

ONE: BEGINNINGS

George F.G. Stanley, historian: “For centuries the western prairies were the ‘happy hunting ground’ of these Indian tribes [Cree, Blackfoot, Blood, Piegan, and Sarcee]. Numberless herds of bison moving over the plains provided them with all the necessaries of their simple life: food, clothing and shelter. From the Rio Grande to the Peace River, the plains trembled under the heavy tread of these wild cattle. It was the golden age of Indian freedom. In the Canadian North-West the red man lived in savage opulence, wandered over the plains, hunted the ‘thundering herds’ and warred among themselves. The passing years brought little change to their mode of life. But, with the coming of the white man, undismayed by demons or distance, all this underwent a change” (Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*, 197).

MK: In his inimitable style as historian-romancer of the Canadian Northwest, Stanley sets the stage for the dramatic, fateful, and often violent encounter of First Nations hunter and European settler, a much more disruptive intruder into the plains than the people of the fur trade had been. Settlers meant permanent occupation of the plains and the impossibility of sharing them with

Big Bear (Mistahimaskwa):
Plains Cree chief in 1886.
Photo taken at Stony
Mountain penitentiary.
(Glenbow Archives
NA-1315-17)

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buffalo herds and hunters, who initially regarded them with an unfriendly eye.

Big Bear [Mistahimaskwa], Plains Cree chief: “We want none of the Queen’s presents; when we set a fox-trap we scatter pieces of meat all round, but when the fox gets into the trap we knock him on the head; we want no bait, let your Chiefs come like men and talk to us” (in Stanley, 212).

MK: But, by signing the treaties made at forts Carlton and Pitt in the year 1876, the Cree chiefs acknowledged that they did in fact wish to negotiate an alliance with the government in Ottawa over the question of “ownership” over some 120,000 square miles (310,798 sq km) of their ancestral patrimony: land. For several years now their people had been ravaged by smallpox, starvation, and the disappearance of the buffalo, up to then their sole support as a community. In a letter dated April 13, 1871, W.J. Christie, the chief factor at Edmonton House, who had been visited by a group of Cree chiefs, wrote to Lieutenant-Governor Adams George Archibald of the North-West Territories, warning that, with the extermination of their food supply, the Cree would “help themselves” to the provisions of forts and settlements.

W.J. Christie, HBC factor: “And there being no force or any law up there to protect the settlers, they must either quietly submit to be pillaged, or lose their lives in the defense of their families and property.... I think that the establishment of law and order in the Saskatchewan District, as early as possible, is of most vital importance to the future of the country and the interest of Canada, and also the making of some treaty or settlement with the Indians who inhabit the Saskatchewan District” (in Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, 169–70).

MK: Formerly employed in the negotiating of treaties three, four, and five (southeastern Manitoba and Lake of the Woods, southern Saskatchewan, and Lake Winnipeg areas, respectively), Alexander Morris, the new lieutenant-governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories, was despatched once more to negotiate treaty, this time with the Plains and Wood Cree, at forts Carlton and Pitt, in August 1876. Negotiations with the “anxious and distressed” Indians proved difficult and protracted, but eventually all parties seemed satisfied by their agreement, according to Morris. Even though in the government view the Cree had relinquished title to the whole of the plains, they were assured they would receive instruction in farming and the support of missionaries and teachers.

Alexander Morris, treaty negotiator: “They were anxious to learn to support themselves by agriculture, but felt too ignorant to do so, and they dreaded that during the transition period they would be swept off by disease or famine — already they have suffered terribly from the ravages of measles, scarlet fever and small-pox. It was impossible to listen to them without interest.... I closed by stating that, after they settled on reserves, we would give them provisions to aid them while cultivating, to the extent of one thousand dollars per annum, but for three years only, as after that time they should be able to support themselves” (Morris, 185–6).

MK: Then Sweet Grass, called by Morris the principal chief of the Plains Cree, rose, and in words appropriate to the gravity and decorum of the occasion, told Morris he was glad to have a “brother and a friend who would help to lift them up above their present condition.” He expressed his gratitude for the terms of the treaty, and, holding out his hand which he pressed against

Morris' heart, his other hand pressed on his own breast, he said: "May the white man's blood never be spilt on this earth. I am thankful that the white man and red man can stand together. When I hold your hand and touch your heart, let us be as one; use your utmost to help me and help my children so that they may prosper" (in Morris, 191).

Alexander Morris: "I will speak to you frankly, as if I was talking to my own children; the sooner you select a place for your reserve the better, so that you can have the animals and agricultural implements promised to you, and so that you may have the increase from the animals, and the tools to help you build the houses etc. When you are away hunting and fishing, the heat of the sun and the rain is making your crops to grow. I think you are showing wisdom in taking a place away from here, although it has been your home. It is better for the Indian to be away a little piece from the white man" (Morris, 244).

MK: Alexander Morris' account of these negotiations and his evident satisfaction in their conclusion have only ever provided one side of the story. For the other side, how the chiefs felt, we have only Morris' word for it. But a new generation of scholarship does give us a perspective into the motivation of the First Nations in granting the Canadian government access to their territory. They were not acting only out of desperation. As Saskatchewan historians Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser argue, "What mattered above all else during the negotiations, was the belief that they were establishing a special relationship with the Canadian government, consisting of two equal parties who stood to benefit mutually from the agreement." In the chiefs' minds, the mutuality and the equality between the two parties were the guarantee of their future, "in the

expectation that Ottawa would fulfil its responsibilities and help them make the transition to the new agricultural economy and a more secure future. They were wrong” (Stonechild & Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 28).

John Horse, Cree informant: “[My father] Kamistatim was among those who were at Fort Pitt on September 9, 1876, where Chief Tus-tuk-ee-skaws signed Treaty No. 6. Kamistatim shook hands with the Queen’s Representative. He heard many promises that were made to the native people. The Honourable James McKay and Peter Erasmus were the interpreters. He obtained the original flag that was used at the signing. This flag, that was later given to Kimowankapo [John Horse], was meant to strengthen those promises that Kamistatim heard, and to show that the laws of the Treaty would never be broken. The Queen’s Representative promised by the sun and the river that as long as the sun passes and the river flows the promises would last. Because the sun and the river were created by God, if one of the promises were broken it would be a promise broken to God” (Horse, *Land of Red and White*, 67).

MK: However, in a move that would have fateful consequences for the people of the Northwest, white and First Nations, the Plains Cree chief Big Bear, along with several other chiefs, refused to sign the treaty; holding out for more concessions from the government and hoping for allocation of contiguous Cree reserves, he preferred to take his chances with hunting the last of the great bison herds grazing around the Cypress Hills, Fort Walsh, Wood Mountain, and into Montana. Unlike the Wood Cree who hunted small game in the forests, the Plains Cree hunted mainly on the open prairie, and they had no choice but to hunt further and further south as the buffalo receded

from the plains down to the American boundary and beyond. That, or starve.

By 1879, with hunger intensifying, only Big Bear still refused to sign Treaty Six. But when, in the summer of 1881, no buffalo at all appeared north of the US–Canada boundary, Big Bear conceded that he could no longer feed his people, and in December 1882 signed adhesion to Treaty Six.

George F.G. Stanley: “The passing of the old days of the North-West cannot be related without a word of sympathy for the Indians. To them the old life meant independence and liberty; the new, restriction and bondage. It is a matter of no wonder that a strong stand was made against the government’s efforts to make them leave their old haunts, places associated with the memories of freedom and plenty. To leave behind the tawny hills and treeless prairie was to break forever with the scenes of their happiest thoughts, and to destroy the last hope, to which they had so fondly clung, of once more being able to live by the chase” (Stanley, 236).

John S. Milloy, historian: “When the end finally came, as it did in 1879, it was heralded by a tragic cry which went up and echoed across the plains.

*I have nothing to eat,
I am dying of thirst —
Everything is gone!
My father, have pity on me!*

“Turning to face the east, the Cree could see the emptiness of their lands. The great herds now ran only in their memories. All that was real was the approaching European and the strange confinement of the reserve.

“If there is a tragedy in Plains Cree history, it is not that a growing dependence on white influences caused the society to crumble; rather, it is that Plains Cree society, or at least the Cree ability to organize on economic and military lines, remained remarkably unchanged, outliving the herds upon which the society physically existed. What was led into the bondage of the reserves was not the ruin of a political and social system, but rather a healthy organism which had taken root and grown strong on the plains. The fate of the Plains Cree nation followed that of the buffalo – not to death, but into a white man’s pound, the reserve” (Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 121).

Amelia M. Paget *née* McLean, linguist and author: “Perhaps few realize how hard it is for our Indians to have to beg for the common necessities of life. They are naturally very proud and reserved, and among the older ones to beg is most humiliating. Being brought up to look upon everything as for the ‘common good,’ it is hard for them to have to remind people by begging that they are in want. There is, as a matter of fact, no such word in either the Cree or Saulteaux languages as ‘beg.’ The only thing approaching such a word in their language is ‘Puck-oo-she-twan’ (Share with me)” (Paget, *The People of the Plains*, 44).

MK: The situation was exacerbated by bureaucracy: the Department of Indian Affairs, the Department of the Interior, and the Indian Commissioners for Manitoba and the Northwest, all had a hand in administration, none of it co-operative. Under the Indian Act, Indian agents administered the reserves with powers to control the bands’ movements, expenditures, and agricultural equipment and resources. With the famine crisis of 1879, Ottawa appointed an Indian commissioner, Edgar Dewdney, and sent him to the Northwest, under instructions to direct

the operation of the competing agencies “in such a manner as to ensure the carrying out of all treaty stipulations and covenants in good faith and to the letter” (in Stanley, 228).

In the summer of 1883, Big Bear and his band moved north to the district of Fort Pitt on the North Saskatchewan River. When he saw what life on the reserve was like, he resisted accepting a settlement. Early in 1884 Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Lawrence Vankoughnet had cut back on the department’s budget for rations, arguing this would encourage the Cree to take up their reserves. Government-issued food rations had been cut to the Indians on the reserves; local Indian agents no longer had independent authority to distribute vouchers, and even the Wood Cree who, unlike the buffalo hunters of the plains had been farming their reserves for some time, went hungry for lack of a market for their grain, or even a mill.

Once confined to the reserves, it was hoped by government that the Indians, “discouraged” from using tents and tipis, would build houses and barns, send their children to the schools that would be built there, and receive instruction in raising cattle and planting potatoes. But, in fact, the reserve economy consisted mainly of relief and a policy of work-for-rations. According to historian Sarah Carter, the work-for-rations policy was “a mean-spirited act since the amount of food provided was not only well below caloric needs but sometimes unfit for human consumption” (in Stonechild & Waiser, 37). As for schools, from 1883 they were built away from the reserves as residential industrial institutions and under the control not of government but of religious foundations. Tribal governance was gradually supplanted by the local Indian agent. Resistance to this system on the part of the old chiefs, writes Stanley, “was resented by the Government and

denounced as noxious and heathenish.... The chiefs and headmen became mere names, archaeological expressions” (Stanley, 241). Likewise “heathenish” were the ritual dances, which were “discountenanced” by the withholding of “any gift of provision” when not outright suppressed.

Walter Hildebrandt, poet: *“Reed, Major Hayter ... Entering the outside service of the Dept. of the Interior, 1881, he became Indian Agent, Battleford Dist., and Asst. Indian Commr. for Man. And N.W.T., May 1884. Apptd. a mem. of the N.W. Council, Apl., 1882, he served as Admnr. of the Govt. of the N.W.T., Feb., 1884, and, afterwards, as Commr. of Indian Affairs and Deputy. Supdt. Genl. of Indian Affairs, being apptd. to the latter office, Oct., 1893. He remained in that office till placed on the retired list, 1897.... elected Presdt. of the Ottawa Polo Club, 1896.*

- “Indians called him ‘Iron Heart’ (it was said he liked that) [...]
 - Questioning the system was not permitted
 - he thought the Indian childlike
 - he refused to negotiate compromise or concession
 - ignored established traditions on treaty day
 - Indian complaints he saw as attempts to avoid work
 - ‘work for rations’ policy was thus rigorously enforced
 - his mission no work no food [...]
 - earned the label Iron Heart refusing rations no matter how piteous the plea”
- (Hildebrandt, “Marginal Notes,” 40-1)

MK: The choice had been cruel: famine on the empty hunting grounds, or penurious settlement on a reserve.

Winter 1883-84: driven by hunger and near-destitution, some Indians stole food and assaulted government farm instructors. Government eased up on some of its restrictions

but, for the peace-minded among the Cree, notably the old chief Big Bear, it was too late. Their authority had been undermined by the agents and now the young warriors, Big Bear's son Imasees, Little Poplar, and Wandering Spirit [Kapapamahchakwew] asserted their leadership. The severity of the winter of 1884–85 pushed them to the point of hoping to join up with the Métis in Saskatchewan, led by Louis Riel in armed insurrection.

Alexander Morris: “There is another class of the population in the North-West whose position I desire to bring under the notice of the Privy Council. I refer to the wandering Half-breeds of the plains, who are chiefly of French descent and live the life of the Indians. There are a few who are identified with the Indians, but there is a large class of Metis who live by the hunt of the buffalo, and have no settled homes ... and while I would not be disposed to recommend their being brought under the treaties, I would suggest that land should be assigned to them ...” (Morris, 295).

Heather Devine, historian, interview: “First of all it should be remembered that by the time Treaty Six was negotiated, the government was aware that there were three classes of mixed-race people living in the Northwest. And Alexander Morris, who was the lieutenant-governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories and the man responsible for negotiating numbered treaties three to six, drew distinctions between these different groups of mixed-race people.

“When the government negotiated Treaty Six they chose not to make any provision for other groups of Métis, they just chose to negotiate treaty and include those mixed-blood people who were culturally ‘Indian,’ to take treaty, as Indians.

“And, because Treaty Six is essentially a Cree treaty, you’ve got a number of culturally Cree, mixed-bloods taking treaty. And the reason for that is that, historically, the Cree had the closest working relationship with Europeans due to the fur trade. And because of the fur trade relationship, there’s a lot of intermarriage. So it’s not surprising that you’ve got large numbers of mixed-race Cree people taking treaty.”

MK: In the early 1880s, almost everyone living in Canada’s Northwest had grievances against the Government of Canada in Ottawa. First Nations people, who had signed treaties and moved to reserves, were angry about the government’s failure to live up to its commitments. White settlers protested their lack of political representation and the dominance in Ottawa of eastern-Canadian interests. The Métis, descendants of First Nations and European marriages, were desperate for Ottawa to recognize their rights of possession to their farms along the Saskatchewan in advance of the inexorable influx of settlers who were already beginning to fill up agricultural land — right behind the surveyors. The CPR and the Hudson’s Bay Company had received vast tracts of land from the federal government and, of course, the First Nations had been granted reserves. Yet the government delayed surveying the land and issuing scrip (a certificate issued by the government that could be exchanged for land). Even white settlers were sympathetic to their plight — or were at least anxious about their own security in the event of organized Métis protest.

In May 1884, a group of whites, English-speaking mixed-bloods, and French-speaking Métis held a protest meeting near Prince Albert and determined to seek famed Métis champion Louis Riel to lead their cause. At St. Laurent, on March 8, 1885, another meeting passed a ten-point Bill of Rights that

included the demand that “this region be administered for the benefit of the actual settler, and not for the advantage of the alien speculator.”

David Breen, historian: “By the autumn of 1884 the desperate plight of the northern Indians was clearly apparent. Observing that on almost all the reserves the crops had failed, C.B. Rouleau, the federal agent who had been sent to Battleford to investigate half-breed grievances, urged that increased provisions of food and clothing be distributed by the Indian agents to alleviate the ‘misery and starvation’ that he predicted would be accentuated during the coming winter. The great danger, he warned, was that a hard winter would unite the Indian and Métis against the government. Rouleau advised Dewdney, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories, that the Métis grievances should be settled quickly, for ‘once the half-breeds quiet, there is no possibility of any union between them and the Indians, and the latter being isolated will be always easily controlled’” (Breen, “Timber Tom,” 1).

MK: To make matters worse, the crop in the fall of 1884 was a failure due to near-drought. Every settler and inhabitant felt the pressure of immediate want and need. As a sympathetic observer of the community, the teacher Robert Jefferson reported: “Every variety of wild talk was indulged in at these meetings and very few had either the will or the courage to dissent.... As Ottawa appeared unmoved by all these declamations, the thoughts of all turned to Riel” (Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan*, 123).

Robert Jefferson, adventurer and teacher: “Since there were Halfbreeds at Duck Lake who could write and others scattered over the country

who were able to read, it is quite understandable that natives in all parts of the country were kept tolerably well informed as to the progress of the agitation at headquarters. These men have been called spies of Riel, but it is difficult to see that they were anything more or less than people who had an interest in the result of the movement and kept in touch with what was going on" (Jefferson, 154).

Louis Goulet, mail carrier: "[Riel delegate] Gabriel Dumont ... reminded us of the fact that, when the Governor General of the Dominion had come to the West in 1878, the Métis had set out their grievances for him. They'd told him they never received any land grants as the Manitoba Métis had, by virtue of their Indian ancestry. Not only that, even those who had been settled on farms for fifteen, twenty years and more had never received recognition of their titles, and the government agents made them pay for hay and wood they cut on lands which they thought should belong to them twice over, once as natural children of the country by right of their Indian birth and again by right of settlement and occupancy.

"Gabriel Dumont spoke for a long time about the miseries and injustices the Métis had endured ever since the day they'd let the White men set themselves up as lords of the land.

"In conclusion, Dumont told us: 'And let me tell you, my friends, that's not the end of it. The government will never give us anything! They stole our land with promises and now they've got control, they're laughing at us. They don't intend to grant us the slightest thing in return for soil where generations of our ancestors sleep. No. We'll never get anything from them, until we take matters into our own hands and force the government to give us justice'" (in Charette, *Vanishing Spaces*, 110).

G. Mercer Adam, author: “The sedition of Riel was the signal for the rising of this mass of disaffection [‘no less than five thousand’ Indians on the North Saskatchewan]. His runners carried news of the half-breed revolt throughout the district, and the Indian nature could not resist the contagion” (Adam, *From Savagery to Civilization*, 302).

MK: Into this brew of disaffection was poured the suspicion on the part of government authorities that Big Bear was behind the growing talk of “sedition.” It was the view of the Indian agent for the Battleford District, Major Hayter Reed, that “Big Bear is an agitator and always has been” and that with the “moral support” of the Métis behind him, he could be expected to “incite” the Indians (in Stanley, 293–4). Historians and journalists writing at the time accused him of being a “malign influence” on his restless people (Adam, 302) and of summoning all the bands in his vicinity to pow-wows in order “to persuade all within his reach of influence to dig up the hatchet, abandon their reserves, and under his wild, savage and reckless leadership to demand his rights, and the fulfilment of the promises that had been made him — at the muzzles of their rifles, or at the edge of the scalping-knife” (Mulvany, *History of the North-West Rebellion*, 121).

Blair Stonechild, historian, interview: “They needed someone to demonize and he [Big Bear] made a good target. He had first run afoul of white authorities by questioning the Treaty Six negotiations. He was very hesitant about simply accepting the motives of the commissioners, with the result that he didn’t sign, and it was many years before he did. He had a reputation as someone who was a resister, someone who was a difficult politician, in the sense that he wasn’t easily convinced and was very skeptical. And so

he was conveniently an individual who could be easily transformed into this ‘monster’, though it’s very clear from the writings that he was a very spiritual and principled individual.

“And what [our book] was an effort to do, was an effort to show that First Nations leaders did have a position. In fact, they did debate and think about what their actions should be in the Northwest Rebellion, that, in fact, there were movements afoot particularly on the part of Riel to implicate them, and actions were taken to bring about their involvement.”

MK: In June 1884, Big Bear rode to Poundmaker’s reserve near Battleford where he sponsored a Thirst Dance, a traditional spring ritual, according to Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, “representing renewal and cooperation.” Residents of Battleford, however, feared it as the “warm-up to an eventual Indian rebellion” (Stonechild & Waiser, 56). But there were also skeptics, such as P.G. Laurie, the editor of the only newspaper in the North-West Territories, the *Saskatchewan Herald*, whose tone was condescending; but he had also made a penetrating observation — that among the disaffected Cree and Métis there was no “unanimity.” And there would be none, in the ensuing events of 1885.

P.G. Laurie, newspaperman: “There is no truth in the report of a past or probable rising of the Indians in this district, nor any other that we know of. The noble red man may try to intimidate an odd storehouse keeper, and in an emergency capture a bag of flour or a side of bacon; but as to a general uprising, he has strong reasons for letting that job out. He has neither horses, without which he cannot move; nor arms and ammunition, or any means of buying them; nor has he any provisions to carry him over campaigning; above all there is an absence of

unanimity among the bands such as is necessary to insure success in case of conflict with whites" (in Stobie, *The Other Side of Rebellion*, 29).

Blair Stonechild, interview: "I don't want to second guess the decision that [First Nations] leaders made back more than a hundred years ago, but what I can tell you is that the historical relationship between First Nations and non-First Nations people went back to 1670 when the fur traders arrived on the shores of Hudson Bay, and that there was a trading relationship which thrived and existed over several hundred years. Certainly this relationship was not perfect and there were certainly unjust things that happened, but by and large the two sides had decided that they could mutually benefit from each other's existence.

"The chiefs who negotiated the treaties in the 1870s were looking for peoples with whom to live side by side in friendship and partnership. As a matter of fact, the language of the treaty itself is one which is similar to how one talks about a family relationship. This was the premise that the leaders were working on at the time of the Rebellion. I know that virtually no chiefs supported Riel. Those who supported him were generally those who sympathized with the Métis. And of course it's hard to judge those individuals because there was a real sense that government was not living up to the treaties, there was a sense that there was a betrayal of the treaties."

Peter Shirt's dream, March 1884: "I have had an odd dream that bothers me a lot ... I dreamed that a very old man came to me and, taking me by the hand, led me to the top of a high hill. 'Look to the east,' he said, 'and tell me what you see.'

"I see many black clouds churning and rolling in many

queer shapes and forms. Yet they seem to cover the same area and are not drifting with any wind. What does it mean?’

“It means that there will be war and bloodshed and troubled times for many people” (in Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights*, 271).



TWO: TROUBLE AT FROG LAKE

MK: On a miserable June day in 2005, with the heavy overcast sky threatening rain and a relentless wind ploughing through the aspen bush, I stood at the site of the so-named Frog Lake Massacre of 1885 — or, rather, stood at the little cemetery not far from the site where lie buried seven of the men killed on April 2, 1885, in the early weeks of the Northwest Rebellion.

In what is now Alberta, hard by the border with Saskatchewan, in the parkland near the North Saskatchewan River country near the reserve of Frog Lake First Nation, I meandered shoulder-high in grass and bramble, wild rose bushes and aspen deadfall. I noted the still-visible slumps of land where cellars had been dug for the houses and Hudson's Bay Company post of the settlement of Frog Lake. The calm beauty of the fields spread out all around belied the violence and tragedy commemorated here.

A monument, a very imposing stone cairn about two metres high, erected by Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1926, describes the event as a “massacre” by “rebel Indians under Big Bear” who then also “took prisoners.” Among these prisoners, or hostages, were the widows of two of the men killed, as well as a young employee of the HBC, William Cameron,

Group at Fort Pitt,
1884. (left to right)
Thomas Quinn, Francis
Dickens, James Keith
Simpson, Frederick
Stanley Simpson,
Angus McKay.
(Glenbow Archives
NA-13409-20)

all of whom eventually wrote about their ordeal, held for two months in the camp of Big Bear and his people and followers. They were sometimes terrified by their captors but ultimately they also shared their anxiety and privation as they trekked cross-country just several kilometres ahead of militias in hot pursuit.

William Cameron, HBC clerk: “The Cree nation is divided into two branches, Wood and Plains Cree. The former – whose property these reserves were – differed widely in character and mode of life from their brethren of the plains. They were solitary hunters and trappers afoot, the mainstay of the Saskatchewan valley fur trade....

“The Plains Crees, on the other hand, pitched their lodges in the great open territory between the North and South Saskatchewan.... They were better orators, more crafty, savage and daring than were their relatives of the woods” (Cameron, *Blood Red the Sun*, xxii).

Old Keyam, storyteller: “The Treaty had been made in due and proper form. There had been justice, apparently, and kindness too on the part of those who represented the Crown. Yet at the signing there were men, both white and Indian, who were sick at heart because they knew the almost certain outcome, yet could see no alternative.

Old Keyam is a character created by Edward Ahenakew to represent the generation that grew up in the aftermath of the events of 1885.

“In those days before the Rebellion, the reserve at Frog Lake seemed to be developing. The Indian Agency was there, and an outpost of the Hudson’s Bay Company from Fort Pitt. There was a mill too, run by water-power. Everything is gone now, only the cellars remaining, and a heavy wheel from the mill.

“The Chief of the [Frog Lake] reserve was *Chas-cha-ki-s-kwas*

(Head-upright), and he and his band were Bush [Wood] Cree, a quiet and peaceable group. But there were five bands in all encamped at Frog Lake, each under its own Chief. The Plains Cree under Big Bear were long used to bloodshed, brought up from childhood to regard battle as the highest test of their manhood, ever at war with the Blackfoot and the Bloods in a feud that meant killing at sight, in the quickest and most practical manner ... The winter had been severe, and with so large an encampment the hunting was difficult. The presence of Big Bear's band fostered discontent and resentment ..." (in Ahenakew, *Voices of the Plains Cree*, 73-4).

William Cameron: "Frog Lake, a shimmering expanse of blue water, lies ten miles north of the North Saskatchewan river, with which it is connected by a creek bearing the same name ... The settlement – to dignify it by the name – lay at the foot of the lake. There were the buildings of the government Indian agency, the Hudson's Bay Company trading post, the Roman Catholic mission, and the store of a 'free' trader named Dill. On the creek, two miles away, a dam under construction marked the site of a small grist mill waiting to be built for the Canadian Indian Department. The contractor, John C. Gowanlock, lived with his young wife in a log house on the bank of the creek nearby, and his clerk, William C. Gilchrist, lodged with his employer" (Cameron, *xxii*).

Allen Ronaghan, historian: "Fathers [Leon] Fafard and [Joseph-Jean-Marie] Lestanc had assisted in the founding of St Jean-François Regis Mission at Fort Pitt in 1877.... It soon became clear, however, that, with the disappearance of the buffalo, Fort Pitt no longer enjoyed a central position in the movements of the Native peoples. In the early 1880s, St. Jean-François Regis was closed

and a new mission — Notre Dame de Bon Conseil — was begun at Frog Lake.... Here Father Fafard worked with his customary zeal; by 1885 this mission was something of a showpiece in the Catholic outreach system. There was a church, two houses, a school with a good library, a stable, three horses, a plough, a buckboard, a farm wagon and a cart.... The school was so successful that Father [Felix] Marchand was sent to help Father Fafard” (Ronaghan, “Who Was the ‘Fine Young Man’?”, 16-7).

G. Mercer Adam: “John Delaney, the Farm Instructor, had in 1882 come with his wife from the neighbourhood of Ottawa, and had the supervision of four bands of Indians in proximity to Frog Lake. His official duties were also to attend to the issue of Government rations to the followers of Big Bear. We are told that he was engaged in the performance of this humane duty when the outbreak took place. A like beneficent work had brought Mr. J.A. Gowanlock to Frog Lake: he was engaged in erecting a mill for the benefit of the Indians of the district” (Adam, 305-6).

Richard Laurie, surveyor: “Frog Lake ... was one of the points apparently selected for a centre for teaching the Indians farming when a number of farming instructors were sent from Eastern Canada in 1878.... In the summer of 1884 the Indian Department advertised a bonus for anyone who would build a grist mill at Frog Lake. Mr Gowanlock,... being a practical millwright, suggested to me to go in with him, and take up the proposition. ...While working on the framework of the dam, I received a letter from Mr Gowanlock that he would be bringing a wife back with him and to build him a house” (Laurie, *Reminiscences of Early Days*, 20-2).

Mel Dagg, author: “The truth is she has been married two months to a man moving fast on the far edge of frontier, a man who combined their honeymoon with a trip east to buy machinery and then left her waiting six weeks in Battleford.... Her eyes follow the cold green river coiling and uncoiling through the bare trees. She searches the valley below, wondering what is across the bridge, on the other side, the wilderness that claims her husband and from which he will soon return to take her to Frog Lake ...” (Dagg, *The Women on the Bridge*, 47–8, 39).

Theresa Gowanlock, wife of John Gowanlock: “Another time on going out [in Battleford] while two men were crossing the bridge over Battle river; a horse broke through and was killed and the squaws gathered around it taking the skin off, while others carried some of the carcass away, and I asked what they were going to do with it, and my husband said ‘they will take it home and have a big feast ...’” (Gowanlock, *Two Months*, 6).

Mel Dagg: “The three women bend over the horse and she glimpses the flash of their knives as they fall upon the mare.... They hurl away the hooves and the head, and fling the intestines in an arc that ends with a splash in the water below.... In less than twenty minutes all evidence of the horse and the women is gone and it is possible to believe for just a moment that she did not see the slaughter, that it didn’t happen.... On the bridge between settlement and wilderness, she has glimpsed a part of the country she had not known existed” (Dagg, 39–40).

Theresa Gowanlock: “That little settlement of our own ... was distant from the Frog Lake Settlement, our nearest white neighbours, about two miles. But we had neighbours close by, who came in to see us the next day, shaking hands and chatting to us in Cree, of

which language we knew but little. The Indians appeared to be very kind and supplied us with white fish twice a week” (Gowanlock, 10).

Theresa Delaney, wife of John Delaney, (from Deposition given at Regina): “My husband and I left home [County of Carlton, Ontario] 1st of August 1882, and went at once to Frog Lake, NWT, where my husband held the position of Indian Instructor.... He then had to look after the Chippewans, Onepowhayaws, Misstoos, Koosawsis, and Puskeaskeewins and last year he had to ration Big Bear’s tribe. He was so engaged when the outbreak took place. All these Indians were peaceably inclined and most friendly to us all. My husband was much respected, and really beloved by all under his care, and they seemed to be most attached to him” (in Mulvany, 400-1).

George Stanley [Mesunekwepan], grandson of chief of Frog Lake Reserve: “One day (in 1884) a man named Ouche came over and told my father [Chief Ohneepahaow] that a white man — a Government man — had come to Onion Lake the day before and was coming to Frog Lake to meet the Indians that day.... The Government man said; ‘I have been sent here on very important business to you.... Big Bear wants to come here with his band to camp over the winter [1884/5].... I would be very glad if you would give him permission.... He will have to cut some wood on your land, catch some fish in your lake, etc. but for this you will be paid by the government.... There is one more thing I want to speak about.... I wish to find out from you if the Indians will be willing to let the white people build a grist mill at Frog Creek.’... The mill was proceeded with and a store built nearby which had big windows on the south. Big Bear and his band came from the south in the Fall and camped about two

miles south of our camp” (in Hughes, *The Frog Lake Massacre*, 159–60).

William Cameron: “The months of January and February passed uneventfully. Big Bear and his band were camped in the timber along Frog Creek not far from the mill site.... The old chief often had dinner with me; thus I had frequent opportunities to study his deeply-lined, intelligent face. Big Bear was then perhaps sixty years of age. He had an amazing voice and when he talked, as he often did, with his right arm free and the left holding the blanket folded across his broad chest, with the dramatic gestures and inflections natural to him, he reminded me of an imperial Caesar and was one of the most eloquent and impressive speakers I have ever listened to” (Cameron, 26–7).

Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, authors: “But all was not well at Frog Lake. Although the tiny hamlet with its Indian agency, Hudson’s Bay Company storehouse, Roman Catholic mission (Notre Dame de Bon Conseil), and new grist mill seemed destined for a promising future — there was even talk of a railway connection — tensions churned beneath the surface. Part of the problem were the two government officials that the Indians had to deal with on a daily basis. Thomas Quinn, the local Indian agent, was a tough-minded autocrat, who in the words of NWMP Superintendent Crozier was ‘very much disliked.’... Prior to assuming his duties at Frog Lake in 1883, the slight though pugnacious Quinn had worked out of the Battleford Indian agency and assisted in moving bands in the Cypress Hills area, including Big Bear’s, to the North Saskatchewan country. [By winter 1884 Big Bear’s group was camped by the Wood Cree reserve at Frog Lake.] In his new position, he adhered steadfastly to the Indian department’s work-for-rations policy as if

it were carved in stone. Nothing could deviate him from his course — not even his Sioux heritage or his Assiniboine wife. And he quickly earned a reputation as a mean-spirited, petty little man completely lacking in compassion” (Stonechild & Waiser, 108).

C.P. Mulvany, author: “Mr T.T. Quinn, the Indian Agent, was known as one of the most capable and competent of the employees in the Indian Department in the North-West. He was born in the Red River valley, his father being an Irish trader and his mother a Cree half-breed. He received a good education at the St Boniface College. When a mere lad he went down into Minnesota and spent some time in a trader’s store and it was while he was there that the Minnesota massacre occurred. His employer’s store was raided and its owner murdered, but in the midst of these scenes of horror an Indian who had taken a liking to young Tom Quinn’s bright and handsome face hid him under the counter among some empty salt sacks, and by that means he made his escape from savages who were sparing neither women nor children, no matter how helpless they were. As a young man Mr. Quinn entered the service of the Hudson’s Bay Company in which he soon distinguished himself for courage, intelligence, industry and thorough honesty” (Mulvany, 96-7).

G. Mercer Adam: “Thos. Quinn, the trusted Indian Agent of the Government, was a native of Red River. His father was an Irish traveller in that region, and his mother a Cree half-breed. Physically, Quinn was a fine specimen of humanity: he was a thorough frontiersman and accomplished horseman, and an expert canoeist. He is said to have laboured long and zealously for the conversion of his Pagan brethren and to have earnestly sought the amelioration of their condition” (Adam, 305).

Louis Goulet: “Tom Quinn and George [sic] Delaney knew from experience that as soon as the land had been cleared it would be much in demand for homesteads, once the Indians had been removed to their reserve. They were cooking up a plan to clear land before it was opened for settlement” (in Charette, 158).

Heather Devine, interview: “What eventually happened is that [Big Bear] held his ground. He wanted a larger land base for his band. The government wanted them to settle in another location. Big Bear did not like the terms. They go through the winter of 1884 without rations. They’re living in the vicinity of the Post at Frog Lake where they do not like the people in charge. They see them as ... I guess you could call them hard-dealers, hard-nosed people. There were rumours circulating about the Indian agent sexually harassing Indian women in the area. They didn’t like that.”

Fred Horse, Cree elder: “[A]n agent had to be also flexible, patient and tactful. These qualities were not apparent in Tom Quinn. He was compulsively stubborn and notorious for his explosive temper. At first the Indians had given him the name, ‘Sioux Speaker,’ but he soon became better known as ‘Dog Agent’ and ‘The Bully.’... Quinn was often contemptuous of Indians and enjoyed demonstrating his authority over them.... The Indians saw him as the most reluctant dispenser of food rations in the entire Department. He hoarded supplies with such tenacity and doled them out so unwillingly that one would have thought he had to pay for them himself. This was the man who would be dealing with the Big Bear Band in that perilous winter” (in Jean Goodwill, *John Tootoosis*, 48)!

Rudy Wiebe, author: “He sat back, his left hand crept into his vest, his right

occasionally lifted the tea mug; he began to talk. Of his half-Sioux mother in Minnesota and his Irish-French father killed there in ambush by the Sioux while scouting for Major Brown during the massacre in 1862; of himself fighting through the Carolinas with the Wisconsin Regiment of what was now called the Grand Army of the Republic; of himself with the cavalry scouting against the Cheyenne and Arapaho (before they got smart and signed on as scouts themselves) and Sioux; of Dewdney saying they definitely needed a man like him to handle the Plains Cree" (Wiebe, *Temptations of Big Bear*, 230-1).

Old Keyam: "And I have been told by those who knew [Quinn] well that he was utterly wild and reckless, a 'no-good man,' were the words used of him. The Indians listened with more confidence to those who, like A-yi-mi-ses, Big Bear's son, urged a council meeting with the Chiefs of Onion Lake and Long Lake, who were moderate men" (in Ahenakew, 74).

Heather Devine, interview: "And they were getting impatient with their own leadership, Big Bear. They felt that he wasn't achieving anything in his negotiations. They had gone through the winter without rations, so by the time springtime arrives, they are angry, hungry, they're fed up."

William Griesbach, major general and son of a NWMP officer: "The real commander of the Indians was not Big Bear but Wandering Spirit. He was a cold-blooded individual who hated the whites like poison and had as a warrior a good deal of ability" (Griesbach, *I Remember*, 76).

"[Quinn] could not easily contemplate any challenge to his own authority, not from Big Bear, and especially not from

Wandering Spirit. The rivalry was well known” (in Goodwill & Sluman, 51).

Fred Horse: “Given the helpless and famished state of the Crees as that deadly winter wore on, gifts of food in return for favours rendered would have been irresistible and truly in keeping with the frontier morality of the time, often thinly veiled by the surface Victorian postures of virtue. As William Cameron was later to say: ‘...That weakness — for a tawny oval face — was a failing of too many of the white men whom the government employed to show the ignorant red man how to live’” (in Goodwill & Sluman, 54).

William Cameron: “Then too, Delaney abused his power as Farm Instructor to take advantage of Indian women. When the husband of one of the women protested, a man named Sand Fly, John Delaney trumped charges of assault against him, had him imprisoned, and then cohabited with his wife all winter. To add insult to injury, when he tired of the Indian woman, Delaney married a white woman, Theresa Delaney” (in Dagg, 111).

Hugh Dempsey, historian and biographer: “The feeling was general that ‘Mr. Delaney had the man arrested in order to accomplish his designs,’ and he cohabited with the prisoner’s wife all winter. Sand Fly’s brother, Dancing Bull, resented the actions of the autocratic farm instructor and may have become a threat, for in 1882 Delaney accused him of witnessing the killing of a government ox and saw him sentenced to four months in jail” (Dempsey, *Big Bear*, 117).

Fred Horse: “It was hunger which brought about anger to the Plainsmen. ... Their children were crying for food. They were hungry and

the Indian Agent refused food” (in Stonechild & Waiser, 114).

Hugh Dempsey: “Early in January 1884, Big Bear’s father-in-law, *Yayakootyawapos*, returned from a long hunt, hungry and empty-handed. Exasperated, he went to see Delaney to beg a little food for his family. Because of [government’s] strict orders [that provisions were to be given only in exchange for work], the farm instructor was forced to turn him down and brusquely ordered him to get out of the ration house. Instead, the tired and frustrated Indian sat down on a pile of frozen fish and declared he would not move until he had some food. Delaney’s response was to grab him by the arm to forcibly eject him, but *Yayakootyawapos* reached under his blanket and drew his knife. Surprised and frightened, Delaney dashed for the door but had enough presence of mind to lock it on the way out. When the Mounted Police arrived a few minutes later, *Yayakootyawapos* was taken into custody and sentenced to two years in the guardhouse at Battleford. This incident was just one of many that involved hungry Indians that winter” (Dempsey, 123).

Vernon LaChance, editor: “Now they were at Frog Lake and, at latest report showed, in utterly wretched conditions, poorly clothed, and destitute of food, except when supplied with provisions by the Indian Agent there. Even the horses were suffering and several had died. No big game had been shot at Frog Lake and to obtain the necessities of life Big Bear’s followers had been compelled to submit to the implications of Agent Quinn’s dictum: ‘No work, no food.’ As a result they had reluctantly agreed to work at cutting wood” (Vernon LaChance, *Diary of Francis Dickens*, 77).

D'arcy Jenish, author: "Many of [Big Bear's] followers had no stomach for political struggle, for an endless fight against impossible odds. They simply wanted a home and whatever assistance the government might provide to help them start new lives. They had hoped Big Bear would choose a reserve after the long march north from the Cypress Hills in the summer of 1883. And they became sullen and resentful when he stalled yet again in the fall of 1884.... The camp included another faction. It was made up of warlike young men who still dreamed of riding the plains and ridding them of whites. They rallied around Wandering Spirit, Big Bear's militant war chief. In the winter of 1884-5, Wandering Spirit acquired a potent ally — the spellbinding Little Poplar, a renegade Cree who had rolled in from Montana preaching defiance and spoiling for a confrontation" (D'arcy Jenish, *Indian Fall*, 157).

Fred Horse: "Wandering Spirit had been born, had grown to maturity and earned his scars as an outstanding hunting and fighting man. He had fed, protected and served his people in the best tradition of that war-like nation. Now he could do none of those things. He had to crawl around after gophers where once he had raced amidst the thundering herds. He had been forced to watch as his children grew thin and listless and shivered in their ragged clothing.... The Plains tribes have, as always, defended their own hunting ground — theirs as far back as anyone could remember. Would white men have stood idly by, while outsiders came in and began to shoot their cattle? Not likely! It seemed that there was one law for white men and quite another for the Indians. Well, it would not happen again. There were soon no more buffalo left, either to shoot or defend. Wandering Spirit had been jolted out of his once honoured role, out of the only way to live that he had ever known.

He was left stranded and humiliated, subject to the grudging charity of the Indian agent” (in *Goodwill*, 50–1).

Fred Horse: “[Big Bear’s Band] was looking forward eagerly to the October treaty payments. It was the custom to give each band enough fresh meat at that time so that they could enjoy a good feast before taking their money.... But when the Big Bear Band rode up into Fort Pitt on the date set for the payments, Tom Quinn announced that he was not going to give them any meat for the expected feast on the excuse that they had not yet cooperated with the government and chosen a reserve! Their bitter disappointment soon changed into furious outrage” (in *Goodwill*, 48–9).

William Cameron: “Quinn got to his feet. Six and a half feet tall, spare, athletic, broad-shouldered, exceedingly active, Thomas Trueman Quinn was a splendid figure of a man. It was from his knowledge of the Sioux language that he had received from the Crees his name of Kapwatamut or The Sioux Speaker.

“[Little Poplar] scowled: ‘I have heard of you!’ he retorted. ‘Away over the other side of the Missouri river, I heard of you. I started to come this way and the farther I came the more I heard. You’re the man the government sent up here to say “No!” to everything the Indians asked you!’

“‘Now, I am going to ask you something. I will ask it three times before I sit down. It is long since the buffalo went away. My people are hungry and would like to eat fresh meat again. Will you kill an ox before the treaty money is paid?’

“Quinn shook his head. ‘The government gives cattle to the Indians for work and milk, but not to kill. There’s no beef for you.’

“Little Poplar went on: ‘I crossed the Line and travelled north.

After a time I came to where the grass had been torn up, and two iron lines had been laid down and stretched away to the east and west as far as I could see. I said to myself, "What is this?" I thought for a moment: then I said: "Hai, yes, I know! This is the *pewabisko meskano*, the iron road that the government has made to carry food and clothing in their big wagons to the poor starving Indians."... He turned again to Quinn. 'For the second time I ask: Will you give us beef?'

"I've answered that question. You heard what I said,' replied the agent.

"*Namoya, itwayo!* No, he says. *Akwusee keeam!* Very well!' Little Poplar raised his voice.... 'For the third and last time I ask – and when you answer, *speak loud* so that every Indian in this house can hear you: Will you give us beef?'

"No!' came the reply in the deep voice of the agent.

"And with yells of defiance the whole band swept out of the house [Fort Pitt], across the square and up the hill, firing their guns in the air as they went. That afternoon the Indians started the war dance and Big Bear made a speech. He attacked the government and the Hudson's Bay Company and, ignoring the other whites present, walked up to Captain Francis Dickens, son of the novelist, commanding the NWMP at Ft Pitt, and held out his hand.

"'You are a man,' cried Big Bear, 'whom Manito made to be a chief! We like you, your heart is good. As for that man' – he pointed at Quinn – 'his heart is made of stone'" (Cameron, 4-7).

Isabelle Little Bear Johns, granddaughter of Big Bear: "I was about 8 years old. My father was third son of Big Bear.... I lived with my foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Thunder and our home was amongst the other Indian houses which constituted the main camp....

"My people belonged to that great race called the Plains

Indian. We lived entirely on the buffalo who provided us with food, shelter and clothing. We were not trappers or growers of seeds, although we did obtain some of our food from edible roots and plants...

“Our men had only one means to earn food, and that was to chop wood for the river steamers in exchange for a piece of bacon or a sack of grain. There was a limit to how much firewood the Hudson’s Bay steamer could use, since it sometimes made only one trip up the Saskatchewan River per season. Therefore, there were times when the men of my village couldn’t chop wood for food or anything. It was at this time that our chief Big Bear organized his last big hunt” (Little Bear Johns, *Edmonton Sunday Sun*, 16).

Rudy Wiebe, interview: “And Big Bear actually goes moose hunting, at a time when things are starting to accumulate in Frog Lake, in April, end of March 1885. Big Bear is away moose hunting. This is a buffalo hunter, away hunting a solitary moose in the bush, who’s used to hunting buffalo on the plains. This is part of what’s happened; their life has been taken away from them and they’re back to the life they have left, because their identity is attached to the plains culture. So when Big Bear’s men are starving because they can’t go out on the plains, there’s no buffalo left on the plains, this is partly where this conflict comes from.”

Rudy Wiebe: “He danced. He had not eaten buffalo for a long time and he could not rest too long for perhaps he might not be able to begin again, though the fear of that was nothing compared to the other he would not consider, and he was praying over and over as he danced, swaying only a little now, barely raising his feet to the rhythm of the ground:

Thunder you know I promised
but bacon and flour with a few sweet fish
empty a man
thunder giver
give
give" (Wiebe, 166).