

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: JOHN YELLOWHORN
(HEREDITARY CHIEF)
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: PEIGAN RESERVE
ALBERTA
INTERVIEW LOCATION: PEIGAN RESERVE
ALBERTA
TRIBE/NATION: PEIGAN
LANGUAGE:
DATE OF INTERVIEW:
INTERVIEWER: JOHNNY SMITH
TOM YELLOWHORN
INTERPRETER: JOHNNY SMITH
TRANSCRIBER: J. GREENWOOD
SOURCE: OFFICE OF SPECIFIC CLAIMS &
RESEARCH
WINTERBURN, ALBERTA
TAPE NUMBER: IH-244
DISK: TRANSCRIPT DISC 25
PAGES: 7
RESTRICTIONS: NONE

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Treaty #7: in preliminaries, taking, understanding of, effect on way of life.
- Comparison of Canadian and U.S. treaties.

Johnny Smith: My name is John Smith. I'm a treaty field researcher for Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research (T.A.R.R.). The purpose of this interview is to get an Indian understanding of the treaty and of the promises made to the Indians by the government representatives at the signing of the treaty. The elder that we are going to interview is John Yellowhorn. He will be interviewed by my grandfather Tom Yellowhorn.

What is your name?

John: I am named John Yellowhorn:

Johnny: How old are you?

John: Seventy-five. I'll be seventy-five October the seventh.

Johnny: Tom will start to ask you questions now.

Tom: The purpose of this interview is to try and get an Indian understanding of the treaty, and the promises that were made by the government people that were sent here by the Queen.

John: I'm going to talk about the stories which have been told to me by my elders. Those people who were there, who were living at the time, who knew about the signing of the treaty. These are the people who I have listened to. There must have been at least four stories which Small Water Child has told me. These are the stories I will tell you. The old lady, she was a very old lady. She must have been Gee-Pip-Os-Stoi. And there was about four stories that she told me. And they were identical to the stories told to me by Small Water Child. Here were these people who just appeared at Aganasko. And at this place they asked Bull Head questions. Bull Head was from here, he was a Peigan, North Peigan. Here they were shown Stabiska. Bull Head liked camping along the Old Man River west to the mountains, north to High Prairie and east to Cypress Hills. And that is the area he claimed as his. That was his land. And here on Bull Head's land the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) walked. And there was Bear Child. He was their guide. They came upon Bull Head's camp. It was up north near where the two rivers meet. There were not many tipis. When they approached this encampment, they asked where Bull Head's tipi was. They were told, "It is here." The party was introduced. Bull Head was told, "Here are the police, the Queen sent these police. The chief of the police was sent here to meet you." Bull Head said, "All right, allow him to enter," as this is Indian custom to invite a stranger into your home. The Queen's man went in,

sat down, and explained his reason for wanting to see Bull Head. He said, "The Queen has sent me here to keep peace amongst you people." They made friends with one another and this is when Bull Head gave Macleod his name. Colonel Macleod told him he would give him a uniform the same as he was wearing. Bull Head said, "No, you will not give me this clothing. The trail you took to come here, you must follow the same trail back. You will not sign treaty with me." Macleod said, "It will be winter soon, the place where we came from is far. May we camp where these two rivers meet? In the spring time we will return to where we came from." This place here is across the river from where Fort Macleod is now. Bull Head gave him permission to camp there. And here they put buildings, because this is where they were going to spend their winter. Bull Head remained where he was camped. He must have been sick right after this meeting because he died soon after. Summer passed and there was no attempt made by the police to move their encampment. Here they remained.

They went to these tea parties that the Indians were having. There were Indian camps nearby where Macleod was camped and it was here that they were holding these tea parties. Colonel Macleod and his men greatly enjoyed these tea parties. They came in 1875 and in 1877 the treaty was signed. There was no mention during these years that there was going to be treaty (1875-1877). All of a sudden it was being said that there would be treaty and the place it would be signed was at Blackfoot Crossing. Red Crow and Sitting on the Eagle Tail Feathers broke up camp and moved there. The Sarcee chief moved there. To this day I do not know who this chief was. On one

side Crowfoot camped. On the other side they were camped. They were camped for quite some time (they being the Queen's representatives). Crowfoot was elected by the Indian people to represent them because he was a very intelligent man. For days the Queen's men were sent across the river to negotiate with Crowfoot. Crowfoot told his people, "I will hold off as long as I can so that we may get as much for our people as we can." Finally he signed. The Queen's representative must have been an east Blackfoot who came to ask Crowfoot again. He turned his horse in the direction the sun goes. Because the Indians are always following the sun and this east Blackfoot turned his horse around to the Indian people and he went to all the different people and talked to them. This is where he talked to my grandfather and my father's mother. And this is what they heard him say right from his mouth. He said, "All of you people you have all given up. The reason why I haven't given up, in the future our way of living is going to change. We will no longer live our nomadic way of moving around. Way in the future there will be no more hunting or living from the

earth." My grandparents said he was a very intelligent man because he knew what was going to happen in the future. There were three other people I have spoken to who said the same thing about this east Blackfoot who knew how we would be living in the future. They went ahead and met for the signing. And this same east Blackfoot who spoke of the future said, "My people, I will show off to you." He put on war paint, and he went and shook hands with Colonel Macleod. Next thing, Colonel Macleod pulled his hand back quickly. He hand was burned on this east Blackfoot's hand. And after this they had the final signing of the treaty. There were no chairs and no tables. Just Crowfoot and Colonel Macleod stood together. There was no writing at the signing of the treaty. All of the writing about the treaty is all recent. I feel like taking a piece of paper and making my own writing now, to say what actually took place at the signing of the treaty. That is one reason why I don't look at these recent books written about the treaty, because they are all recent and do not say what actually happened. What was discussed at the treaty and the promises that were made by the Queen's men at the treaty, this is what I believe in, this is what I go by. They were promised that each individual would get 12 dollars every year, rations. The Queen has made the Indian people her children. I do not fully understand what the meaning of the Queen making us her children is. I have been asking around and to this day I still do not know. If I take someone as my child and I already have lots of children, my own children, should they get better treatment than the one I have adopted? No. The Queen's man said that, "The Queen will look after you from now on. The Red Coats will look after you, they will clean up the whiskey traders. They will protect you from the wrongs these whiskey traders are committing against your people."

They were promised all sorts of things, such as cattle, and things they could make a new life with. Medicine, education, your children will have education. But at that time the Indian people did not understand all these things. But

this is what they heard from the interpreter and this is what my grandmother heard the interpreter saying. Each person was paid twelve dollars. It did not matter what age they were. What does a one or two year old child do with money like that? There were priests, white men from the south, east and north and Indian chiefs at the signing of the treaty. And no one explained to the Indian what this paper money was for. They were told it was for trading but they did not know its value. When they went to buy, even for only a package of matches, they just gave all of it. They did not know how to count it, what it was worth.

NOTE: Part of this interview has been deleted because it did not relate to treaty negotiations or interpretations. The complete interview is on file, however, and could be made available to those interested.

Richard Price

Tom: What stories have you heard from the old people about why the buffalo disappeared? When did the buffalo disappear, before or after the signing of the treaty? Did the disappearance of the buffalo change the Indians' way of life? How were the Indians able to survive after the disappearance of the buffalo? Did the signing of the treaty change the way the Indians lived? How did the reserves change the Indians' way of life?

John: About the buffalo, they say that the white people killed off all the buffalo. The Hudson's Bay Company were buying all the hides. And the white people and halfbreeds were killing all the buffalo, just for the hides to sell to the Hudson's Bay. The Indians never killed more buffalo than what they needed. The Indian will kill a buffalo and use just about everything on the buffalo. They'll take the hide - there were a lot of hard working women at the time. Some of the hides were used for their own needs, some were used for trade. That was the time when they were taught how to buy. They go and buy guns, there were guns with long barrels and they used to pile their hides up until they were the same height as the gun. I feel that the northern people were cheated more, because the hides that they used for trading were very expensive hides, animals like mink, marten and silver fox. This is one of the reasons I say that the Hudson's Bay Company really got rich off the Indian people. When the buffalo disappeared, they substituted cattle, the Indian people said these cattle are very soft, they're not strong. The buffalo is a strong animal which gave us strong bodies and made us very smart. These cattle are crazy, they just stare at us. We, the Indian people, do not get strong bodies from them.

After the signing of the treaty, the Indian way of life was greatly changed. We no longer lived the Indian way of life. It was really different, the way they were showing us to live after the signing of the treaty. And we still do not know this white man's way of living. There was a fellow by the name of

Se-Po-Mak-Sik-A who talked about the treaty. He spoke of how the Indians' way of life was going to change. Our way of gathering food, our way of getting medicine, they were told not to do this any more by the police and the government people. These people told them it was the devil's medicine they were

using, not to use it any more. But the medicine in the old days was good Indian medicine. It was strong medicine and it never poisoned anybody. It made the Indians strong. For the amount of land the Indians used to have, the white people sure gave them very little land in return. The reason why the white people settled so close to the reserve was to keep a close watch on the Indian people, so that anyone carrying on the Indian way of life, such as Sundancing, was stopped. They kept the Indians from doing what they were used to and this really changed their way of living. There is no way we will get our way of living back. There was nothing an Indian person could do without the Indian agent looking over, watching what he is doing. They kept hearing from the agent that, "The government says you can't do this and the government says you can't do that."

On education, the individual was brought away from his reserve just to take away anything that was left of his Indian ways. He was not taught, he did not know the white man's way of life either. They did not know either way of living, they were really lost. These people who went to school were not allowed to come home during the holidays. They were not allowed to go out of the boarding school so they did not know how Indians were living. The treaty really changed the Indians' way of living. The promises that were made at treaty, most of them were never kept. The only two promises they kept were medicine and education. We have had education for a long time. It has only been the recently educated Indians who have really learned the white way of living. We were given self-government at a time when we did not know what it really meant. The young people were told to take over the government of the reserve and the older people were no longer consulted. That was another mistake that the Indian people made. The Indians were divided into their respective bands and each band had a chief and their own area. These were the areas they asked for at the signing of the treaty. The white man's way of living and the Indians' way of living are very far apart.

Johnny: Who was the interpreter at the signing of the treaty?

John: James Bird was the interpreter at the signing of Treaty 7. Bear Child (Jerry Potts) was not the interpreter. He was an employee of the North West Mounted Police. I do not know whether or not James Bird spoke good Blackfoot. I have heard a lot of halfbreeds speak and I have never known one to speak good Blackfoot.

Tom: Did the Indian people hear about the treaties that were being signed in the States? And if they did, what did they hear

of them? Who wanted to make treaty? Was it the Indians or the

white people? If it was the Indians why did they want treaty? If it was the white people why did they want treaty? Why did the Indians think the government wanted to make treaty?

John: It was the government that asked the Indians to make treaty. The Indians were told by government officials and priests before the treaty was signed that they were going to have a much better life if they made treaty. The treaty was good at least for the first three years. Education was especially good. The education received in the United States was very good. Everyone was given a chance to get education. The promises made in the treaties about rations in the States, are still being kept. They're still getting rations. They were given horses and cattle. Now you should see the amount of cattle they still have. During that treaty there were even some people from Peigan and Blood that were given rations, and these cattle and horses. They hadn't even signed treaty here when they heard that they were already fighting down east over who owned this land. The people from the States and the people from Canada were arguing over who owned this land. The Indian people did not know there was going to be a border put on their land. That's why a lot of people have relatives down in the States because they were divided by this line. The Blackfoot from Canada hold ownership for the United States because that was part of their territory. The people in the United States had very good education from the beginning. But the people from Canada only started to get education yesterday. The cattle that are being run by the CY Ranch belongs to us Indian people. Those cattle came from cows that once belonged to Indian people. Those cattle left unbranded by the owner were the start of this herd. Now it has grown and belongs to all of the people. The promises made to the Indians in the United States by the United States government were all kept. It was good for the Indian people there. These things I have been talking about make me begin to think of how hard it was for the people in the past.

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