

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: WILLIAM OKEYMAW 2  
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: SUCKER CREEK  
ALBERTA  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: SUCKER CREEK  
ALBERTA  
TRIBE/NATION: CREE  
LANGUAGE: CREE  
DATE OF INTERVIEW:  
INTERVIEWER:  
INTERPRETER:  
TRANSCRIBER: J. GREENWOOD  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- William Okeymaw attended the signing of Treaty 8 when he was 12 years old.
- Signing of treaty; treaty promises.
- Establishment of reserves around Lesser Slave Lake.
- Expansion of these reserves as population grew and present need for further expansion.

Inter: Our first speaker is William Okeymaw from Sucker Creek. How old are you? He is 90 years old. When we have come to see him here, his birthday is on November 21.

William: I am aware of what is being talked about. I listen and hear what is happening even though I am unable to get out. I will give you what I know.

For three days they held a meeting, Chief Fish and councillor Mustus. Being brothers, they had faith in one another. That is why Mustus was made councillor.

I will show you this paper. Perhaps you have seen it before. This is what it looked like at that time. True treaties were made. The chief got up when the treaties were made and land was being given to the Indian agent. This is a picture of them shaking hands. Here is the sun. These are our treaties. As long as the sun will shine and as long as the rivers flow, the promises will not be broken. After these promises were made to one another about the use of land, but

not any deeper than six shovels full. Beyond this depth, would be ours. This was the agreement and they shook hands. This is the picture story of that treaty and not money. This is what they looked like then. This is what I saw. Chief Fish was agreeable to this. None of these promises should be broken, as long as the sun shall shine and the rivers flow. We were not to be stopped anywhere that we wished to hunt for a livelihood. Wherever a person is born, even if he doesn't belong there, he would be entitled to this land forever without interruption. That was before the land was surveyed. Now the white man has surveyed the land.

Previously, wherever a man was born is where he belonged; he was promised. This had existed long ago. Since then it has changed. A person was on his own on a reserve if he had taken treaty, as long as the sun, rivers, and land exist. These were the promises that were made.

If he wishes to kill anything, including fish, he was never stopped. Traplines were never mentioned to him or permits. Everything was open to him. In white man's land, it was different. Friendship was to be maintained, which has been long an oversight. If they were to make friends, we too were to make friends, is what was promised. The Indian agent had made good promises. He paid treaty money, till I grew up. This old man I have seen, before his son took over. And Albert Tate was the name of the person who was the interpreter. He was Metis and very dark. He spoke very good Cree so he

interpreted for the Indians. The Metis had their own interpreter by the name of Dave Ferguson. He was the head of the Metis and he looked after his fellow people. There was a priest by the name of Lacombe (Pere Lacombe). He did a lot of talking. He encouraged the Indians to accept the treaty, "This is your life line," he said. "It will serve you long and well, my children," he said. "Accept this," he said several times. I heard him say this. That is why the Indian accepted treaty, and this part of the land. They thought differently, so they got a different deal. This didn't break their friendly ties, but not in a joined effort. These were our promises.

Travelling field workers like yourself should exist. People like yourself should travel around and see other people, but we are not given this. A few are given horses to travel with and cattle for a livelihood. A walking plow, a grub hoe, fork and scythe were given first. At that time there were no roads and very little clearing.

That time there no complaints. Nothing was given to the white man. What the King promised to the people was not to spoon-feed them unless they were hard up. Doctors will be provided and everything. You will be cared for. You will be helped, we were promised. The people were willing to accept these promises and give part of our land but not underneath. This is why we get small payments now and then for oil rights.

The King mentioned all of the land. We are facing a hardship, because we have no proof in writing. Take like us for an example here at Sucker Creek, we had papers in a metal box. This box was taken to town by Chief Mustus when they were asked for it. From there it was lost. Other less important papers were given to him. The document that was lost would have told the truth. What I have shown you, Scotty is keeping it but it is like the one the chief had, just like this one I have shown you, these people that are shaking hands. It looks like this one but those people are standing.

More recently I have been given this fifty-year medallion by our reigning Queen. When treaties were first made, people were also given these medallions. I was given two, one for my wife. This is what I know about the treaties. I wouldn't make up anything. This is what I saw. Today, we are treated very differently. This isn't what we were promised. It is going to be very difficult, I think, because we have no proof. We have lost our legal document. We have lost to the white man in many ways, for he is getting wiser. What you field workers are attempting to do is what you are striving for. Perhaps you

are trying to stop them. It would be very nice if you don't give up, and accomplish something. I would be very glad for the rest of my life if I could see this. Some of us have lost many things not only me. Just like we old people, we are not cared for enough. Old people should be cared for, he shouldn't have to work for himself. He should be given food even though he gets a pension. He should get a few extra gratuities. We, who are old, have lost all this. We used to get clothing and things but today we aren't given anything. We have to buy our own. This is what we have lost. I don't know where all that has gone to. Perhaps to the King or somewhere else. I can't blame anyone on my behalf. He also mentioned that I have told you, as long as a person doesn't sit around with his mouth open waiting to be fed, that's what we were promised. From there we were going to be helped, is what we were promised in exchange for the land.

Inter: Education was also mentioned?

William: Yes, education was also mentioned. The priest discussed a lot about this. Pere Lacombe was his name. He wanted to get control of all the education. This is what he was told. He used to teach across the lake, to the elders. That's where Charlie Anderson used to interpret, and also his brothers. This was at the landing which was called Four Hills or Buffalo Ways. These people were taught there. One time the teacher got up and said, "I would like the school door to remain open for everyone including visitors and myself." Chief Fish agreed to this. Half of the studies to include religion was agreed to. The door was also open to the Protestant students too. The priests were very difficult. They encouraged us but it was only for money. I thought it was out of the goodness from their heart and working for God, but it was for income and nuns to be cared for. They promised to clothe them properly.

Some kids froze to death about 20 miles north of here known as Big Point. They had run away from school and were going home. They were ill-treated. They weren't fed properly. They were angry so they went home. They froze to death while attempting to get home. The school treatment didn't look too good. Nobody fought against it. Today, things look good. They are being fought for. The kids today have bus services right from their homes. They are treated very well. At that time schools were very clean. Today we see things differently.

Inter: How about underground minerals? For an example, gravel and rock. Did the Indians use any of this?

William: What we were promised is, only six shovels full in depth including white man's land. If anything was discovered it is ours. In the future, things may be found such as gold or something in the rock or iron or useful things such as coal was mentioned. Anything in general, if discovered would be to our benefit. This was promised by the King. This is why I say, the promises sound good at that time. These promises have not been kept. We have lost a lot.

Inter: As long as you live?

William: No, this was to last forever. As long as these things shall run, the sun and the rivers. Nothing can be held from you, that you have hunted and killed. You can go hunting anywhere to make a livelihood. There was no mention of permits then.

Inter: You weren't prevented to go fishing, to feed yourselves?

William: For fishing, we were issued nets. Four small bundles of fish webbing was issued to each person and he had to make his own nets. String was also issued. The women folk had special wooden needles with which to make the nets. They had a stronger string for the border and drag lines.

Inter: Yes, I have seen these needles. How about buckshot and gunpowder?

William: Buckshot was issued always. These were promised to us for our livelihood and we still receive some shells.

Inter: Are nets still given to you?

William: Nets are no longer issued.

Inter: Are you only given .22 shells?

William: Yes, we were only issued .22 shells.

Inter: Do you remember for how long we were promised these things?

William: These promises were to last forever.

Inter: Did they promise a certain amount of money? Do you remember?

William: That wasn't told, but the number of people was questioned of Chief Mustus. How many of your brothers are

married? How many of you are there all together? When you start giving these things out, you count the number of your people. He was also given a drinking cup which was used at the store and held one pound which was to be used for measuring. Another smaller cup was used which held buckshot caps. Six small sacks of buckshot was issued. They were quite heavy. These were to be issued. Also gunpowder kegs weren't very big. Two of these were issued along with bacon in two large sacks. These were about two hundred pounds in weight. This bacon was to be cut up and given to the people. Ten or twelve large flour bags were issued, also sickles, hay rakes and horses were issued. These were given to people to start with.

Chief Mustus took these along the creek where he lived. Along the road past the church where the Calihooos used to live is where we used to make hay, as young people. Our grandfather, John Marie was still living at the time. This is where we now live. Here, Us-ta-chee-quan made hay when he was chief long time ago.

Inter: How much land did Chief Fish ask for?

William: The number of people we had and the amount of land they would need to occupy, they were given 25 miles each, 50 miles if there were two reserves. This was later cut in half. When people begin to over-populate, and the reserves are too small, additional land was to be given wherever necessary, it was promised. True, we got an additional 12 miles where I helped on this extension. This is our present trouble. We are becoming over-populated for our reserve. This is not the only reserve, this is what was promised. Our leader should mention these things. If the reserve is not big enough on which to make a living, then he should ask for additional land. This was promised to us.

Inter: Do you remember who helped survey this creek?

William: At first when the reserve was surveyed, I am not too sure when they started, but they did start off right close to my place here. My father helped with the survey, also Scotty's father and Chief Mustus was the one in the lead. He was the one who decided where the survey should go, also there were Wee-chee-go, doing the bushing. Old Man Prince was the interpreter at the time. The others didn't talk English. The interpreter would tell the people what to do. The last time, the reserve was extended by someone who might be a relative of yours, was called McLean. He was very old. He was in charge of the surveying and we went with him up to Driftpile. He

worked for that old man.

Inter: Was there any mention of reserves that extended into water, that time?

William: Yes, our reserve here is an example of that. Across here where Joe Cardinal lives, there is an iron marker there. On this iron marker is a cross. There it tells us, one side is Metis land, and the other is the reserve. That marker is there under the ground.

Over here at the south point, there used to stand a huge birch tree which was used for a land marking with binoculars by the surveyor.

Inter: At the south point?

William: Yes, where those buildings are now standing.

Inter: I wonder if they used any steel markers?

William: Nothing, except for the tree, where the buidings now stand.

Inter: Across here where Joe Cardinal now lives there is a steel marker?

William: Yes, there is one standing there and a little farther on this side is where my son-in-law Freddie, used to live. There used to be a steel marker there, I asked my daughter about this marker not too long ago. She said there are still two of them there. One treaty marker and one Metis marker, where those building used to stand, was the marker. From there they used their binoculars.

Inter: Today, we are told, when our reserves run into the water, we are not entitled to that land.

William: Yes.

Inter: This, we are told, but we do not agree. For instance, where the reserve extends into the water, we should own that portion.

William: Yes, we were given the land where it runs into the water. We were given this land, but I don't know if anyone has any documents on this. It should have ran on this side of the fishing grounds, that is where. Do you know Julia Belcourt? He used to live along the old road, just on this side is where the land extended to.

This is where the reserve extends right through. It can be seen right to the top of the hill, but not too far. A steel marker also stands there. This includes everything on this side of the fishing grounds is how it was marked. At first it was marked with a flag so that the fishermen wouldn't go into

our waters. True, fishermen didn't fish in our waters. This belongs to us.

Inter: So I guess from Joe Cardinal's it is surveyed as far as South Point.

William: Yes, to that extent.

Inter: From there it extends across to where Julia Belcourt used to live, just on this side.

William: Yes, just a little on this side. That is our fishing grounds. That is the way it was chosen.

Inter: Do you think you lost any land? That way you understood, the land was given to us.

William: No, I cannot say we lost any land. But the way I understood it, when people increased in number, and the reserves were becoming crowded, that is when we were supposed to increase the reserves. That is the way I understood it. That I would say would be the responsibility of our chief. If our reserve is too small our chief should look into it. He should look after all of his people. The way I understand it, it should always remain that we can always extend our reserves whenever the need arises. Even though it is on white man's land, if it should be vacant, the Indian should be able to live on it.

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