



**The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson**

Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada  
K1A 0A6

January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Re: Request for Designation of the Great Sandhills Railway Switching Operation at Northwest Terminal Project**

Dear Mr. Wilkinson,

I send to you this letter in relation to the proposed Great Sandhills Railway Switching Operation at Northwest Project (the Project) and the request for designation your office received from Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation on October 16, 2020. While the proponent has resubmitted a project description that does not meet the threshold for an Impact Assessment under the Canada Impact Assessment Act 2019, the following letter in addition to the appended narrative outlines a historical narrative that forms the basis of Moosomin First Nation's inherent interest in any activities that would expand or increase the capacity of rail networks within our traditional territories.

Moosomin First Nation is a Nehiyaw-Plains Cree First Nation, historically known as one of the 'River Cree' bands inhabiting the Canadian Plains. Our peoples' traditional territory spans from the Milk River in southern Alberta north to the parkland fringes of the Canadian plains, west from the Rocky Mountain foothills, east to the border regions of present-day Saskatchewan and Manitoba. For generations, Moosomin's people hunted bison and fished the region's rivers and lakes. However, with the disappearance of bison in North America which resulted in extreme food insecurity and starvation, our ancestors were forced to enter into Treaty 6 through an adherence in 1881 under the understanding of the oral interpretation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty terms and promises as negotiated in Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt (1876). Since this time, the way of life of our people and our access to our territories has been relentlessly undermined by the growth of European settlement and lands being taken up by agriculture and other natural resource development.

The settlement of western Canada and the extraction of natural resources therein would not be possible were it not for the construction of railways through Indigenous territory. Gaining

access to lands on which to construct these railways required that the government of Canada enter Treaty with the Indigenous Nations of the Canadian Plains, including Moosomin First Nation. Since accepting Treaty, Moosomin's people have been conditioned through the implementation of illegal policies like the pass system to believe that they had no interests outside of their reserve's boundaries. Our religion and oral histories were taken away from us through assimilationist policies conducted through forced participation in residential schooling and prohibitions on cultural expression. As has been well-documented via the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, this purposeful cultural genocide has led to inter-generational trauma within our community and contributed to a loss of identity amongst our youth.

Moosomin's oral history, which is gifted to us by Elders and through teachings and ceremony, tells the story of our ancestors' displacement twice by Canadian authorities as a result of the construction of Canadian Pacific and Canadian Northern Railways through our territories. Using the funding allocated to us by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada's participant funding program for the Project, we elected to engage Moosomin Elder Peter Gladue and his wife Shona Gladue in addition to historian James Daschuk with assistance from Wade Derkson, to initiate a process of documenting our historic relationship with Canada's two main railways which led to over one hundred years of exile from our historic homelands.

The research supporting this submission was conducted via interviews and a review of secondary and online sources - essentially combining traditional oral and western historical narratives. It is important to note that what we are presenting at this time is an incomplete history due to limited resources available to us. Our community is made up of diverse individuals who each have specific stories and traditions. We hope to fill in the missing pieces through ongoing communication with our Elders and knowledge keepers. We hope this project creates a foundation of knowledge that will instill pride in our youth's identity as Nehiyaw-Plains Cree people and connect them to the events and leaders of the past and reconcile them with their lands. With this narrative, we hope to begin to impress upon governments and proponents, the requirement to meaningfully include Indigenous Nations in all matters related to the expansion of railways through our territories.

The following key points are drawn from the appended historical narrative:

- At the time of Treaty, Moosomin's band was made up of Plains Cree and Saulteaux people who occupied and harvested resources in the territory currently covered by much of Treaties 4, 6 and 7.
- Led by Chief Yellow Sky, Moosomin's people were not present during the original signing of Treaty 6 in 1876.
- Yellow Sky was a contemporary of Big Bear, who was the preeminent political and spiritual leader of the Plains Cree. Like Big Bear, Piapot, Little Pine and other Cree Chiefs, Yellow Sky wanted the government of Canada to create contiguous reserves in the Cypress Hills

region in an attempt to preserve the larger Nehiyaw-Plains Cree community that had always gathered in this spiritually significant and resource-rich area.

- The first displacement of Moosomin's people from their sacred homelands in the Cypress Hills can be traced to government policies in the late 1870s and early 1880s which sought the ethnic cleansing of "all Indians in the territory of Assiniboia, by force if necessary, from the land south of the proposed (Canadian Pacific) railway"<sup>1</sup>.
- In the spring of 1881, pressured by famine and disease brought on by the disappearance of bison and government policies which purposefully limited the distribution of food to First Nations by requiring absolute proof of starvation before assistance was given, Yellow Sky's headman, Moosomin entered into Treaty 6 through an adhesion and a reserve was surveyed along the North Saskatchewan River near Highgate in the Battlefords area of modern-day Saskatchewan.
- Moosomin's people are documented as having found success in adopting an agrarian lifestyle at the Highgate reserve, despite government policies which limited their access farming implements and prohibited selling their produce in local markets.
- The second displacement occurred after the construction of the Canadian National Railway through the Highgate reserve in 1903 whose fertile lands attracted the interest of politicians and settlers. As a result, Moosomin's people (and other bands in the area) were forced to surrender the reserve in 1909 and relocated for close to a year in a hastily built refugee camp while our current-day reserve near Cochin, Saskatchewan was made fit for habitation.

Oral tradition tells us that in keeping with the seasons, our ancestors regularly moved between important areas within our territory, including Sounding Lake, Turtle Lake, and the Great Sandhills in the north and the Cypress Hills in the south. We would gather in much larger congregations during the summer months when the buffalo were plenty to conduct politics, trade, kinship rituals and ceremonies like the Sundance. These traditional patterns of gathering and dispersing allowed our sacred areas to return to their natural state between visits and formed the basis of traditional methods for protecting the environment. The federal government used railroads and agricultural settlement as a pretext to remove us from our homelands and for many years actively prohibited us from gathering with our families by denying the creation of adjoining reserve lands and other policies designed to confine us in one place.

Despite the series of displacements forced upon our people, Moosomin's relationship with Canada since entering Treaty is one characterized by cooperation and industriousness. We fulfilled our part of the Treaty bargain by leaving the Cypress Hills area and becoming productive farmers. We surrendered our original reserve when the fertility of those lands was recognized by Canadian authorities. The post-Treaty history of Moosomin's people has been inexorably shaped by the construction of the two major railways across western Canada. The hardship and displacement our community experienced should be seen in relation to the opportunity the railway projects provided for the Dominion of Canada and its growing

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<sup>1</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, John A. MacDonald, Hansard, 24 March 1882

population of agricultural settlers. As Saskatchewan came to be known as the “breadbasket” of the world, the original inhabitants of the land were confined to their reserves through an extra-legal pass system and a permit system that hobbled attempts to develop commercial agriculture on reserve farms across the west, creating poverty, food insecurity and ill health for more than a century.

In addition to shining a light on our history to help inform a curriculum that instills pride within our youth of their identity, by documenting our people’s historical relationship with Canada’s rail operators, we hope to build foundations for constructive relationships with Canadian National (CN) and Canadian Pacific (CP) railways. Moosomin values our relationships with these companies and we seek to create a shared understanding of our collective past so that we can advance our shared interests in a spirit of collaboration. It is for this reason that we request governments acknowledge the historical displacement of Moosomin’s people, and other Indigenous peoples, by providing appropriate opportunities and support to participate in regulatory processes or projects that seek to expand or increase the capacity of rail networks within our traditional territories.

Respectfully,

<original signed by>

Chief Bradley Swiftwolfe  
Moosomin First Nation

Cc: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada  
<email address removed>

Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services, Government of Canada  
<email address removed>

Honourable Carolyn Bennet, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Government of Canada  
<email address removed>

Rosemarie Faulk, Member of Parliament for Battlefords-Lloydminster, Government of Canada  
<email address removed>

Chief Bobby Cameron, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Relations  
<email address removed>

National Chief Perry Bellegarde, Assembly of First Nations  
<email address removed>

Honourable Warren Kaeding, Minister of Environment, Government of Saskatchewan  
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Gary LaPlante, Moosomin First Nation  
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Shona and Peter Gladue, Moosomin First Nation  
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Wade Derkson  
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Steven Rowe, Shared Value Solutions  
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Meaghan Langille, Shared Value Solutions  
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Moosomin, a loyal Cree. circa. 1885  
*Library and Archives Canada/MIKAN 3406955*

# Moosomin First Nation Historical Themes Since Treaty



**MOOSOMIN**  
FIRST NATION

## INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the theme of Moosomin First Nation's displacement within its homelands at the hands of Canadian authorities within the overall context of Nehiyaw-Plains Cree negotiations with the terms and conditions of Treaty 6. It does not purport to be a definitive history of the band and is mostly based on secondary sources and available online primary sources.

The following historical narrative is limited in its scope and should be viewed as initial steps towards the development of a more comprehensive understanding of Moosomin's displacement and that there remains much more to learn. It is important to note that the place names and territories referred to in the following narrative carry significant meaning to all Indigenous peoples of the northern plains, not just the Nehiyaw-Plains Cree. It is also important to note that prior to Treaty, the ancestors of Indigenous peoples did not adhere to band lists, but were independent units based on kinship and family, each with their own traditional territories and preferred areas for gathering. Therefore, the place names and territories referred to below are to be understood as areas of significant importance to many of the ancestors of today's citizens of Moosomin First Nation within a much broader traditional territory which was inhabited by Nehiyaw-Plains Cree people.

## PRIOR TO TREATY: PLAINS CREE PLACES

In the decades prior to Treaty 6, Moosomin was a leader and a headman of a group of Nehiyaw and Anishinabek (Cree and Saulteaux) people led by Chief Yellow Sky who were intimately connected to Big Bear (*Mistahi Maskwa*). Like Big Bear, Yellow Sky's people wintered in the Jackfish Lake area approximately 50 km north of present-day Battleford, Saskatchewan.

Moosomin, a headman of Yellow Sky, was younger than Big Bear, probably by about 10-15 years, and is believed to have been born sometime before 1850. The influence of Big Bear, the preeminent political and spiritual leader of the Cree, over Yellow Sky and Moosomin was likely great. In addition to a shared history and territory in the Jackfish Lake/Battleford area, the men lead interethnic groups comprised of Nehiyaw-Anishinabek (Cree, Saulteaux), and (likely) Métis people.<sup>2</sup> These leaders had plenty in common and an analysis of Treaty annuity paylists would likely reveal close kinship ties between the two bands<sup>3</sup>; it is reasonable therefore to infer an intimate relationship between the two men and their respective followers.

The grandparents of Big Bear and Moosomin would likely have been young adults in the 1780s, the year of a continent-wide smallpox epidemic. By that time, the Cree had "accommodated

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<sup>2</sup> These ethnic distinctions appear to have been more important to anthropologists and historians than to the people they were writing about. Anthropologist David Mandelbaum listed Moosomin among the "Battleford Cree" whom he defines as "Plains Cree or Swampy Cree." *The Plains Cree*, Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XXXVIII, Part II, 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed Paylist analysis was not possible for this project and these records are not yet digitized.

themselves to the Plains Indian culture”<sup>4</sup> and were becoming the dominant force in the area currently marked by most of Treaties 4, 6 and 7.

The numbered treaties are often seen to correlate with Indigenous identity and territory. For example, Treaty 6 is considered Nehiyaw-Anishinabek (Cree and Saulteaux) territory, while Treaty 4, is considered Nakota-Assiniboine territory. In reality, they are just lines on a map drawn by colonial newcomers of European origin into the territory. As such, they are administrative and legal devices imposed by recent arrivals in the region, not historical representations of Indigenous territories.

If you look at the point at which the boundaries of Treaties 4, 6 and 7 converge, it is at the confluence of Red Deer and South Saskatchewan rivers near the present-day Alberta-Saskatchewan border, just north of the Cypress Hills. The Treaty borders, rather than marking off the exclusive territories of distinct ethnic groups, in fact signify the very opposite: an area that was common, where resources were shared, and at times contested.

Historian Theodore Binnema has referred to the larger area of the northwestern plains as “common and contested” ground.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, Binnema emphasizes not conflict born of a “clash of cultures,” but rather “complex combinations of trade, warfare, and diplomacy in a common and contested ground of diverse communities.”<sup>6</sup> This is the context in which the Nehiyaw-Cree, operating in close alliance with the Nakota-Assiniboine, sought to live off the bounty of those lands, at times in conflict with other people, such as the Blackfoot.

The history books make much of the historical enmity between the Nehiyaw-Cree and Niitsitapi-Blackfoot, but for large swaths of their shared history their relationship is marked by something other than hostility. If not peaceful coexistence, they operated in a mode of what might be called “strategic accommodation,” at times taking the form of an actual coalition or alliance.<sup>7</sup> As it is, the conflict between the Nehiyaw-Cree and Niitsitapi-Blackfoot, culminating in the Battle of the Belly River in 1870, appears to have been less internecine warfare over territory and more about individual horse stealing incidents.<sup>8</sup> Following the Battle of Belly River, in 1873, the two nations made peace when Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot adopted the influential Nehiyaw-Cree leader Poundmaker as his son, giving him the Blackfoot name *Makoyi-koh-kin* (Wolf Thin Legs).<sup>9</sup>

The pattern of Nehiyaw-Cree land/resource use during this period was marked by what might be called “nucleation and dispersal,” an anthropological concept that explains the cyclical movement of people. Gathering during some part of the year -in summer- as a larger

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<sup>4</sup> John Tobias, “Canada’s Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885,” *Canadian Historical Review* LXIV4 (1983), p. 522. John Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy, and War 1790 to 1870* (1988).

<sup>5</sup> Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground* (2001).

<sup>6</sup> Binnema, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Certainly prior to 1790, which is when the historians mark the end of the Cree-Blackfoot alliance.

<sup>8</sup> Milloy, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Dempsey, Dictionary of Canadian Biography: [www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pitikwahanapiwiyyin\\_11E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pitikwahanapiwiyyin_11E.html) Dempsey’s book *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet* (1972) has a chapter on the events around the adoption.



community and dispersing into smaller communities for another part of the year. These places were not necessarily the same places each season. This pattern of migration appears to have played several important functions for the Nehiyaw-Cree. It was an adaptive strategy to respond to changing dynamics and conditions. It also had a spiritual component, as people gathered at sacred spaces to participate in ceremonies, the most important of which was the Sun Dance. Gatherings such as this enabled discussion and input from all the chiefs on political and strategic issues of the day as well as the formation and reformation of kinship bonds through marriage and adoption. Through sacred practices (ceremony) and secular interaction in the forms of entertainment and trade, these large gatherings created a large, strong, and flexible sense of community and identity. For the Nehiyaw-Cree and other Indigenous nations of the plains, these large gatherings took place in the summer, mirroring the concentration of their staple food, the bison, who gathered in massive herds for the rutting season. For the rest of the year, Indigenous communities would disperse to sheltered areas, often on the margins of the northern plains, to places like the Cypress Hills, Sounding Lake and Jackfish Lake to fish and hunt and trap small game. Sounding Lake is commonly referred to as “the Wintering Grounds” in Nehiyaw-Cree tradition.<sup>10</sup>

This pattern of activity varied by band, each with their own unique circumstances, and with conditions. In 1940, anthropologist David Mandelbaum based his description of the seasonal cycle on the observations of John Palliser, whose expedition crossed the prairie a century earlier:

The Prairie Cree...habitually formed great encampments and followed the buffalo herds. During the summer they generally camped along the Qu'Appelle River and the Missouri Couteau, where they bordered on the Sioux and Assiniboine. At other seasons they were mostly in the valley of the Saskatchewan, from the Neutral Hills south of the Battle River to the Beaver Hills and Fort Edmonton where they impinged upon the Blackfoot.<sup>11</sup>

Mandelbaum asserted that Palliser’s generalization did not necessarily apply to *all* the Plains Cree, but it likely applies to the communities lead by Big Bear, Yellow Sky and Moosomin. The oral record confirms these historical observations. Big Bear’s direct descendent, Yvonne Johnson, stated that Big Bear’s people “lived and hunted buffalo, antelope and deer and moose north to the Great Sand Hills, and the Eagle Hills, and Sounding Lake and the North Saskatchewan River and Fort Pitt, and Jackfish Lake where he was born in 1825, and all the way south to the Milk and Missouri rivers.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Annie Whitecalf, interviewed in 1974. Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), IH-089. For a longer discussion of the seasonal cycle of Indigenous nations on the northern plains, see James Daschuk. “A Dry Oasis: The Canadian Plains in Late Prehistory.” *Prairie Forum* 34(2009): 1-29.

<sup>11</sup> Mandelbaum, p. 185

<sup>12</sup> Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman* (1998), p. 9.

Sounding Lake appears to have been a particularly important location for the Nehiyaw-Cree, serving as a political centre during summer gatherings there. It is there that Lt. Gov. David Laird met with Big Bear and other Cree chiefs over several days in the fall of 1878 to secure the adhesion of reticent communities. Government accounts estimate the number of Nehiyaw-Cree and other nations at the Sounding Lake summit to be 1,800 people.<sup>13</sup> Big Bear and the other chiefs sought “more liberal” terms to Treaty 6, which Laird said he was not authorized to make. Two other chiefs adhered to Treaty at Sounding Lake.<sup>14</sup> A year later, in July 1879, when Little Pine and Lucky Man adhered to Treaty 6 at Fort Walsh, Big Bear told the Commissioners that he would “take the Treaty at Sounding Lake at the time of the payments.”<sup>15</sup> However, he did not take Treaty until three years later (1882).<sup>16</sup>

The age-old cycle of gathering and dispersing according to the seasons and the availability of resources was fundamentally altered in the late 1870s. The extirpation of the bison, the bedrock of the food system for millennia, and the imposition of the reserve system and other government policies aimed at restricting the movement of Indigenous people in their traditional territories permanently severed the link between the people and the land they had lived and moved on for generations.

## TREATY 6

Neither Moosomin nor Big Bear were present at the main Treaty 6 negotiations at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt in the summer of 1876. Treaty Commissioner Morris noted that his associate, James McKay, visited a camp on the Battle River, “some 70 lodges in all” where he met Chief Yellow Sky the acknowledged leader of the band that came to be led by Moosomin. McKay noted that “they expressed good feeling” about taking Treaty but could not wait for the Commissioners as the buffalo hunt beckoned. Morris described the community visited by McKay on the Battle River as “composed, it was afterwards ascertained, of the Saulteaux of Jack Fish Lake and of some Crees under the Yellow Sky Chief and were favorably disposed though unable to remain.”<sup>17</sup> It is reasonable to infer that Moosomin was present at those meetings on the Battle River, since he was a headman under Yellow Sky’s leadership. But Yellow Sky remains an obscure figure, from a documentary or archival perspective: there are few archival references, and he does not appear to be mentioned by traders, travelers, adventurers, and later anthropologists, who entered the territory that was once his shared domain.

The historical consensus is that Moosomin adhered to Treaty 6 in 1881 at Battleford.<sup>18</sup> In fact, however, the historical record is unclear about the timing of Moosomin’s adhesion. John

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<sup>13</sup> RG 10, File 10771.

<sup>14</sup> One was Bobtail, the other is not certain, based on available sources.

<sup>15</sup> RG 10, File 10771.

<sup>16</sup> RG10, Vol. 1848/IT328:

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba, the North-West and Keewatin in the Dominion of Canada*, p. 182.

<sup>18</sup> The Encyclopedia of Canada states that the Moosomin First Nation signed an adhesion in the Spring of 1881. Similarly, documents produced in relation to the 1909 land surrender for the Indian Claims Commission (ICC) note

Tobias, whose 1983 article on the subjugation of the Plains Cree for the *Canadian Historical Review* is considered essential reading, notes that Moosomin took Treaty in 1878, while historians Sara Carter and James Daschuk both suggest 1879. Still another source gives 1880 as the date of adhesion.<sup>19</sup> The uncertainty seems to suggest a profound ambivalence toward Treaty on the part of Yellow Sky, Moosomin and their people and that the details of the Moosomin adhesion were not a priority of government officials charged with, among other things, keeping a record of events.

Between 1876 and 1879 several other Nehiyaw-Cree chiefs adhered to Treaty 6. Two of the most important to enter Treaty during this period were Little Pine and Lucky Man, two of Big Bear's headmen who signed on at Fort Walsh in July 1879. At the time, a group of Nehiyaw-Cree chiefs, including Big Bear, Piapot, Little Pine, and others, wanted to create contiguous reserves in the Cypress Hills region.<sup>20</sup> This may have been a continuation of the age-old practice of gathering in summer. As an Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs explained in 1917, "It must be remembered that the Plains Indians were essentially gregarious, and for generations lived in large bands for purposes of protection against starvation as well as enemies."<sup>21</sup> Historians have recognized that their quest to settle on reserves together was largely a political strategy (unity, strength in numbers, etc.), but it should also be seen as an attempt to preserve the larger *community* that had always gathered in the resource rich and sacred territory.

## POST-TREATY 6

Themes of adaptability, negotiation and strategic accommodation also mark Moosomin's post-Treaty experience. After taking Treaty, Moosomin's band settled on reserve land near Battleford (IR 112, IR 112A at Highgate). Government records show that Indian Affairs recognized Yellow Sky as the Chief of the Moosomin Band from 1881 until 1884, when Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney appointed Moosomin as Chief.<sup>22</sup>

Early government reports following the survey of the reserve in 1881 suggested that Moosomin's people did not initially take well to farming, but this was in part because of lack of proper support from the same government that wanted them to become farmers.<sup>23</sup> By 1885

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that: "Moosomin, a headman of Yellow Sky's band, and a number of others settled in the Battleford area sometime in the summer of 1880 and later adhered to the terms of Treaty 6." ICC, *Moosomin First Nation 1909 Surrender Inquiry Report* (1997), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Tobias, p. 527, fn 30. James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*, p. 114. Sarah Carter, "Moosomin," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*: [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mosomin\\_13E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mosomin_13E.html). The Archives Canada photo of Moosomin contains the accompanying text: "Chief Moosomin signed Treaty 6 at Battleford (Sask.) in 1880."

<sup>20</sup> Tobias, p. 527.

<sup>21</sup> SAB FERGUSON PAPERS, M-FILM R 2.391 (VILLAGE SYSTEM).

<sup>22</sup> Indian Claims Commission, *Inquiry into the 1909 Reserve Land Surrender Claim of the Moosomin First Nation* (March 1997), p. 10. This ICC report references band paylists as its source for this conclusion.

<sup>23</sup> Historian Sarah Carter, in her DCB entry on Moosomin, writes that Moosomin "refused initially to sow a crop in the spring of 1881 as a protest over Treaty promises that had not been kept."

these reports had been replaced by glowing reports of their farming prowess and overall industriousness.<sup>24</sup> A photograph, taken in the summer of 1885, shows Moosomin on a farm with cattle in the background, with the caption: "Moosomin, a loyal Cree."<sup>25</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Themes of negotiation, resistance, accommodation, and adaptation permeate Plains Cree history generally, and Moosomin's history specifically.

Throughout the pre-and post-Treaty periods "the Cree were both flexible and active in promoting their own interests, and willing to accommodate themselves to a new way of life."<sup>26</sup> Nehiyaw-Cree attempts to negotiate better terms in Treaty 6 are well documented, Their Chiefs were intimately familiar with the process and terms of Treaty 4, negotiated two years earlier. The ambivalence of some of their leaders to the Treaty process was reflected in absence of key people, including Yellow Sky and Moosomin, at the meetings in the summer of 1876, and in the number of prominent chiefs holding out for better terms in subsequent years.<sup>27</sup> And in fact, they succeeded in this negotiation: Treaty 6 is more generous than the previous numbered treaties in terms of land and agricultural assistance.

Unfortunately, the post-Treaty period is dominated by another theme: displacement. Moosomin's people, like other Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine and others are a displaced people: displaced from their traditional territories, its rivers, its hills, its game, and other important resources, and ultimately from their way of life, their kin, and their larger community. This displacement was accelerated by government policy in the Treaty and post-Treaty period.

The first major displacement of Moosomin's people, shared by many other Plains Cree, was their physical removal from the Cypress Hills area where they hunted, lived, and held Sun Dances and other sacred ceremonies. The forced expulsion of Indigenous communities from the area, effected in part by the withholding of rations in a time of famine, has been described as an act of "ethnic cleansing," necessary to open the territory for the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway and European settlement. The starvation policy, overseen by Prime Minister Macdonald himself in his role as Superintendent General of Indian Affairs,<sup>28</sup> was a critical factor in the undermining of the health of Indigenous people in the prairies and sparked the explosion of tuberculosis throughout the region.<sup>29</sup> Even after their expulsion from the Cypress Hills, Nehiyaw-Cree leaders persisted in their hope to be able to live together again. In 1884, Little Pine traveled to Crowfoot's camp, explaining the hardship they were experiencing,

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<sup>24</sup> Excerpts from Indian Affairs Annual Reports, found in Mandelbaum's field notes, SAB, IH-DM 112.

<sup>25</sup> Library and Archives Canada, *MIKAN 3406955*

<sup>26</sup> Tobias, p. 520.

<sup>27</sup> Chief Sweet Grass could only persuade 317 out of the ~1500 Plains Cree who were there to accept annuity payments. Frederick Tarr and Larry Peterson, *LITTLE PINE/LUCKY MAN BAND #116 Report*, SAB R-E1883.

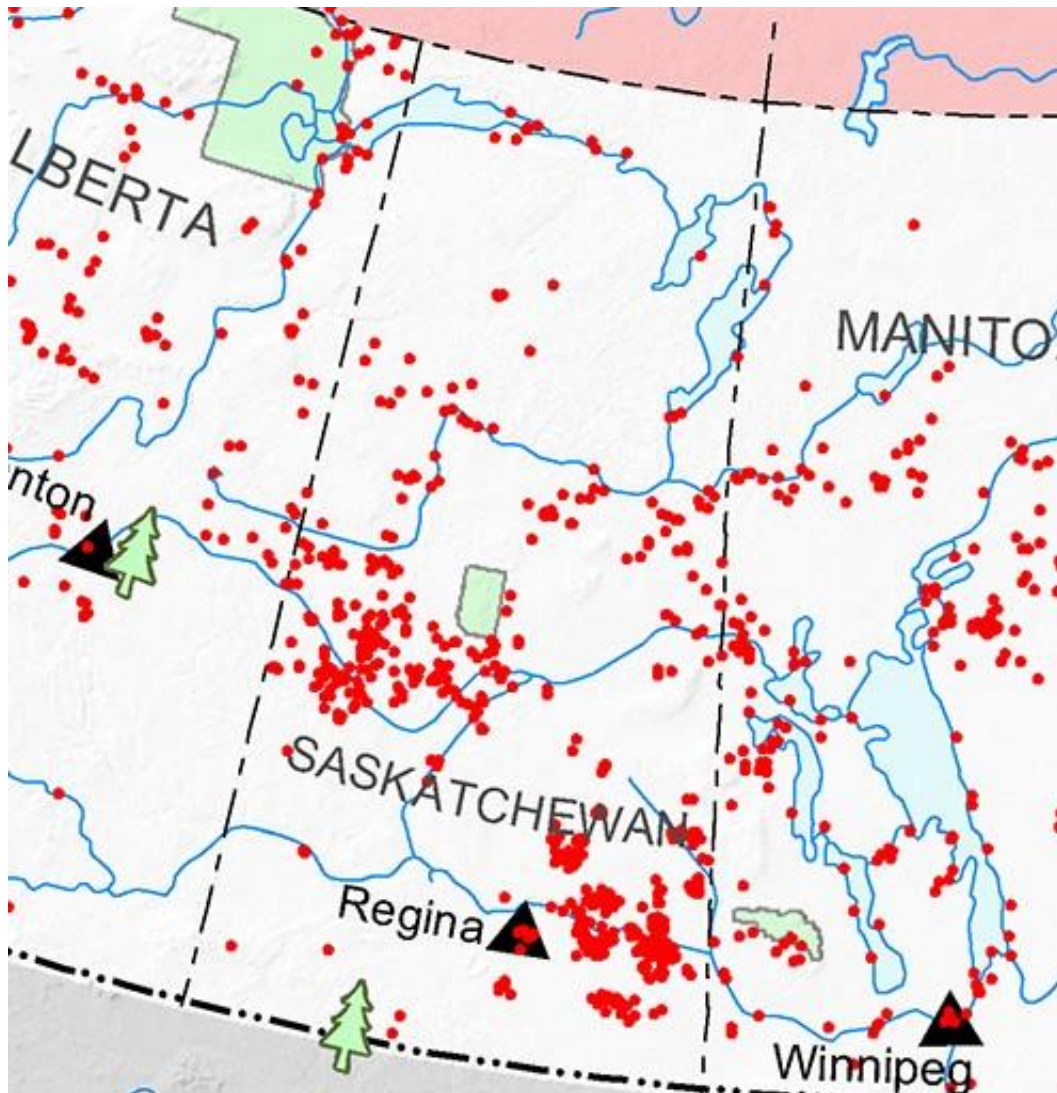
<sup>28</sup> A post MacDonal held from 1878-1888, making his tenure in the role the longest in Canadian history.

<sup>29</sup> Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*.

and advocating Big Bear's vision of a single "large Indian territory in the central part of Saskatchewan and Alberta with a large community centred in the Red Deer River."<sup>30</sup>

The magnitude of this historic displacement – and much of what is troubling about Canada's colonial history with Indigenous people – can be gleaned from looking at just three maps. The first map shows the location of Indian Reserves in present day Saskatchewan. It shows but three Indian Reserves near the Cypress Hills, all of which are products of negotiations/settlements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> The second map is an archaeological map showing Indigenous history with the Cypress Hills.

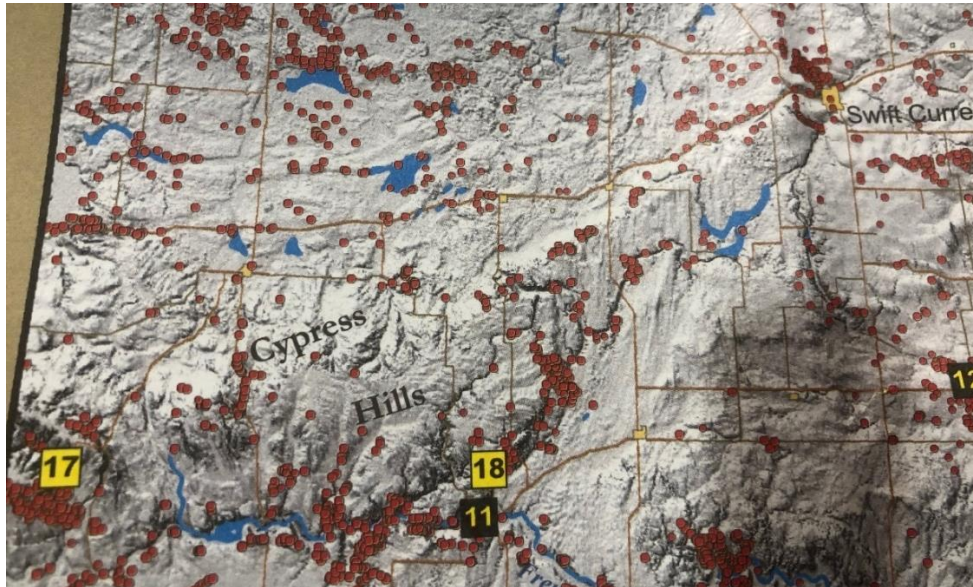
**Figure 1: Map of Indian Reserves in Saskatchewan**



<sup>30</sup> Tarr and Peterson, LITTLE PINE/LUCKY MAN BAND #116 Report, Saskatchewan Archives, R-E1883.

<sup>31</sup> They are: i) Nekaneet First Nation (1913); ii) Little Pine IR 116 (purchased pursuant to TLE); and iii) Carry the Kettle/Nakoda, IR 76-7.

**Figure 2: Archaeological Map of Saskatchewan<sup>32</sup>**



**Figure 3: Map of CPR Route Through Saskatchewan**



A third map shows the route of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the main line of which runs just north of the Cypress Hills. The degree of disconnect between the historical occupation by Indigenous people of these lands and what transpired after the Treaties could scarcely be greater or more profound: only through protracted negotiation and litigation have indigenous people been able to reconnect with their traditional territories. And this has only been afforded to a handful of ancestors.

<sup>32</sup> *A Map of Saskatchewan Archaeology* (2005).

The second displacement of Moosomin's people was the 1909 railway relocation to Murray Lake near Cochin. The 1909 relocation was the second time in a generation that railway construction led directly to the dislocation of the Moosomin community. This displacement was the subject of an Indian Claims Commission (ICC) Report in 1997, eventually resolved in 2004. A mediator's report commented on the persistent efforts of the Moosomin First Nation to negotiate a solution to the wrongful surrender:

For approximately nine years, efforts by the First Nation to have its claim validated were unsuccessful...After two years in negotiation, efforts by the First Nation and Canada to achieve a settlement also proved unsuccessful.<sup>33</sup>

Despite these displacements, Moosomin's relationship with Canada since signing Treaty is one characterized by *cooperation* and *industriousness*. They became productive farmers, fulfilling, in effect, their part of the Treaty bargain, which was to adhere to Treaty, leave the Cypress Hills, and become farmers. Decades later, when changing circumstances led Canada to seek their cooperation, this time for the building of a new railway (Canadian National Railway), Moosomin and his people cooperated, surrendering their reserved lands near Battleford, and relocating to Cochin (present day reserve) at Murray Lake.

The experience of the Moosomin First Nation during the Treaty has been shaped by the construction of the two major railways across western Canada. The hardship and displacement the community experienced should be seen in relation to the opportunity the railway projects provided for the Dominion of Canada and its growing population of agricultural settlers. While Saskatchewan became the "breadbasket" of the world, the original inhabitants of the land were confined to reserves through an extra-legal pass system and permit system that hobbled attempts to develop commercial agriculture on reserve farms across the west, creating poverty, food insecurity and ill health for more than a century.

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<sup>33</sup> ICC, REPORT ON THE MEDIATION OF THE MOOSOMIN FIRST NATION 1909 RESERVE LAND SURRENDER.