

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: SUMMARY OF ELDERS' INTERVIEWS:  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INFORMANT'S ADDRESS:

INTERVIEW LOCATION:

TRIBE/NATION:

LANGUAGE:

DATE OF INTERVIEW: APRIL, 1974

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INTERPRETER:

TRANSCRIBER: JOANNE GREENWOOD

SOURCE: OFFICE OF SPECIFIC CLAIMS  
& RESEARCH  
WINTERBURN, ALBERTA

TAPE NUMBER: IH-341

DISK: TRANSCRIPT DISC 31

PAGES: 4

RESTRICTIONS: NONE

Elders' Interviews - Economic Development

Treaty 8 - 1899

Thirty-nine of the sixty-nine elders interviewed from the Treaty 8 area mention the subject of economic development. As has been the case with other subjects discussed in the interviews, opinions expressed in Treaty 8 interviews are much more varied than is the case in the other treaty areas. Generally, the same topics, i.e., promises related to development of non-traditional means of earning a livelihood and their implementation, are discussed, but with more contradictory opinions expressed. This may simply reflect the consequences of interviewing a greater number of people in the Treaty 8 area.

The way in which the treaty promises are most frequently expressed is typified by the statement of Pierre Papostis (Sturgeon Lake, 78) who says the people were promised assistance "if they chose to farm." It may be that statements such as this one imply that the people believe they were promised assistance for farming, but not for anything else. Other projects for which assistance would be provided are certainly not mentioned, but at the time of the treaty signing it is likely that other means of earning a living were simply not conceivable. William Beaver (Trout Lake, 41) discusses the problem of obtaining money to start work on a sports facility, but it is not clear whether he feels people are entitled to support for such non-agricultural schemes by virtue of any treaty promises or by virtue of something other than treaty promises. In any case, it is clear from the interviews that

the people do not believe they were forced to go into farming.

As for specific promises regarding assistance in farming, elders often mention various tools such as plows, picks, discs, mowers, harrows, forks, sickles, and racks. Wagons and sleighs are also mentioned and Edward Willier (Driftpile, 107) even says that if the crops turned out well, the people were promised a threshing machine and four granaries. Seed and seed potatoes are other items listed by several elders. Frank Cardinal (Sucker Creek, 68) says that the people were discouraged from trying to grow anything except potatoes because "they couldn't do anything with it." A few elders seem to disagree, however, that help would be given for farming. For example, Sylvester Auger (Wabasca, 65) says that his father "did not say the government would give the needs for starting the farm," and Louie Boucher (Fort Chipewyan, 82) says that there were no promises for implements made since "there was no reserve discussed." Thus, people may have felt that they would only obtain some of the promised assistance if they settled on reserves. Many elders mention that animals, horses and cows were promised. One elder, Pierre Papostis, says that he does not know whether animals were promised, but he is an exception.

As in the Treaty 6 interviews, most elders do not say anything about the number of implements and/or animals which were promised to a particular number of people. It may be that people did not think to mention this subject, or it may be that amounts of things promised were never made clear. One elder, George Okeymow, (Driftpile, 79) relates that Noo-kin-is said that a group of three families would receive implements, a team of horses, a "walking plow", discs and harrows. Edward Willier (Driftpile, 107) speaks of the people receiving four teams of horses, a sleigh, plow, disc, harrows, potatoes, machinery, and ten head of cattle, use of which was to rotate, but he does not specify how many people received these things.

Another promise which is mentioned quite frequently by elders is that rations would be provided to the people during harvest time, or haying, or while they were farming. It is almost always specified that the rations were meant for these busy periods when it would be difficult for the people to feed themselves by hunting and fishing. One elder, Edward Willier, even says that the people's guns would be taken away when there was work to be done on the farm to keep them from hunting. Specific rations mentioned include bacon, in two large sacks of about 200 lbs., 10 or 12 large flour bags (William Okamau, Sucker Creek, 90), tallow (Sylvester Auger), sugar, beans, bread, tea (Scotty Willier, Driftpile, 67).

On the subject of how long these treaty promises were to last, most elders are silent except that they may have expressed the opinion that the treaties in general were to last forever. Only one elder, Paul Gladue (Wabasca) complains specifically that plows, ropes, horses, cattle were promised, but that the people have not been provided with any of these things for about thirty years.

Many elders cite cases in which difficulty in obtaining the promised items was experienced. For example, Frank Cardinal feels that the people at Sucker Creek who attempt to farm are not provided with sufficient machinery and cannot obtain loans to buy it. Furthermore, the Indian Agencies "are trying to destroy our reserves" by not providing help to those who are serious about trying to farm and giving it to those most likely to fail. Solomon Beaver (Wabasca, 76) claims that people did not realize they could get assistance for farming because the chief and council never mentioned it. In general, the Treaty 8 elders are not complaining about broken treaty promises so much as about the ineptness with which they are carried out.

None of the elders mention that any government personnel were promised for their use as was the case in the Treaty 6 interviews. Some elders say they were "taught" farming, but do not say anything in particular about the teachers. It may be that the treaty negotiators did not discuss such personnel in terms of their being potential "resources" for the Indians, or that the people have not been affected by them very much one

way or the other. Such personnel as Indian agents simply are not mentioned very much. One elder, Alfred Chaterlain (Horse Lake, 68) does mention that two agents probably cheated people out of money they should have been paid for a railroad right of way. Another elder, Frederick Prince (Gift Lake Colony, 78) feels that an agent was responsible for the "disappearance" of the people's cattle around 1918. However, usually agents are simply not mentioned in any way.

A recurring theme in the interviews is the peoples' desire to have some control over their own economic development, or at least over their day-to-day economic affairs and resentment is expressed when their independence in these matters has been infringed upon. Many elders seemed particularly upset over what they considered to be interference with their control over their own cattle. For example, Isadore Martin (Wabasca, 85) claims the people understood that "once the cattle started numerating excessively, they could be killed and eaten. This we did not see. If a person kills his animals, he is taken to trial." Another elder, Rosalie Tourangau (Wabasca, 67) mentioned an incident whereby the people's cattle were put into the priest's pasture for distribution at a later date, but disappeared. In these incidents the elders feel that the promised ownership and control over the cattle they were given has been unreasonably taken away. As Pat Lalonde (Faust, 83) puts it, "I do understand also that we were not entirely the wards of the government," yet, "I had to get a paper saying I could sell what I grew."

NOTE: Summary re Treaty 6 see #IH-221

Summary re Treaty 7 see #IH-248

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