 52:2 *Ottawa L Rev* 301.

6 Emma Durand-Wood, “Thursday Thinkpiece: Lussier & Stechly on Decolonizing the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation*”, *Slaw* (15 September 2022), online: <slaw.ca/2022/09/15/thursday-thinkpiece-lussier-stechly-on-decolonizing-the-canadian-guide-to-uniform-legal-citation/>.

7 Bo Kruk, Sharon Roberts Law Group “Personal Communication” (2023) via oral communication [communicated to author].

8 Amy Shawanda, “Nda-nwendaaganag (All My Relations): A Relational Approach to Citation Practices” (2023) 1:3 *Turtle Island J Indigenous Health* 11.

guides.⁹ Steven and I, who had both moved on to new professional roles in different cities and time zones, would periodically reconnect and marvel over the way the work was moving through the world.

Shortly after the publication of our article, a new edition—the 10th—of the *McGill Guide* was issued.¹⁰ In the 10th edition, some progress was made towards addressing some of the concerns that we and other scholars had raised about the exclusion of Indigenous Knowledges, cultural heritage, and knowledge holders.¹¹ While I was initially thrilled to see some progress, I worried that in some cases the amendments inadvertently served to further denigrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

For example, the 10th edition of the *McGill Guide* provided guidance on citing wampum belts,¹² which was a specific concern that Steven and I had articulated in our reflections.¹³ My moment of joy at this new development was immediately tempered by the context around the inclusion of the guidance. Still classified under the broad header of “secondary sources and other materials”, a new section—6.19. – Physical Objects—was added to the end of the *McGill Guide*.

The section reads “this section applies to physical objects, including works of art and artifacts”, and proceeds to offer several examples of how a legal scholar may cite them. A proposed citation format for the Two Row Wampum belt appears below a suggested citation for a painting by Pablo Picasso.¹⁴ As Penelope Kelsey points out, the Two Row Wampum arguably served as the basis for all other treaties for the three hundred years of treaty-making that followed,¹⁵ and as Steven and I argued in *Traitorous*

- 9 Andrea Menard, *Indigenizing Citations Guidebook 2023: ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱ Bimaadizi “Living” Citations* (2023) [unpublished, archived at Indigenous Connect, online: <indigenousconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/bimaadizi-living-citations-Nov2023_.pdf>] at 11; Andrea Menard, *Indigenizing Citations Guidebook 2024: ᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱ Bimâtan “Living” Citations* (2024) [unpublished, archived at Indigenous Connect, online: <indigenousconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/INDIGENIZING-CITATIONS-2024.pdf>] at 11; Queen’s University Library, “Aboriginal Law & Indigenous Laws: Style and Citation Guides” (last modified 8 April 2026), online: <guides.library.queensu.ca/Aboriginal-and-Indigenous-law/research-and-citation>.
- 10 McGill Law Journal, *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation*, 10th ed (Toronto: Thomson Reuters, 2023).
- 11 McGill Law Journal, *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation*, 9th ed (Toronto: Thomson Reuters, 2018).
- 12 *Supra* note 9 at E-110.
- 13 Lussier & Stechly, *supra* note 4 at 322.
- 14 McGill Law Journal, 10th ed, *supra* note 9 at E-110.
- 15 Penelope Myrtle Kelsey, *Reading the Wampum: Essays on Hodinöhsö:ni’ Visual Code and Epistemological Recovery* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014) at 4.

Love, the very reason that wampum may require special consideration in the *McGill Guide* is as a result of their constitutional importance.¹⁶ With all due respect to the artistic works of Pablo Picasso, from my perspective it is unconscionable that a legal instrument such as the wampum belt that physically embodies and articulates a foundational treaty signed in the year 1613 be grouped together with—and in fact, positioned subordinate to—an example of his work.

As an important aside, the overall guidance for citation of physical objects appears on the very last page of the *McGill Guide*—immediately below guidance offered in 6.18.4.1 for “Non-Fungible Tokens.”

I have existed in these spaces long enough to know that even a small win such as including a proposed citation for wampum—however ill-positioned—was likely the result of years of advocacy, and emotional and intellectual labour by under-resourced Indigenous folks, and for that I am recognizant and grateful. That said, I am sad at the crumbs of hope Indigenous legal practitioners are offered: positioning the Two-Row Wampum under the header of “Physical Objects”, below Pablo Picasso, subordinate to “units of data stored on a blockchain”—and it being an improvement on the status quo. For crying out loud. You can’t make this stuff up.

III. MCGILL LAW JOURNAL SYMPOSIUM ON INDIGENOUS CITATION PRACTICES

Time, as it does, marched on, and in the middle of the 2025 Winter term I received an email from the current learner-editors of the McGill Law Journal. Like many law journals affiliated with Canadian law schools, it is a learner-driven enterprise.¹⁷ In addition to publishing peer-reviewed scholarship, these journals help support the development of critical professional and research skills for the JD students who volunteer as editors, submission managers, and citation managers.

The invitation from the learner-editors that hit my inbox did, in fact, find me well. Disruptions during COVID meant that participation in conferences and in-person gatherings had been either impossible or very difficult for me for several years, and my career had taken some unexpected and interesting turns towards land-based science laboratories, glass bead production and trade, and other beyond-law research that had led me away

¹⁶ Lussier & Stechly, *supra* note 4 at 322.

¹⁷ McGill Law Journal, “About” (last visited 24 April 2026), online: <lawjournal.mcgill.ca/about>.

from legal conferences and towards other gatherings. This ultimately meant that the symposium was one of my first opportunities since the emergence of the public health crisis to gather in person with the many legal scholars whose work I have been tracking online for a number of years.

It was humbling to be included on a guest list that included Marilyn Poitras, Dr. Jaime Lavallee, Sara Mainville, Professor Sylvia McAdam, and Dr. Aaron Mills, amongst many others. Dr. Mills and I had spoken on the phone during an early lockdown but had never met in person. I had recently crossed paths with Professor McAdam at the Symposium on the Continuum of Legal Education in Truth and Reconciliation hosted by the Council of Canadian Law Deans and the Federation of Law Societies just a few months before,¹⁸ but Marilyn Poitras and I racked our brains and finally settled on the Indigenous Bar Association conference in 2019 as the likely site of our most recent in-person encounter. We agreed: it had been a long minute.

Other scholars I had never had the opportunity to meet before, to the best of my memory. To hear Dr. Lavallee speak about her experience as a new-ish professor at the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan, some of which I had previously read about in her article, was truly a profound experience.¹⁹ It was simultaneously a great comfort to hear Dr. Lavallee articulate experiences similar to those that I have personally lived or heard reported from colleagues and mentees, and destabilizing when I reflected on how slow progress towards healthy inclusion of Indigenous folks in the legal academy has been—and continues to be.

Even in a space with as positive an energy as the one created by the learners who organized the Symposium, testimonies like those given by Dr. Lavallee were emotional and somewhat overwhelming. I was equally overwhelmed—in a different way—to meet members of the Indigenous Advisory Council who have been working with the Journal for many years, including Elders Stephen Augustine and Sherry Copenace. It is my understanding that the Elders and the rest of the Advisory Council were critical to the development of the “Working Draft of the Interpretative Framework for Citing Indigenous Laws” that we had gathered to discuss.²⁰

18 Joint Working Group of the Council of Canadian Law Deans and the Federation of Law Societies of Canada, “Symposium on the Continuum of Legal Education in Truth and Reconciliation”, (delivered in Toronto, Ontario, 30–31 January 2025) online (pdf): <umanitoba.ca/law/sites/law/files/2025-01/i_symposium_agenda_v3.0.pdf>.

19 Jaime MN Lavallee, “How To Be Biased in the Classroom: Kwayeskastasowin – Setting Things Right?” (2022) 48:3 Mitchell Hamline L Rev 771.

20 Participants were asked not to disseminate the Framework, which remains in draft form.

I will admit that I cornered Elder Augustine during a break to share with him photos of beadwork that his granddaughter Paula Sock had created in partial fulfilment of requirements for a course on Indigenous Legal Traditions that I once taught at the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Law. I frequently say this of the Indigenous women who take my courses because I am forever in awe of their brilliance and bravery, but it makes it no less true: Paula has a heart and mind that will change the world. To meet her kin in the context of this symposium felt full circle for me as an educator.

Meanwhile, it took absolutely everything in me to not fangirl over Lorisia MacLeod, library scientist from James Smith Cree Nation, whose work I had long followed. In parallel to her transformative work around Indigenization of the library sciences,²¹ Lorisia is also a prolific beadworker. My own collection contains a number of her pieces that I purchased online over the course of the pandemic and that are the favourites of my children. To those who say “never meet your heroes”, it is clear to me that your hero isn't Lorisia MacLeod. She was as brilliant as I knew she must be, and as it turns out, she had brought her beads too.

IV. RECLAMATION OF (VISUAL & PHYSICAL) SPACE: BEADING THE MCGILL GUIDE

In early discussions with the learner-editors around participation in the Symposium, I contemplated the idea of creating a piece of beadwork to mobilize knowledge shared and generated during the conference. They had been tracking my previous work translating legal knowledge into beads, and were curious what this kind of engagement might look like.²² I shared with them about a recent intervention in the context of a conference at Queen's University where two graduate learners, Mary McPherson and Abigail Green, and I engaged in a process of redacting the *Royal Proclamation of 1763* using size six seed beads.²³

21 Lorisia MacLeod, “More Than Personal Communication: Templates for Citing Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers” (2021) 5:1 KULA 1.

22 Danielle Lussier, “If These Beads Could Talk: A Legal Love Letter to My Children” (2022) 18:1 Indigenous LJ 1; Danielle Lussier, “Ob-La-Di, Oc-to-Pus (Life Goes on): a Modern Métis Fire Bag (2021)” (2024) 22:2 TEXTILE: Cloth & Culture 375.

23 Danielle Lussier, Mary McPherson & Abigail Green, “Beading Across the Royal Proclamation, 1763: (Visually) Disrupting a Foundational Colonial Document” in Charles Prior & Mark Walters, eds, *Connected Nations: Celebrating the 260th Anniversary of the Royal Proclamation of 1763* (Montreal: Queen's-McGill University Press, 2026) [forthcoming in 2026].



Beading Across the Royal Proclamation, 1763: (Visually) Disrupting a Foundational Colonial Document; with Mary McPherson and Abigail Green

We also had discussions about the value of visual note takers, a practice that I have seen gain popularity at conferences over the last few years. On more than one occasion, I've attended conferences where talented graphic artists, equipped with either sharpies or iPads, generate infographics, drawings, and posters in real time, allowing participants to snap photos and share insights gained during the conference on social media. I frequently marvelled at how talented these artists are insofar as capturing both broad themes and small seeds of ideas that take root during discussions.

As a conference participant, I have found it valuable to carry these visual conference summaries in photos snapped on my phone; when I am speaking about what I learned at the conference by the water coolers or when I am teaching about similar themes in my classes, I am able to pull up the photo, allowing folks to connect with the ideas in new ways. As an added bonus: I can also cite them.

In the time between those initial discussions and the Symposium itself, my teaching of two new courses in the middle of a Teaching Assistant strike got away from me. In order to survive my day-to-day learner-focused responsibilities, I had to set aside thoughts about research, beadwork, and the bigger picture of decolonization of the academy. Practically, this meant

that my preparation for the Symposium was not as calm or thoughtful as I wish it could've been, and the night before I was scheduled to drive to Montreal—immediately after teaching a three-hour lecture to a class of 140 learners—I found myself scrambling to put my thoughts (and my suitcase) in order.²⁴

As they often do, the children travelled with me. I long ago stopped caring about side-eye in lecture halls or snide comments about the appropriateness of children existing in university spaces, and my family frequently accompanies me when I travel for work. In fact, when the children are actively excluded from these spaces, I take the opportunity to open conversations about why that is so and who it is serving. From my perspective, work to “Indigenize” and decolonize the academy is work that must necessarily include both children and older folks. I have said it before, and I will continue to say it as long as necessary: if this work is not done in service of children, then who are we doing it for?

While it is important to include little ones, it is also often challenging. It means that I am not responsible for packing one suit and a change of socks, but rather for coordinating health, safety, and comfort for my entire family in parallel to ensuring that I am intellectually prepared to engage on very complex academic issues. The night before we were scheduled to leave for the symposium, for example, saw a considerable amount of scrambling to ensure that everyone had clean pants, fresh socks, and toothbrushes. The idea of embodied practice unfortunately became an afterthought in my preparations.

As the trunk was being loaded, I made a last-minute decision to grab a bag filled haphazardly with leftovers from a recent beading circle workshop I stewarded as a guest educator in the context of a land-based law school course. The bag had a little bit of everything, but not quite enough of anything; but, Indigenous legal scholars are often used to generating brilliance under less-than-ideal conditions, so I imagined it would be fine. And besides, I wasn't quite sure I was in the headspace to bead, anyway.²⁵

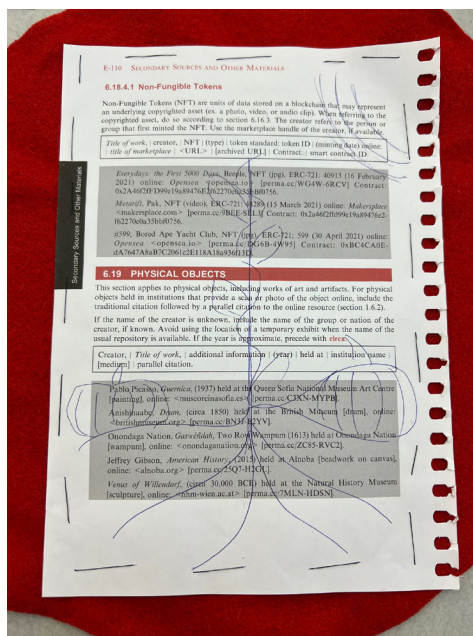
Then, I met Lorisia, gauged the positive intellectual energy in the room, and felt my hands begin to itch. The chairs in the room on the third floor of the law school had been arranged in a circle, and so I sought permission from the Elder welcoming us to her territory—Tealey Ka'senni:saks

24 I later pulled it together enough to write about the experience (see e.g. Danielle Lussier, “Because the Lives of My Kin Depend on it: Reflections on Teaching Indigenous Studies 101” (2026) 0:0 *AlterNative* 1).

25 Lussier, *supra* note 3 at 325.

Normandin—to bring a table into the circle so that Lorisia and I could bead through the conference. I also asked one of the learner-editors if she had an extra copy of the *McGill Guide*, warning her that she likely wouldn't get it back intact.

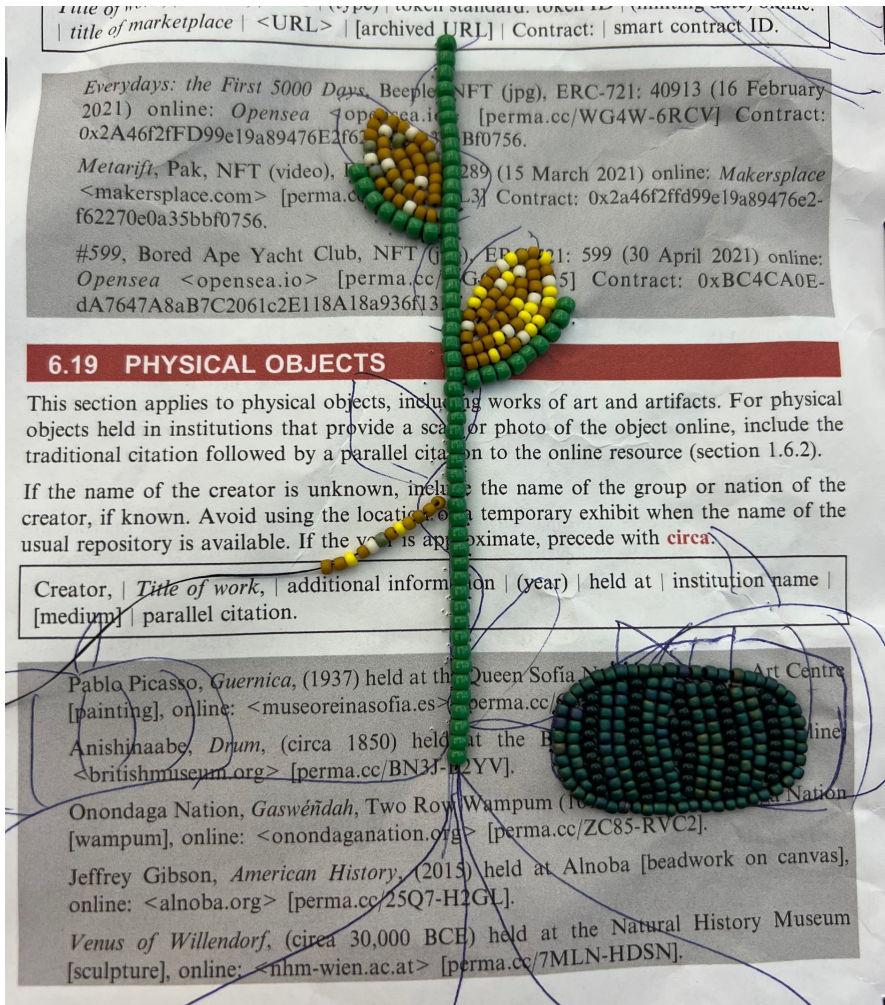
Once we were settled, I promptly set about defacing a page that I tore from the 10th edition. It should be noted that it is almost unheard of for me to embark upon a project without a pattern. Patterns emerge in different ways in my beading practice: sometimes from dreams, other times from active effort to communicate something specific to my children, my learners, or another community of practice. I often work on patterns for a considerable period of time before I begin beading, and I keep previous versions of patterns safe in a special drawer in my living room. While my patterns often evolve as I move through the beading process—sometimes as a result of realizing the limitations of the beads I am working with, other times, because the piece simply calls for deviation from the script as I follow the beads—it is fair to say that I do not generally “freestyle”. I have always been in awe of beadworkers who I watch developing their patterns in real time and I decided that this was the day I would try my hand at translating that inspiration into action.



Long, ugly basting stitches and sketching, in pen. Noteworthy (and one of the reasons I work and rework patterns): in the initial sketch, the squash are drawn upside down. Yikes.

The page that I tore from the 10th edition of the *McGill Guide* is tacked down to a piece of almost round red melton trade cloth with black nylon beading thread and a very imprecise basting stitch. As I listened to the Elders and colleagues during our opening circle, I began to sketch (in pen) and bead a visual translation of some of the themes that were emerging for me personally.

Immediately obvious in the centre of the page is a tall, straight corn stalk with her sister of beans winding from the root to the topmost cob. Running along the ground, the third playful sister of squash dances across the torn-out page.



Sisters, in progress.

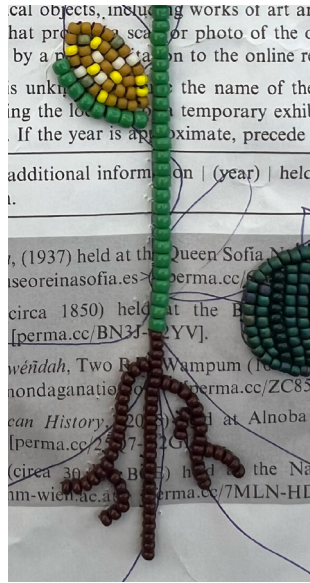
I was inspired to begin this work with the Three Sisters for a few reasons.²⁶ First, as we were welcomed to the faculty by Mohawk knowledge holder Tealey Ka'senni:saks Normandin, she reminded us of the Three Sisters and their importance in Haudenosaunee communities. Beyond critical importance to traditional food systems, the Three Sisters and practices of companion planting²⁷ also serve to highlight and remind us of the importance and interdependence of our relationships.²⁸ In the story of the Three Sisters as I have only just begun to understand it, we are reminded that we are all related and we must continuously tend to our relationships and care for those around us if any of us are to grow and thrive.

Following the opening, the word “companion” seemed to hang in the air and ultimately reoccurred throughout circle discussions in a number of different contexts. For example, conversation eventually turned to the appropriateness of writing some Indigenous Legal Knowledge down at all. These discussions are not emotionally or intellectually straight-forward, and for me, the exchanges truly served to elucidate how a one-size-fits-all approach will prove challenging for the learner-editors of the *McGill Guide* given the diversity of legal traditions across Indigenous communities in North America. Some examples from legal practice of Indigenous laws being accompanied by “companion” documents (such as drafting instructions, which can be retained as confidential helper documents), were shared as I continued to bead the Sisters and their roots.

26 Michelle Corneau, *Strong Stories Kanyen'keha:ka: The Three Sisters* (Nanaimo, BC: Strong Nations Publishing, 2016).

27 Companion planting is the practice of planting certain crops together, for example the Three Sisters (corn, beans, and squash), to encourage growth (see Oneida Indian Nation, “Companion Planting” (last visited 24 April 2026), online: <oneidaindiannation.com/companion-planting>; Haudenosaunee Confederacy, “Food and Hunting” (last visited 24 April 2026), online: <haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/historical-life-as-a-haudenosaunee/food-and-hunting>).

28 For one version of the Three Sisters story, see Oneida Indian Nation, “The Legend of the Three Sisters” (last visited 24 April 2026), online: <oneidaindiannation.com/the-legend-of-the-three-sisters>.



Roots

I cannot recall the first project in which I included visible roots, but it is something that I have done in the context of several other beadwork projects, such as the five petal rooted flower of “Absolute Refusal”.²⁹ As conversations continued around me, I thought about what had brought us together in the room, and I was struck at the grace and kindness that was being offered in the circle—even when we may have disagreed. From my vantage point, the efforts made by the learner-editors to bring people together into the room were growing from a good space and rooted in a desire to gain forward momentum and take action to address what they identified as “gaps in the Guide”. It was kindness, grace, and a good-hearted desire for action that I kept in mind as I rooted the Sisters.

As I stitched, it also came to mind that for a year or two, several years ago, the Indigenous Law Association at McGill published a journal titled *Rooted*,³⁰ and I recalled that the brilliant Mary McPherson (participant in the aforementioned Royal Proclamation project) published a piece of visual legal knowledge transfer in the second issue in 2021. The original of the work titled “There Once Was Pride”,³¹ hangs on the wall in my dining

29 Danielle Lussier, “Absolute Refusal (2023)” (2024) 1:2 Pawaatamihk: J Métis Thinkers 191.

30 Rooted: A Publication on Indigenous Law, “All About Rooted” (last accessed 24 April 2026), online: <rootedlaw.squarespace.com/about>.

31 Mary McPherson, “There Once Was Pride” (2021) 1:2 Rooted 2 at 2–3.

room where I ultimately completed work on this project. For me, the roots are therefore also imbued with the knowledge that we are all related, and a teaching that sometimes sitting quietly and listening can go a long way to helping us process and make connections between new information and memory.

The beaded roots are artificially straight and minimal, not at all because I believed the investment of organizers was shallow, but rather as a function of the supplies I had available on hand and the very limited quantity of appropriate beads. Interestingly, this practical limitation—restrained resources—highlighted for me (and now perhaps for you, Dear Reader) the complexity of the discussions around the appropriateness of capturing knowledge(s) in a static form. The stories of kindness in the room, and the links I was personally drawing to works of legal scholars beyond the symposium, would be silenced in a contextual vacuum. Without the companion of this written article or a live interaction wherein I can read the beads, an observer might misinterpret the context around the shallow roots, for they would not understand that the roots would have been depicted as deeper if the resources had been available to me at the time of knowledge capture.



Sun, with 7-bead rays

Meanwhile, without a written interpretation, even a not-so-careful observer will notice residual black thread in the uppermost right-hand corner of the torn page. This thread is what is left of a first attempt of beading a sun, one which I ultimately decided was too high in the sky. While I chose to

remove the beads, I left the cut threads intact as a visual reminder that we are allowed to make mistakes and to change our minds when things just aren't quite right.

I chose instead to reposition the sun slightly to the east, which speaks to the early moment we find ourselves in as we work to decolonize the *McGill Guide* and hold space for Indigenous Knowledges and perspectives. Each ray contains seven beads, nods to both the seven generations ahead of us that we need to keep in mind in doing our work, and the seven sacred teachings that can guide us in it.³²

Given a selection of bead options, I likely would've beaded the sun in a slightly different colour, but on his way to lunch, Elder Augustine pointed at the bag of yellow opaque beads I had brought with me and said “There is your sun”—and I certainly wasn't going to argue with Paula's grandpa.



Spirit-marked shadow

32 For a discussion on the Seventh Generation Principle and the Seven Grandfather Teachings, see e.g. James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw, *The Seven Generations and the Seven Grandfather Teachings* (Burnsville, MN: James Vukelich, 2023).

During the morning's circle discussion, Elder Augustine shared his understanding that our shadows can serve as a visual reminder of our ancestors accompanying us through life. Remembering that our ancestors were with us as we were doing the hard work of disrupting the status quo in legal research felt like an important idea to me, and at the break I sought Elder Augustine's advice about where the shadow of the Sisters would fall given the position of the sun. By beading an imperfect (and, quite frankly, too short according to the math) shadow, I hoped to create visual space for this teaching.

The beaded shadow also includes a pink "spirit bead". Spirit bead teachings carry many different meanings, some of which are not appropriate to share here; but, one important truth that they hold is that nothing in life is perfect. This was certainly true of the contents of my bead bag; thankfully, I wasn't beading alone. Both the beads for the shadow and the spirit bead were donated to the project by Lorisia.

As the symposium drew to a close, my brain was buzzing with the energy of hopeful possibility, but my body was tired. I packed my bead bag and headed down the mountain to meet the children for dinner.

V. CLOSING: BEYOND THE PAGE

Over pizza, I shared with my children my reflections on the day and showed them my progress on the piece. One of the first questions they asked was whether I intended to tear off the paper once I had finished beading the partially completed sun. We had several conversations in the days that followed, drawing in additional expertise from legal beadworkers like Abigail Green, over the pros and the cons of leaving the "beaded over" page in place, including that it would provide additional clues and context to outside observers.³³ On the other hand, removing the paper would leave the themes of relationship, reciprocity, slow progress, and moving forward in a way that is respectful of our ancestors, to stand on their own.

At the risk of making a terrible pun that my son will find hilarious when he one day reads this article: I was torn.

33 Abigail Green, *Walking in a Good Way: Espousing Indigenous Method(ologie)s and Pedagogies of Visiting and Beadwork in Legal Research* (Master's Thesis, Queen's University, 2024) [unpublished].



Bored Ape Yacht Club.

I ultimately decided that, as the work to decolonize legal citation practices in Canada remains an ongoing project, I would leave the paper underneath the beadwork for the time being. My hope is that leaving the page in place may act as an intellectual bridge for outside observers of the work, prompting reflection and questions. Perhaps someone will notice the entry for a non-fungible token that cites the “Bored Ape Yacht Club” and wonder, like I did, why it not only shares a page with the physical embodiment of a 400-year-old treaty, but is also somehow positioned as superior to it. Maybe someone else will notice that the page is crumpled and torn from being manipulated by my hands as I sewed, and they will spare a thought to the energy that was invested in the creation of the material object.

When Steven and I closed our 2022 article, we sent readers off on the following words: “[a]pproaching this decolonial project with kindness and a good heart will reveal that being mindful when citing is a responsibility for all who are labouring in legal spheres towards a more just society.”³⁴ I stand by these words and the sentiment they carry; as I cannot know what intellectual or emotional space future observers of the work may be in, leaving the page in place is a kindness to offer context to outside observers.

34 Lussier & Stechly, *supra* note 4 at 326.

Decolonization of legal citation practices is absolutely a work in progress. Maintaining the page behind the beads will also allow me, as a scholar, to add to the piece over time as my thinking about these processes evolves. In other words, it is a kindness to my future self; I am leaving a door open to revisiting and revising the object—and the thinking associated with it—again in the future.

In the meantime, I sincerely hope that you, Dear Reader, will be inspired to join the conversation. From my perspective, the leadership that was demonstrated by the learner-editors who planned and hosted the 2025 Symposium highlights how much progress can be made when taking responsibility with a good heart is centred in a process of reimagining. They've offered you an example of how individuals and groups can begin to respectfully engage with Indigenous thinkers, and some of our critiques of their (ongoing) efforts. They accepted critique with grace and were open to constructive feedback. Nothing in life is perfect, and sustainable progress may sometimes feel slow. This is true both in stitching beads and in moving the needle on an entire profession's approach to knowledge transmission...but with patience and consistency, changes can become visible. I, for one, will follow the evolution of the *McGill Guide* closely; I do hope that consistent, respectful engagement will soon result in transformative action.