

Treaty signing in 1876 – Excerpt from the Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research of the 1970's

The word Cree is not our own. The word was only used by the newcomers to identify us as separate from the other tribes at the time of Treaty. The name Cree came from the Oblate missionaries who came west to win over converts. It is a Latin word that means "Cries." When the Cree people sang they would "*sahkawey*" or cry, yell out loud while singing. We called ourselves "*nehiyaw*" which means human being, a person, or a two-legged. We originally came from the east and migrated west with the fur trade. Our people blended with the French Voyageurs who looked for fur up and down the rivers of Canada and gave birth to the Metis people a mixture of French and Cree descent. Another interesting side note, the Saskatchewan river is a Cree word meaning fast flowing river.

The following was extracted from the oral history from the Saddle Lake elders. Transcripts from Elder interviews conducted by the TARR (Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research) research team and a thesis conducted and documented by Sam Bull. In the 70's the Alberta bands heard that there were land claims being won by Eastern tribes in court which resulted in huge land claim settlements. The Chiefs turned towards the Indian Association of Alberta to start a process to assist the Alberta Bands to conduct land claim research as most bands could not afford to do it. The Indian Association requested for and received research grants under TARR the Treaty Aboriginal Rights Research and hired a team to go to each reserve and begin interviewing elders.

One of the interesting things about the reserve lands in most cases is that the Chiefs that signed treaty selected land where their people would camp during the winter months. It was referred to as their wintering grounds. The main camp was around the Frog Lake area with Big Bear as the leading Chief. The area was not big enough to sustain the tribe through the winter months. The bands would break off for the winter to their own wintering grounds. In Spring time, the bands would come out of their wintering grounds and gather to renew relationships and prepare for the summer hunt. They would celebrate week long with song and games. After the celebration, they would prepare for the summer buffalo hunt and war if necessary. They would stay bunched together for safety reasons too in case they come under attack from a war party. There is strength in numbers.

Wars are expensive and the Canadian government knew that it was cheaper if they made a treaty with the Indians. In the governments interpretation of the treaty, it is viewed as a surrender document. To the natives, it is viewed as a "sharing" agreement as long as the sun shines, rivers flow and the grass grows. We were never defeated in a war and that is why we view it as a sharing agreement. Our forefathers also used a pipe at the treaty signing so that the agreement was also blessed by the Creator. The Treaty Commissioner also smoked the pipe on behalf of the Crown. It is not supposed to be broken for these and for many other reasons. In Treaty six, the Chiefs added a specific clause which was the medicine chest clause. It was meant to help the native people in times of famine, strife and sickness. This clause was subsequently made available to all the natives in Canada and was also expanded to all the peoples in Canada which is known as the universal health care system whereby everyone is provided for with health care service regardless of income or nationality. Thank you Treaty Six Chiefs.

There were two locations for the signing of Treaty 6. The first signing was at Fort Carlton. Chief *pakan* went to Fort Carlton with Chief *onchaminahos* and with Chief *pakan* as the spokesperson. The Chiefs agreed prior to leaving that they would ask for a reservation land with the four bodies of water as the boundaries of the reserve. The water boundaries are Whitemud Creek to the West by Smoky Lake, Beaver River to the North towards Lac La Biche, Dog Rump Creek to the East close to Long Lake in

Kehewin, and the North Saskatchewan as the South boundary. There was a immediate misunderstanding between Chief *pakan* and the Treaty Commissioner.

The Commissioner only had the authority to grant reservation land with the formula of one square mile for each family of five. The Chiefs did not know what one square mile was. Chief *pakan* explained to the Commissioner that they wanted a reserve three camps long and the commissioner did not know the distance of one camp. One camp was typically the distance a tribe would have to travel within a day. The Commissioner could not approve anything other than the formula of one square mile for every family of five. Chief *pakan* told him that they would not sign the Treaty if they could not get their request approved. Chief *pakan* also asked that they talk to someone who has the authority to approve their request. The Commissioner said that he would take their request forward. Then the Chiefs left Fort Carlton and waited for the next Treaty signing.

The next Treaty signing took place at Fort Pitt. The Chiefs went to the Treaty signing and again asked for the same size of land and asked if there was anyone from down East who had the authority to grant their request. There was no one other than the Commissioner. He still did not have the authority to grant their request. However, the Commissioner did convince the Chiefs to sign and that someone with authority would come meet with them to discuss their reserve land size at a later date. The Chiefs agreed and signed unto the Treaty.

The standard process used by the government was that a Surveyor would follow the Treaty Commissioner and begin conducting a legal survey of the reserve land for each Chief that signed unto the Treaty. The surveyor would do a head count of each family within the band and begin calculating reserve size and measuring out the area where the Chief and his members selected. The surveyor eventually arrived in Saddle Lake with his crew. Chief *pakan* threatened to shoot him if he tried to survey the reserve. Chief *pakan* told him that the Commissioner said that someone with authority would come meet with him to talk about the reserve size and to grant him the size of the land that he requested for. The surveyor left without starting his task.

Ten years had passed and during that time an incident occurred at Frog Lake. Riders were sent out to recruit warriors from every band. *pakan* and *onchaminahos* did not wish to participate however, those that wanted to go went. *pakan* took his people away up north to safety from all the trouble that was going on. *onchaminahos* stayed but kept his people close in case trouble came. During this time, an old lady arrived at *onchaminahos* camp. They were both starved and ragged. The old lady said that they came from up north and they were the last survivors of their camp due to a great sickness. They also said that they had done a terrible thing because they were starving. She begged the men to kill them before they turned into a *wetikow*. The men were very hesitant and finally agreed to do the deed before the old lady and her daughter changed. They beheaded the old lady and the young lady took off. The men chased after her and she ran to the lake. The men saw her running across the lake towards a dark shadow or a mirage on the lake and she disappeared within the shadow. They could not find her as her tracks ended in the shadow. There was a mispronunciation of the English word shadow. It sounded like the other English word saddle. That is how the lake got its name, Saddle Lake. The lake was known to the Cree people as *onihcikiskowapowin*. Translated to English it means my "fellow fisherman sitting on the lake", as the people would sit on the lake and ice fish together in the winter time.

After the rebellion, the indian agent implored *pakan* that he needs land to be surveyed for his reserve or there would be trouble. *pakan* and *onchaminahos* finally agreed. *pakan* wanted his land beside *onchaminahos* and he also wanted to retain his fishing and trapping grounds further to the north alongside a lake what is now called Whitefish Lake. The Indian agent agreed. The indian agent also convinced Chief Blue Quill to move to Saddle Lake alongside *onchaminahos* from Egg Lake (east of the town of Andrew). It was too much trouble for the indian agent to travel from reserve to reserve by horse and wagon. Blue Quill agreed and added a few conditions of his own. He wanted forever two seats on Council for his people amongst other things. Area on the west side of Saddle Lake was added for Chief Blue Quill and his band. *pakan* was wise and was aided by Reverend Henry Bird Steinhauer as he was an educated man and knew what one mile consisted of. *pakan* was worried that he wouldn't receive too much land based on the reserve land formula as he lost some members within the past ten years since the signing of the Treaty. The indian agent and Chief *pakan* agreed that they would go back to the original treaty pay list and use those numbers for the reserve land formula. Surveyor Nelson then came to Saddle Lake surveyed out the land for Chief *pakan*, Chief *onchaminahos* and Chief Blue Quill in September of 1886 ten years after the signing of Treaty six. The three bands amalgamated in 1901.

A lot had happened since then. Chief Bear Ears had his own reserve a few miles west of Saddle Lake called the "Wahsatnow reserve" which was twelve square miles at Hollow Hill alongside the North Saskatchewan river just south of the town of Waskateneau. The indian agent wanted them moved to Saddle Lake as it was too much trouble to travel from reserve to reserve and it made his job easier if the people were all in one location. Fourteen sections were added on the north side of Saddle Lake to accommodate Bear Ears people even though Chief Bear Ears and his people did not want to move. They were eventually forcibly moved to Saddle Lake. The four bands were officially amalgamated in 1902 by the Government.

The Department of Citizenship and Immigration took care of the native people from the time of Treaty until 1853 when the government created a new department specifically for native people and called it the "Department of Indian Affairs" or DIA. The reservation formula of one square mile for each family of five was borrowed from the US. Senator Dodds introduced the formula to the Senate and was part of the Dodds Act in the mid 1800's.