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ALBERTA
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ALBERTA
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INTERVIEWER: ROSE SADDLEBACK
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Aged 72.
- History of Lesser Slave Lake ReserveS.
- Swan River Reserve, details of history.

Intro: My name is Rose Saddleback and I work at the Indian Association of Alberta. I'll be talking to this person by the name of Dolphus Davis from the Swan River band which is located in the town of Kinuso. He was born on August 22, 1905.

Rose: Could you please first tell us your name?

Dolphus: I'm Dolphus Davis.

Rose: And how old are you?

Dolphus: 72.

Rose: 72?

Dolphus: 72, will be in August.

Rose; The reason I'm here is I want you to relate to us your understanding of the events leading to the acceptance of entering into the treaty. What do you know of the Swan River Band?

Dolphus: I do not know very much about that history. The

treaty was taken a long time ago.

Rose: Your elders including your parents must have told you stories about the treaty.

Dolphus: Yeah, we didn't have a chief here.

Rose: No chief?

Dolphus: No, just a councillor. There was only one chief for this whole area. A Willier. I don't know which one as there were three brothers in that family. I think there were about three brothers. One of them is Key no say oo, the other is Mustus and Astachukun.

(P.S. Dolphus' wife, Maggie, was listening to the interview. In the background of this interview her voice could be heard saying that there were only the three brothers.)

cont'd Dolphus... All these three brothers became chiefs. At that time we had chiefs for a lifetime. They had authority over Driftpile, Wabasca, Sucker Creek, Sturgeon Lake, Whitefish Lake and Grouard. There was only one chief for all these places.

The hereditary chieftainship was done away with upon the death of the last brother. It was a custom followed that upon the death of a brother, the next brother in line takes the role of a chief for a life term. The last hereditary chief was Astachukun who in 1930s approximately was no longer considered a life-time Chief, decided by the local people. The local bands in the 1930s had begun electing their own chief and council.

Rose: The band was under a different system. Then a different type of elective system was agreed upon?

Dolphus: Yes, that was the last time.

Rose: I guess all the people of the Treaty #8 area were considered as one cohesive group under the authority of the one chief. All the power was in the hands of the chief. So when did the individual bands start electing their own chief and council? When did they separate into individual bands?

Dolphus: The Chief Astachukun deceased in 1961.

(P.S. I don't think this person kept accurate figures. Most of the people from the Treaty #8 claimed that Astachukun deceased in 1950s.)

Cont'd Dolphus... We have a chief and 2 councillors for this band. The Driftpile bands is under this same system. They manage their own band affairs. Also, the number of people in the council for each individual band vary based according to the total population of the reserve.

Rose: The cemetery site. The land that was supposed to have been set aside as part of the reserve was not done so or carried through. It was located or selected to locate in the vicinity of Kinuso. Could you explain that to me?

Dolphus: A long time ago, an Indian person lived on that site. That site was selected for a cemetery and was known as "on reserve".

Rose: "On the Reserve"?

Dolphus: "On Reserve".

Rose: "On Reserve".

Dolphus: A whiteman took over that piece of land. He continued to take more land, over a time, and eventually constructed a house on that site. But the Indian man who lived

there prior to the take-over of the white person had a close contact with the Indian agent. The agent's name was Laird.

Rose: Agent Laird? Laird. (Unsure of pronunciation)

Dolphus: That's the Indian agent. And he would write a letter stating that this (white) person be evicted... (those living on Indian land).

Soon after W.W. I, one white man took land here which was probably set aside for the use of soldiers coming out of the war. Ottawa authorized this veteran to take that land. Somebody had to report to Ottawa. Ottawa has to know the status of all lands in the province. We have a few cases like that on this reserve. Apparently, this was stated in the government documents. We still have those papers here(?). All the land that was surveyed for us people is all under one reserve.

The white people had informed us that in the event our reserve members marry non-members they would qualify for lands in the surrounding area. But not all of them. The land belonging to the band was marked, "on-reserve" land. I guess about 4 quarters or sections were given to outside people or non-members.

Rose: Are you referring to "home-steaders"? Were they settling on these lands?

Dolphus: No, when someone wanted to settle around here the lands were marked "on-reserve". The ones marked were not bothered. Whoever is the first occupant of the land must submit a report to Ottawa. So, Laird should have reported to Ottawa stating the name of the Indian occupant, hence, we would probably have had extra land for the reserve. He did not report to them at all. The white persons could have been evicted.

After the war, Ottawa changed it's policies giving the

veterans the priority to take land. There are two quarters of land here that come under this policy.

Rose: What is the Cree word for the Swan River Band?

Dolphus: Wab so seepee.

Rose: What about Sawridge?

Dolphus: Kiss si pik ka mak.

Rose: I guess there were about five families from there (meaning Sawridge) according to documents found at Ottawa that came here. We would like to know if in fact, for example, the woman by the name of Isabella Twinn. Nee so tasis is one, Leon Ward, John Ward and another word. Okay, it's Twinn and Ward's. Did they in fact transfer to this band?

Dolphus: I recall just the two.

Rose: You mean Isabella Twinn?

Dolphus: I just remember the two, that one and Edward Twinn.

Rose: They came to live here?

Dolphus: They came here. A lot of other people came here but they were not accepted in to the band membership.

There is also one other person who came here. His name was Benjamin Potskin. He was taken into our band membership. I think he was from Slave Lake band (meaning Sawridge Band). Benjamin Potskin was his name. He was the only one added to our band list - his family were not included in.

Rose: He was all by himself.

Dolphus: His wife had pre-deceased him.

Rose; Do you recall the name "McLean"? I guess he was the surveyor for the reserve here.

Dolphus: I used to see him but I can't say what kind of work or deal he made. The people who took lands (I think he's referring to women) figure that in later years they would be able to marry white men or non-treaties and have lands in their possession within the reserve which was marked "on-reserve". We had a huge tract of land.

Rose; I guess after McLean finished surveying the reserve for the people here (supposedly setting it aside for the Indians) white people came and settled on the selected site. Do you remember anything about it?

Dolphus: Yes.

Rose: Can you explain it further?

Dolphus: Well, the reserve boundary runs along here (along the bush). It ends there. The white people occupy the next quarters located directly adjacent to the reserve boundaries.

Rose: Are you referring to the north or south of this reserve?

Dolphus: South of here. When the white people started migrating to this area they just lived anywhere taking land even those marked "on-reserve". They missed other reserve lands a mile this way.

It was surveyed allotting 160 acres (to a quarter) for a family.

Driftpile was different. They were only given 80 acres not 160 acres.

Rose: Do you recall the following names? Moses Caraveau, Jim Posey?

Dolphus: Yes. They lived "on-reserve" land. It's an Indian Reserve.

Rose: Indian Reserve?

Dolphus: Those 2 quarters were Indian lands. They were both called "on-reserve"

Rose: Were they accepted into the band as members? Or did they just take land without authorization?

Dolphus: They took the land but they had to report to Ottawa proclaiming their right of occupancy. Once they occupied the land, they remained at that same location.

Rose: I wonder if they were aware that the land they occupied or had occupied was surveyed for an Indian Reserve?

Dolphus: Oh yeah.

Rose: An Indian reserve?

Dolphus: No one could tell the status of the land for sure at that time.

Rose: What about Assiney River?

Dolphus: Assineau River. (pronounced assin no).

Rose: Yes, who owned that parcel of land?

Dolphus: He was known to us as "Chief" (ups chi nese). His English name was Felix Giroux. He owned half section of land over there.

Rose; A half section?

Dolphus: He lived over there, Assineau. He was given that land. It still belongs to our band.

Rose; Still?

Dolphus: Yes, I know the number too. I had it somewhere in my cabinet.

Rose: Was he the only one to have utilized that parcel of land?

Dolphus: Yes.

Rose: No one else ever made use of it?

Dolphus: His son-in-law lived there also.

Rose: What was his name?

Dolphus: Samuel Sound.

Rose: Sam?

Dolphus: Samuel Sound, yes.

Rose; I wonder how long he resided there?

Dolphus: Not too long. They were only there during the time the railroad was being built. After the completion of the railroad they all moved to here (meaning Kinuso).

Rose: What was it you said? Ka wat ta soak?

Dolphus: Freight. Boats were used in the summers from Slave Lake to Grouard.

Rose: So, going back now to the issue of transferred memberships. I assume a meeting was held to discuss whether the people from here would consent to take the families from Sawridge into Swan River Band. The Twinn family?

Dolphus: Yeah.

Rose; Now, the land itself was it always farmed? Is there any farming being done here?

Dolphus: Barely.

Rose: Just a little?

Dolphus: I always farmed a long time ago.

Rose: Was there any fishing station given to your band?

Dolphus: We used to get material for nets. The people made their own.

Rose: Was there a certain area given to the people for fishing?

Dolphus: No, there was no restriction.

Rose: None at all?

Dolphus: We're able to fish anywhere on the lake.

Rose: You mean all of Slave Lake?

Dolphus: Yes, just all over.

Rose: What is the situation these days?

Dolphus: People have to obtain license (fishing), and only catch enough for own food supply.

Rose: What about the people in general, were they always moving from one place to another? Were they allowed to go and reside on another reserve?

Dolphus: No, people have to accept you in as a member of that band. Take for example Benjamin. He came to stay on our reserve while at the time I was in the council.

Rose: Benjamin...?

Dolphus: Benjamin Potskin. He was from Slave Lake. (NOTE: I didn't ask if he was originally a Sawridge Band member since most of the people at Slave Lake area know Sawridge as just Slave Lake). He was probably the last person we took in.

Rose: Was that just recently?

Dolphus: No, that was around the 50s.

Rose: In the 50s?

Dolphus: A person has to relinquish his original membership of another band before he could transfer to another band.

Rose: What about the farming? Did the people farm their own lands or did they lease them out? What were the arrangements?

Dolphus: I used to cultivate my own land (on foot). (NOTE: Probably using horses and a small till.)

Rose: Did a lot of people farm that way?

Dolphus: No.

Rose: You were the only one?

Dolphus: There was another family, Frank Sound.

Rose: Frank Sound?

Dolphus: Yes.

Rose: Do you know Key no say oo?

Dolphus: Yes.

Rose: Was he the one that signed the treaty?

Dolphus: I would think so. I'm not sure, it could have been Mustus too. I don't think Astachukun was involved. That is why our town is called Kinuso. He was the chief at the time.

Rose: So, was he totally responsible for band affairs? I wonder if he only concentrated in one band (reserve). Wasn't he a resident of Driftpile or where?

Dolphus: Which one?

Rose: Key no say oo.

Dolphus: Sucker Creek.

Rose: Sucker Creek?

Dolphus: There were two brothers at Driftpile, the last one was Astachukun. They were originally both from Sucker Creek. Since the death of Astachukun, we adopted a different system, an elective system. The bands elect their own chief and council now.

Rose: I'm not grasping where all the brothers resided at Key no say oo, Astchukun i.e. the chief and the councillors.

Dolphus: That was the chief and the rest were councillors who were residing at other reserves. For example: Ups chi nese. He lived at Assineau. He was a councillor.

Rose: He was just a councillor?

Dolphus: Yeah, the chief had authority over all the other bands. Since the people were reluctant to control or manage their bands, the chief was responsible for those bands (all bands).

Rose: Is the railroad right on the reserve?

Dolphus: Yes.

Rose: How many acres of reserve land does the railroad cover?
How far does it stretch across the reserve?

Dolphus: It lies across the reserve.

I don't know how much compensation they received, if any.
The railroad bought this land eventually.

Rose: The railroad bought this land?

Dolphus: Yes, the town. The stores were located off the
reserve a short distance away from the present location. I
think the railroad might have expropriated more land than
requested for.

Rose: Does the railroad still own the land?

Dolphus: No, the town bought it off them. I think the
railroad bought 10 acres. They kept 2 acres. After World War
II, soldiers bought that piece of land off them and sold it
back to the town eventually.

Rose: So Soldier Settlement Board was probably involved with
the deal?

Dolphus: Yes, they're the ones that bought that last 2 acres.

Rose: Does the Soldier Settlement Board still own it?

Dolphus: Yes, 2 acres. I don't now about the land where the
school is presently situated. I think the town bought it.

Rose: So, Key no say oo and Mustus were brothers?

Dolphus: Yeah, they were brothers?

Rose: Key no say oo, Mustus, and Astachukun?

Dolphus: Astachukun was the last surviving member of the brothers.

Rose: Was Key no say oo the eldest of the brothers?

Dolphus: I'm not sure who was the oldest of the two. It's
either Mustus or Key nosay oo. They transferred to the
Driftpile band. Key no say oo lived at Kinuso and it was named
after him. Key no say oo is supposed to be the proper name or
pronunciation.

Rose: What were their last names? They just have had changed
their names. i.e. their Indian names translated to English.
What name did they go by?

Dolphus: I don't know. I just knew them by Astachukun and
Mustus. They went by Willier.

Rose: So they would be "Williers".

Dolphus: All of them were Willier.

Rose: What about Wasinicunape?

(NOTE: No one seemed to know the translation of this word.
It's meaningless.)

Maggie Davis talking in the background thinks it should be pronounced Pesacunape - "String of a hide". Maggie and Dolphus think it must be Pesacunape.

Rose: Was there a person by the name of Pesacunape?

Dolphus: He was a non-treaty. He used to stay around this district but never took treaty.

Rose: Did the Williers only have that name?

Dolphus: That's their last name.

Rose: They were all brothers?

Dolphus: All brothers.

Rose: Now going back - Key no say oo lived at Driftpile?

Dolphus: Yes, they all came from Sucker Creek initially.

Rose: And then they...

Dolphus: When they took treaty, we were all separated into our bands. At that time people transferred memberships easily. They were the only headmen (Chief). Now the Indian agent had taken over.

Rose: I don't have anything else to question. Do you have anything else to add?

What were your parents names?

Dolphus: Alexander was my father.

Rose: Davis?

Dolphus: (Inaudible)

Rose: And your mother?

Dolphus: Katherine.

Rose: Were your parents always members of the Swan River Band?

Dolphus: Yeah.

Rose: That's all I wanted to find out. Thanks.

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