

*Wawatay*, otherwise known as Aurora Borealis or the Northern Lights, have always fascinated people. For the First Nations peoples of Manitoba, they are more than just the northern lights. The Cree and the Ojibway have a similar word for the northern lights. The Cree say *Wawastew* which is similar in sound to *Wawatay*. The Northern Lights symbolize some of the teachings and practices of the First Nations people.

One of these teachings, passed on from generation to generation, is the belief that *Wawatay* are spirits of the ancestors celebrating life, reminding us that we are all part of creation. Their dancing forms a pathway for the souls as they travel to the next world. It is said that when we are living properly and conducting our ceremonies and dances, the spirits of our ancestors dance in the heavens.

A teaching tells us that when we leave this earth, we are to dance out the doorway to the next world in spirit form. When we do this, our relatives will meet us. Those left living on the earth will see the Northern Lights (*Wawatay/Wawastew*) dancing in the sky from the northeast to the northwest.

Another teaching is that the North is understood as the land of the bear and that the bear's power includes healing. So it is said that when the bear's healing power is the strongest, the Northern Lights will dance in the sky.

However, First Nations understood that the Northern lights were always associated with dancing because of their movement and colour. So it is with the launching of the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre Scholarly Journal that we celebrate with the spirits of our ancestors, who are celebrating with us.