

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: GEORGE OKEYMAW 2  
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: DRIFT PILE RIVER RESERVE  
ALBERTA  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: DRIFT PILE RIVER RESERVE  
ALBERTA  
TRIBE/NATION: CREE  
LANGUAGE: CREE  
DATE OF INTERVIEW:  
INTERVIEWER: DAVE CAPOT  
DAN MCLEAN  
INTERPRETER: LAWRENCE COURTOUREILLE  
TRANSCRIBER: J. GREENWOOD  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Understanding of treaty promises.
- Distribution of food, ammunition, etc. in earlier times.
- Intereting accounts of home-made agricultural equipment (as well as that supplied by Dept. of Indian Affairs).

Inter: Okay, the person who is going to speak to us is called George Okeymaw from Driftpile: He is 79 years old, on the 29th of April.

"What I am going to ask you, what did you hear even though you didn't see it, when the treaty first came into being? What was promised to them? Are you aware of the first treaty? All these treaties that were promised to us. Hospitalization and hunting rights and all these things that were promised to us, you have a better memory of them, father."

George: Yes, these things I remember. At first when the treaty was made, I wasn't present at the exact place where the treaty was made, because I was small. I would rather play. But later on when the treaties were made with our leaders, it was Mustus who was made chief, followed by another chief called Fish. I guess their names will be written in the book. That chief was called Shank and the other was called Weasel. Weasel was called Mustus. He was the one that was chief at the Creek. That person, as I was growing older, later on Mustus made a council meeting. I have gone with my father many times when

they were having their council meetings. "What is to become of us in the future?" was mentioned to me by the Indian agent. These things that are promised to us to try to change our lives he said many times. I have heard. These promises for an example, medicine, we're never to pay for. Fish you can kill, whatever amount you desire, we were promised. The land we're given is a reservation. The white man was told never to interfere with the reservations. Only we, who are treaty Indians. The ducks that are within the reservation, we are allowed to kill in any amount, but not to waste. Moose we can kill in any amount, we were told. Also we are allowed other form of trapping without having to get special permits. Our leaders weren't told we had to get special trapping licenses. These were not mentioned. You won't have to pay for permits as long as the sun shines and as long as the rivers flow.

These promises that were fulfilled in Ottawa, as long as you shall live and as long as the rivers flow and as long as the sun shines, this will be the case forever. If you wish to use implements for your livelihood, just like farm equipment, for an example, a plow. These were given to some people; I have seen, I was growing older. Many times my father and I have used these implements to break land. This was first. And then scufflers that were used to cover up the potato gardens, and also a garden hoe. These things were given to the people. A pick, grub hoe, fork, these things they were given to provide a livelihood. I remember in the days before treaty, my father

made a homemade fork out of willows which he jokingly said he was going to go and buy at the store. He cut hay all day with a sickle. They coiled hay all day with their homemade forks. With these homemade forks, my father tossed and turned over the hay so it would dry quicker. After the hay had thoroughly dried then the hay was stacked. My father said, "I will get a hay rack." He took his axe to the bush and brought back two sixteen-foot lengths of spruce trees. He sharpened the ends of the spruce poles which he slid under the coils which we then hauled to the hay stack. These coils were hauled in a stretcher-like manner. As the hay stack got bigger my father had to go into the bush for more sticks to build a ladder. My mother then climbed up the ladder and built a stack while my father pitched up the hay to her with his homemade fork. My mother having been a big woman was almost falling off the round pointed hay stack. My father then got another sharpened pole which he got my mother to pierce into the centre of the haystack. From the pole were tied old fishing lines to secure the haystack. My mother then came down on the homemade ladder. Luckily, she didn't fall. I remember there was much laughter during all this. Later on we were to get tools to use; we were promised. Horses were also being given. Previously, dogs were used for packing. Boats with oars were also built and the women helped. I remember playing in the water while we paddled along the lake shores. Wherever we heard that fish was plentiful is where my father would want us to go. When we heard where ducks were plentiful is where we would go just like here from the creek. We moved here to the creek from Driftpile

Point.

The tools and implements that I am now going to mention, these we will be given now including horses, said Noo kin mis. "We will lend one another the horses and harnesses," said Noo kin mis. He made a council meeting which I also sat in. We are going to be given implements and a team of horses. We will be given a walking plow which has handles on either side which will be drawn by a team of horses. We will be able to break our own land. We will also be given discs and harrows. These implements will be shared by three families.

In the early days there were no railroads. Shipping was done from Athabasca in the winter time. By this time the Metis had horses here in town. During the summer time my father and my brother helped with the barging. Toward the end my father asked me to go along to help the cooks so I could see where they had gone, but my mother did not want me to go. I felt sorry that I wasn't able to go on this barge.

It was a huge barge filled with tools and food that were brought to the Hudson's Bay store here which is now called Grouard. These were tools that were given to the people that following spring. Food was also given out but we had to go and get it. By this time the people had their own small wagons. Small boxes were purchased by the trappers which were used on the wagons. Slowly the people acquired all these things. When the people left to go and get their food supply in town where the Indian agent slept overnight. The Indian agent lived in the church basement at this time.

Later on after I grew up I went to work for him there all summer long. When the shipping had arrived there were at least 22 sacks of flour in 100lb bags. There were also 3 or 4 50lb bags of bacon. There was also tea and tobacco in three or four boxes full. There was also rice issued, and beans. These were the main items that were issued to the people who were trying to help themselves. These rations were issued so time would not be spent in hunting to interrupt with their farm work. This was a very good system because the rations would last for a long time. My father was given fifty pounds of flour for five children plus my father and mother. The bacon that was rationed out to us lasted for about a month. Tea was given out in a big wooden container. I still have one of these empty containers in the back room which I have kept for a long time. My wife is presently using this container as a flour bin. These large wooden containers filled with tea is what used to be rationed to the people. Also a bag of beans and rice. Later on these things were rationed out and people had to take their own bags to the Indian agent. He gave rations out to the chief and councillors and the people. On these ration days, I have went with my father many times. These rations were given out to us when the spring plowing began.

There was one old man who came to see us from Red River

Creek. He was married to one of my relatives. His name was Jim Prince. I thought what he said was rather funny at the council meeting. They were discussing how farming should be run. These things were thought of even though the times were very hard. Very little was accomplished because very few implements were given out. We couldn't do anything because we didn't have any money. We didn't have any saw mills. We didn't have anything to sell from our land. There was also very little fishing. More recently is when the fishing started. Saw mills are more plentiful. If this was the case at first I would have plenty of equipment.

I could have made money on logging from within the reserve. I was strong enough to work on any job just like my wife who helped me a great deal when we were trying to farm. She would hitch up four horses and do the plowing and I would also hitch up four horses and follow here with the discing. We would do all of this work on my land, but 80 acres is very little. Some white men have 500 to 600 acres and he soon has all the implements. This the Indian did not see. He did not see these. This was hard work. He was lazy and he knows very little, was said about him. But we knew how to make our livelihood. Nothing was given to us by the Crown. Many times our chiefs made the request to our Indian agent but he would tell us there was no money available so nothing can be given to us. What can a person do without any money? The only time our fathers had any money was when they sold their furs to the Hudson's Bay store. This was their only form of trade, nothing else. That today I have thought of many times. It is only too bad that we didn't do like the white man in farming for our livelihood.

The people weren't give any cattle right away. Today, cattle is one of our main farm produce. Cattle can be sold or butchered for food consumption. Then a person doesn't have to go hunting for game, because a one-year old butchered steer would be sufficient food supply until the seeding was completed. Then there wasn't any interruptions in looking for food. Long ago there wasn't any cattle until more recently. An American family by the name of Travis homesteaded in Grouard, who had cattle. When I first heard one those cows, it scared me so much I grabbed my mother, not knowing what the noise was. A horse also scared me when I first heard it, not having heard nor seen one before. Nowadays, horses are plentiful. Even people who weren't very intelligent raised their own horses. This wasn't the case long ago even though hay was plentiful to feed the horses.

One thing I forgot to mention is hay mowers and hay racks. Later on we were given these things which would be drawn by a team of horses. The mower blade only cut a three-foot swath which was drawn by one horse, therefore, it was difficult for a small horse to pull. My father whittled out a whipple tree where he hitched up a pair of cayuses. I would hitch up a single to the rake with a handle lever. Today all you have to

do is kick a foot lever and all you have to do is hold the reins which isn't a hardship. The old hand lever was a backbreaker by noon, raking hay that dad had cut. Then later on coils were made and then stacking. We were able to keep horses and later on were given cattle that were lent out. There was plenty of hay. Later on the cattle decreased in number. Nothing went right for the Indian so he could make

money. The cattle died of old age. Some of the young calves were lost in the river. Others strayed off with the white man's cattle. Soon they diminished. The Indian did not destroy all the cattle. Later on cattle raising came back. When my father died of the epidemic he left me 8 cows. The Indian Agent put these cattle in my name. I gave two cows to my brother. And I gave my brother-in-law, Watson, one cow and I only kept four for myself. From these I was able to make a livelihood. Then I came to Driftpile. By this time we were milking eight cows at this place where we are presently living, just a little across the way. One spring when we turned our cattle loose to start their spring grazing, six of them were poisoned. And my cousin George also lost three milking cows by poison. We were fortunate enough to save one cow. I saved the cow by making it drink a solution of gunpowder and oil which caused diarrhoea. From this one cow we saved six calves. My wife felt very sorry for the cattle we had lost.

I forgot to mention about duck hunting. Pellets and gunpowder in 25-pound quantities was rationed out to us. Kegs were about a foot and a half wide and about two and one half feet high. Noo kim miss would sometimes bring four full kegs. But he would bring five or six kegs of pellets which weighed about 25 pounds each. Caps were also rationed. Then came the shotguns and repeating rifles. These were requested and supplied and these he would bring.

That's all for now. Later on I would be able to tell you more.

Inter: Were you aware whether the Indian gave away the mineral rights? Was there any mention of this in our treaties?

George: The only thing I heard long ago was that we owned this. Reservations that were given to us, we owned six shovels in depth. When a person is seeding the ground and where he is living, he is entitled to six shovel full in depth. Beyond that depth, we are not entitled to anything, that should be found later on. This is what I heard, but it wasn't written that way. I guess the white man was the only one who was given six shovels full in depth to do what he wants to do on the surface. The Queen did not give him any ground depth where Indians had their grain fields. Everything that is within the reserve belongs to the Indians; he owns that. This is the way I heard it. I don't know if it is true. I do not know what they are going by. I don't know.

Inter: How old are you?

George: I am 79 years old in August 4th. My baptismal certificate says differently, but that is wrong. I was born in June, my mother said. When the saskatoon trees begin to bloom, in June or July is also what Regular Prince used to say. We were born right close together, one month apart. My baptismal certificate that was written out by the priest wasn't accurate. As a rule they help out in this manner. I lost two or three months in getting my pension. That was the priest's fault even though I told him the exact date. Luckily, the Indian agent found my right age in the records. From then on there has been no error in my age. In the spring I will be 80 years old, but I am still quite active. I am still capable of bringing in food for my wife, hauling in firewood and water. These are my chores, also splitting wood. When we buy groceries, the kids help put them away. When I am sitting here watching T.V., many times I have fallen asleep, because I am getting old.

Inter: That is all for now. You go and eat.

(End of Interview)

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