A Media Account of the Government's Acquisition of Treaty 8 Lands

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ABSTRACT. Land! Everybody wanted it — Europeans, Easterners, and the Government of Canada — but the Indians and Halfbreeds had it. The government could not simply take the land: Canadians sensibilities would not allow it. As Canadians, we required affirmation (whether genuine or otherwise) that we had treated our Indians better and more equitably than the Americans had treated theirs. There had to be a land surrender and some type of commodity exchange: it seemed the fair thing to do. Treaties were the answer. Government got land for European/Eastern settlement; Indians got Treaty Promises; and Halfbreeds got a choice of either land or money. Everybody benefited — not necessarily equally, but that is another matter.

The Crown signed Treaties with the Indigenous inhabitants of the region we now know as Canada from at least the mid 1700s. In signing Treaty 8, one of a series of Numbered Treaties, the Indians and Halfbreeds of the region gave up 324,000 square miles of land — an area about three-quarters the size of Ontario. It was a lengthy process involving the Crown's representatives (Treaty and Halfbreed Commissioners) and numerous First Nations and Metis leaders.

This article analyses media accounts of the 1899 Treaty 8 signing process. How did the media portray the participants and the events to its readership? Were certain people or events deemed more important than others? Did the Press help fulfill the government's mandate to populate the West and support the Boosterism phenomenon of the time?

SOMMAIRE. Les terres! Tout le monde en voulait — les Européens, les gens de l'Est et le gouvernement — canadien — mais c'était les Indiens et le Métis qui les possédaient. Le gouvernement ne pouvait pas simplement s'en emparer: la sensibilité canadienne s'y serait opposée. En tant que Canadiens nous voulions être rassurés (de façon réelle ou autrement) que nous avions traité nos Indiens bien mieux que ne l'avaient fait les Américains. Il fallait une remise de terres ainsi qu'une espèce d'échange de marchandises: cela semblait juste. Les traités étaient donc la solution. Le gouvernement recevait les terres pour l'implantation venant de l'Europe et de l'Est; les Indiens recevaient des promesses; et les Métis avaient le choix entre des terres ou de l'argent. Tout le monde bénéficiait — pas de façon égale, sans doute, mais ceci est une autre histoire.

La Couronne signa des traités avec les autochtones de la région que nous appellons à présent Canada à partir du milieu du 18ième siècle. Par la signature du Traité 8, l'un d'une série de traités numérotés, les Indiens et Métis de la région cédèrent 324 000 miles carrés de terres — environ trois-quarts de l'Ontario. Cela prit du temps et impliqua les représentants de la Couronne (commissaires pour les Traités et les Métis) ainsi que de nombreux dirigeants autochtones et métis.

Cet article analyse les rapports de presse concernant la signature du Traité 8 en 1899. Comment les participants et les événements étaient-ils présentés au public? Certains étaient-ils considérés plus importants que d'autres? La presse contribua-t-elle au mandat du gouvernement de peupler l'Ouest et aux processus de promotion de l'époque?

Introduction

"They think they own the land." That is how the *Alberta Plaindealer*[1] described the Indians and Halfbreeds of the Treaty 8 region of Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories in 1899. Although the editors of the *Alberta Plaindealer* may have wished to deny this ownership, it was the fact that Indians and Halfbreeds claimed ownership of the land that forced the federal government to negotiate with them. By 1898 there was a new sense of urgency in dealing with the original inhabitants of this area because European settlement of the west was imminent and the availability of natural resources such as fish, timber, minerals and oil had been recently discovered. The only thing standing in the way of progress, resource exploitation and riches was — the Indians.

Treaties can be viewed as an agreement which recognizes the Aboriginal rights of Canada's original people. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 declared that nobody could purchase land from Indians and that only the Crown had the authority to enter land negotiations with them (Cumming and Mickenberg 1972: 291).

Thus, a series of treaties began to be entered into which established peace and friendship relations between the Crown and the First Nations. After Confederation in 1867, the numbered treaties were negotiated by the Crown. Historian John Chalmers wrote that the federal and territorial governments treated the area north of Treaty Number 6 with "benign neglect" (1981: 215). There had not been a need for a treaty in more than 20 years since all Indian lands in the "fertile belt" had been surrendered in preceding treaties and settlement of these lands had proceeded (ibid., 215).

The signing of Treaty 8 between the Indians,[2] the Halfbreeds,[3] and the federal Government of Canada (represented by the Treaty and Scrip Commissioners)[4] was an important event in the development of Canada, especially the West. This historical event involved both vast tracts of land[5] and abundant resources.

Treaty 8 was a long time in the making.[6] According to researcher Dennis Madill:

> Since the 1870s there had been pleas from missionaries, fur traders and Indians for a treaty in the Athabasca-Mackenzie region, but the federal government disclaimed any responsibility for these Indians, despite the hardships they suffered, and remained committed to that policy of not proceeding for settlement (1986: 2).

Historian David Leonard says of the Treaty 8 region, "The perceived need for a settlement, had been mounting for some time. Mineral resources along the lower Athabasca River seemed ripe for tapping, while the Peace River Country appeared to be on the verge of large-scale agricultural settlement" (1999: 17). The Klondike Gold Rush brought as many as 40,000 individuals through the Treaty 8 area on their way to the Yukon (Kesterton and Bird 1995: 35). The Treaty 8 Commission entered into its first treaty signing with the local Indians, while the Scrip Commission issued scrip to the local Halfbreeds on June 21, 1899 on the western shore of Lesser Slave Lake. The Treaty and Scrip Commissions visited many areas in northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories during the summers of 1899 and 1900.[8]

This article examines how the signing of Treaty Number 8 and its participants were depicted in 1899 Alberta newspapers.[9] Who were the primary players? How

were the participants and events described? Were some depicted favourably while others were shown negatively? Essentially, this study is about the government, expansionism, the media, and their relationship to the Indians and Halfbreeds.

First it is important to give a brief overview of the role of the media in non-Aboriginal society, followed by the role of the press in the settlement of western Canada.

Role of the Media in Western Society

Paul Rutherford, a renowned authority on the role of media in society, says, "Ideally, mass communications require the regular and frequent transmission of a uniform message about life and affairs by a small group of experts to a large, anonymous and heterogeneous public" (1982: 4). However, this is not to say that these messages cannot and do not often have particular leanings as they did during the time period covered by this study. The public forms its opinions based on both the information provided and the context in which the information is set. By selecting, interpreting, and setting events in context, the media filter our news. They do this in a number of ways: location of a story in the newspaper (front page coverage is generally more important than articles located further back); size of headline; length of the article; and whether or not an event is covered at all. What is determined as newsworthy is debated, and ultimately the reporter or the editor has the final say in whether a story makes it to print.

Many things have changed in the 100 years since Treaty 8 was signed. However, one thing remains the same — we live busy personal lives and therefore rely on the media to inform us of current external happenings.

The Role of the Press in 1899

The year 1899 was part of what is referred to as the "Third Press Period: The Western Transplant and Spreading Growth" journalism period in Canada (Kesterton and Bird 1995: 33). Essentially the press was on a mission to "sell" Canada to potential immigrants. The press not only wanted to convince people to move to Canada but they also wanted to entice people to move from well-populated eastern Canada to the largely unpopulated west. Journalists were relied upon to assure potential immigrants that Canada, and specifically western Canada, was a hospitable and viable place to settle. Homesteading was an opportunity for landless settlers to leave the past behind and start anew.

The "Third Press Period" is closely linked to an immigration propaganda phenomenon called "boosterism" which was particularly prevalent in the undeveloped prairies of western Canada. According to R. Douglas Francis, boosterism is a deliberate attempt by local leaders to present an inflated image of the amenities of their home community in hopes of an eventual self-fulfilling prophecy (1997: 427). David Knight for his part defines boosterism as the exaggerated proclamations of the worth of a particular place over all others (1973: 10).

Expansionists, who wanted the west to be settled, believed that development of the Northwest Territory (the area including what is now Alberta and Saskatchewan) was essential and must be effected as quickly as possible (Owram, 1980: 5). However, it seems that the expansionists did not want just anybody populating the west.

Owram states that the expansionists (largely English-speaking Protestants) wanted to shape the west in their own cultural and philosophical image (1980: 5). And as Charles Mair wrote to George Munro Grant in 1871, "we may find the dreary miseries which are baffling to statesmanship in Europe imported to this country"(in Owram 1980: 136). As Owram states, "The basic economic strength of the North West lay in the fertility of the land and any social strength the region was to achieve had equally to be based on a class that would work the land" (1980: 136). Thus, according to Mair and other expansionists of the time, the preferred class was British.

The government tried somewhat unsuccessfully to lure "British" farmers to settle the west. For example, twelve delegate farmers from England, Scotland and Ireland were brought to Canada (at the government's expense) to tour the Canadian West in 1890. The 1890 "farmers" tour was modeled after an earlier agriculturalist tour in 1879 that had netted favourable results (Norton 1994: 26). The tour began with the farmers being greeted by the Lieutenant-Governor and Mrs. J.C. Schultz, "who expressed a desire to see Canada peopled by English-speaking races" (Norton 1994: 27). The group was then treated to a series of dinners, luncheons, displays and other events, all hosted in their honour by towns across western Canada.

In return for this hospitality, each farmer was required to produce a report that chronicled their experience. Most reports were positive and spoke to the merits of Canadian society and the Canadian countryside. As one of the Irish delegates stated, "[in] two departments at least Ireland would have a rival in British Columbia; those were the beauty of the women and the growth of potatoes" (Norton 1994: 29). However, others spoke harshly of the condition of Canadian roads and of the waste of timber in British Columbia (ibid. 1994: 30). The reports were then published and used to lure prospective immigrants to Canada, but there was no measured increase in British immigration to Canada as a result. In fact, according to geographer Ronald Rees, immigration rates were almost at a standstill despite the mammoth efforts of the Canadian Pacific Railroad (1988: 10). When the first choice of the Canadian government, the British, failed to be lured to the new land, the government then looked to eastern Europe for a population to settle the west.

Clifford Sifton, who took over the Ministry of the Department of the Interior in 1896, conducted a large-scale immigration campaign. He was interested in recruiting experienced farmers for western Canada. He decided that "hardiness was the key and Sifton judged that there was no shortage of it in the northern Slavs" (Rees 1988: 11). Special efforts were made to recruit peasant farmers from the impoverished and crowded villages of Ruthenia, Galicia and Bukowina, in the area that is now Ukraine (Rees 1988: 11, 12).

The press in 1899 did more than just "reflect public opinion," it also attempted to mold popular attitudes (Rutherford 1982: 288). For example, David C. Jones states that country life, rather than town or city life, was seen as wholesome and respectable, and he adds that there was a belief that man, with the aid of science, could tame the land and make it both livable and fertile (1982: 96). Many newspapers, such as the *Nor'West Farmer*, the *Farmer's Advocate*, the *Grain Growers' Guide* and the *Farm and Ranch Review*, were devoted to the notion of the superiority of country living (Jones 1982: 97).

The newspaper buyers are an integral part of the press. In 1899, the partisan press was closely connected with the business or political interests of particular groups (Rutherford 1982: 288). Regarding the Treaty issue, we must ask ourselves the following questions: "Who was the audience?"; "What did they want?"; and also "What did they want to hear?" The newspapers of that time contained issues of relevance to the audience, just as they do today. For example, Alberta newspapers are currently debating the pros and cons of a private health care system. An alternative called "a two-tier American style health system" by its detractors and a "sensible way to relieve the backlog of patients and provide better care" by the proponents. Regardless, the newspaper-buying public relies on accurate and frank reporting. The right-leaning and corporatist *Calgary Herald* provides different evidence than the left-leaning, socialist *Edmonton Journal*.[10]

Research Findings[11] and Interpretation

The location and size of a particular article denotes its importance in relation to other articles published that day. Most of the early reports found their way to the front page but were later relegated to subsequent pages. Page 2 was the most frequent location for Treaty 8 newspaper coverage (41% of the coverage), while front page coverage followed with 36%. Article length ranged from 1 column inch to 40 column inches. The longer articles were usually on the second or subsequent pages.

The articles' titles generally mentioned the terms "Treaty," "Indian," "Scrip," and "Commission" or "Commissioner" with very little variation. However, one of the more interesting headlines that made its way to the front page of the Alberta Tribune was "The Beavers Gave Trouble," in which the reporter stated that the Beaver Indians did not give the commissioners an amicable welcome because they were angry about the mounted police who arrested one of their members for killing a settler's horse (August 19, 1899: 1).

The Commissioners and the process of signing the Treaty with the Indians were the predominant topics of the articles. As one might expect, the articles were "informational" in nature, and the tone was generally positive; they spoke of progress in the treaty-making process, of successful negotiations with the Indians, and of the large numbers of Halfbreeds who had accepted scrip.

The Commissioners were treated kindly by the press. They were described as giving "clever speeches to the Natives" (*Calgary Herald Weekly*, August 3, 1899: 2). They were the primary actors in approximately 80% of the articles, in which they are glorified for "doing their duty to the Queen" and described in generous terms. They were portrayed as willing to endure hardships such as harsh weather conditions and unfamiliar terrain. An *Edmonton Bulletin* report for example stated upon the return of the Commission that "the commissioner, although an elderly man and of a far from robust appearance, has stood the trip extra well" (September 11, 1899: 4). The Commissioners were in unfamiliar territory, but they were accompanied by many people (mostly Indians and Halfbreeds) who were very acquainted with it. In fact, the Commissioners had many people with them whose job it was to ensure their comfort and their success, such as cooks, camp attendants, tripmen, translators, guides and trackers. Historian David Leonard states that the Treaty and Halfbreed Commissioners' entourage numbered nearly 50 people (1995: 16).

However, they were seen as heroic in their efforts to obtain land from the Indians for future European settlement: their success in obtaining the land as well as their progress in the treaty-making process, was mentioned repeatedly. Newspaper accounts show them as patient people using a benevolent tone in dealing with the Indians (*Calgary Daily*, July 28, 1899: 2). They were also authoritative, "However when the Commissioners did arrive they were not long in getting down to business" (*Edmonton Bulletin*, July 15, 1899: 2). And successful in obtaining the land from the Indians and the Halfbreeds, "At the June 21st signing, treaty was made with the Indians at this point about 275 in number. The Half-breed scrip commission issued about 600 scrip there" (*Alberta Plaindealer*, September 1, 1899: 1). The *Edmonton Bulletin* refers to the Treaty as being "'pulled off' at Rocky Point" (July 17, 1899: 2).

A great deal of attention was given to the Commissioners' itinerary. Frequent topics of newspaper reports included: where they went; how they got there; and the conditions under which they traveled. The reporters struck a delicate balance in their depiction of the Commissioners. On the one hand the commissioners were shown as the government's heroic and faithful servants dutifully fulfilling their task of obtaining Indian land in less than ideal conditions — harsh weather, unfamiliar terrain, amongst fierce Indians and Halfbreeds. On the other hand, the reporters could not make the Commissionerss' exploits too adventuresome and the inhabitants too inhospitable because it might discourage settlement. Historian Sarah Carter states that "tales of adventure and peril in remote lands peopled by strange 'primitive races' were enormously popular at that time" (1984: 27): this particular undertaking would have made for "good reading" for the newspaper-buying public back in "civilization."

Water and road transportation in the region is frequently mentioned: "They drove a buckboard and wagon from the crossing to within 25 miles of St. John in 4 days" (*Edmonton Bulletin*, August 31, 1899: 2). There are numerous mentions of improvements made to the modes of transportation, "McFee's Northwest government road cutting party had completed the road that far. All creeks were bridged and an excellent road had been made through the Big Muskeg" (*Edmonton Bulletin*, August 31, 1899: 2).

Land was an important topic for the newspapers to linger on. Approximately half the articles mention it as beautiful, lush, vast, and rich:

> The territory is of great area and vast and varied resources. It differs most radically in its different parts, from the high rolling bluff studded prairie of Peace River — the most beautiful piece of prairie land in the world — to the bare rocky shores of Lake Athabasca at Fond du Lac, also on the edge of the Great Grounds of the Arctic. There are hundreds of miles of fine agricultural and grazing land on Peace River (*Edmonton Bulletin*, August 31, 1899: 3).

Regarding the resources in the region the correspondent wrote:

> the most wide spread petroleum deposit in the known world [is] on the Athabasca River, splendid salt deposits near Fort Smith, excellent fisheries in the Athabasca and Great Slave and hundreds of smaller lakes, extensive timber lands in many localities and mineral deposits of many kinds of yet unknown value (ibid. August 31, 1899: 3).

These descriptions were meant to entice settlers. The *Edmonton Bulletin* further stated, "All [resources] are now open to the enterprise of civilization, under the full administration of the government of Canada" (August 31, 1899: 3). Stich notes that newspaper articles of that time can be viewed in the same light as the immigration pamphlets, "realistic-cum-romantic interpretations of the new country" (1976: 19). One must therefore remember that this entire exercise was designed to promote western settlement.

Many reports stated that the Indians had options and had been treated fairly in the treaty negotiations. They could accept treaty; accept scrip; or refuse both and remain as they were. However, the Indians were told that their lifestyle was about to change forever. They were told by Commissioner Ross that "White men are bound to come in and open up the land" (*Calgary Daily Herald*, July 29, 1899: 2). Although they were supposed to have a choice in whether to take treaty or scrip, historian John W. Chalmers states that the Commission brought Father Lacombe along to "persuade unwilling or suspicious Indians to accept the proposed treaty" (1981: 218).[12]

The terms of the Treaty were mentioned in approximately 30% of the articles: the treaty-making process was depicted as an "exchange of commodities." In signing the treaty the Indians surrendered the land, and promised to live within the laws of Canada and not molest the Whites. For surrendering the land, the Indians received a number of treaty promises which included: $5 per year for perpetuity, health care, education, as well as farm implements and other equipment to help insure their lifestyle and livelihood. There was thus a feeling that the Indians were being compensated for their relinquishment. The fact that options were given to Indians and Halfbreeds and that compensation was also offered helped to assure Canadians that they had treated their Indians better and more equitably than the Americans had treated theirs (Owram 1980: 131). It also assured Canadians that the land issue was resolved and that the land surrendered by the Indians was now available to them to settle.

The first treaty signing of Treaty 8 was the most extensively covered by the media. It occurred at Willow Point on June 21, 1899 and is mentioned as a ceremonial affair with gifts being given and speeches made by both the Indians and the Commissioners. The atmosphere is described as fair-like and excited, "Everything is in a whirl out here, excitement and fun galore. This is the first and perhaps the biggest blowout this section will see in our time" (*Edmonton Bulletin*, July 17, 1899: 2). Indian and Halfbreed money was said to have been easily spent. The *Edmonton Bulletin* observes that "the three eating joints are well patronized " (July 17, 1899: 2); and further that "money flowed like water from a spout ... Natives with few exceptions went the limit and spent it like they got it from a rich aunt" (*Edmonton Bulletin*, September 11, 1899:4).

Perhaps one of the most consistent features of the newspaper coverage was that the Commissioners were always mentioned by name. This is a courtesy afforded to many Whites (except the traders), to only a few Indians, and to even fewer Halfbreeds. Indians and Halfbreeds were generally addressed collectively. The only exceptions were in the naming of Kinoosayo (The Fish), Moostoos (The Bull), Wahpeehayo (White Partridge), Felix Giroux, the Captain, Neesnetasis, Wehtigo,

at the Willow Point signing[13] on June 21, 1899; and Kwiskwiskekapoohoo who signed at Vermilion. The only Halfbreeds named were three men who served as translators: they were Samuel Cunningham, Deschambault (an interpreter who traveled with the entourage), and a French Half-breed named "Bourassa" who spoke English, French, Beaver, Cree, and Chipewyan (*Edmonton Bulletin*, August 17, 1899: 3). The Commissioners are never addressed as simply "the commissioners," and Father Lacombe is never referred to as "a clergyman" or "an accompanying priest." The use of someone's name is both a sign of respect for that person and a symbol of importance; generally the Indians and the Halfbreeds were thus deemed less important, or at the very least less interesting.

The Halfbreeds were treated unfavourably in most reports. They were seen as uncooperative because of the refusal of many to accept land scrip:

> At the Crossing on the way up the Commissioners had some controversy with the natives and only 11 scrip were issued. The Commissioners ... will issue the balance of the scrip on their return provided the half breeds have then arrived at a conclusion as to what they want (*Alberta Tribune*, August, 15, 1899: 2).

They were also seen as covetous because of their desire for "cash scrip" which would not bode well with a newspaper-reading audience replete with individuals waiting for an opportunity to own land themselves. The idea that someone might forego the opportunity to own land was unthinkable. The Halfbreeds were then seen as being uncaring of the land and more interested in the short-term gain of money than in the long-term benefit of being landowners.

The Commissioners were said to be frustrated by the Halfbreeds who would not allow the government to look out for their best interests, "The intention of the government and Commissioners had been to issue the scrip surrounded by as many precautions against transfer as possible, and to make it necessary to execute an assignment before the scrip could be registered" (*Calgary Daily Herald*, July 13, 1899: 3). It seems the Commissioners were trying to protect the Halfbreeds from land speculators who traveled in the area and purchased scrip at cut-rate prices, "The highest price paid for scrip was at the Landing. There the competition was very keen and up to $130 was paid for $240 scrip. The lowest price was at Vermilion and Wolverine point on Peace River. There the price was as low as $70" (*Edmonton Bulletin*, September 25, 1899: 2).

The treatment of the Indians by the newspapers is consistent with public sentiments at the time. Fraser Pakes speaks of the image of the Indian running the gamut from extreme positivity to extreme negativity (1985: 1), and observes that many nineteenth-century Whites, while seeking a link to a simpler past by romanticizing and stereotyping Indians as athletic, noble, and pure (ibid.: 8), nevertheless saw them as fierce and savage. Stories of attacks by Indians, of brutality, scalpings and other mutilations received widespread coverage in eastern magazines and newspapers (ibid.: 10).

The Indians wavered between being "problematic" and being "meek." On the negative side, they were described as "thinking the land is theirs" (*Alberta Plaindealer*, May 4, 1899: 1) and "asking a lot of questions and driving a hard bargain" (*Edmonton Bulletin*, September 11, 1899: 4). This might have caused anxiety

amongst the newspaper readers waiting for land. They were "difficult to deal with" according to an *Edmonton Bulletin* account which stated, "In fact the Chipewyans are much more difficult to deal with than the Crees, and in all probability will require much longer to deal with" (August 29, 1899: 2). The Indians were also shown as amoral. The *Edmonton Bulletin* wrote, "dozens of cases cropped up where grown up people did not know their parents' names... Here is an elegant chance for some investigation on the part of any order interested in missionary work" (July 17, 1899: 2). Rumors about the Treaty were said to have been circulated by the Indians, "Their little acquaintance with the Whites had made it possible to circulate silly stories amongst them with some success" (*Edmonton Bulletin*, September 11, 1899: 4). All of these negative portrayals could have served as just cause for the non-Aboriginal newspaper-reading audience to obtain the land which they could and would appreciate much more than would the difficult, amoral and rumor-mongering Indians and Halfbreeds.

On the other hand they are also described as being patient. After waiting 11 days for the Commissioners it was reported that "they waited patiently with a patience not known to White men" (*Alberta Tribune*, July 15, 1899: 2). They were shown as good natured, "It is worth the trip out here to see them lose. They are the best losers on earth — if you get their money, it's all right, they will just laugh as loud and perhaps a trifle heartier than you" (*Edmonton Bulletin*, July 17, 1899: 2). Sometimes, they were also portrayed as civilized and well dressed, "the Commissioners found no Indians wearing blankets or any other relic of savagery but men were all dressed in good suits, wore hats and white shirts, collars and frequently boots. The women wore well-made dresses and hats on their heads instead of shawls" (*Alberta Plaindealer*, September 1, 1899: 1).

At times, the Indians were also depicted as prosperous "They [Beavers] number 40-50 and families are said to be very well off" (*Alberta Tribune*, September 9, 1899: 1). Prosperity amongst the Indians of the region might suggest to Whites that they could certainly obtain wealth from the region as well. Given the attitude of European superiority over the Indians prevalent at the time, it might be thought that if the Indians could get rich — so could any White man.

Conclusion

The newspaper reports that came out of Treaty 8 were consistent with the mandate of the "Third Press Period": the aim was to reinforce the government's national policy of promoting immigration and settlement of the west. The newspaper with the most treaty coverage in my sample was the *Edmonton Bulletin*; the owner of the *Edmonton Bulletin* was Frank Oliver,[14] who was also a member of parliament representing the Edmonton. As a member of Parliament (MP) one can assume that he would push government policy, but in addition to his duties as an MP he was also a trader/merchant in Edmonton: he thus stood to benefit personally from increased immigration to the area through the sale of goods to both those who remained in Edmonton and those who used Edmonton as a point of departure for places farther north. Oliver had both the motivation (personal gain) and the opportunity (through the press) to promote western settlement: he could be called a booster. The press took an active role in the "boosterism" of the

time, and constructing reality was and still is part of its job; press coverage was therefore pro-development, pro-immigration, pro-treaty, and anti-dissension.

The main issue for the newspapers was the land: they basically told prospective homesteaders that the "coast was clear" for settlement in the region. Not only was the land abundant, vast and rich in resources, but transportation to the new areas was improving. The region had many inducements for the settler: land ownership was practically guaranteed; prosperity was predicted, and resources were "there for the taking."

The Indians and the Halfbreeds who had signed treaties or taken scrip were no longer a threat to the newcomers: an exchange of commodities had taken place between them and the Crown through the treaty-making process and the issuance of scrip. The land issue had been settled: it now belonged to the Crown, although government representatives told the Indians and Halfbreeds that the land had belonged to the Queen all along. The Indians and Halfbreeds reportedly entered the agreements freely: the fact that an exchange of commodities had occurred and that the agreements were entered willingly allowed well-meaning Canadians to feel they had "done right by the Indians."

Indians were portrayed as both exotic (to titillate the readers, but not so fiercesome as to frighten them) and familiar (to set the newcomers at ease). The government had given the Indians an opportunity to become farmers. The newspapers drew therefore many similarities between the Indians and the Whites: not only were they similar in dress and manner, but they would likely share an occupation in the future. The Indians were also said to be prospering, which of course meant that the Whites would have every opportunity to become wealthy.

The Treaty 8 region was settled through the government's national policy of promoting immigration to and settlement of the west. The newspapers assisted this process by assuring potential settlers that everything was ready for future settlement since the land now belonged to the Queen. After the extensive media coverage given the treaty signing and the "exchange of goods" between the Queen's representatives and the Indians, the newspaper-reading public could be assured that the Indians could no longer "think they own the land."

The treaty-making process did not put an end to the land issue for either the First Nations people or the government. Differing interpretations of "land ownership" have caused disagreement between First Nations and the government to this day. The discord began with the concept of land ownership. Fundamentally, First Nations people do not believe that land can be "owned" and that our Mother Earth sustains us as human beings. This idea is very different than the non-Aboriginal view of land as "real estate."

As it turns out, the government does not have absolute ownership of the land as asserted in the 1899 newspaper reports. First Nations and the governments (both federal and provincial) are involved in comprehensive and specific land claims to determine ownership of the land and who receives the benefits from resources derived from the land. In fact, First Nations continue to have interests in the lands ceded to the Crown through the Treaties. One hundred years later, First Nations people still "think they own the land" and debating their position, just as they did in 1899.

Notes

This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Treaty 8 Centenary Conference held in Grouard, Alberta, June 17–19, 1999.

1. The *Alberta Plaindealer* was published in Edmonton from 1896 to 1900 when it became the *Strathcona Plaindealer* (Strathern 1988: 320).
2. I use the term "Indian" whenever I refer to the newspaper articles. Under normal circumstances I would address this group as "First Nations" which is what we now call ourselves. The Indians involved in the Treaty 8 signing in 1899 included: Cree, Beaver, Chipewyan, and Slave. The Indians involved in the 1900 Treaty 8 signing included: Beaver, Cree, Slave, Dogrib, Yellowknife, Chipewyan, and Sekani.
3. I use the term "Halfbreed" in this paper because it is used in the newspaper articles. Under normal circumstances I would address this group as "Metis" which is what they now call themselves. The Halfbreeds received scrip throughout the region in both 1899 and 1900.
4. The Treaty Commissioners included David Laird, James Ross, and J.A.J. McKenna with Harrison Young and J.W. Martin serving as their secretaries. Halfbreed Scrip Commissioners were Major James Walker and J.A. Cootie. Charles Mair and J.F. Prudhomme were their secretaries.
5. This treaty involved 324,000 square miles of land — an area about three-quarters the size of Ontario (Oberle 1986: 1).
6. The last numbered treaty prior to 1899 was Treaty 7, which was signed in 1877 in southern Alberta.
7. The 1899 treaty signings include: June 21, 1899 at Lesser Slave Lake, Alberta (Cree) ; July 1, 1899 at Peace River Landing, Alberta (Cree); July 6, 1899 at Dunvegan, Alberta (Beaver); July 8, 1899 at (Fort) Vermilion, Alberta (Beaver and Cree); July 13, 1899 at Fort Chipewyan, Alberta (Chipewyan and Cree); July 17, 1899 at Smith's Landing, Northwest Territories (Chipewyan); July 25 & 27 at Fond du Lac, Saskatchewan (Chipewyan); August 4, 1899 at Fort McMurray, Alberta (Chipewyan and Cree); and August 14, 1899 at Wapiscow Lake, Alberta (Cree).
8. The 1900 treaty signings include: May 30, 1900 at Fort St. John, British Columbia (Beaver); June 8, 1900 at Sturgeon Lake, Alberta (Cree); June 23 at Fort Vermilion, Alberta (Slave); July 25, 1900 at Fort Resolution, North West Territories (Dogrib, Yellowknife, Slave and Chipewyan); and August 15, 1900 at Fort Nelson, British Columbia (Slave and Sekani).
9. I examine this by conducting a content/discourse analysis of 39 newspaper articles drawn from 1899 Alberta print media. The newspapers used in this paper include: the *Edmonton Bulletin*, the *Calgary Daily Herald*, the *Calgary Weekly Herald*, the *Alberta Tribune*, the *Alberta Plaindealer*, and the *Medicine Hat News*.
10. These newspapers usually have very different perspectives on the same issue although they have the same owner.
11. These data were obtained from 39 articles collected from newspaper microfilm. The majority of the newspapers (37 of 39 or 95 percent) were from the 4-month period from May to September, 1899 with the remaining 2 articles published in 1898. Slightly more than half of the articles (56 percent) were published in the *Edmonton Bulletin* (which incidentally was owned by Edmonton businessman, booster, and member of Parliament Frank Oliver), which had a newspaper reporter accompanying the Commissioner's entourage. There is speculation about who the reporter might be or if there was a reporter at all. Some say the reporter might have been Duncan Marshall while others speculate that it was Charles Mair who might have been the correspondent.
12. Father Lacombe was paid $10 per day by the government to accompany the Commissioners for the duration of the treaty-making process. The average man at that time made about $1 per day.
13. The Indians did not actually sign the treaty with their signature or with an "X" but touched the pen with their finger to signify their agreement. The "X" and their signatures were written by the commissioner.
14. Frank Oliver became one of the most notorious promoters of Indian reserve land surrenders. In fact, he is implicated in the questionable surrender of the Michel Band land west of Edmonton, Alberta.

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