

Pamphlet # 3

First Nations Peoples in Canada

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When Europeans first came to what they called the New World, 'Indian' was the term they used to identify the local inhabitants, a fact which had its origins in the confused geographical knowledge of Christopher Columbus. Five hundred years later the term is still in use to legally describe the original inhabitants of North America. In Canada, *Section 35(2) of the Canadian Constitution 1982* recognizes that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada include the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples. However, in the Twenty-First Century, the term 'Indian' is not an acceptable term to most Aboriginal peoples and many identify themselves as First Nations or, for example, as members of the Ojibway Nation, the Dakota Nation or the Cree Nation.

There are many ways of defining the members of the Aboriginal population but there is no single or 'correct' definition. In fact, according to *Statistics Canada* the choice of a definition depends on the purpose for which it is used. For further discussion of the terms in use see the Indian and Northern Affairs web site at:

www.child.gov.ab.ca/whatwedo/firstnations/pdf/indian%20definitions.pdf

In Manitoba, according to the *Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs*, there are five First Nation groups: Cree, Dakota, Dene, Ojibway and Ojibway-Cree. They each have distinct territories in the Province: the Cree are to be found mainly in the northern part of Manitoba; the Ojibway in the southern area; the Dakota primarily in the southwestern region; the Dene in the extreme

northwestern area; and the Ojibway-Cree in the northeastern section of Manitoba.

The Cree

The Cree nation entered central and northern Manitoba sometime in the last 1000 years from what is now Quebec. They spread out over the west and established groups with new dialects and new interests. During the fur trade era they were actively involved as middlemen, much to the chagrin of the Hudson's Bay Company. Once Canadian settlement arrived, the Cree tried to diversify their economy but ran into resistance from the Canadian government which ultimately limited their ability to prosper. Today, Cree peoples in Manitoba are re-establishing their Nations and working towards self-government.

The Dakota

Usually known as the Sioux, the Dakota people in Manitoba are descendants of the Ogallala and Hunk Papa Lakota peoples who escaped to Canada after the Battle of The Little Big Horn in 1878. They were some of the most advanced farmers in southern Manitoba in the 1880s but lost their livelihood and independence when the Canadian government relocated them onto reserves. Like the other First Nations in Manitoba, the Dakota peoples are working towards self-government and the improvement of their people. The Dakota's land base is primarily southwestern Manitoba.

The Dene

Dene people in Manitoba belong to the Chipewyan Nation. Dene is an Athabaskan word meaning 'people', of which the Chipewyan are the most northeasterly group. Dene people

can be found as far away as the Gwi'chin community of Old Crow in the far northwest corner of Canada and the Hopi and Navaho Nations in the southwestern United States. Two communities in the far northwestern portion of Manitoba, Lac Brochet and Tadoule Lake, are the homelands for the local Dene and they include two distinct groups, the T'suline Dene and the Sayasi Dene. Traditionally, the Dene were hunting peoples who traveled in small family groups which emphasized the use of caribou for clothing and food.

During the fur trade era, a long-standing feud took place between the Cree and the Chipewyan/Dene. Thanadelthur, a Chipewyan who had learned the Cree language, became an interpreter in order to establish peace between the two warring groups. Her actions also pleased the French who wanted a peaceful milieu in which to trade for fur. One of the reasons Thanadelthur agreed to help was because she quickly realized the difference European trade goods would make in the lives of overworked native women. Fur trading continued for many decades until the early twentieth century when the Dene, specifically the Sayasi Dene, were forcibly relocated by the government of Canada to the community of Churchill on Hudson's Bay in northern Manitoba. With the forced relocation came serious social consequences the Sayasi Dene had to overcome and with which they still struggle today. They have since returned to their traditional territories where they established the community of Tadoule Lake.

The Ojibway

The Ojibway in Manitoba are a division of the Anishinabe Nation that moved west during the 1800's and became known as the Plains Ojibway (Salteaux). They were excellent traders and established extensive trading networks into the United States and farther west into Canada.

Today the Ojibway are the second most numerous First Nation group in Manitoba. The Ojibway are traditionally located in south-eastern Manitoba.

The Oji-Cree

The Oji-Cree are traditionally located in communities in north-eastern Manitoba. It is said by the Elders that long ago the Ojibway and Cree peoples met in peace and with such friendship that the boundary between the two peoples disappeared. The people in this transitional area spoke neither Cree nor Ojibway, but instead used a blend of both. Eventually, all aspects of the two cultures seemed to come together and they were then referred to as the Oji-Cree people. They are a unique people since they are neither Ojibway nor Cree.

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