



Treaty Signing. August 10, 1910. From left to right: Councilor Robert Beardy, Chief Charles Wastesicoot and Councilor Sandy Beardy.

TREATY 5

The Government of Canada negotiated treaties with aboriginal peoples from the late 1880's to the early 1900's in order to make way for European occupancy and settlement of the Canadian western territories. First Nations suffered depleted animal populations during this period that made them both hungry and vulnerable. We were willing to sign the treaties in order to receive some relief from the harsh living conditions. In 1875, the Crown signed Treaty 5 with the Saulteaux and Cree at Berens River. Treaty 5 covered the area south of the Hudson



*We still retain
unfulfilled treaty
land entitlements*



Treaty Day Celebrations.

Bay Lowland and an adhesion was signed in 1908 by Split Lake (Tataskweyak) and Nelson House. Our predecessors at York Factory (Kischewaskahekan) wanted to be included under Treaty 5 but the Government was not interested in the Lowlands for settlement purposes and wished to avoid the cost of signing another treaty. It was not until August 10, 1910 that YFFN signed an adhesion to Treaty 5 that included, amongst other things, provision of reserve land for YFFN.

At the time Treaty 5 was signed, no land transfer was made to us. A reserve on the Hayes River at York Factory was discussed, after Treaty 5 was signed, but was never set aside. It was not until 1990 that a small area of reserve land was established for our use at York Landing (Kawechiwasiq). However, we still retain unfulfilled treaty land entitlements.

 JIMMY A. BEARDY

"Our Elders weren't stupid. No one was stupid enough to say 'you can have this land'. What they were saying is 'you can use it, the areas that we're not using'. You can't give away land."

In 1933, the York Factory post lost its status as a customs port of entry, leading to a reduced level of traffic and trading. As well, Port Nelson (Pawinakaw) was abandoned and many of our relatives moved to Split Lake (Tataskweyak), Shamattawa, Churchill (Mantayo Seepee) and other sites along the railway line. In 1947, two different groups of York Factory band members formed the Shamattawa and Fox Lake Bands. We continue to share a common history, even common grandparents, with Cree families in Shamattawa, Churchill, Bird, Ilford (Moosokootchisik), Split Lake and Gillam (Akwayskimakuk). The York Factory Homeguard Cree who chose to remain at York Factory became the York Factory Band: our immediate ancestors and families. We were the last of the Ininiwak at York Factory. Five family groups continued to spend the summers at York Factory (Kischewaskahekan) – one from Port Nelson (Pawanikaw), another from Crooked Bank (Wanatawahak), another from Ten Shilling Creek (Seepastik), another from Kaskatamakan and the remainder from Shamattawa.



THE MANITOBA TRAPLINE SYSTEM

*We were the last
of the Ininiwak at
York Factory*

 ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH MARY NEEPIN, 2005

"Yes they have these areas divided up and marked and that's where a person had to trap. They didn't have these a long time ago. People never argued over land. This never happened, people shared the land."

Between 1935 and 1948 the harvesting of wild furbearers was "rationalized under a system of registered trap lines and fur rehabilitation areas."⁶ The recovery of fur prices after a low in 1930-31 led to an influx of outsiders to northern Manitoba and competition for furs became intense. Most newcomers were interested in little more than making money and "left few stones unturned towards this end"⁷, employing the widespread use of poison and snares to take furbearers.

Overharvest and "high-grading" led to severe depletions of the fur resource. Cree Chief Albert Sinclair of Cross Lake, went to Ottawa in 1938 and petitioned the federal minister to... "conserve our fur. Legislate against its destruction. Put the beaver back in the northland. Create preserves or sanctuaries. Give us trapping areas and formulate a form of supervision, which will bring back the Indian to his status of a natural conservationist".⁸ Thus, under the prevailing authority of the 1930 Natural Resources Transfer Act, Manitoba introduced the Registered Trapline (RTL) system in 1940 with the basic feature of allocating exclusive trapping rights for a defined area to one individual.

By 1944, the RTL plan had proven its worth in a limited part of the Province (from Ilford to The Pas) and it was considered desirable by the province to bring all of the north under the plan. However, aboriginal fur harvest differed markedly from that of the white trappers of European descent. In our way of life, several men would work one, large area rather than several individual



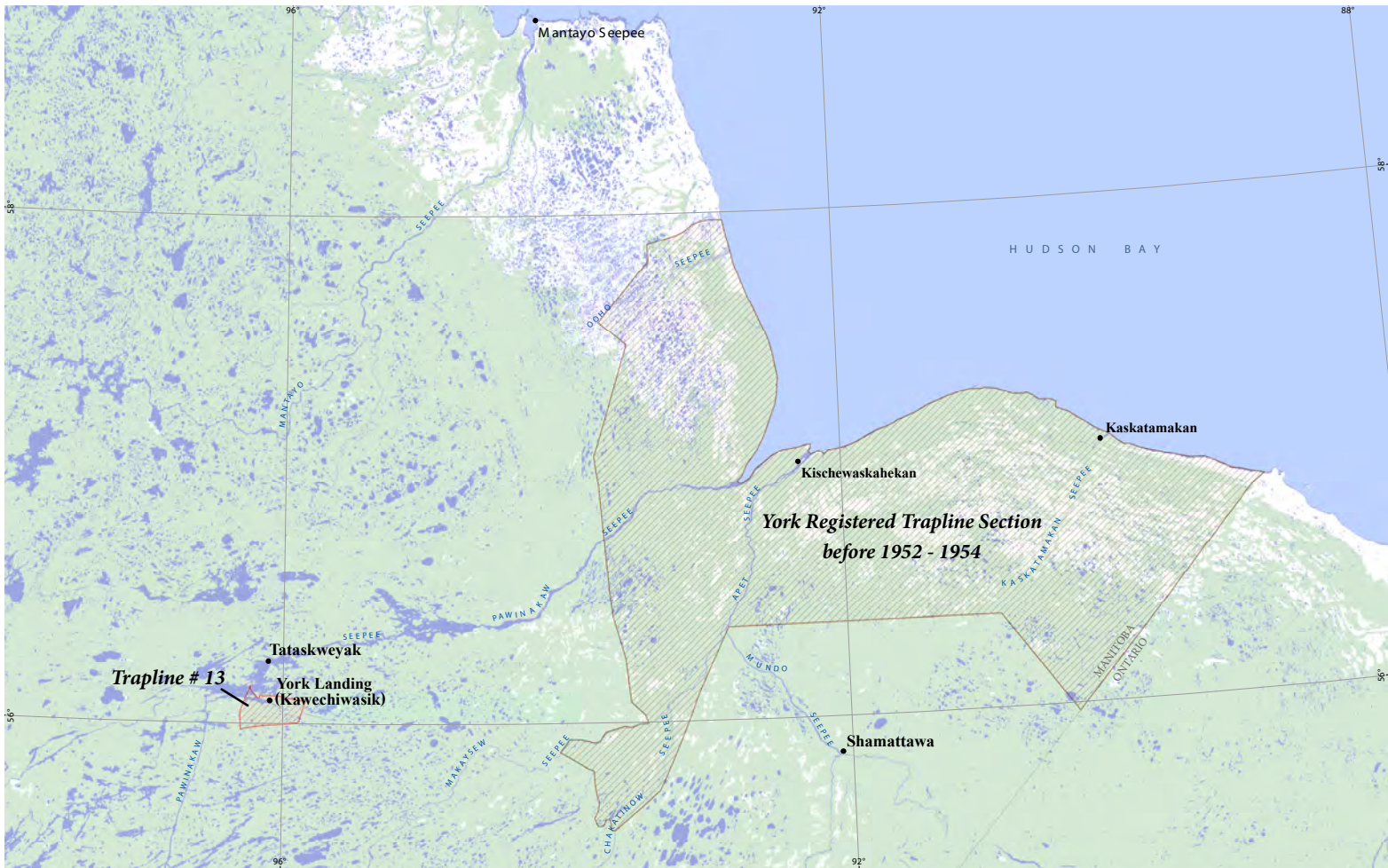
Obediah Wastesicoot

⁶ Carmichael, R.G. (1973) Innovation and Enterprise: A history of Fur Conservation in Northern Manitoba, 1935-1948.

⁷ Same as above.

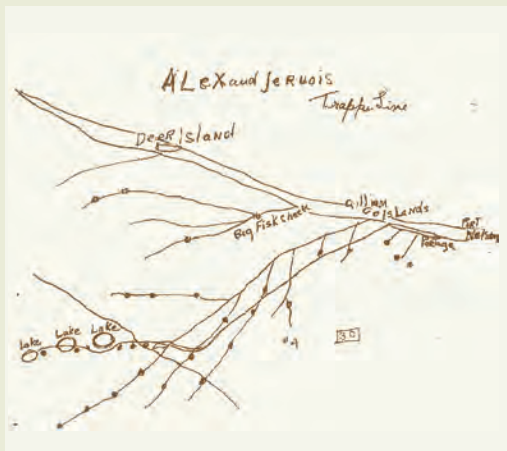
⁸ Same as above.





York Registered Trap Line Section

The original YFFN Registered Trapline Section was established in our coastal territory in 1948. After relocation, we lost our coastal trapline section and were granted use of one trapline, Trap Line 13, at York Landing.



Members' trapping area, circa 1950.



Members' trapping area, circa 1950.

lines. As such, all of Manitoba north of the 53rd parallel was declared an RTL district, with sections allotted to each band, after the few white trappers received trap lines. Boundaries were to be confirmed between the Chiefs and councilors of neighbouring bands, based upon natural lines of division which our bands had followed over the years.

No attempt was made by the Province to market furs under the RTL scheme. The established system of barter and credit between our members, private traders and the HBC was left intact. Overall, the RTL system was embraced by northern First Nation communities, in the face of competition for fur from outsiders and the decline of the resource.

The RTL sections established in 1948 included the large York registered trap line section for our York Factory Band along the Hudson Bay coast east to Ontario, north beyond the Owl River (Ooho Seepee) and inland, up the lower Nelson River and Hayes River; another large section for Split Lake (essentially the same boundaries as today), and south of the York Factory section, the Shamattawa trap line section. These trap line sections mirrored what had been negotiated between the bands, with provincial government facilitation. The York Factory registered trap line section negotiated by our ancestors is a very good proxy of our traditional territories. Its subsequent elimination and replacement with newly drawn trap line sections after our relocation represents a significant loss and confinement imposed on our First Nation. The Resource Management Areas (RMAs) (see map on page 62) subsequently recognized by Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro in our Northern Flood Agreement (NFA) Implementation Agreement are a poor proxy for our traditional territories (see page 44-45).

The Resource Management Areas... are a poor proxy for our traditional territories

RELOCATION TO YORK LANDING (KAWECHIWASIK)

In the fall of 1956, representatives from Indian Affairs traveled to York Factory (Kischewaskahekan) and told our people of plans to





Elders and dignitaries commemorate the 50th anniversary of the relocation.

move us inland. Sales at the York Factory post had fallen in the previous year. Facing low fur prices, the HBC decided to close operations at the fort. The Chief had left the community a year before in search of work, and left only two Councilors to act on the community's behalf. Our members were taken aback at the idea of being relocated. We had everything we needed. The Indian Agent promised that if we agreed to move, a store, school and church would be provided. As well, we were instructed to leave behind all personal belongings and told that they would be replaced. Our boats, sleds, dog teams and sewing machines were all left behind. We traveled with only our families and basic possessions.

"They didn't get what they were promised at all."

-Dorothy Morand

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH DOROTHY MORAND, 2005

Dorothy: We started to stay here. That's when they said, they want to close down York Factory. They told us, they were going to close that. That was Mr. McIvor. That was the last manager there. He's the one who told us that. It's best that you leave, there's going to be no one here he said. That's too bad you know, that shouldn't have happened.

Flora: The people would have survived.

Dorothy: Oh yes. We survived all those years. I don't know why we couldn't.

Flora: We could have had a road there by now.

Dorothy: Oh yes. There would have been something there, if they didn't close it down. But that's what they say, we didn't want to bring no more freight there. It was costing too much money. That's what they were looking at. Costing too much money, to stay there. So we had to go, you can't go back there again.





York Landing (Kawechiwasiq).

Flora: Yes the other old timers there. They tell of stories of why they moved, and tell what happened when they moved. They were promised this [and] that.

Dorothy: And they never got around to that promise. The Promise. They didn't get what they were promised at all.

Flora: No.

Dorothy: Yes well I guess that's what happened.

Flora: Yes they would have survived there.

Dorothy: Oh yes.

Flora: That's what that old Chief [Abraham Beardy] wanted. He didn't want the people to leave there.

Dorothy: He was the Chief that time. Even Shamattawa and York Factory.

Flora: Yes but William Beardy was the Chief, at that time (when they closed the post)... He left his people, then John Beardy became Chief.

Dorothy: Oh yes, he left first I think. He left first, he went away from there. And then after that, the rest followed. And then they told us, we had to move. That we couldn't stay there no more. Cause there's nothing there no more, they said.

At least one hundred children under ten years of age and a hundred other members traveled over 250 kilometres inland from York Factory to York Landing (Kawechiwasiq) in 1957. We left with no idea where we were going or what our new location would look like. When we got to York Landing (Kawechiwasiq), there was nothing there for us except a pole on the shore of the lake. Our personal belongings, left behind at the coast, were never replaced by Indian Affairs.



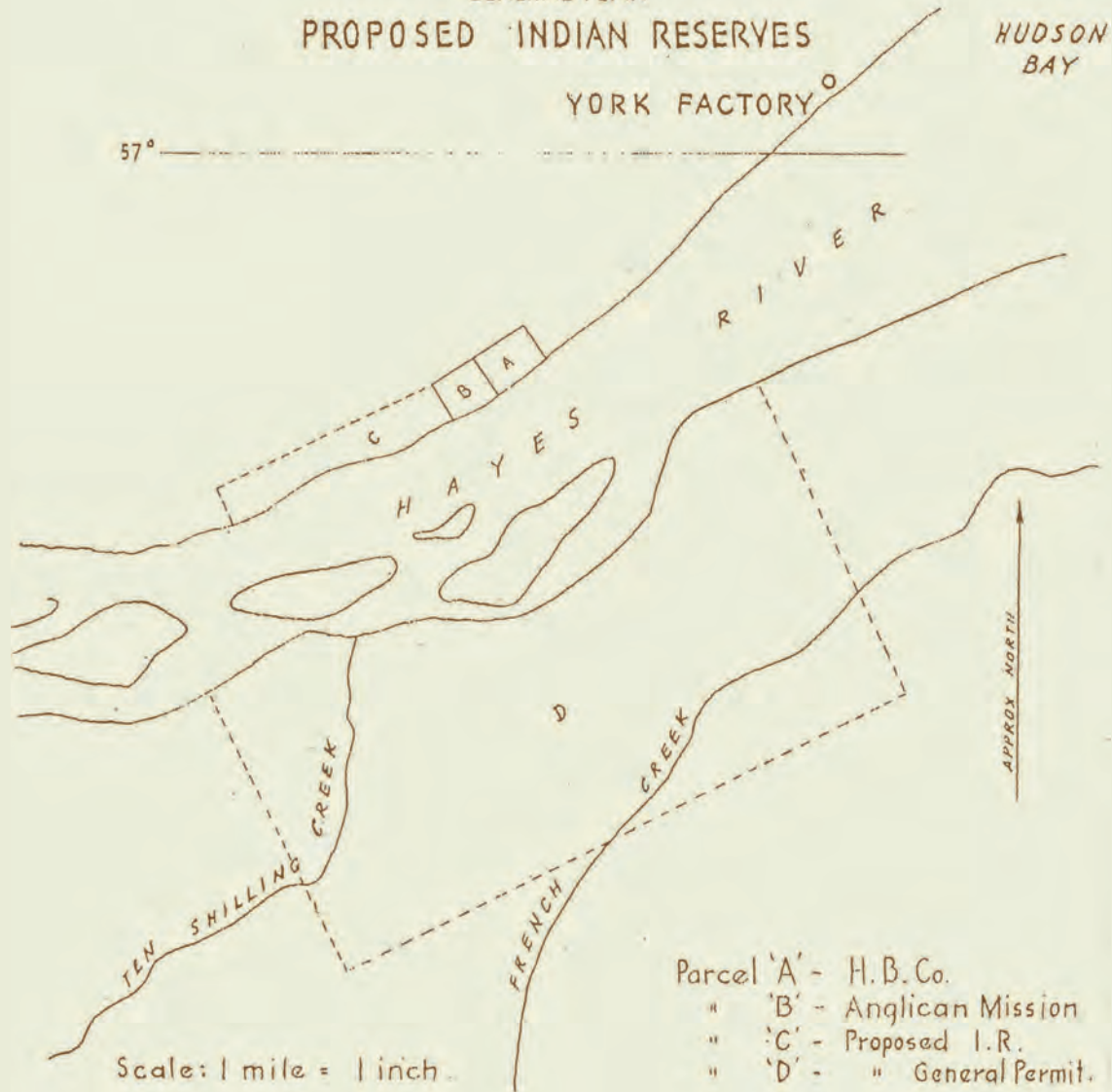
Lawrence Saunders Jr., Nadine Saunders, Marvin Flett, Janice Ouskan and Jackie Ponask





LANDS BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND NATURAL RESOURCES

GENERAL PLAN
PROPOSED INDIAN RESERVES



Government correspondence shows that a Reserve was considered at York Factory, prior to the relocation. (Correspondence from Regional Supervisor of Indian Agencies to Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Jan. 28, 1952).



York Boat at York Factory, "Bob".

 WAYNE REDHEAD

"We were the last of our people at York Factory and were manipulated, forced out and relocated to our present location at York Landing in 1957."

It was past the middle of August when we arrived at York Landing (Kawechiwasiik). The men began to clear trees and brush and started to build log cabins for their families and people lived in tents while houses were completed. By the winter that first year, 12 cabins had been completed.⁹

Everything was different at York Landing (Kawechiwasiik) for our people. Joseph Saunders said that, "it was like changing our way of thinking and looking at things in a different perspective. All our lives we had known exactly where to go to continue living and supporting our families under our traditional life style."¹⁰

The relocation disconnected us from the land that our people had been a part of for centuries. We knew this land in intimate detail. It is where we were born, raised, and learned to support our families. This land was part of who we were as a people – a place where every landmark echoed with memories of how our parents, grandparents and ancestors lived before us. York Landing (Kawechiwasiik) was a foreign site on a lake 250 kilometres from York Factory. Though we were able to build houses and find resources to harvest there, it was not our homeland.

"We were the last of our people at York Factory and were... forced out"

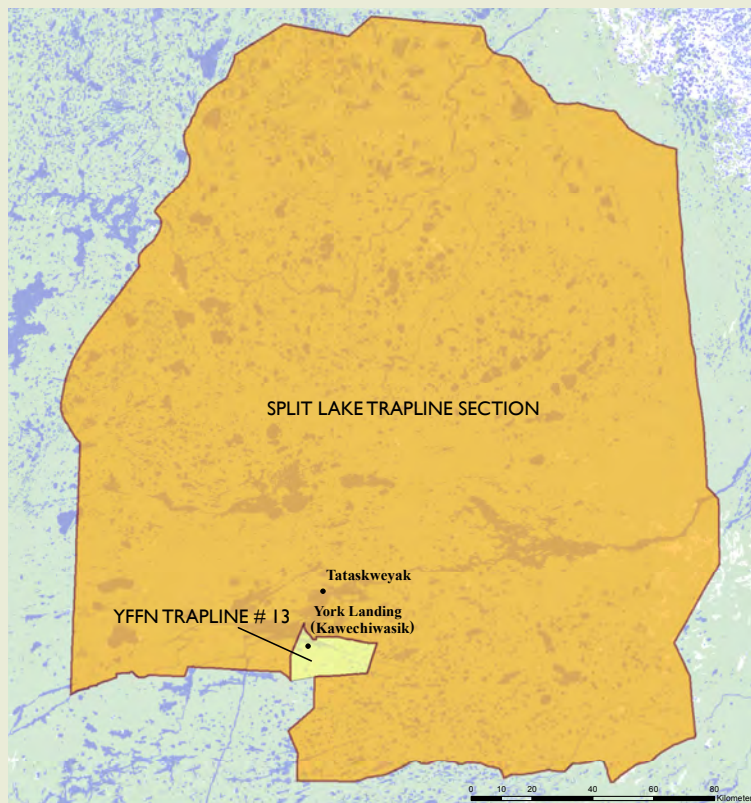
-Wayne Redhead

The relocation disconnected us from the land that our people had been part of for centuries.

⁹ Fast, H. and D. Saunders. (1996) From Kischewaskahekan to York Landing: A Land Use History of York Factory First Nation.

¹⁰ Same as above.





YFFN Trap Line No. 13 and the Split Lake Trap Line Section.

The community is isolated for up to 12 weeks each year as freeze-up and break-up make the lake impassable

At York Landing (Kawechiwasiq) there was no resource area like at the coast. While the York Registered Trap Line Section on the coast existed until 1973, access to the area was not viable on a continuous basis. The RTL system, which had first served us well, ended up being a jurisdictional confinement to our people, given our relocation. When we were relocated to York Landing (Kawechiwasiq), Tataskweyak Cree Nation gave up one of their traplines, Trap Line No. 13, for our community to use surrounded by the Split Lake Trap Line Section, but it was small, crowded and insufficient to support our people, even though it is still being used today.

A second challenge at York Landing (Kawechiwasiq) is that the site was - and continues to be - isolated from economic centres. With no all-weather road, or railway access, York Landing (Kawechiwasiq) is only accessible over water, ice, or by air. The community is isolated for up to 12 weeks each year as freeze-up and break-up make the lake impassable. Since we were assigned to this location in 1957, its isolation has continually inflated the costs of bringing construction supplies, groceries, equipment, contractors and specialists into York Landing (Kawechiwasiq). Travel out of the community for meetings, medical appointments, grocery trips, and family visits has been equally expensive, creating an on-going sense of social and psychological confinement in the community.



While the relocation was an unwelcome and traumatic imposition on us, we have now lived in York Landing (Kawechiwasiik) for more than 50 years. Our younger members were born in York Landing (Kawechiwasiik) and take only occasional trips to York Factory, Port Nelson, and Kaskatamakan. We now have homes, memories and a friendly community in this new place. Though we continue to be frustrated by isolation, resource access and conditions on Split Lake, and though we work hard to maintain ties to our coastal territory, York Landing (Kawechiwasiik) has become a home to us as well.

*We have now lived
in York Landing
(Kawechiwasiik)
for more than 50
years.*

 DARCY WASTESICOOT

"I didn't know what to think when I was a child growing up in York Landing. It wasn't until I was becoming an adult that I started to learn about who I was and where I came from. This is home to me. I Didn't have any choice to make it my home. We were healthier people when we used to live off the land twenty-four-seven. Now that we have all these inventions and technological advances to make life easier, we are not as healthy as we used to be."

THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Our families have been changed forever by the residential school system that pulled us out of our childhood homes in order to "isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures and to assimilate them into the dominant culture as it was infamously said... to 'kill the Indian in the child.'"¹¹

 BARBARA GORDON

"The parents had no say, the government sent somebody in there and said you, you, you, your child is going to residential school, they had no say, they just took them."

 WAYNE REDHEAD

"There was a school there at York Factory. Some kids went out to [residential] school, but some took school right there at York Factory. When they came here [to York Landing] there was no school. People

¹¹ "Statement of Apology - to former students of Indian Residential Schools" as presented by Stephen Harper, June 11, 2008.



were living in tents while they built houses, so there was no school and all the children had to go away. There wasn't a school here until sometime in the 70's. In Split Lake it's different. That community was established long before and had its own school, so kids there traveled for a few years to residential school, but for York Factory [kids from YFFN] we spent so many years there."

 CONVERSATION WITH DOROTHY AND WAYNE REDHEAD, 2010

Wayne: What about us when we went to school, myself, Roy, Louisa... how did you feel when we left?

Dorothy: I never liked it too. I used to cry too when my kids are going away to go to school over there. I don't know what they're doing to them, I was thinking about that too one day. I used to think about that and I don't know what happened to them. It's awful when your kids get taken away. The little ones when they're only six years old.

Wayne: What about York Landing, what was it like with all those kids gone? There was only adults and young kids and Elders, what was it like here with all the kids gone to school?

Dorothy: People were sad, there's no kids around there after they went to school. All the kids are gone. Just for the summertime to come, we don't have any kids when they went to school. There's no kids around there when they started going to school in Dauphin. We can't go visit, nobody help us to go visit in Dauphin until you finished school, that's when I went over there. Indian Affairs doesn't even help us to go visit. Nothing. And when somebody's kids are sick there, just like Sylvia Saunders died over there and my brother died over there, we never even go see him. He went to the hospital right there after when he finished school. My mom used to cry lots taking it hard. Indian Affairs only coming there by plane from Ilford to tell my parents my brother is dying.

 GORDON WASTESICOOT

"In the late sixties, I was going to School on the George Gordon Reserve Residential school ran by the Anglican Church (in Saskatchewan). It is located approximately 90 kilometers north of the capital, Regina. In the fall of that year there were students running away from this school. I had no plans to do this - it was just my second time of running away [the first time we got caught by the police, and were sick from eating the wrong berries]. There were four of us when we started. After a few days of being out in the cold fall weather, the other three gave up. It took me about one week to make it to York Landing. In those days the only communication



MacKay School, Dauphin.



available to our people was by mail. So when I arrived home it was sort of like someone coming back to life after being dead. There was a lot of hugging and greetings from my family and other community members. I really enjoyed being home with my parents. I never noticed any other children my age in the community except for babies and adults, some young people. I never saw anybody drunk or doing anything that was not accepted by the community. It was quiet. They were all preparing for winter. I learned a lot about respecting nature, and about our language. Most things were handed down from one generation to the next. I had the privilege of having the whole community teach me how to live off the land, and communicate in our language. But I also saw the look of loss, loneliness, of hopelessness in our people. They had no power to keep their children with them. Only twenty-one miles away in the little town of Ilford there were mothers and fathers that had their children at home with them. It must have been heartbreaking for people from this reserve to see this. I really enjoyed being home that year. I enjoyed my people and saw their willingness to accept things both good and bad and move on. It takes a lot of courage to do this. They have been relocated from their homeland, had their children taken away, been flooded, and told to live on two thousand acres of land that is composed of muskeg and mud in exchange for what... nothing but misery. You cannot replace families. Families are the reason we live. I ran away because I wanted to be with my family. Why would anyone make that long journey?"

 FLORA BEARDY

"Mary was with a group that was sent out of York Factory to go to school. She said they were gone for seven years. Not once did they come home during that time...This was when they started sending the children out to residential school down south...She said she was 16 when the minister from York Factory, Reverend Faries, came to get them and take them home. There was her, late Elizabeth Oman, probably five or six of them. While Mary was at school, her father passed away at York Factory... She said she just about died. "I just about went crazy! They didn't even bring me home for his funeral. I was in the hospital for a month" [she became sick grieving for him]... ."

 GEORGINA REDHEAD

"I was 16 years old before I realized my first language was Cree and I didn't know how to communicate in Cree with my grandparents."

 ESTHER SPENCE

"There's stories about how badly the children were treated at these schools... I'm told stories... ."



 DONALD SAUNDERS

"The residential schools, did you ever talk about that with your father? No, that is one thing I never, I never did talk to him about that. I always struggled, I couldn't tell him. I told my brothers. I talked to a couple of my brothers. And I said it to a couple of my sisters when we were sharing. When we would share from the heart and talk. It's too hard."

 EMILY KEMATCH

"Residential schools are a big issue in York Landing. Most of us went through that system and have been and continue to be severely affected. Our children have been impacted because we did not know how to parent them. Because we were taken away from our parents, our parents did not pass down parenting skills to us. While attending residential school, we were treated very harshly. Now that we are parents; we learned to parent either very passively or very aggressively, but these are extremes; they are not healthy ways of parenting. Also, there is so much alcohol and drug abuse in the community. Today it seems like children are abusing drugs at a younger age."

 GEORGINA REDHEAD

"The residential school, losing our language, family, connections, and culture. I wasn't shown parenting. And so you grow up not knowing healthy boundaries. You lose examples for learning to hug and love your kids and your siblings."

 DONALD SAUNDERS

"I think that a lot of spirituality was lost through the residential school system. For me, that's how I feel and how I see it. So they uh, work with, a lot of them are school survivors, too many negative things that they have to deal with so, and negative experiences, and it doesn't really build any strong emphasis on the church. So they, a lot of people turn to drugs and alcohol. I went through a lot of that myself, the alcohol. I know what it is doing, and what has happened to a lot of survivors. Some survivors are gone, and never really had the opportunity to work on those things like alcohol and drugs. Because I've lost two family members to that - two of my siblings. They were alcohol related. That's how I see how strong the impact was on the residential school survivors. And a lot of us are still fighting that today."

Cree communities across the north and we, as YFFN members, have been profoundly changed by the residential school system. Many of us who attended the schools in The Pas, Dauphin, Elkhorn, Brandon and elsewhere, have deep personal wounds



that have not yet healed. Our Cree culture is being eroded by the loss of our Cree language, the separation from parental and family teachings and the chaos of drug and alcohol abuse, much of which stems from our residential school experiences. Many of us raising children today were in the residential school system, and that has hurt our own parenting skills and personal physical, mental and emotional well-being. These effects carry forward to the youth in our community, many of whom struggle with drug and alcohol abuse and their school, social and working lives.

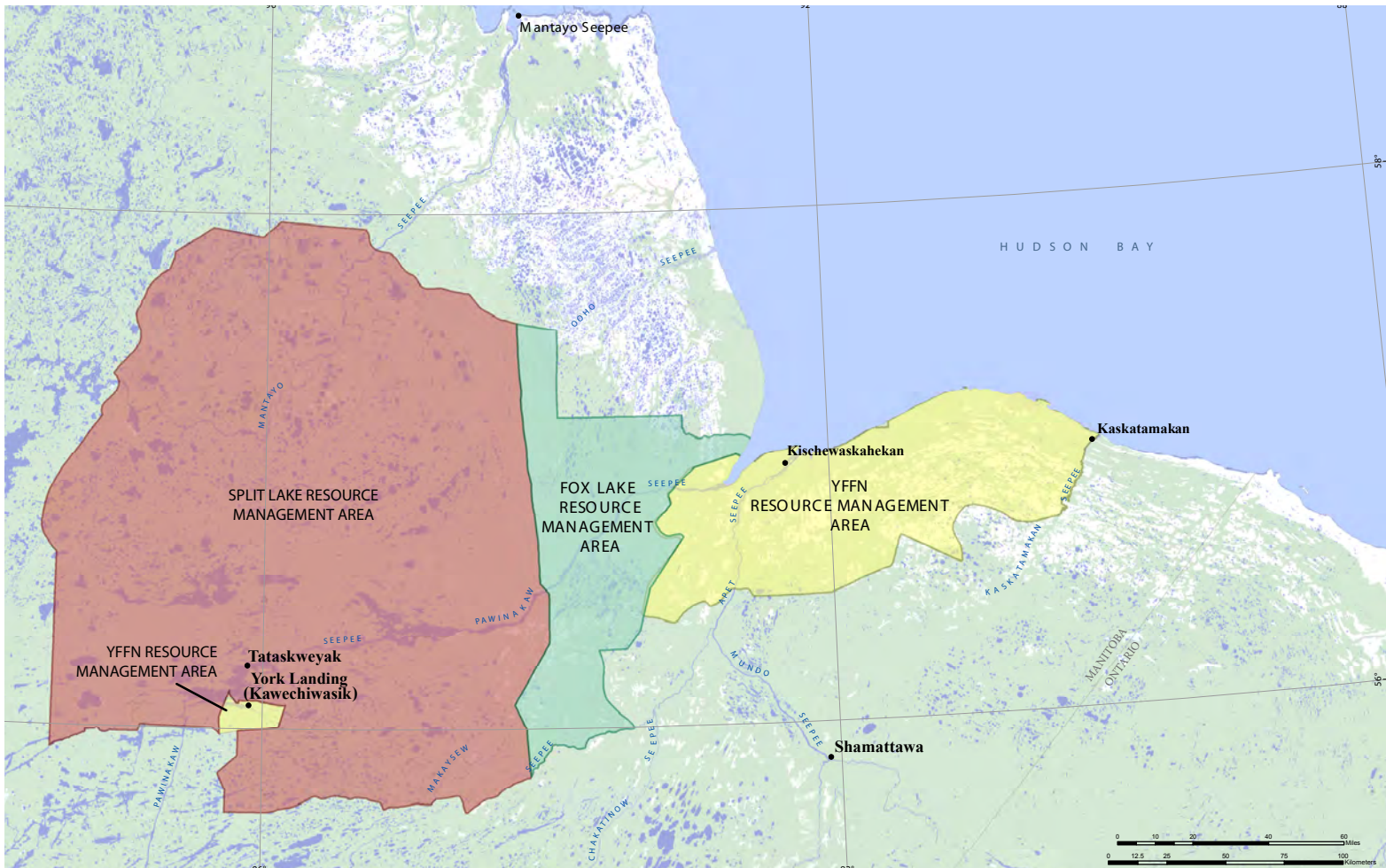
 ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH MARY NEEPIN, 2006

- Mary: I worry about the youth. I often wonder what is going on with them. Sometimes I see young boys, when I go to the store, just young boys about this size and they are drunk.
- Mary: They must be drinking because they are drunk. It was never like this with the youth a long time ago. It was a peaceful life. That's how we were raised. There's so much change today. Our parents raised us and we listened. We lived with them and moved to different places until it was time for us to live our own lives. There was always wild game. We all lived on this. We never purchased food from a store. We always had country food: fish, caribou meat, which people hunted for, ptarmigans, rabbits. We never bought food from a store. A person hunted if they wanted to eat. The food was never wasted everything was eaten or used. That's what we did.

 ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH MARY SAUNDERS

- Mary: You've probably seen this yourself that some things shown on TV are not good.
- Lillian: Yes.
- Mary: There's swearing and other things.
- Lillian: Yes.
- Mary: The children listen to this and they copy what they see. That's partly why this is happening. They learn from the TV. There are so many things that the youth have access to today. Nothing, like this, was available a long time ago. Nothing, it was peaceful back then.
- Lillian: Yes. Also the youth can't speak to their grandparents because they can't speak Cree and the grandparents don't understand English. All the children speak English.





Current Resource Management Area Boundaries

Our Resource Management Areas (RMAs) only partly resembles our traditional territory...

HYDRO-ELECTRIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE NORTHERN FLOOD AGREEMENT (NFA)

In 1958, only a year after we arrived in York Landing (Kawechiwasiq), Manitoba Hydro began construction of the Kelsey Generating Station. Our members were not consulted about the project, although it was built just kilometres from our new community and would change the waters and environment around us. In the 1970's, the Lake Winnipeg Regulation (LWR) and Churchill River Diversion (CRD) proceeded, again without any prior consultation with Cree communities and without any environmental assessment and licensing. The Kettle Generating Station was completed downstream of York Landing (Kawechiwasiq) in 1974, followed by the Long Spruce Generating Station in 1979 and the Limestone Generating Station in 1990.



We describe the impacts of these projects in detail in the next chapter, as they continue to sadden and affect our members.

 DOUGLAS CHAPMAN

“When we first moved to York Landing, everything was here for us, a good place to hunt, fish, and trap muskrat and beaver. The hunting used to be good but there is a significant difference today. The grass along the shoreline, the dry willows: they used to be fresh and they are not anymore. Hydro is not given the right to control the land – our land. Not many of us here today have seen what it was like when we first moved to Kawechiwasik. Hydro has already done a lot of damage to our community. Does Manitoba Hydro realize or see what they have done to our livelihood?”

In response to on-going hydro-electric development in our lands, we joined with the other affected First Nations to form the Northern Flood Committee (NFC) and negotiate the Northern Flood Agreement (NFA). The NFA was signed in 1977, by Canada, Manitoba Hydro, the Province of Manitoba, and the five NFC communities. In 1995, we concluded the YFFN NFA Comprehensive Implementation Agreement with Canada, Manitoba Hydro, and the Province of Manitoba. These two agreements, while making important provisions for compensation for adverse effects from hydro-electric development and requiring Manitoba Hydro to consult with us prior to new development, are complex agreements that are not well understood in our community. We have needed to have ongoing legal advice to apply their provisions in our interests.

As noted earlier, these agreements have helped to identify us as ‘flood communities’ to outsiders, blurring where we come from and who we are as a community. The 1995 Comprehensive Implementation Agreement also formalized Resource Management Areas (RMAs) and confirmed a role for YFFN in land-use planning and resource management. However, our RMA only partly resembles our traditional territory (see map on page 44-45) and our historically negotiated York Registered Trapline Section (see map on page 50). To this day, these RMAs have acquired a level of meaning that often leads to confusion between the creation of additional resource management rights and our historical relationship, rights, and responsibilities to the land.





Kelsey Generating Station.

Colonialism: refers to the historic period during which Europeans expanded throughout the world, including our traditional territory, and imposed their form of economics, politics, religion, language and culture on our people.

Neocolonialism: refers to the present time period and the new, more subtle ways that governments, corporations, and other organizations sometimes, but not always, continue to impose their system of economics, politics, religion, language and culture on our people.

REFLECTIONS ON COLONIALISM AND NEOCOLONIALISM

“Lots of times I sit and think about a long time ago. What I remember and saw. How people survived and what they did to survive. Today things are so different. Its a lot easier for people today. This is what we were told a long time ago and we remember this. We were told that in the future things were going to be different; there would be changes. I see a bit of this today. We were also told that some day the Indian culture and way of life will be forgotten. There will be changes; things will happen differently. We were told in the past not to lose our way of life, our heritage, to practice it always. Not to lose touch with our culture. We were also told, when we first started going to meetings down south, that the white men were trying to change the Indians, trying to get them to live the way they do. But it’s not going to be like that, at least not soon. Maybe way in the future. Today, there are still a lot of Indians hanging onto their way of life, their culture. It’s different in the north than in the south. In the south, its easier to live the way the white men do.”¹²

Our First Nation has been subject to successive forms and practices of colonialism since the 17th century. Europeans



St. John's Church at York Landing.

¹² Richard Beardy as quoted in: Beardy, F. and R. Coutts. (1996) Voices from the Hudson Bay: Cree Stories from York Factory. McGill - Queen's University Press.





York Landing (Kawechiwasiik), Manitoba, late 1990's.

and their descendents have imposed their culture, economy, government and religion on us from the outside. We have been profoundly changed and hurt as a people and culture. Yet, we have somehow survived and been able to adapt sufficiently to keep who we are as a people - to protect our core values and culture. We became an important part of the fur trade and the operation of York Factory post. We joined the Anglican Church and the church became an important part of our community life in York Factory. We signed Treaty 5 in 1910 and succeeding annual treaty days were marked with memorable feasting and community dances by our ancestors and a good relationship with the RCMP.

We adapted once again to our forced relocation to York Landing (Kawechiwasiik) in 1957, building an attractive community with little of the promised support from Indian Affairs, attempting to re-establish our use of the land around us. Hydro-electric development then began in 1957 when the construction of the Kelsey Generating Station began, followed by the Lake Winnipeg Regulation (LWR) and Churchill River Diversion (CRD) of the late 1970's. Kettle, Long Spruce, and Limestone were built between 1974 and 1990. In the following chapter, we will explain more about the profound environmental changes that hydro-electric development has brought to the water and land.

 JOHNNY SAUNDERS

“Our people have been cumulatively impacted. Over the last 60 years, we have been impacted by our dislocation from York Factory, residential schools, and hydro-development. These impacts have built upon each other and continue today.”

We have somehow survived and been able to adapt sufficiently to keep who we are as a people



Grave at York Factory.



Our perspective on hydro-electric development is that it has been a destructive, exploitive form of neocolonialism, imposed from outside on our lands and community. In the past, we have not even been consulted let alone had an opportunity to participate in the planning and assessment of past hydro-electric development. The benefits and opportunities of hydro-electric development have escaped our community, while we have been at the heart of the environmental impacts and cumulative changes to the lands and waters, which deeply affect our way of life. The Keeyask Project will still create substantial and inevitable environmental impacts. We know this from our experience with past hydro-electric development.

 JOHNNY SAUNDERS

“Our Aboriginal and Treaty rights are very important to our community and are protected under the Constitution of Canada – Section 35. Our rights have been impacted by past projects here in the north. Even development in the south affects us because we are downstream. We will be impacted by future development.”

 WAYNE REDHEAD

“Keeyask and Hydro development are emotional issues because they have, and will continue to change our way of life and who we are as a Cree people.”

 JIMMY A. BEARDY

“It’s another form of assimilation. It makes us more dependant on money and destroys what was our ‘money’ - the caribou and resources that were our way of life.”

 ROY REDHEAD

“Hydro is playing the same colonial role that the residential school system played in the past. I see Hydro as just another way to destroy our way of life and erode our traditional knowledge. Hydro needs to be taught that the way of life that is being destroyed was our way of surviving.”

Some of our community members continue to consider Keeyask as another form of neocolonialism. However, the Keeyask Project is fundamentally different from past hydro-electric projects in terms of our role in the development and the potential benefits and opportunities to our community. As we have explained, we



have become a partner in the Keeyask Project to take an active role in determining our community's future by influencing how the Project is developed and managed as well as trying to create benefits for our current and future generations.

“The people of York Landing have seen many changes over the years and yet they have maintained their proud cultural traditions adapting to major disruptions such as relocation, the loss of their traditional lands, and the impacts of major hydro-electric projects. Today, the people of York Factory First Nation are preparing for the future by re-establishing their connection with the land, and becoming more self-reliant again.”¹³

This hopeful statement was made over a decade ago and it remains true today. In these pages we have stated why we have joined the Partnership. We believe the only way we can succeed, and the Partnership can succeed, is to hold onto and apply our core values, teachings (kiskinohamakehwina) and traditional knowledge (ininiwi-kiskénihtamowin) of our Elders to the Keeyask Project. This is crucial if we are to continue to adapt, maintain our identity and achieve positive outcomes in the Keeyask Partnership.

¹³ Fast, H. and D. Saunders. (1996) From Kischewaskahekan to York Landing: A Land Use History of York Factory First Nation.



