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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Interviewee is 91 year old resident of Clear Hills Reserve.
- History of reserves at Clear Hills (Eureka), Horse Lakes.
- Sale of reserve at Fairview.

My name is Richard Lightning and I'm here today at Spirit River, Alberta. The date is September 1, 1976. I will be talking with Francis Napasis regarding what happened in the past with the various reserves such as the reserve at Fairview, Horse Lakes and what took place with the Clear Hills reserve.

Richard: As I am now talking to you, you can first give me your name and age?

Francis: On October 2, I'll be 91 years old.

Richard: Where were you born?

Francis: Grande Prairie. That is where I was raised. There were 12 of us in the family but I never saw any of my family. They all died before I was born. I only saw 1 boy and 1 girl.

Richard: How about your parents, where did they originally come from?

Francis: They came from Grande Prairie.

Richard: When you mention Grande Prairie, are you referring to

the area where the city is presently located?

Francis: Yes, and all the surrounding area. They lived all through that area. There were a great number of Indians in that part of the country.

Richard: Can you now tell me from the knowledge you have about the reserves which were in this area many years ago? I think there was one south of here which was a small reserve called Green Island.

Francis: That is the one I mentioned earlier. That was very good land, it was flat. Half of it was fit for agriculture. It was allotted to the chief and his wife for nothing. They always took the hay from it and picked their berries from there too, so the agent just allotted the land to them. Now the white people have claimed that piece of land. It has not been sold yet. It was in the paper two winters ago.

Richard: What was the chief's name?

Francis: Nipee (water).

Richard: Was that his only name, he didn't have a surname?

Francis: No, he didn't have another name. Long ago they had no names, they just gave names to each other. Just like that name Nipee, it was given to him. They were never baptized. Many Indians were never baptized even in the Fort St. John, B.C. area. It was only when the missionaries arrived in this country that they travelled around, baptized the old people. That is the time they were given English names and surnames. After I was born we lived by the river and there used to be a priest in the Peace River country. He is the one who baptized me. I went to see him once in Grouard; he had many names there in an old thick book. There were all kinds of names there but those names were given by the missionaries.

Richard: Do you remember the priest's name?

Francis: No, I don't.

Richard: Now about the reserve Horse Lake, what exactly happened. How did it become a reserve?

Francis: You mean that place where they are living now?

Richard: Yes.

Francis: Originally it was Alfred Chaterlains' reserve. I'm often amazed, he alone was able to enter the Horsemen into the reserve. Only two old women had put their names down. Now the whole reserve belongs to the Horsemen, they are the only people who are alive on that reserve. But he was trying to marry a woman from there (Horseman family). I think they spent

a lot of money at Beaverlodge, the money is sent direct to the bank at Beaverlodge. They spent much of the pensioners' money. I witnessed it twice myself, where wood was purchased for the old people. I was very surprised at the small loads of wood which were delivered. A lot of money was wasted there.

Richard: Who are you referring to?

Francis: Horsemans.

Richard: Were they not treaty Indians before?

Francis: No, they were Metis. They were raised at Fort Vermilion.

Richard: And Alfred Chaterlaine entered them into the reserve?

Francis: Yes, and there was another group who were removed from a band here. The last chief was Pelee Lowe. He was the son of Nipee; he succeeded him. He raised one of his grandsons, his name is Lloyd. I don't know where he is now, probably at Hines Creek. Another is Bernice Stranger's mother and one of the chief's son, they all took treaty. Then suddenly they were taken off treaty. It was that French agent who took them off treaty.

Richard: Do you remember his name?

Francis: I think his name was Galabois. He did plenty of harm, he was not well liked, as a result he didn't last too long.

Richard: From what reserve were they taken off the band list?

Francis: From our reserve here, Eureka.

Richard: Was that the reserve which was located at Fairview?

Francis: Yes, that is why we are living there now, Eureka. There is nobody alive at the other place (Clear Hills).

Richard: The reserve which was located at the present Fairview townsite, what happened to it? What transaction took place?

Francis: They made fools of the Indians, they were all Beaver Indians who were there. For three years in a row, they made fools of the Indians. There was a fellow by the name of Leo Ferguson from Grande Prairie, he was making fools of the Indians. For two years, they were not able to persuade them. I discouraged them and told the people not to agree with it. I was a young man during that time, when they come for the last time (officials). The chiefs arrived early and I told them they would be asked about the reserve surrender. They would not receive money all the time. The people from across the river at Horse Lake were living at Dunvegan, long before the treaty was

signed. I told the Chief that if somebody was to enter my reserve in the future, they will be the people. This is what I told him not to say. When he was questioned on who would be registered on the reserve, he told the commissioners they could all be registered there, (Horse Lake band). This is what I told him not to do. Now if the reserve is sold (Clear Hills) we will not benefit from it. It was the people from there that spent the money. The money was counted once by my fellow residents who also had an interest in the reserve through their parents. This was two years ago. They figured for an acre

which was cleared, the estimate was \$45 per acre; where there was some brush, it valued at \$25 per acre. When it was totalled it came to half a million, something like \$2,000 (doubtful on figures). The people who bought land at Fairview most of them are alive today.

Richard: The place where you are residing at Eureka, who is your chief or your leader, what is his name?

Francis: Nobody. I don't have a chief, there is no chief there. Only two of us live there. There was my daughter also but she left, and one son who lives in Hythe and one grandchild. She is married in High Prairie, she was here a few days ago.

Richard: That place you refer to as Eureka, is that Clear Hills you are talking about?

Francis: It is the same thing. There is another thing I would like to talk about. That reserve at Clear Hills, the Horse Lake band is trying to sell it. I was not informed about it. Even right now they are haying on the reserve. There is a good crop of hay coming from the reserve. My grandson was telling me about it too, he was cutting hay there also. But he said he never receives one cent from the hay which is sold. They get all the money (Horse Lake), they can sell one ton of hay for \$3. While I'm talking about the reserve, and if somebody will interpret for me I just don't want to... I would like a chance to talk. I've been here for a long time, it has been 77 years. I've always been around that area, also at Fairview. The reason why I don't want to part with it, is that there are many people who are buried there including my wife, one son and also some of my grandchildren. This is why I don't want the reserve sold. It was only this summer that the grave sites had been looked after, they really look good. It was a long time since the epidemic. There used to be many people here, but the flu reduced the population. Some people spent the winter at a place called Hoadley, it is 16 miles north of Eureka, it is from the winter camp that the heavy death toll came.

Richard: Do you remember what year it was when they sold the reserve at Fairview?

Francis: No.

Richard: Would it be 1928?

Francis: I'm not certain on the date. That is what I mean about the older people at Fairview, they don't know about it...most of them are still alive.

Richard: Do you recall any of the agents' names?

Francis: What was his name? The agent who paid treaty money was tall, I think it was Laird.

Richard: Is it Harold?

Francis: Laird. Dion ... Jean Marie that is the family his wife came from. He was sent to jail for spending too much money; he was also a heavy drinker. He would ask anybody to get him drinks, even the Indians. He used to travel to Fort Nelson to pay treaty money using team and wagon.

Richard: Did you know Charlie Anderson and who was he working for and what was he doing?

Francis: He was always travelling with the agent. They travelled in the area of Riviere Qui Barre, that is the other side of Sucker Creek. He always worked for him but that is a long time ago.

Richard: Did he do the interpreting?

Francis: Yes.

Richard: How were the agents you remembered, how did they work with the Indians?

Francis: They were fair most of them, except for that tall man, Laird.

Richard: When the final decision was made about selling the reserve (Fairview), what did the Indians expect to receive in return, or was there anything they expected?

Francis: They did, but never received anything. It was only when they were on the reserve (Horse Lake) that they were given implements to try agriculture. But for me and my three sons there was nothing ever given to us. They used to request a tractor and implements, but it was of no avail. Everything went to them they were given a tractor and other things, I don't know what all they received.

Richard: Who made the selection of the Clear Hills reserve?

Francis: It was both of us, me and the chief. We had selected a place to live as there was no place for agricultural purposes. But it is also nice within the area where I live,

there are hills and very few trees. Across the river, it is the same way, with only a few shrubs. This area must be one mile square. On this other side of my place there is a muskeg which extends half a mile into the reserve. It used to be very nice country but now the shrubs are becoming more plentiful. The far end of the reserve is also good with rolling hills.

Richard: You mentioned the reserve at Fairview as the Beaver Indian reserve. And you stated that they were made to look like fools. Were they not willing to sell the reserve?

Francis: At first I tried to discourage them. After that they made fools of the Indians for three years. The promise was they would receive money every month, \$50 per head for three months during the summer including children. Then they would just receive the interest as they required it. That is what convinced them.

Richard: Did they receive it?

Francis: Oh yes, but they never received the interest money, that money has accumulated somewhere. I spoke to a man here in Fairview who had a lot of authority. He caused many arguments. He tried for one year to help me get out (enfranchise) he wasn't successful. This was for a treaty Indian.

Richard: What was it you had in mind when you tried to discourage the chief in making the transaction for the reserve land?

Francis: I thought that if they didn't sell the reserve land... I had often heard that they may benefit from it, like as discovery of minerals, this is what I had in mind. Sure enough, they discovered gas a short distance from the reserve which then was brought in towards the present townsite.

Richard: Were you a councillor during this period?

Francis: No, but I had no hesitation in talking to other people. Now I have trouble communicating, even in Cree to express myself. The removal of my teeth was almost fatal. Many times the chieftainship was offered to me, but I didn't want it.

Richard: When the document of the important transaction was made, did the Indian people recognize what it was what they were signing? Did they know what it was?

Francis: I don't think so. I never knew anybody who could write then.

Richard: It was the responsibility of the interpreters to inform the people and make certain they understood. Did this take place?

Francis: No, they didn't know anything. The only thing I observed was when the time came to give it away (surrender)

they were signing their names. They were selling the reserve. They were not writing their names, just making X marks.

Richard: On that document, it should have stated that the surrender of the reserve at Fairview was to be replaced by a reserve somewhere else, would the Indians have been aware of this?

Francis: One old lady kept one of those documents, the chiefs were issued with medallions. When the chief died, the old lady took these from his possessions, but then they lost them. That happened at Eureka.

Richard: When did they realize that they were given a new reserve at Eureka?

Francis: It was not promised.

Richard: But it was like an exchange.

Francis: Yes.

Richard: Were they informed of this immediately?

Francis: Yes, we went to make the selection, as we lived nearby. I was with the Chief. It was a small reserve about 2 miles by 3 miles.

Richard: When the selection and choice was made, did the Indians first have a meeting or discussion on it?

Francis: No, nobody knew anything about meetings at the time.

Richard: How did you decide about going on to make your selection?

Francis: The agent told us to go and make a choice of where we wanted to make our living, and where we would always live, with livelihood coming from wild game. So we went and we stayed

overnight out there. I went out hunting in the morning and killed a moose.

Richard: Was the transaction for the surrender already in progress when you were told to go and make your selection of land? Or were you told before the discussions to go and make your selection?

Francis: No, the surrender first took place.

Richard: The transaction was first completed.

Francis: Then we went out to make our selection.

Richard: You are now referring to the Beaver Indians?

Francis: Yes.

Richard: What was the chief's name?

Francis: Nipee.

Richard: Was he a Beaver Indian?

Francis: His son was the last chief, his name was Pelee Lowe.

Richard: Was Nipee given the other reserve (Green Island) then?

Francis: Yes, the reserve was allotted to him and his wife.

Richard: Do you recall the name Duncan MacDonald?

Francis: Yes, he was the one who looked after the Indians at Dunvegan. He lived in Dunvegan and spoke fluent Cree. But he has been dead for a long time now.

Richard: When the Beaver Indians surrendered their reserve and the selection was made at Clear Hills (Eureka), was there any discussion of money there?

Francis: No, I didn't hear any discussion about it.

Richard: Or, did they understand that it would be an exchange of land?

Francis: No, it was the money which persuaded them. When they realized they would receive \$50.

Richard: So the agent must have mentioned money to them at one time or another?

Francis: Yes, they received the money right away. Two of my sons were alive, both of them received money.

Richard: What I wanted to find out was did the Beaver Indians and Cree discuss this matter of surrendering one reserve and selecting another one?

Francis: No, nothing was ever discussed. The Beaver Indians were not familiar with such matters: they didn't know anything.

Richard: Later on, the Eureka reserve was paid for from the band's capital. That money was used to pay for the Eureka reserve, that is what happened there, do you know anything about that?

Francis: No, I know nothing about that.

Richard: It is like using your own capital funds to pay for the reserve at Clear Hills (Eureka). That is how this was

handled by the department of Indian Affairs. The sum of \$26,000 was used in paying for the land on the reserve. This took place during the '50s. The year the surrender took place and when Clear Hills became a reserve, where did you make your home at the time?

Francis: You mean when Fairview was sold?

Richard: Yes.

Francis: I was living a short distance beyond the town.

Richard: Was that on the reserve?

Francis: Yes, it was half a mile from Fairview. We always lived there during the summer.

Richard: Beaver Indians and Crees were living there too?

Francis: Yes, they lived all over the place, we had many houses there.

Richard: Was there anyone named Nipee Pierre? Or was it only Nipee?

Francis: I only knew Nipee.

Richard: How about Pelee Lowe?

Francis: That was his dad. His name was Pierre, but they called him Pelee Lowe.

Richard: You are saying Pierre and Pelee Lowe was the same person?

Francis: That was Pierre's dad.

Richard: The old man was Nipee and the son was Pierre?

Francis: Yes.

Richard: Where did Pierre make his home while the land transaction was taking place?

Francis: He lived there at the Beaver Reserve, we all lived there.

Richard: When Pierre was chief was he the chief of many Beaver Indians?

Francis: Yes, because there were a large number of Beaver Indians. Today there are none left, they have all died off.

Richard: Did you know any of the Crees south of the Peace River towards Grande Prairie? There was one whose name was

Antoine.

Francis: What was that name?

Richard: Antoine Catlass?

Francis: No, I don't know people in that area.

Richard: Did those people from that area travel this far north?

Francis: No.

Richard: How about Eureka, would they have travelled that far?

Francis: No.

Richard: The Indians who were north of the Peace River and the group from Grande Prairie, were they together when the reserve transaction took place?

Francis: No, there were only two from Grande Prairie who came here. They never saw this part of the country. Even in my part of the country at Eureka they are not aware of it, because they don't come this way.

Richard: When the reserve land was surrendered, there was a small portion set aside at Hay Lake which was to be used for a camp.

Francis: That is the one I referred to as being half a mile in length.

Richard: That was sold in 1948.

Francis: That was never sold.

Richard: Were you able to write your name?

Francis: No, I couldn't even speak English, I never went to school. I was born long before schools were built. I never did attend school. My grandchildren attended but they still know their Cree as they were taught from the time they were very young. This one, that just came in is 16 years old the other one is 15.

Richard: On this document it has Francis Napasis with an X mark on it, do you remember marking the paper with an X?

Francis: My cheques are always marked like that.

Richard: What I'm saying is that you marked your X on the surrender document.

Francis: Yes, I did.

Richard: Are you referring to the land sale at Fairview?

Francis: Yes.

Richard: This other document dated 1948 also has your name and X mark along with Edward Stoney, Pierre Jocarn, Johnnie Napier, Angela Davis, Sam Desjarasis.

Francis: Edward Stoney is from Horse Lake.

Richard: With the documents signed by these people, were you in favor of selling the reserves?

Francis: No, I wasn't in favor, that is what I told you, I was against it, but I was alone, what could I do?

Richard: Is that the time you decided to sign it?

Francis: When it was time to sell, that is when I signed it.

Richard: The other portion you refer to as half a mile of land (Hay Lake) was also sold in 1948, according to this document, now you are saying it was never sold.

Francis: No, it wasn't.

Richard: Is there anything more you would like to discuss regarding the land surrender?

Francis: No, I'm too sick, I can't even sit up properly.

Richard: Thank you for the information.

(End of Interview)

INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
AGRICULTURE				
-equipment	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	6
BEAVER INDIANS				
-range	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	4,10,11
DEATH				
-graveyards, grave sites	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	5
DISCRIMINATION				
-within bands	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	6
DISEASE AND ILLNESS				
-influenza	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	5
INDIAN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF				
-Indian agents	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	4,6
RESERVES				
-sale of	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	2-13

PROPER NAME INDEX

PROPER NAME	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
CLEAR HILLS RESERVE, ALTA.	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	4-10
FAIRVIEW, ALTA.	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	4-13
GALABOIS, JOE	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	4
HAY LAKE, ALTA.	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	12,13
HORSE LAKES RESERVE, ALTA.	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	4-6
LAIRD, MR. (INDIAN AGENT)	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	6
NIPEE	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	2-4,9-11
PELEE LOWE	IH-309	F. NAPASIS	29	4,9-11