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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Relationship between Gregoire Lake and Clearwater Lake Reserves and the settlement at Waterways. (Fort McMurray band)
- Discovery of Gregoire Lake.

I'm here at the Charles Camsell Hospital visiting Joseph Cheechum, and I'm going to talk with him to find out what knowledge he has about the treaties. Also I want some information from his reserve at Anzac and from what source he has this information.

Richard: The first thing I am going to ask you about is your name and your age. What is your name?

Joe: My name is Joe Cheechum, I'm 71 years old. I was born in 1904.

Richard: Where were you born?

Joe: Fort McMurray.

Richard: Where were your parents born?

Joe: They too were born there, but only my mother is still living. My father died quite a while ago. There were two of us boys, now I'm the only one left. There is one son who is

still alive and also my daughters. They are scattered all over the place.

Richard: Did you ever hear where your parents came from or do you know of their birthplace?

Joe: They were from the area of McMurray, that is where they are born. There is one thing I would like to find out; when Treaty 6 and Treaty 7 were made, was there one Indian who was the leader when the negotiations were taking place with the Queen's representatives. Was there someone who was the headman?

Richard: This is what I wanted to ask you about, to find out if there were headmen at the time. Did you hear anything about that?

Joe: You must have heard of the man named Big Bear; he was one who was at the negotiations. There was a man which I knew, he was about 85 years old when he died 20 years ago, he was at the treaty signing.

Richard; Who is this man you are talking about?

Joe: His name was Colin Castor.

Richard; Was he an Indian?

Joe: No, he was a Metis, but he spoke Cree. He is the man who told me of him being there. He told me he was thirteen years old at the time. I'm wondering if that is the time he was referring to. I'm wrong, that was at the Frog Lake massacre. What I'm talking about was before that time.

Richard: This is not what took place at Fort McMurray, what you are now relating to me.

Joe: No, that is not what I am talking about.

Richard: Was there any negotiating which took place at Fort McMurray which you may know about?

Joe: Yes, I think that something took place there, but I'm not too certain of it.

Richard: Or would you know the names of headmen who were representing the Indians?

Joe: I can remember the chiefs.

Richard: That is what I mean.

Joe: The first chief that I can remember was Paul Cree, he was an old man. He was from the family of Crees. He died many years ago.

Richard: Have you ever heard the name Saputawakinum, or did

you know him?

Joe: We were related to that old man.

Richard: Where was he from?

Joe: He too was from that part of the country, but I don't know exactly what he did, because I don't remember many chiefs as they were being replaced.

Richard: How was the reserve at Gregoire Lake established? The place where you make your home?

Joe: There are two reserves, at Clearwater and Fort McMurray. But, I'm not certain of it because I was a very young boy at the time. I don't know if it was the time that they surveyed the reserve.

Richard: And there is the reserve at Anzac, is that where you make your home?

Joe: That is where I am from, it is quite a big reserve but the population is small. Because the people at Waterways will not come there to live. Commercial fishing is not allowed there. The lake extends half-way into the reserve, and there is also an island there. Along the lake there is a highway, it goes around the lake. Across the lake (Gregoire Lake) there are 46 acres which are still reserve land.

Richard: Are there two names for that place?

Joe: Gregoire Lake is the proper name. Anzac is only a railway siding. It used to be known as Willow Lake. There was an old man who lived there. His family grew up in that area, they also died there. I remember that old man, I saw him.

Richard: Which old man are you talking about?

Joe: That is the one whose name was Gregoire, the lake was named after him. He was there for a long time.

Richard: Was he a native person?

Joe: He was a halfbreed, part French and part Indian.

Richard: Did the Indians have a Cree name for the lake?

Joe: Yes, they called it MEEK WAH PAY MUG (Red Willow) Lake. That was the name it was first known as, then it was renamed to Gregoire Lake. I remember that we were already past childhood at the time. They must have named it after him.

Richard: Were there any Indians there before?

Joe: I'm not sure, I don't think so because I've heard stories that the old man Gregoire discovered there were fish in that lake. It is said that years ago the Indians used to stay at

Jackfish Lake. It is about 50 miles from here. It is situated on the provincial boundary. The lake was known as KINOOSHAYO Lake, it is said that Gregoire discovered the lake when the people would move from place to place in the fall. So when the surveying took place, that is the place which was chosen as it was a good agricultural area and the fish were plentiful including the animals. There is also a railroad there, now there is also a highway. We usually fish in that lake but we don't sell the fish; it is for ourselves.

Richard: Would you know when this man discovered the lake?

Joe: I would think it was a long time ago.

Richard: Would there have been Indians in Fort McMurray when Gregoire made his way to Red Willow Lake?

Joe: I don't know. I saw Fort McMurray when there were no buildings there, only about 2 or 3 buildings in the area. That was when the Indians would work on riverboats going downstream (barging) from Lac la Biche to Fort Chipewyan. I remember when they used dogs for the trip, that took place once a month. One man would walk in front of the dogs with snowshoes, because there was no road. There was nothing in that part of the country for a means of transportation or for moving freight. The people would bring their freight to Athabasca to be moved, by a scow on the river. They even used pack horses for hauling purposes.

Richard: The place where you make your home at Anzac is that Cree or Chipewyan territory?

Joe: It seems to be mixed with Cree and Chipewyan. As I said before, they don't stay there. Maybe it's because they are a different kind of people. They are different in character. You take Anzac - half of them are different from Cree. But they have left that place a long time ago. Some left when they were young and now they are approaching old age. I would think about half of them left. They never returned; they are now at Janvier reserve.

Richard: Do they have a chief there?

Joe: Yes, they do.

Richard: And you people, do you have your own chief as well?

Joe: Yes, we have our own chief.

Richard: Is he Cree or Chipewyan?

Joe: He is a Cree.

Richard: The people who live at Waterways, where do they actually belong?

Joe: You mean the Crees? They should be at the reserve

(Clearwater) it is about twelve miles from Waterways along the river. During the winter they can drive to the reserve, but it is very difficult. The number of children they have does not justify building a good road. This would be for the purpose of taking the children to school. Two houses were built for them from the government, they were log houses, but nobody lived in

them. That was about 6 or 7 years ago. There is no bridge for the river the people have to cross. The rivers that join there are Clearwater and Christina rivers. The bridge is needed on the Christina river. If there was a road that would go to Fort McMurray that is only twelve miles away. Maybe Indian Affairs don't want to do that because there are only a few children. So the people cannot stay there, that is why they make their homes at Waterways.

Richard; Do they have a chief?

Joe: No, they do have a councillor but I heard he was fired.

Richard: Are they not supposed to belong on your reserve as well?

Joe: Yes, they belong here, there is no problem there. Our chief, Albert Cheechum, is doing a good job.

Richard: Do they have their own chief or are they administered by your chief?

Joe: Our chief looks after both places, Gregoire Lake and Clearwater.

Richard: You also stated that your parents were born at Fort McMurray?

Joe: Yes, they were born there, most of the people were born there. There are not many who were not born in the Fort McMurray area, not many were born elsewhere.

Richard: Do you remember any names of chiefs who may have had something to do with the adhesion at Fort McMurray.

Joe: No, I don't remember, I only remember Paul Cree. Then it was Milton, Milton Whitehead. He was from Grouard, but he met his wife at McMurray and he stayed there. Then Harry Cardinal was the chief, he was from St. Paul originally. He was the chief for about 3 or 4 years.

Richard: How long ago would that be?

Joe: That must be about 30 years ago. It then was Johnny Milton when his old man died. He was named Johnny Whitehead, he was known as Johnny Milton. He didn't serve for one year and he died too. Then I was chief for 3 years.

Richard: When was that?

Joe: That was only about two and a half years ago. Then I passed it on to my son-in-law. He went to school and understand the business. He doesn't travel much because he has a job as well.

Richard: The other thing I wanted to ask was, say when you were young and you parents went hunting, what areas or territories did they cover?

Joe: They hunted any place in the surrounding areas of our reserve and also Fort MacKay. Even the Janvier reserve because all those reserves are not too far apart, they may be about 60 or 70 miles apart. Because they made their living by hunting and trapping. They trapped towards the west also, some still trapped until the traplines were given to them. Then it seemed like they didn't trap anymore.

Richard: When they were moving about, would they have come across any other Indians in their travels in pursuing hunting and trapping?

Joe: I'll tell you something else! When I was in MacKay in 1926 there were no Crees in that area at the time. I was the only one with my parents. There were a few Metis. There is a place called Chipewyan Lake which would be quite a distance straight west from there. There were Indians who lived in that bush country. And in 1926 I saw them moving into the MacKay area, there was a family of eight girls, two boys and also a young child, there was also a mother and father. They had moved from Chipewyan, I don't know how they heard of MacKay. I think the oldest girl was 30 years old, the priests looked after them and then they were all taken to Fort Chipewyan. It was the first time the old man and his wife were baptized, when they were taken to Fort Chipewyan. But they returned to MacKay, but only four of them. Then gradually more Indians moved eastward to MacKay.

Richard: What were their names?

Joe: I think his name was Alex Courtoirelle. They used to call him Wedigo, his Cree name.

Richard: Did they speak Cree?

Joe: Yes, they spoke Cree. The old man was Alex Courtoirelle, the girl was Agnes, one boy was named Germaine and the other was Paul. There are many of them today.

Richard: So they may have travelled the northern area to a great extent?

Joe: Yes, the Indians travelled a lot in many areas.

Richard: How did the missionary get along with the Indians?

Joe: I don't know anything about that. When I first saw a

priest they were using a dog team and they were coming from Fort Chipewyan. The next time I saw a priest was in Fort McMurray; his church still stands in Fort McMurray. We were living there at the time. Most people lived in Fort McMurray until it was time to go hunting and trapping before they would move away. This took place in the fall of the year.

Richard: Thank you for talking to me.

NOTE: The combined population of Gregoire Lake #176A and Clearwater #175 reserves was 102 as of June 1973. These figures were obtained from the Department of Indian Affairs band lists.

(End of Interview)

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