

LAKE ABITIBI INDIANS AND TREATY 9 (1906)

Here are the facts. With the signing of Treaty 9, the Federal Crown wanted to extinguish the aboriginal title on the treaty territory (i.e., Northern Ontario) to allow construction of railways and roads, settlement, trade, mining and forestry exploitation. The terms of the treaty were the following : a \$4.00 individual annuity, an additional \$4.00 allowance at the signing of the treaty, reserves of 1 square mille (2.5 square kilometers) per family of five, and day-schools when necessary. The Provincial Crown would assume the annuities cost. The Federal Crown would administer the reserves and pay for surveys. The Indians would be permitted to pursue their hunting, fishing, and trapping activities on Crown lands according to regulations.

The Treaty 9 commissioners (i.e., Duncan Campbell Scott and Samuel Stewart, accountant and deputy-secretary for Indian Affairs representing Canada, and Daniel George McMartin representing Ontario) paid a first visit to Abitibi Fort on August 30, 1905. Most of the Indians had already left for their hunting grounds. The commissioners called a new meeting for the following summer. The upcoming negotiations would be difficult as the treaty would not apply to the Abitibi Lake Indians whose hunting grounds were in Québec. The commissioners reassured the few Québec Indians met that the Department of Indian Affairs would take the necessary steps to get them a reserve, from the province, of an area equivalent to those offered within the frame of Treaty 9. For the 170 Lake Abitibi Indians of Québec, this would mean a 34 square mile (88 square kilometer) reserve.

The commissioners resumed their journey in 1906 with Abitibi Fort. On June 7, they signed Treaty 9 with the Lake Abitibi Indians of Ontario. On June 8, the 146 Lake Abitibi Indians of Ontario received \$8.00 each (i.e., an annuity of \$4.00, and a premium of \$4.00). Louis McDougall Jr. was elected Chief, Andrew McDougall and Michel Penatouche Councillors. The parties agreed to the location of the 30 square mile (77.5

square kilometer) Abitibi reserve. Also, on June 8, the Lake Abitibi Indians of Québec elected Isha Mychenny as Chief, John Kistabish and John George Cuitche as Councillors.

In order to settle the issue of the promised reserve to the Lake Abitibi Indians of Québec, but also to quiet their requests for financial compensation, the Department of Indian Affairs put forward a settlement implying all of the Lake Abitibi Indians, a settlement which was unanimously agreed to on June 22, 1908. According to the terms of the agreement, the Lake Abitibi Indians in Ontario accepted to share the Abitibi reserve with those of Québec. The Lake Abitibi Indians of Québec then received an undivided portion of the lands and assets of the reserve, but relinquished the idea of ever getting a reserve in Québec or anywhere else in Canada. They also adhered to Treaty 9, and started to get, in 1908, the \$4.00 individual annuity from the Federal Crown. They surrendered all their rights, titles, and privileges to the treaty territory. A Federal order-in-council, of July 22, 1908, endorsed the agreement, but also stated that the Lake Abitibi Indians of Québec's title was extinguished outside the Treaty 9 territory.

Here are a few questions (raised by the events narrated above, and which we will try to answer in our presentation). What was the Indians' understanding of Treaty 9? Were the provisions of Treaty 9 just and reasonable? Was the signing of Treaty 9, on June 7, 1906, valid? What were the consequences, for the Lake Abitibi Indians of Ontario, and for the Lake Abitibi Indians of Québec, of the agreement of June 22, 1908? Has the order-in-council of July 22, 1908 respected the spirit and the wording of the agreement? Do the narrated events still have an impact on today's life of the Lake Abitibi Indians descendants?

The Lake Abitibi Indians in Ontario have also been known as the Abitibi-Ontario Band. Today, they make up the Wahgoshig First Nation and live on the Abitibi reserve in Ontario. The Lake Abitibi Indians of Québec have also been known as the Abitibi-Dominion Band. Today, they make up the Abitibiwinini First Nation and live on the Pikogan reserve in Québec.

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October 9, 2006