

Young Chippewayan Indian Reserve #107

The Young Chippewayan Indian Reservation is located in Treaty Six Territory, the traditional home of the Nehiyawak or Plains Cree people. Near historic Fort Carlton there is a Cairn that marks the place where Treaty Six was signed in 1876. By the 1870's, the time of the Treaty signing, Aboriginal people faced severe circumstances. Increased white settlement, the decline of the fur trade, devastating epidemics, an influx of ruthless whiskey traders into the Northwest and the disappearance of the buffalo were all factors which weakened the Aboriginal people's bargaining position but they consistently approached the Treaty negotiations with dignity and courage.

There are 30 square miles of excellent farm land located near the present town of Laird, that was granted to Chief Chippewayan and his people in 1876. The following year, Chief Chippewayan died and his son Young Chippewayan became Chief. Life following the Treaty was very difficult. With the disappearance of the buffalo, many people faced starvation. In turn, some became dependent on Indian agents for food and others returned to the hunt. In 1885, Louis Riel and his Metis people confronted the Government about the way they were being treated and expressed fear about the loss of their land. The Federal Government feared that local First Nations people would join with the Metis, so their guns were taken away to force them to farm and to eliminate the possibility of them fighting with Riel. Young Chippewayan heard that buffalo had been sighted and headed south to Cypress Hills to find food for his people. The Young Chippewayan people were scared of returning to this land for fear of reprisal from the Indian Agents and eventually many of them made their home with Bands near North Battleford.

The Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve

In May of 1897, this land (Reserve #107) was taken from the Young Chippewayan Band by the Federal Government to make it available for white settlement. The Young Chippewayan people were never contacted and were not aware that their land had been relinquished, for it was done without their surrender or consent. In 1895, the Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve had been created, when the Federal Government offered them a large tract of land north of Saskatoon up to Rosthern. This Mennonite Reserve as it was known was soon filled up, so that in October 1898, this land at Laird was added to it. So the former Young Chippewayan Indian Reserve now became a Reserve for Mennonite farmers. Mennonites became beneficiaries of this land transaction but were unaware at the time of the history of the Young Chippewayan people and their loss. At the turn of the century, they were joined by German Lutheran settlers from the United States who moved into this community and their descendents are still here today.

The Young Chippewayan Today

The Young Chippewayan band has never been compensated for this land that they had taken from them. Most of the descendents of this band reside in the North Battleford area and others near Prince Albert but are considered to be squatters in the communities in which they reside. Their claim has been rejected by the Indian Claims Commission arguing that they have a legitimate claim but they still need to do genealogical work to determine who their band membership is.

Stoney Knoll Gathering 2006

On 22 August 2006, approximately 130 people (Young Chippewayans, Mennonites and Lutherans) gathered at Stoney Knoll to Commemorate the 130th Anniversary of the signing of Treaty Six and to continue the journey of building friendship and understanding. The group decided to meet at Stoney Knoll (Pwashemow Chakatnow), the highest place on the Reserve and is considered to be a sacred place by the Young Chippewayan people. In 1910, the Lutherans built a Church and Cemetery on this site, the church was moved into Laird in the 1950's, so they too have a strong spiritual connection to this land.

The day began with a pipe ceremony and opening prayers from all communities. Then each told stories of their connection to this land. The program that day also included dancing, singing, eating, greetings from dignitaries and exchange of gifts. There was time to visit, relax, to mix, to get to know one another better and to enjoy each other's humor. A highlight was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by all three groups: giving thanks to the Creator, indicating respect for Covenants including Treaties and calling for a committing to peace, justice and sufficiency for all communities. We agreed that we did not want to fight amongst each other but to hold the Federal Government responsible for the injustice that they had created. Chief Weenie emphasized that this was not a time of confrontation but as a time of healing between our peoples. The emphasis was to be a spiritual one of healing, where perhaps said Chief Weenie we could set an example to the rest of the country of how our peoples could live in peace and harmony with each other. Chief Weenie made it clear that the Young Chippewayan respected the current ownership of the land by the settlers and in turn Mennonite and Lutheran communities pledged support for the Young Chippewayan band's ongoing struggle to obtain compensation for the land owed to them under Treaty Six after all these years. The gathering brought renewed hope to all those that were gathered there.

The Next Steps

There are some specific things that the Young Chippewayan Band is working on in order to seek redress for their Specific Land Claim by meeting the requirements of the Indian Claims Commission (ICC). In 1995, the ICC concluded in it's report on the Young Chippewayan Claim that the Department of the Interior had illegally taken from the Young Chippewayan Band without their consent but that genealogical research was needed to prove that there is an "identifiable community" or Band, so that their Treaty provisions could be honored. Therefore the Band has hired a genealogical researcher, who is familiar with Plains Cree history, culture and kinship structures to complete this band membership list. All three communities have offered prayer, moral and financial support for this cause.

Leonard Doell

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