

MISSISSAUGAS OF THE CREDIT - PAST AND PRESENT

In the mid-eighteenth century the Ojibway occupied almost all of southern Ontario. The New Credit people's ancestors themselves owned all the territory from Long Point on Lake Erie to the headwaters of the Thames, Grand, Humber, and Rouge Rivers. New Credit is nine square miles in size; that is all that remains of their once-expansive property.

When the French arrived in Canada, the Ojibway were living around the shores of Lakes Huron and Superior.

In the spring, families gathered to collect maple sugar, to fish and in the fall, to cut wild rice. In the winter months, they hunted and trapped in small family units. With furs they could trade with the French for European goods.

To the south were living a different Indian, with a different language and culture. They were the Iroquois. In the early seventeenth century, fierce warfare raged between the two large Iroquoian groups, the Hurons and the Iroquois Five Nations. After routing the Hurons the Five Nations attacked the Ojibway who had sheltered many refugee Hurons. The Ojibway defeated the invaders in several battles on Lake Superior, then on Lake Huron. By 1700, they had conquered most of Southern Ontario. Some of the Ojibway who went south came from the Mississagi River area on the north shore of the North Channel, which is located at the head of Lake Huron. Consequently, the French, and later the British, termed these Indians, "Mississaugas Indians". With the defeat of the Iroquois by the Ojibway Indians, and the dispersement of the Hurons, the entire area formerly occupied by the

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Iroquois and Huron was now inhabited by the Ojibway tribes.

Although a majority of the Ojibways remained in the Lake Huron and Georgian Bay areas, the band from the Mississagi River began to drift towards the south-east section of Upper Canada.

As the tribe travelled, they eventually came to the river where one group continued to drift south and the other group began to follow the direction of the river flowing south-east.

The Mississaugas travelled along the river until they came to Lake Ontario. While they may have wandered along the shores of this lake, their favourite camping grounds were at the mouth of the river. This camp site became known as the "Indian Village".

In the 1720's the French set up a trading post at the mouth of the river, near the Indian Village for the purpose of trading with the Mississauga Indians.

Trading with the French sometimes went on for days. If the Indian did not have enough furs to trade for whatever goods he wanted, he was allowed to take the goods on credit. The Indians traded this way and the post became known as the "Credit Trading Post". The river was named the "Credit River" and the Mississaugas Indians (who had been named from the Mississagi River) became known as the "Mississaugas of the River Credit Indians".

An English woman who had travelled with her husband to the Credit Trading Post published a book in which she says of the Mississaugas Indians: "This might seem a hazardous arrangement, yet I have been assured by those men long engaged in the trade that for an Indian

to break his debt is a thing unheard of". If, by any personal accident he should be prevented from bringing the stipulated number of beaver skins, his relatives and close friends consider their honour implicated and make up the quantity for him.

During the American Revolution, Europeans began to occupy the Mississaugas' lands. In the 1780's several thousand United Empire Loyalists arrived, including most of the Six Nations Confederacy (the adhesion of the Tuscaroras in 1712 made the Five Nations into the Six Nations).

The Mississaugas embraced the Iroquois, their traditional enemies, as they would brothers.

In order to present a united front to the white newcomers, they elected Captain Joseph Brant, of the Six Nations as one of their chiefs. Thousands of American immigrants followed in the next two decades. Forced to sign treaties, many Mississaugas retreated farther north to find new hunting grounds. Hunting was becoming impossible in the south. The farmers cut the forests, wild game declined. By 1812 farms covered the area. Towns grew up, first on the lake front, then at the cross roads. The Mississaugas wandered over the countryside searching for fish and wild game. By the third decade of the nineteenth century, the Mississaugas were outnumbered by more than one hundred to one by the white settlers. They were beginning to become outcasts in their own land.

Many aspects of traditional Mississauga society had changed; their religious practices, their occupations, even their dress. Yet, despite this, the Mississaugas still wanted to remain an Indian people.

When the white settlers began to surround the Indian Village at the River Credit, the head chief Joseph Sawyer called a council with his people to discuss moving to a new area.

On 6 August, 1840 Chiefs Joseph Sawyer and John Jones commenced a council meeting-giving priority to the decision of whether or not to move from the Indian Village. This matter was discussed for the next six years, as a decision was not made until the winter of 1846. By this time, John Jones had retired from council and was replaced by Reverend Peter Jones, his nephew. All possible locations for relocation had been investigated by Chiefs Joseph Sawyer and Peter Jones. They had recalled that before the outbreak of the war between the French and British, the Mississaugas and the Six Nations Confederacy had a verbal agreement with their councils, allowing the Six Nations a certain tract of land. A condition was that they were to offer the Mississaugas land if they should ever desire to move from their village at the Credit River. This agreement between the two bands was later put on paper and made binding by Lt. Governor Haldimand. He also arranged for the surrendering and purchase of the land from the Mississaugas Indians for which the tract of land sold to the Crown for £2,000. It was by this former verbal agreement that the Six Nations offered the Mississaugas the 6,000 acres when they decided to move from the Indian Village.

So, in the spring of 1847, and upon agreement with the Six Nations Confederacy, the Mississaugas of the Credit band moved to a tract of land which formerly belonged to them; and purchased by the Crown and then granted to the Six Nations.

Approximately 266 members of the Mississaugas of the Credit Indians moved from the Indian Village that year. Some of the more common names were; Sawyer, Halfday, Finger, Herkimer, King, Chechock, Sault, LaForme, and Johns. With the sale of their land at the Credit River these people were to receive money for the work they had put into the land. Such as clearing fields, fences, houses, and any other improvements they had given the land. With the money they received for their improvements at the Indian Village, they were to begin again at the "New Credit Reserve".

The Indian Act was written up and accepted in 1886. A reserve is defined by the Indian Act as a tract of land, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, that has been set apart by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of the band. Although the lands were set apart for the Indians, they were not given the legal title and the title was to remain with the Crown.

On 15 June, 1903 the Mississaugas bought the 6,000 acres for the sum of \$10,000. An agreement with the Six Nations was entered that the Mississaugas will secure for all time the right of undisturbed use and occupancy of the land.

The reserve, as it stands today, consists of Lots 1 to 12 in the first and second Concessions in the Township of Tuscarora in the County of Brant which contains 4,800 acres and Lots 1 to 6 in the first Concession in the Township of Oneida which contains the other 1,200 acres; 6,000 acres altogether.

The Elective System started in 1924. Prior to this, the Mississaugas

maintained hereditary chiefs. This, however, no longer exists. The elective system is how we elect our Chief and Councillors.

The Chief is elected by a majority of votes of the electors and holds office for a term of two years. The five Councillors are elected in the same way and also hold office for two years.

The population of the reserve today is approximately 520 people. Half of the residents live off the reserve during the winter months due to a lack of work here on the reserve. Most of the men work away from the reserve in such places as Brantford, Hamilton, Nanticoke; but some travel as far as the United States or up north in order to provide for their family on the reserve.

Although the land is very rich and fertile our land is leased by non-Indians. The reason for this is because of the systematic way in which the whites conduct their business. The Indian cannot go to a bank or loan company to borrow money to farm with, because we have no collateral. Therefore, we cannot go into any type of farming or agriculture. Regardless, the New Credit Reserve has prospered and grown. This is evident by the increase in the reserve's population from 266 to 520 in the past 128 years.

Although there are no local industries maintained on the reserve, negotiations are being made by the present chief and councillors to put both band property and band members into a profitable enterprise. A factory was started 30 April, 1971 which produced burlap insulation pads for car seats but was discontinued. Since the fall of 1972 the ex-factory building has been an Adult Education Resource Centre, operated through Mohawk College in Brantford and has been held on the

reserve for the last three years. Members of both the New Credit and the Six Nations reserves have attended and benefited.

New Credit also maintains it's own Council House, Public School, Research Department, Welfare Administration and Athletic Park.

There are also three historical sites on New Credit as well as a few homesteads that are over 100 years old.

The first site is the Council House where the hereditary chiefs held council until the change to the elective system in 1924 was introduced, and is now where the council meetings are held by the chief and councillors. The Council House was built in 1850.

The second site is the New Credit Church. The church was first a simple frame building erected by local labour and completed on 27 July, 1852 but was bricked almost 20 years later. Sunday services and meetings are still held in the church today.

The third site is the New Credit Parsonage. It once housed the circuit preachers and later on the ordained ministers. The parsonage was completed 7 September, 1851.

There are two schools on the reserve. One is an old frame building which is still being used today and was built in 1938. The first Indian teacher in the old school was Mr. J. C. Hill. The new school was completed on 5 October, 1965 and an official opening ceremony held on 20 May, 1966.

There are also two Federal Government Programs on the reserve. One is the Housing program which allows the people five new homes a year. The other program is the Sanitation program; both of which were introduced in 1956 and are allotted at the discretion of the Council.

Roads are maintained through grants to the band and are budgeted to

last the full year.

Over the past two centuries, the Mississaugas Indians have been transformed twice. The hunters and fishermen first became farmers. With the advance of industry, the grandsons of these farmers learned to work in modern factories.

The Mississaugas may have chosen to adopt the white man's way in order to survive, but no matter how many surface changes are made, their background, culture and heritage will always remain Indian.

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