

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: PHILLIP MACDONALD
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ALBERTA
INTERVIEW LOCATION: FORT MACKAY
ALBERTA
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DATE OF INTERVIEW:
INTERVIEWER: RICHARD LIGHTNING
INTERPRETER: RICHARD LIGHTNING
TRANSCRIBER: JOANNE GREENWOOD
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Lifetime chief of the Fort MacKay band.
- Brief account of the signing of Treaty 8.
- Fort MacKay band reserves; how they are located a long way from Fort MacKay where people reside.

Richard: My name is Richard Lightning. I'm a researcher for the T.A.R.R. program. I am here at Fort MacKay to interview Phillip MacDonald. He is the chief of the Fort MacKay band.

Richard: What is your name?

Chief: I'm Phillip MacDonald, the chief of Fort MacKay.

Richard: How old are you?

Chief: I'll be 66 years old on my next birthday.

Richard: Where were you born?

Chief: I think it was right here at MacKay.

Richard: Have you lived here all the time?

Chief: I have lived here all my life.

Richard: How long have you been chief?

Chief: I've been chief a long time now. It is almost 30 years now. At first there wasn't any chief here, just a councillor. I was the councillor. Finally there was a chief here. His name was Sammy Roland. When he died, I became the chief. That is quite a while ago. It must be 20 years.

Richard: What system is used in selecting a chief?

Chief: I was chosen by the people.

Richard: Will you remain the chief or will your time expire like some reserves with the two year system?

Chief: When I was chosen, it was understood that I'd be the chief for as long as I lived.

Richard: What is the population of the people here?

Chief: There are 185 treaty Indians and many Metis as well. They have been given some land but they haven't moved here yet. It will probably be in the summer.

Richard: Do they live here amongst the Indians too?

Chief: Yes, we all live here together. They were given homes and by summer they will probably move there and they will get assistance also from the government.

Richard: How do the treaty Indians and Metis people get along?

Chief: We get along fine because we grew up together and we've always lived here.

Richard: Do you know where this name MacKay came from?

Chief: Not really. It has always been Fort MacKay. A short distance from here is the MacKay River.

Richard: The Indians have been here all the time. Did you ever hear stories of where they came from?

Chief: The elders were also born and raised here, including our grandparents. But when the treaty was first signed and the commissioner was sent here from Ottawa, the Indians didn't accept the money right away. It is said that it took 3 days to convince the bush Indians to take the money. It seemed like the government wanted the land here. The commissioner never mentioned anything to the Indians about something underground that could be valuable such as minerals or oil. They only mentioned the fish and ducks for the purposes of daily food. There was never any mention of underground minerals, that could be worth something of value to the Indians. The government wasn't honest about it. They should have told the Indians right there. Maybe we would have a reserve here today. The government didn't do this. They only told the chief that he could choose land in an area where it would provide sustenance. That was at the first signing of the treaty when the first chief was

recognized.

Richard: Who was that chief?

Chief: His name was Adam Boucher. He died long ago. He did select land about 70 miles west of MacKay. There are many lakes there with plenty of fish. His main concern was food. That is why we are having trouble today with a reserve.

Richard: Is that where your reserve is located?

Chief: Yes, we have 2 reserves over there and there are lakes too.

Richard: Do you know the size of the reserve?

Chief: I don't know, but they are fairly large.

Richard: Does anybody ever live there?

Chief: Nobody ever lives there, just when they go trapping. But not permanently. Long ago the people used to spend their winters there. They would fish for food.

Richard: Has there been any exploration on your reserve, or cutlines going through it?

Chief: Yes, they have explored in that area. There are roads all over the place. There was also some drilling on the reserve, but I haven't heard if they made any discoveries.

Richard: At your present location here, how did the people arrive here, or have they lived here all the time?

Chief: Before I was even born, my parents had been here already. Before the treaty, our great-grandparents were here. We cherish this land here and we could never leave it.

Richard: Is it recognized by the government as a reserve?

Chief: No, there isn't a reserve here. That is why I said before the chief was cheated out of acquiring a reserve here.

Richard: Do you know who the interpreter was at the time?

Chief: I don't know who the interpreter was. Maybe the government sent an interpreter with the commissioner when he came here.

Richard: Where did the signing of the treaty take place?

Chief: It was right here that the Crees and the Chipewyan Indians were paid treaty.

Richard: Do you also have Chipewyan Indians here?

Chief: Yes, there are many Chipewyan Indians here, also the Cree.

Richard: What do the people do for a living?

Chief: Right now, most of them are on welfare. Some of the younger people work, but the older people are on welfare. Like in my case, I'm a pensioner. It is not much but we get by on it. I receive \$105.00 a month. My wife receives welfare and that is how we exist.

Richard: Do the Indians still trap here?

Chief: Some people still trap, but there was too much snow this winter. It makes trapping difficult. It is not like long ago. People in those days were energetic. It didn't matter how deep the snow was. They had dogs and snowshoes for trapping. In those days, there was no welfare. They didn't get assistance, they made a living on their own. Today this is not the case. They are dependent on welfare. The younger people today are lazy. They should go out and work, but they don't work. They depend on welfare too much.

Richard: Is there work for them if they decided upon it?

Chief: There is plenty of work. Even government people have approached them. But they don't think of working at all.

Richard: Do the people encounter any difficulty from the government or other non-Indians when trapping and selling of pelts?

Chief: No, there isn't any trouble. Years ago they restricted beaver, but other than that there is no problem.

Richard: Do the Indian people fish for themselves for food?

Chief: Not too much. They do fish from August to the fall when the fish are spawning.

Richard: How about hunting? Do the Indians have trouble with hunting?

Chief: No, with the treaty Indians there is no problem. But moose is getting scarce around here now. They used to be plentiful.

Richard: Why is it they are becoming few in number?

Chief: They have reduced by hunting or they have moved to a different area.

Richard: I wonder if exploration and drilling outfits have made the moose go to a different area?

Chief: I thought of that too before, because there is much

work going on around here. They use all kinds of machines and they are loud. They moose may have been frightened away by the noise.

Richard: Have you approached the government to see if you could get land elsewhere, or look into the possibility of benefitting from the minerals underground?

Chief: At a recent meeting in Edmonton which I attended, I approached about 4 people and requested that we should get this land and also to include the minerals not only the surface. That was my argument at that last meeting.

Richard: You mentioned before that the elders never mentioned at anytime that minerals were disucssed during the signing of the treaty or that no agreement was made.

Chief: Yes, like I said before at the first signing of the treaty, the Indians were never dealt with in honesty. They were never told of any underground mineral potential. Reference was only made to fish and game for food. That is why the chief did not select land here, where minerals may exist. That is the error which was made.

Richard: Thank you for talking to me.

(End of Interview)

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