**The First Nations People in the Northwest   
(1870-1877)**

**Study Guide**

**The Whisky Traders:**

During 1870’s the control of the Northwest was passed from the HBC to the Canadian Government.

One of the first problems that faced Ottawa was a fur-trade issue.

By the early 1870’s the American fur traders in the southwest part of the North-West territories (present day southern Alberta) caused trouble.

The Canadian Fur Trade had been controlled by the HBC since 1821 and the American Fur trade was taken over by smaller, independent companies.

**What did they trade?**  
The companies traded strong, cheap liquor to the Natives Peoples of the region in return for buffalo robes and other fur.

The principal post was called Fort Whoop-Up.

**The impact of the whiskey traders:**

The liquor that was traded led to a widespread alcoholism among the Natives peoples. It resulted in malnutrition, disease to the point of death.

**The North West Mounted Police: (NWMP)**

By 1872, the Canadian government decided that the Northwest required some sort of policing. In 1873, the North West Mounted Police was created. It served as both a police force and a **paramilitary government** (an unofficial military organization)

**What was there goal?**

The NWMP’s task was to drive out the Whisky traders and regain control over the entire North West Territories.

**The Incident**:

The process of driving out the Whisky traders was quickened by an incident that involved both whisky traders and the Assiniboin peoples.

The spring of 1874, a group of Assiniboin was attacked by a party of whisky traders in Cypress Hills. (Present day Southern Saskatchewan)

30 Assiniboin lost their lives. This is now known as the **Cypress Hills Massacre.**

The NWMP sent 300 troops into the prairies to establish control of the area. Unfortunately, by the time they arrived the whisky traders fled to the US.

**The NWMP and the Natives:**

The NWMP was welcomed by the Native peoples, who believed the police might put an end to the lawlessness that has overpowered the region for more than a decade.

**Treaties with the Native Peoples:**

The government’s main goal was to open the North-West Territories and Manitoba to Canadian and European settlement.

But, the question of the aboriginal title had to be settled first.

By 1870, with the exception of the Selkirk settlement, all of the land in the Northwest was under aboriginal control.

The aboriginal groups wondered about their fate under a Canadian government, and they wanted to make the best possible deal for their future.

In 1870, the government began negotiating treaties with the Native peoples through the Department of Indian Affairs. Indian Commissioner W. Simpson went to Manitoba and began various talks with the Cree and Salteaux peoples. The end of August 1871, Simpson concluded Treaties 1 and 2, and the Native peoples of Manitoba no longer claimed their traditional homeland.

Between 1874 and 1877, the Canadian government concluded five more treaties with the aboriginal peoples of the prairies.

**The Indian Act of 1876:**

The Natives were concerned when the Canadian Government introduced the Indian Act of 1876, which placed Native peoples on reserves, and tore Native children away from their families and dignity and were forced to attend residential schools.

**W. Simpson’s thoughts:**

The Canadian Government was impressed with this outcome and there was rarely any space for negotiation on the plates of the Native peoples.

Simpson’s quote in Treaty Number 1:

*“God intends this land to raise great crops for all his children and the time is come when it is to be used for that purpose. White people will come here to cultivate it under any circumstances. No power on earth can prevent it”*

Ay-ee-ta-pe-pe-tung, a Cree elder replied to Simpson:

*“I have turned this matter of a treaty in my mind and cannot see anything in it to benefit my children. This is what frightens me. After I showed you what I meant to keep for a reserve, you continued to make it smaller and smaller...Let the Queen’s subjects go on my land if they choose. I give them liberty. Let them rob me. I will go home...”*

**What did the Natives received?**

The Cree and the Salteaux did not want to give up all their land-they wanted to control about 60 percent of the land that made up Manitoba.

Simpson offered 160 acres (64.7 hectares) for every family of five. The offer was no acceptable for the Cree or the Salteaux. But, they were able to get farm equipment, supplies, and instruction in farming techniques in return for land.

**When the Treaties were signed:**

Treaty Number 1 was finally signed on August 3, 1871. Treaty Number 2, which gave the government title to the forests lands between Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba, was signed on August 21, 1871.

Compared to the original lands held by Native Peoples, the reserves that were set aside for them were now tiny. The Canadian Government had no intention of living up to its bargain.

**Natives and Farming:**

The Natives of the prairie welcomed the fact of becoming farmers, as their traditional lifestyle has been endangered because of the extinction of bison herds.

**HOWEVER**, the promised tools, supplies, and animals promised by the government never came through, and their standard of living began to decline. The Canadian government never wanted the Native peoples to become profitable farmers. They only wanted the Natives to farm enough food for their own use.

Indian Commissioner, Hayter Reid would say it was “unnatural” for the Native people to use farm machinery. Even though it was impossible to grow and harvest wheat without it. The Canadian government never wanted the Natives to become competition to the white farmers and make money off the surplus of wheat for cash.

Reed stated that if the Native peoples grew too much food-more than they needed for their own use, they were planting too much wheat.

Natives abandoned the idea of farming and became dependant on the government for survival. Between 1874 and 1877, the Canadian government concluded five more treaties with the aboriginal peoples of the prairies. The government wanted to conclude the treaty process as quickly as possible because European settlement of the prairies could not begin until the North West had been surveyed.

In 1876, it introduced the Indian Act-it confirmed that the Native peoples would be required to live on reserves and it stripped Native children from basic rights and were sent to residential schools.

The government felt that they were helping the Native because of offer of a small amount of land, and the opportunity to become farmers, it was not the best option but it was better than the other alternative-death.

The government recruited a number of local Catholic missionaries as translators, who encouraged the Native peoples to sign the treaties. The missionaries did not want the Natives to starve and they wanted them to become productive members of new society.

**The conclusion:**

Neither the government nor the Catholic missionaries ever considered the cultural clash it would cause. The treaty process and the creation of reserves destroyed the Native culture.





North West Mounted Police Signed Treaties

*Group Questions:*

*In groups of 4 discuss the following issues:*

*1. Why do you suppose the Canadian government did not provide an effective program of financial and technical support for the Native peoples relocated on reserves?*

*2. In your group discuss possible alternatives to the treaty process as conducted by the Canadian Government. Was there a better way of ensuring settlement without as much disruption to the Native peoples?*