

# *Edmonton Pentimento:<sup>1</sup> Re-Reading History in the Case of the Papaschase Cree*

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People tell stories not only to remember, but also to hope.  
Neal McLeod (2002, p. 43)

'I want you to remember only this one thing,' said the Badger. 'The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them anywhere they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memories. This is how people care for themselves.'

Barry Lopez (1990, p. 48)

A few years ago, I went with my family to visit the cabin that my dad was raised in. From the time he was an infant, Dad lived with his grandma in a cabin in the area of Cooking Lake, Alberta. He was fifteen years old when she died, and he made the decision to move into the city of Edmonton. This meant leaving the cabin and the community behind. The cabin is an important place for us to visit because being out there brings

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<sup>1</sup> Pentimento: the phenomenon of earlier painting showing through a layer or layers of paint on a canvas. (Canadian Oxford Dictionary). This concept for a title is derived from Seed, P. (2001). *American pentimento: The invention of Indians and the pursuit of riches*.

back many memories for him, and we all enjoy listening to his stories. When we arrived at the site of the home, I was surprised to find that the land had been turned into a private campground. It was even more surprising to see that the campground had been built around the cabin. The cabin, as a kind of centerpiece to the campground, had been left as an artifact of times past concealed by the trees, bushes and grass that had been allowed to grow up around it. We approached the cabin, and my brother and I began poking around the inside of it. As we did this, campers from nearby sites, curious themselves, were drawn toward our group and began assembling around the cabin with us. Then, a woman arrived who explained that the cabin had been the home of an old Cree woman and her grandson. In that moment, my dad became an artifact of his own history on the very land that bears his memories and stories. What we did not know at the time was that the uncovering of these family stories and memories would lead us back to the place that we now know as Edmonton.



The next thing I remember is asking my mom about the old woman shown in the photograph. "That's Betsy Brass," she explains. "She's your great, great grandma." As this paper shows, the act of remembering has traveled full circle.

This is a paper about reclaiming memories of my family and, by extension, Canadian public memory. Using memories of my dad's family and place and the photograph of Betsy Brass as starting points, I argue that the Aboriginal people that lived in the region of the city of

Edmonton, Alberta have been written out of the official history of that place. The stories that Aboriginal people tell of Edmonton were forgotten when the city started to grow and modernize. This tendency to separate the stories of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people is one symptom of the legacies of colonialism and paternalism that have, both subtly and plainly, characterized Canadian society. Most Canadians can plainly see that Aboriginal people lived in the place we call Canada before Euro-Canadians arrived, especially in place names like *Saskatchewan*, *Manitoba*, *Wetaskiwin*, or *Medicine Hat*. Canadians can also plainly see that there are Aboriginal languages, traditions, and cultures that are uniquely adapted to this land in interesting ways, although most would argue that these are outdated and largely irrelevant. What is more subtle, and what is often not noticed or acknowledged, is that Aboriginal people and Euro-Canadians are intimately connected through the stories they tell of living together in this place. This relationship persists to this day, despite the distrust, misunderstandings, and animosities that punctuate it. It is in these relationships between people, and the ways in which the stories people tell reveal these relationships, that a new form of Canadian citizenship can be imagined.

The title of this paper, *Edmonton Pentimento: Re-Reading History in the Case of the Papaschase Cree* represents two important and related ideas: *pentimento* and *re-reading history*. *Pentimento* is a concept borrowed from the study of painting that I have chosen as a metaphor for the problem of historicism. The history of Aboriginal people before and after contact with Europeans has been 'painted over' by mainstream interpretations of official history. In that sense, we can say that an attempt was made to displace or replace Aboriginal history and memory (as the history of Canada) with a new 'painting' of a new civilization. The Aboriginal 'painting' was not considered to be a useful or viable portrayal of the new brand of Canadian society that was emerging. It became a separate and distinct item in an isolated part of the museum of Canadian history. However, Aboriginal history and memory has begun to show through in the official history of Canada, conceptual holes in the historical narratives have become obvious, and this has caused many to look more closely to see what has been missed. This kind of *re-reading of history* is predicated on the desire to recover the stories and memories that have been 'painted over.'

This inquiry began with the photograph of Betsy Brass, but was guided by the motif of *pentimento* as a way to peel back the layers of memory that are encapsulated in that single artifact. In order to make sense of the photograph, I have had to re-read much of my own family history against the official history of the city of Edmonton as a way to tease out that which has been obscured and forgotten, to peel back the layers of official Canadian history and memory obscuring it. *Pentimento* implies a desire to scrape away layers that have obscured or altered our

perceptions of an artifact or memory as a way to intimately examine the character of those layers. Doing *pentimento* does not imply a search for an original and pure beginning hidden underneath the layers. Rather, the idea of *pentimento* operates on the acknowledgment that each layer mixes with the other and renders irreversible influences on our perceptions of it. Much like my visit to the cabin, doing *pentimento* requires us to pull back those things obscuring our perceptions of an idea, explore the place for a while, and pay closer attention to the ways the place has changed over the years. Interpreting these changes and drawing attention to the memories and stories that have been forgotten is the focus of this paper.

My own personal narrative telling the story of the Papaschase Cree as a contemporary concern over identity, culture, and memory frames this essay. The story told through this narrative is supported by interpretation, as well as three photographs depicting people and places integral to the telling of this story: Frank Oliver (a journalist and politician), Frank Oliver's home, and Betsy Brass. I have also included a historical map of the Papaschase Reserve, as well as an historical artifact obtained by my family. These artifacts assist in the re-reading of the official history of the city of Edmonton. This intertextuality, and the fact that this essay needs to tell many different stories to somehow represent the memory of the Papaschase Cree, makes this inquiry an example of a curriculum of *métissage* (Donald, 2003).

*Métissage*, from which the Canadian word *Métis* is derived, is an approach to research that often begins with autobiographical texts as a starting point for further interpretations. What these autobiographical texts reveal is that experiences and memories are often influenced by multiple sources and perspectives. The act of doing *métissage* is initiated when we begin questioning the multiple conditions and contexts which give rise to those experiences and memories, as well as the character of the particular places and spaces from which they originate. By drawing on multiple sources and contexts, creating texts of *métissage* can provoke a collective wondering regarding the connectedness of history and memory. The critical potentiality of *métissage* is that it can act as a metaphor for both the fluid and discordant mixture of race, language, culture, and gender that constitutes postcolonial<sup>2</sup> experience and identity (Zuss, 1997, p. 166). Creating texts of *métissage* implies an attempt to describe the braided and polysemic character of our lives, experiences, histories, and memories that are all, contemporaneously, personal as well

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<sup>2</sup> I use this term warily. I am mindful of the problems with postcolonial theory as it applies to Aboriginal people in Canada (Maracle, 1992). In this context, I use the term to indicate that, although colonial structures persist to this day, the dynamics of the contemporary relationships between Aboriginal and nonAboriginal people in Canada play out in a variety of ways. We have not moved past colonialism; rather, we are struggling to live well within the structures and forces that continue to influence the ways in which people interact and speak to one another.

as collective. The mutable and hybrid nature of acts of *métissage* allows writers and readers to creatively reflect upon the relationships that exist between the social, cultural, and historical *milieux* and personal experiences of individuals living in societies coming to terms with the history of colonialism. By weaving multiple and composite identities, *métissage* facilitates the articulation of

new visions of ourselves, new concepts that allow us to think *otherwise*, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground and the very condition of possibility of thought, of 'clarity,' in all of Western philosophy. *Métissage* is such a concept and practice: it is a site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages. (Lionnet, 1989, p. 6)

The value of *métissage* as a form of curriculum theorizing, especially as it concerns Aboriginal and nonAboriginal perspectives of Canada and the world, is in the ways it can demonstrate interrelatedness. Most major curriculum projects in Canada dedicated to addressing Aboriginal perspectives have been couched in terms of inclusion, as though the 'story' can be added on at the end of the course if there is time and if people are still interested. Another common approach is to offer the tipis, food, legends and costumes version of Aboriginal reality, which gives the unfortunate impression that Aboriginal people have not done much since the buffalo disappeared. To properly address Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum, Canadians need to re-discover the historical and current connections between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people in Canada, even if these connections are not always pleasant to discuss. This implies that official versions of history and society must be contested through a process of active and critical re-reading as a way to re-present what has been left out. This view is part of a growing trend among people working in the field of curriculum theory in Canada who wish to articulate the "usually invisible relations" linking the people, places and ideas characterizing their inquiries (Sumara, Davis & Laidlaw, 2001, p. 150). Such curriculum theorizing can be seen as a part of a growing challenge to Canadian curriculum theorists to "seek out or create interpretative tools that allow [them] to write and interpret who Canadians are, what we know, and where we want to go, all the while remaining cognizant of an important truism: there will be no single answer to these questions" (Chambers, 1999, 146).

The implications of these ideas are that any curriculum project dedicated to a consideration of Aboriginal perspectives should be mindful of the day-to-day events that have connected, and will continue to connect Aboriginal and non Aboriginal in Canada. Some may question the extent to which personal stories of particular places can really embody multiplicity, connectedness, and a sense of collective experience

derived from living in the place we call Canada. Others would argue that nations and peoples that were colonized must avoid endorsing any projects that could be perceived as muddling their essential notions of identity and history, or risk appearing inauthentic as cultural groups (Childs & Williams, 1997, pp. 158-164). However, I would argue that any useful attempt to understand social, political, historical, and economic forces in the world requires a genuine desire to establish some terms for fostering intercultural dialogue. One of the vital beginnings for such a project is an awareness of the “historically constituted present state of affairs, with the capacity for illuminating how any humanly livable future begins by acknowledging those historically derived debts and obligations that are part of any identity of the present” (Smith, 1999, p. 10). We must pay closer attention to the multiple ways our human sense of ‘being together’ is constructed through the minutiae of day-to-day events, through the stories and interactions which always are imbued with a living principle of reciprocity, and hence moral responsibility for a shared future.

Now, having made that statement, I will tell one such story. It goes like this.

“Where are you from?” The question is usually asked with a tone of familiarity and camaraderie that distracts me and leaves me not wanting to answer. “I’m from Edmonton,” I reluctantly reply, and then I wait for the response that I have seen many times before. This response is rarely verbal. Mostly, I receive nonverbal cues—looks of confusion, uncertainty, the slow, half-hearted nodding of the head. These work together to give one message: “I thought this guy was an Indian, but I guess he’s not....”

## Which *Indian* Are You?

Who is *Indian*? From the beginning of its creation as a concept describing the people of the so-called New World, the idea of *Indian* has been, at best, enigmatic. An overdone historical account tells us that Christopher Columbus believed that the Aboriginal people of North America that he met over five hundred years ago were inhabitants of islands southeast of the southernmost tip of India. Believing that he was in India, *las Indias*, he naturally referred to these people as *los Indios*, or Indians (Moffat & Sebastián, 1998, pp. 15-16). Columbus cannot really be blamed for making such a mistake; his efforts and perspectives on exploration and conquest were clearly products of European society at that time. What is astonishing is that this misnomer, and the connotations attached to it, has resisted irrelevancy to this day. It is worth noting that Columbus believed he had discovered not just a New World, but an Edenic New World as described in the Bible, and the quest to discover this paradise on earth had preoccupied European consciousness throughout the Middle Ages

(pp. 15-56). "The Native Americans first found by him, therefore, were inevitably assumed to partake of those same Indian-Edenic characteristics that had been discussed throughout the Middle Ages in Europe" (p. 53). Thus, right from the very beginning of the use of the term *Indian*, Indians were conceptualized as people with specific characteristics and inclinations.

Since the time of Columbus, this condition of being "overdetermined from without" has persisted to bedevil Aboriginal people in diverse and damaging ways (Fanon, 1967, p. 116). This means that the processes of colonialism, through various social, cultural, legal, and political forces, have suppressed the identification of the character of the colonized in favour of the colonizer's version of events and people, and consequently the colonized have been defined in European terms. This orientation towards the colonized derives from the European belief that knowledge diffuses out from the cultural center of Europe and that any person with roots in the periphery was thus rendered a "savage" and marginalized as such (Battiste, 1998, p. 22). "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (Bhabha, 1986, p. 154). To define *Indian* in their own terms was advantageous for the colonizers because it enabled them to co-opt the identity and collectivity of the people they called Indians by denying them the chance to be considered real people with real tribal names living in particular places, and instead translated that reality into a European rendition of the noble savage called, generically, *Indian*.

The name "Indian" is a convenient one, to be sure, but it is an invented term that does not come from any Native language, and it does not describe or contain any aspect of traditional Native experience or literature. *Indian*, the noun, is a simulation of racialism, an undesirable separation of race in the political and cultural interests of discovery and colonial settlement of new nations; the noun does not reveal the experiences of diverse Native communities. The name is unbidden, and the Native heirs must bear an unnatural burden to be so christened in their own land. (Vizenor, 1999, p. 47)

In the place we call Canada, where the history and memories of colonialism are frequently re-enacted, a huge, bureaucratic governmental institution called Indian Affairs was created to administer all things related to Indians. To help with this effort, and to limit their clientele, the government decided to define *Indian* as such:

The term "Indian" means

*First.* Any male person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular band; *Secondly.* Any child of such a person; *Thirdly.* Any woman who is or was lawfully married to such a person:

(Smith, 1975, p. 87)

Contained within that definition of *Indian* is Status Indian, who is legally recognized as a registered Indian with a Treaty number and specific Band or Tribal affiliation; and Non-Status Indian, who is a person of Indian ancestry, who usually claims Indian cultural identity, but is not recognized as an Indian by the government. In practical terms, this means that people in Canada who are defined as *Indian* receive Treaty benefits and special constitutional status whereas other people called *Indian* receive no such benefits or recognition because they lack a legal affiliation with a specific Treaty. Thus, a notable effect stemming from this definition of *Indian* in Canada has been to divide and disentitle individuals, families, and communities, and force conformity to interpretations of Indianness limited to the social, cultural, political, and legal interpretations of *Indian* endorsed by Euro-Canadians.

With these influences in mind, it is accurate to depict *Indian* as an abstract cultural concept rife with ambiguities. One aspect of *Indian* connotes the historical and ongoing relationship that First Nations have with both the British monarch and the Canadian government. This relationship recognizes the significance of family, clan, and tribe to Aboriginal people through Treaties, and implies an equitable partnership in which Aboriginal people and Euro-Canadians will share land and resources, as well as the benefits that come from them. The other aspect of *Indian* was imposed by the Canadian political system and personified in the form of the various *Indian* Acts. Through these Acts, Aboriginal governments were displaced, and a series of draconian rules and regulations imposed on the day-to-day lives of Aboriginal people (Richardson, 1993, pp. 95-106). This colonial regime has gone through different phases and seen various consequences. Aboriginal people have been treated as obstacles to economic development and expansion; they have been treated as uncivilized children in need of Christianity and a proper education; they have been treated as mistakes of history who would eventually die off; they have been treated as tax burdens who want their *Indian* rights, but will give nothing in return (Tully, 2000, pp. 41-42).

The emphasis on legal and political definitions of *Indian* has, in part, been fuelled by the idea of the Imaginary *Indian* as a social and cultural icon frozen in time (Francis, 1992). Imaginary *Indian* has certain characteristics and propensities that have been projected on to all Indians in the form of these well-known stereotypes: a closeness to nature, skill in producing artwork, a primitive and ancient inclination to singing and drumming, spirituality, a dislike for work and discipline, a child-like



inability to resist temptation, braided hair, a natural ability to hunt, sneakiness, and a general inability to adapt to the pressures of a contemporary lifestyle. These few examples of stereotypes are listed here to make the point that Imaginary *Indian*, as a cultural icon, has had a profound impact on the possible roles that Aboriginal people could assume in Canadian society:

Any Indian was by definition a traditional Indian, a relic of the past. The only image of the Indian presented to non-Natives was therefore an historical one. The image could not be modernized. Indians were defined in relation to the past and in contradistinction to White society. To the degree that they changed, they were perceived to become less Indian...The Imaginary Indian, therefore, could never become modern.

(Francis, 1992, p. 59)

Indians have not been considered capable of generating anything beyond an anthropological form of culture that emphasizes trinkets, food, and spirituality—exotically *different*, but still inferior and incapable when compared to European forms of knowledge and culture. The present-day quandaries caused by these stereotypes and the colonial inscription of Aboriginal identity are poignantly expressed by my friend *Aamsskááphokítópii*, a young man from the *Kainai* Nation:

What the hell makes an Indian today—if we don't smoke pipes, or if we don't have long braids? What the hell's supposed to be an Indian today? I wasn't raised in a boarding school so I can't go get government compensation. Never lived in a teepee. I don't even own a teepee.

(Donald, 2003, p. 114)

In his statement, *Aamsskááphokítópii* is clearly expressing frustration over the limitations of essentialist definitions and (mis)conceptions of Aboriginal identity, as well as the ambiguity of confronting the Imaginary *Indian* on a daily basis. As Restoule (2000) observes:

...“Aboriginal identity” can be constrictive and colonizing...*Identity* implies fixedness; that the “things” that make one Indian remain the same and should be the same as those things associated with Indianness by the Europeans at the time of historical “first” contact. Identity places power in the observer who observes Aboriginal people from the outside and defines them, giving them an identity. (p. 103)

Thus, the concept of *Indian* identity has a pluralizing effect as the characteristics of individuals are often oppressed by, and subsumed under, stereotypical notions of the collective. This “mark of the plural” sentences individuals to an anonymous existence in which a blanket identity creates the illusion that such characterizations apply to all

members of that group (Memmi, 1967, p. 85). This places the burden of social interaction squarely on the shoulders of any individual who tries to break free from these stereotypes in that Imaginary *Indian* becomes a triple person, someone who is responsible for self, race, and ancestors all at the same time (Fanon, 1967, p. 112).

A culture or cultural group subjected to the forces of colonialism becomes mired in the images, structures, and desires of the dominant group, and the escape from these influences often seems hopeless. Witness, for example, the court proceedings from a case of a non-Status Indian trying to prove that he is a legal Indian (according to government law) rather than a cultural Indian, meaning he *only* follows an Indian way of life:

- Q: Is that—and when I asked you what nationality you were, you said Cree. Could you tell the court how you think of yourself?
- A: As an Indian, Cree Indian.
- Q: Um-hmm, and what makes you think of yourself as a—as a Cree Indian?
- A: Well, near as I can figure out, my Dad was a Cree Indian and my mother was a Cree Indian so I don't know, I couldn't see myself any different from that.
- Q: Um-hmm, and do you know about your—your grandparents on your—your mother's side if they were Cree?
- A: As far as—they were Cree, yes, they all spoke Cree. My grandmother couldn't talk English.
- Q: And your—your grandparents on—on your father's side, do—do you know whether or not they were Cree?
- A: They were all Cree, yeah. Near as I can figure out, that's all they ever talked was Cree.
- Q: Alright
- A: They wouldn't know no English.

(Mallea, 1994, p. 13)

The court ruled against this man's efforts to be legally recognized as a Status Indian. While I certainly do not want to diminish the impact of this ruling on this man and his family, it is hard not to find humour in the questions he was asked and the responses he gave. The over determination of *Indian* as a legal, political, constitutional, cultural, and social entity throughout the history of contact between Europeans and Aboriginal people has led to the ridiculous situation in which people must somehow legally prove their identity and culture. Surely, Trickster<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In Aboriginal thought, tricksters play a significant role in the teaching of tradition, experience, and the forces of nature. All tribes or nations give their own distinct names to this force or being that can transform itself into a hybrid form of life. "Lessons are learned from trickster actions and transformations that encourage new interpretations and awakening" (Henderson, 2000, p. 73n).

is involved in this somehow. The very survival of the pseudonym *Indian*, a term used to indicate comradeship among Aboriginal people today but viewed as politically incorrect by mainstream society, is an example of the kind of trickiness embodied in the reality of being an Indian today. While *Indian* is an invention, “a colonial enactment,” used to dominate and suppress real tribes with real names, Aboriginal people continue to use the term as a form of protest against the perceived attempt to revise history and decide how they will be named or unnamed (Vizenor, 1994, p. 11). *Indian* is an anachronism, but it has a tricky, contradictory, and paradoxical vitality to it that resists irrelevancy. In light of all this, it should not be surprising, then, to find irony in the way Aboriginal people attempt to measure Indianness by asking people to talk about their home, the place that they come from. The irony is that the idea of *Indian* is still so prevalent in our minds that some responses are considered more legally, politically, culturally, and socially authentic and legitimate than others. *Indian* does not come from Edmonton.

When Aboriginal people meet each other for the first time, “Where are you from?” is the most common question. The question seeks identity through location of your roots, your family, your ancestors, your relations, your home, your place, your tribe, your Reserve. I don’t come from a reserve, nor do any of my immediate relatives. I don’t have a place in the Aboriginal sense of traditional territory or sacred land. I may have distant relatives on reserves, but my immediate family lost contact with them long ago. This was before the time “where it went wrong”. (MacLeod, 1998, p. 58).<sup>4</sup>

## A Cree-ation Story

Much of the history of Canada is a chronicle of the interactions between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people. Although the themes of cooperation and partnership can be found in the historical documents and narratives that are part of this history, this is not the way this history has commonly been written and interpreted. People with conflicting interpretations of history will often disagree and misunderstand each other, especially when crucial aspects of their history are directly tied to their livelihoods, and this tension can lead to open conflict in the form of violence. A Hopi legend tells us that the people who get to tell their stories will rule the world. Thus, for example, when the Cree people speak of the Northwest Resistance of 1885 as the time “where it went

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<sup>4</sup> As McLeod explains, this is the English translation of the Cree word *e-mâyikamikahk*, which refers to the tragic events of the so-called Northwest Resistance of 1885. See also McLeod, 2002, p. 35.

wrong” they are not only speaking of the dramatic change in their relationship with the Canadian government, changing as it did from a predominantly peaceful and co-operative association to violent confrontation. Where this relationship also went wrong, and where the power relations got out of balance, is in the stories that were told. The Cree narrative of the past relationships was ignored and displaced by a Euro-Canadian version of the past and present that also imposed a version of the future. The Cree did not imagine things that way.

The relationship between the Cree people and Europeans began when English traders established posts of the Hudson Bay Company on Cree lands around 1670. The Cree were already the single largest group of Aboriginal people in the place we now call Canada, and their role in the fur trade would make them even more numerous, prosperous, and widespread (Dickason, 2002, p. 120). The Cree were the first and primary traders with the Hudson’s Bay Company which meant that they had the advantage of exclusive access to prized European goods well before other tribes did. Their strategic position also made them the main carriers of goods to other tribes and, with control over these trade relations and water access routes that made trade possible, the Cree became middlemen vital to the success of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the fur trade (Hildebrandt, 1994, p. 8). This influence and power, as well as steady access to muskets and iron-tipped weapons, enabled the Cree tribes to expand their territory and begin a move south and west from Hudson’s Bay.

According to Milloy (1988), the history of the Cree people from the time of first contact with European traders to the end of the fur trade era around 1870 can be interpreted as unfolding in three distinct phases.<sup>5</sup> The first phase involved an alliance between the Cree and the Blackfoot. The Cree shared their muskets and other weapons with the Blackfoot, and together these two tribes expanded into the Plains area by following the Red River and Saskatchewan River systems. “Blackfoot and Cree formed the first extensive native trade and military alliance in the western Canadian plains” (p. 6). This alliance enabled both tribes to establish themselves on the Plains by the late eighteenth century. However, an important characteristic of this alliance was the fact that the Cree controlled the flow of trade goods to their ally, and the Blackfoot were careful to maintain peace with the Cree so that the trade of these goods would continue (p. 36). This dynamic changed considerably when the Hudson’s Bay Company established trading posts at Edmonton House in 1795 and Rocky Mountain House in 1799; both of these were within Blackfoot territory. Thus, when the Cree lost their monopoly over

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<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal people disagree with some aspects of this interpretation of history, especially the sections relating to historical connections to the land. My interest in this information is only to provide a brief summary outlining the influences of European traders on the Cree people.

European trade goods, the Cree and Blackfoot began to compete for resources and land, and this led to widespread warfare and a breakdown of this alliance by 1800 (p. 36).

The second phase began with this new era of competition and warfare. As both the Cree and the Blackfoot adjusted to life on the Plains, with its reliance on the horse and buffalo, the competition and warfare seemed to increase. The Cree

acted according to their own interests in trade and military matters. As more Cree adopted the Plains lifestyle, horses became increasingly vital, and to the mid-nineteenth century the Cree sought to form new military and trade patterns that would provide a secure supply of horses. (Carter, 1999, p. 84)

With the establishment of posts of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Plains, the Cree lost their position as middlemen in the fur trade and were required to create new alliances and trade relations. Much of their efforts in trade and warfare were focused on gaining access to a steady supply of horses, which were considered vital to a prosperous life on the Plains during this era. During this period of intense warfare and horse stealing, many tribes were interested in forming alliances to protect themselves and ensure a flow of trade goods. One example of this is when the Cree allied with the Flathead Indians (who lived in present-day western Montana) because the Flathead were supplied with horses by the Spanish trading posts located to the south of them. In return, the Flathead received European goods from the Cree that they were still obtaining from the Hudson's Bay Company (Hildebrandt, 1994, p. 9). So, despite all the tumultuous conflicts and changes during this era, the Cree adapted to the new way of life and prospered on the Plains.

This prosperity dwindled during the third phase as the buffalo herds gradually disappeared. The growing scarcity of buffalo occurred at unequal rates in different regions of the Plains, and this caused the tribes to draw closer and closer in proximity to each other, encroaching on the territories of their enemies in pursuit of the buffalo (Milloy, 1988, pp. 104-105). Since the remaining buffalo were concentrated in Blackfoot lands, the Cree clashed with them often in the years 1850-1870 as they pursued the buffalo. The last great battle of the Canadian Plains between the Cree and Blackfoot occurred in 1870 at the present-day site of the Lethbridge. This famous battle was instigated by the Cree who, desperate to obtain access to lands where the buffalo still existed and hoping to find the Blackfoot weak from the effects of a smallpox epidemic, attacked a Blood camp located a short distance from Fort Whoop-Up (pp. 116-117). The Cree were soundly defeated in this battle, lost up to three hundred warriors, and their camps were filled with cries of mourning and feelings of demoralization during the winter following this terrible defeat (p. 117).

Combined with the loss of the buffalo, increasing incursions into Cree lands by European settlers, and frequent outbreaks of epidemics of smallpox and measles, the devastating effects of this battle seem to have signaled the end of an era. After 1870, the Cree negotiated a peace treaty with the Blackfoot and began considering a new way of life as they faced a new Canadian government beginning to spread its influence westward.

Carter (1999, p. 113) and Hildebrandt (1994, p. 11) both argue that, despite the deprivations of disease and famine, the Cree remained a powerful people and were in a strong position to meet any new challenges to their sovereignty over their lands. Evidence of this can be seen in the attitudes the Cree held towards any government claims to their lands.

[T]he Cree made it clear that they would not allow settlement or use of their lands until Cree rights had been clearly recognized. They also made clear that part of any arrangement for Cree lands had to involve assistance to the Cree in developing a new agricultural way of life. (Tobias, 1991, p. 214)

In adopting this attitude, the Cree were demonstrating a skill for negotiation and adaptation to changing environmental and economic circumstances that they had learned in the years since their initial contact with Europeans traders of the Hudson's Bay Company back in 1670 (p. 214). These attitudes and understandings were to define the character of the negotiations of Treaties 4, 5, and 6 between Canadian government officials and the Cree in the years of 1874-1876. Yet, the Cree people were reluctant to settle on their reserve lands and many continued to pursue the buffalo in the Montana territory until the last buffalo were hunted around 1880. After 1880, the Cree faced starvation and began concentrating around forts in their territory to receive government rations. Several prominent leaders, including Piapot, Big Bear, and Little Pine expressed dissatisfaction with the reserves they had received, as well as the increasing amount of control the Canadian government had over the lives of their people, and wished to have their interpretations of the Treaties honoured (pp. 214-218). Canadian government officials of the time believed that any further concessions to the Cree would prolong the disagreement, slow immigration to Western Canada, and give the Cree the mistaken impression that they had autonomy over their lands. Edgar Dewdney, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at the time, decided to "exploit the opportunity presented to him by the hunger crisis and disarmament of the Cree to bring them under the government's control, even if it meant violating the Treaties" (p. 219). Thus, the government began a plan for subjugating the Cree by reducing or withholding rations and government assistance in the form of agricultural instruction and tools. Later, when starving Cree began raiding government storehouses

on their reserves, the government began imposing the rule of law in Cree territory in the form of the North West Mounted Police (Carter, 1999, p. 140). When the trouble surrounding the Northwest Resistance of 1885 began to impact the Cree, and people began living the “spatial diaspora” that followed, the time “where it went wrong” had surely come (McLeod, 1998).

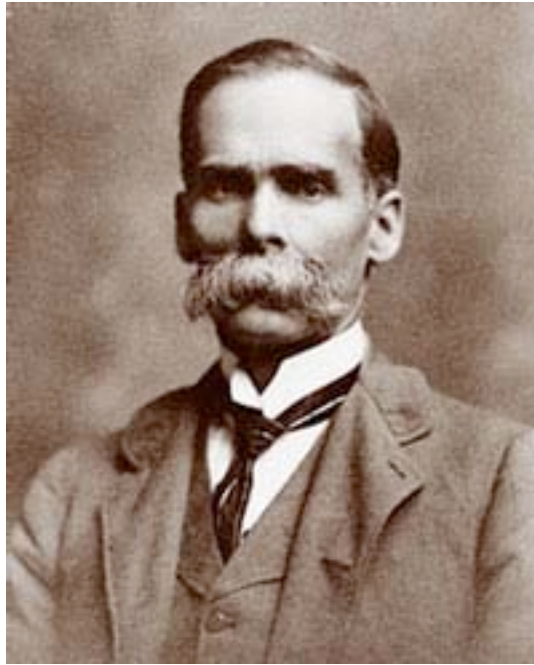
My ancestors were late in negotiating an adhesion to the conditions of Treaty 6. In August of 1877, Chief Papasschayo agreed to the terms of Treaty 6 at Fort Edmonton on behalf of his band of about 241 followers. Papasschayo selected an area for their Reserve approximately four miles south of the North Saskatchewan River, directly across the river from the original site of Fort Edmonton. Soon after making this decision, trouble started. A large and vocal group of settlers in the Edmonton area did not want the Papaschase Indian Band Reserve No. 136 to be anywhere near the growing settlement of Edmonton. They argued that the Reserve would impede the growth and development of the town and deny the settlers access to valuable resources and fertile land. The newspaper of the time, *The Bulletin*, advocated that the Papaschase Band “be sent back to the country they originally came from” (Maurice, 2001, p. 4).

## Naming The (New) World: How *Amiskwaciy*<sup>6</sup> Became Edmonton

The founder and editor of *The Bulletin*, Alberta’s first newspaper, was Frank Oliver. Oliver began publishing *The Bulletin* in late fall of 1880 after purchasing a second-hand printing press in Winnipeg the previous summer (MacGregor, 1967, p. 91). The fact that Oliver made his return trip from Edmonton to Winnipeg and back by again by cart along the same trails used by the Hudson’s Bay Company traders was appropriate for a man who was to play a major role in the development of the city we call Edmonton. After all, the settlement of Edmonton began as a Hudson’s Bay Company trading post in 1795. After several moves of the Edmonton House post, it was permanently established in 1813 at a site above the North Saskatchewan River where the Alberta Legislature now stands in downtown Edmonton. “From that day to this, Edmonton has been continuously occupied, and the Hudson’s Bay Company, one of the world’s longest lived companies, has done business in the city” (p. 31).

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<sup>6</sup> This is the Cree name for the place we call Edmonton. It translates to English as “Beaver Hills” or “Beaver Hills House.”

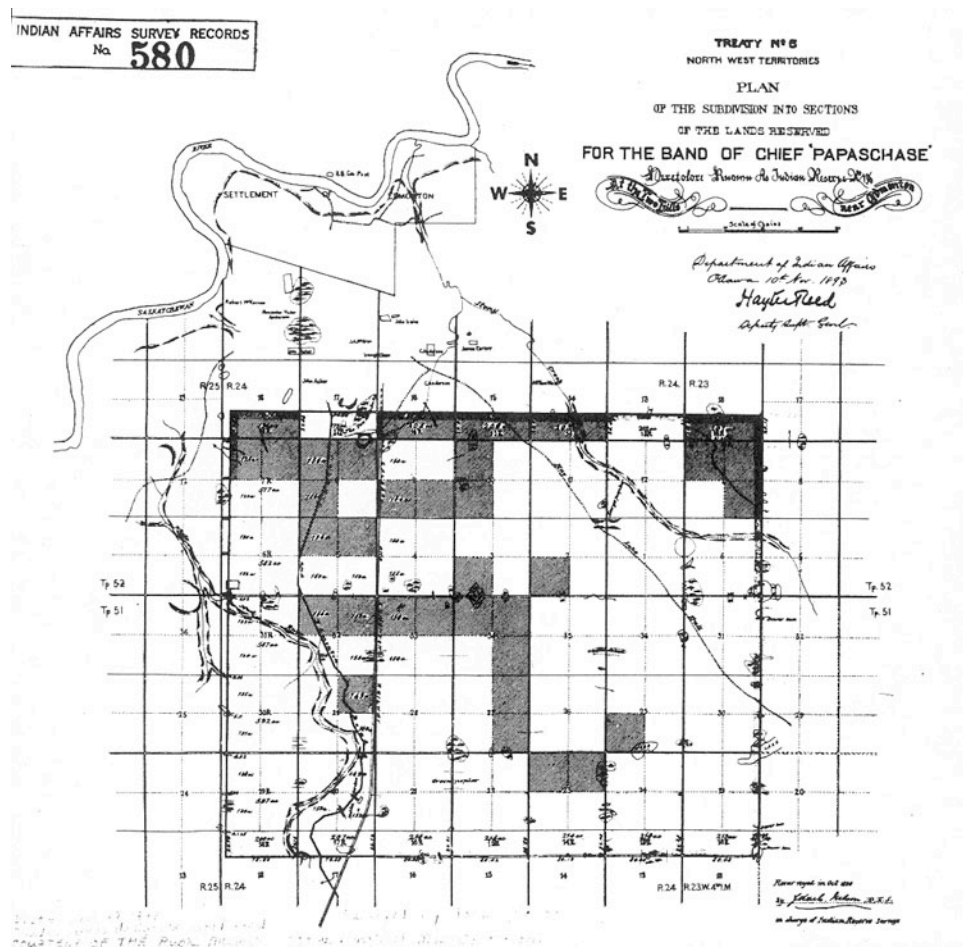


Frank Oliver was born and raised in Ontario and arrived in Edmonton in 1876 after spending three years in Winnipeg working for the *Winnipeg Free Press* (Mardon and Mardon, 1991, pp. 96-97). By the time he started publishing *The Bulletin*, Edmonton was going through a fundamental change as the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly in the area gave away to a competitive, free market economy in which men with determination and entrepreneurial spirit could gain access to land, resources, and commercial opportunities. As part of the effort to facilitate this transition, Oliver was involved with an organization formed to lobby the Canadian government to limit the number of laws and restrictions impinging on the rights of the citizens in the area: The Edmonton Settlers' Rights Movement. This group argued that the Canadian government needed to recognize that the settlers were using their own time, money, and labour to develop the region, thereby contributing to the overall economic development of the nation (Gilpin, 1993, p. 154). They opposed any laws or restrictions that were viewed as detrimental to this economic development. By the 1880s, as land in the Edmonton area previously owned by the Hudson's Bay Company was surveyed, subdivided, and put up for sale, the competition and conflicts over land ownership became increasingly heated (pp. 161-167).

During this time, it was not uncommon for Oliver to use his newspaper to forward his own interests in these issues. In fact, the citizens of Edmonton got used to reading his diatribes on the many different issues that concerned him. It should not be surprising, then, in



light of his interests in protecting the rights and freedoms of settlers in the Edmonton area, to learn that Oliver used *The Bulletin* to steadfastly oppose the establishment and maintenance of Papaschase Indian Reserve Number 136.



His resentment over the creation of a reserve so close to Edmonton was apparently stirred during a mass meeting of citizens of the Edmonton area who forwarded a petition to Prime Minister Macdonald requesting that the Band and the Reserve be moved further south so that nonIndians could have access to those lands (Maurice, 2001, p. 5). Four days later, on January 17, 1881, Oliver published an editorial entitled "Mass Meeting" in which he characterized the Papaschase Band as a questionable group of half-breeds led by a chief, "six or seven of his lazy brothers, one or two Indians and all the old squaws who generally hang around each of the

Company's forts." In the same issue, Oliver continued this argument in a related article called "Indian Reserves:"

If this country was given by the Indians to the Government, then it would be right for the Government to be thankful for whatever they might get; but if the Government has bought the land it is surely their right and duty to look after the interests of the settlers, both present and future, for whom the land was bought, and out of whose earnings it is expected ultimately to be paid for, as well as those of the Indians, who will be a bill of expense and a drawback to the country for an indefinite period.

If the Indians take the reserve as at presently surveyed, a lasting injury will be done to this settlement, without any corresponding benefit accruing to them. Now is the time for the Government to declare the Reserve open and show whether this country is to be run in the interests of the settlers or the Indians.  
(Oliver, January 17, 1881)

Oliver continued to use *The Bulletin* to argue against the establishment of the Papaschase Reserve throughout the eight-year period that the issue remained unresolved. Despite the fact that he wrote, in an article called "That Reserve" in the September 30, 1882 issue of the paper, that the Indians "are of course legally entitled to the land," Oliver continued to question the credibility of the Papaschase Band. An example of this can be found in the April 15, 1882 issue in which he forwarded the argument that the Papaschase are not "true Indians" and are only interested in the Treaty because the government handouts will make their lives easier. Tied to this statement was Oliver's expressed belief that the Papaschase were motivated to be included in the Treaty by their lazy character revealed in their desire to avoid "working honestly for their livings as they had always been obliged to do before."

At the height of this debate over the future of the Papaschase Reserve, Frank Oliver was elected to the North West Territories Council in 1883. From 1888 to 1896, he was a member of the North West Territories Legislature that succeeded the Council. Then, in 1896, Oliver began a career in federal politics that lasted until 1917. His contributions to Canadian federal policy can be seen from 1905, the year he was appointed the Minister of the Interior by Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier. As Minister of the Interior, Oliver had considerable power over the policies governing Indian Affairs and immigration, and this gave him the opportunity to promote his vision of the future of Western Canada, in terms of settlement, land use, and economic development, that he had expressed in the pages of *The Bulletin* for so many years. "[T]he immigration boom of the early twentieth century increased pressure even on the newly-founded Indian reserves and the government began to actively encourage Indian land surrenders and moved to make 'excess' Indian reserve land available for nonIndian settlement" (Ponting and

Gibbons, 1980, p. 20). By 1911, the Indian Act was amended by Parliament to allow for the expropriation of Indian lands for public works, and Minister Oliver announced the amendment by claiming that Indian reserves would no longer be able to impede the economic development of the nation (p. 20).

[http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sg24\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sg24_e.html)

Frank Oliver retired from political life in 1928 and died in Ottawa in 1933. Even though he spent many years away from the city he worked to establish, his influence in the official history of the city of Edmonton has remained to this day. There is a neighbourhood, school, swimming pool, skating rink, and park named in his honour. There is also Oliver Building, located in downtown Edmonton, which houses government offices.



The significance of Oliver Building is that it is located on the very site that Oliver built his stately home back in 1905. This impressive two-story brick structure, with a large front veranda and latticed windows, was a landmark in Edmonton that many people visited and admired. The home was considered an important part of the history of Edmonton and a monument to the hard-working spirit that had built up the city from the small and isolated Hudson's Bay Company outpost it was back in the 1870s.

In the end, the settlers got their wish. The members of the Papaschase Band, forced to wait while their Treaty rights hung in limbo, were left destitute and hungry for several years after the signing of Treaty 6 and the disappearance of the buffalo. Eventually, the members either took Métis

scrip<sup>7</sup> thus forfeiting their Treaty status or simply moved to other reserves in the Edmonton area. On November 19, 1888, three adult males who were living on the Enoch Reserve surrendered the rights of the Papaschase Band to Reserve No. 136 (Maurice, 2001, pp. 13-14).

## Re-creating Spaces: The Displacement of the Papaschase Cree

My great, great grandmother, Elizabeth (Betsy) Brass, legally extinguished her claim to Indian status as a member of the Papaschase Band when she accepted scrip in July 1885.<sup>8</sup> Betsy was born in the 1830's near the Hudson's Bay Company post of Fort Pelly. Her family and community, both a mixture of Cree and Saulteaux, would eventually agree to the terms of Treaty 4 with the Canadian government in 1875 and settle on The Key Reserve, located in what is now called southeastern Saskatchewan. Betsy's life began to take a course different from that of her family and community when she married George Donald, a Métis man who was employed by the Hudson's Bay Company as a carpenter and blacksmith. Since he worked for the Company, George and his family lived among the other workers in and around the various posts where he was stationed during his career. According to the information on his scrip certificate (also completed in July 1885), George worked at the Red River Settlement before he married Betsy in 1853. The couple left Red River in 1855 and moved to Fort Pitt, where they lived for nine years. In 1864, they moved to Fort Edmonton.

As the business of the Hudson's Bay Company slowed down and the fur trade subsided, the employees at the various posts began to lose their jobs. So it was with George Donald who, apparently as part of a reward for long service with the Company, was given a river plot on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River, downstream from the site of Fort Edmonton. Records from a land survey conducted in 1877 report that George 'Donnell' (as the name was recorded) had cleared his property of trees and other obstacles, produced a crop, built two structures, and maintained a healthy supply of farm animals. A composite map of the Edmonton settlement of 1882 shows the property of George 'Donnell' as River Lot Number 21 at the center of the ever-

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<sup>7</sup> Scrip is a legal document entitling the holder to land or the equivalent in cash payment. The acceptance of scrip extinguished all future claims to reserve lands and official Indian status.

<sup>8</sup> All information on the life of Betsy Brass and her husband George Donald comes from the extensive archival research done by my cousins, Janis Brass and Len Last, and my mother, Darlene Donald. Their assistance with this paper is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated.

growing land claims staked by settlers to the area (MacGregor, 1967, pp. 96-97).

Somehow, after 1882, this river plot was lost. It seems likely that George and Betsy lost this land when it became known that they were also members of the Papaschase Band laying claim to Indian Reserve No. 136. Betsy's name appears on an official Treaty list of the members of the Papaschase Band (Hiebner, 1984, p. 17), and in the documents of her scrip declaration it shows that she received money and rations as a Treaty Indian prior to July 1885. This amounted to a total of \$47.00 and was deducted from her scrip claim. The couple's experiences after losing their land were surely marked by hunger, suffering, and disillusionment. In January 1883, a letter to Prime Minister Macdonald was written by Father Scollen on behalf of Chief Papaschase and other chiefs in the Edmonton area in which the leaders accuse the Canadian government of attempting to slowly exterminate the Indians through starvation (Maurice, 2001, p. 6). Months later, a number of Indians from the Papaschase and Hobbema bands confronted Indian agent Anderson and forced him to arrange for rations to be supplied to the starving people from Hudson's Bay Company stores (p. 7). Late in 1883, the Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney himself admitted that the Indians from the Papaschase Band were so destitute that the settlers in the area had been compelled to feed and cloth them, and that many of the Indians wished to leave the Reserve for this reason (p. 7).

In light of this desperate situation, it should not be surprising that many of the members of the Papaschase Band accepted scrip when it was offered to them in 1885.

At the height of Indian discontent over the treaties and in the midst of the Riel Rebellion, the Half-Breed Scrip Commission arrived in Edmonton on June 3, 1885 offering scrip to people of mixed Indian and white ancestry (hereafter "Métis"), including any treaty Indians who could demonstrate that they were of Métis ancestry. The scrip certificate entitled the holder to either 240 acres of land for homestead entry on any unoccupied sections or \$160.00 (enough to buy 80 acres at a different location), minus the amount of any annuity payments previously received by a treaty Indian. Although some applicants could not prove that they were of Métis ancestry, Agent Anderson issued scrip to 202 treaty Indians from June to July, 1885. (Maurice, 2001, p. 7)

DUPLICATE.  
No. 163 Form A. *Ref 11139*  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, CANADA.



NORTH WEST HALF-BREED COMMISSION.

*Edmonton July 5 1886*

I hereby Certify, under the power vested in me by an Order in Council dated 1st March, 1886, that *Elizabeth Russ* a Half-Breed has proved to my satisfaction that he was residing in the North West Territories previous to the 15th day of July, 1870, now ceded by the Indians, and under Sub-clause (E) of Clause 81 of the Dominion Lands Act, 1882, and the Orders in Council of the 29th March, 1885, and the 1st March, 1886, is entitled at this date to Scrip to the amount of *\$47.00* dollars.

*Richard Trevelyan Wood*  
The Scrip called for by this Certificate, amounting to *\$47.00* dollars, will be payable to bearer, and will be delivered to the person producing this Certificate. Said Scrip will be accepted at par in payment of Dominion Lands.

*R. Gould*  
Commissioner

After accepting scrip, George and Betsy likely converted it into money to purchase food, and then may have used the remaining cash to replace some of the tools and implements that had been lost when their title to their river plot farm was extinguished. Eventually, the extended relations of the Donald family moved to the Cooking Lake area southeast of

Edmonton and established farming operations in the area.<sup>9</sup> Settlers to this region report being surprised to find Métis families already living there when they began to homestead in the area in the 1890s (Redekop & Gilchrist, 1981, p. 23). It is likely that this locale was familiar to them because it had been a traditional meeting place for Aboriginal people and was a frequent resting spot for people traveling the trail between Fort Edmonton and other Hudson's Bay Company posts to the east.

Even though the family had moved to the Cooking Lake region, they must have traveled into Edmonton as often as they could to purchase food and supplies, visit friends, renew acquaintances, or just take in the growing city and witness the tremendous changes taking place at the site of their former home. On one of these visits to Edmonton, sometime after 1905, Betsy arranged to have a photograph taken of her standing on a wooden sidewalk with a two-story brick home behind her.



There is a thin layer of snow on the ground and evidence of melting snow can be seen scattered on the roof of the home behind her. What is striking about the photograph is the manner in which Betsy must have prepared and then posed for it. She is wearing attire appropriate for a widowed wife—a long black dress with a black shawl draped over her shoulders. She appears to be holding a white handkerchief, and has linked her hands together with the handkerchief and then placed them at the front and

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<sup>9</sup> My cousin Len Last told me that an aunt remembered visiting Betsy at Cooking Lake around 1910. Apparently, she was living in a tent year round. My father was raised in this same community.

center of her body. Completing this carefully planned pose, and adding still more intrigue to its purpose, is a very determined and sombre expression on Betsy's face. She looks angry to me, or maybe that is just the way that people posed for photographs back then. When you study the photograph, once your eyes have surveyed the figure of Betsy in detail, your attention is immediately drawn to the façade of the home that looms behind her. The photograph has obviously been taken so that Betsy and the home would be shown together. Why would she choose to pose in that manner at that location?

What followed was the displacement and dispersal of the members of the Papaschase Band. What could they do or say about it?

## The Logic of Displacement and the Crafting of Replies

The white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?

There are only two possible answers. The white culture can attempt to incorporate the other, specifically through beaded moccasins and names like Mohawk Motors, or with much more sophistication, through the novels of Rudy Wiebe. Conversely, the white culture may reject the indigene: 'This country really began with the arrival of the whites.' This is no longer an openly popular alternative, but its historical importance is reflected in things like the 'native societies' that existed...in the late nineteenth century, societies to which no non-white, no matter how native, need have applied. (Goldie, 1995, p. 234)

Betsy and the other members of the Papaschase Band were disentitled of their Treaty status and land claims by a Canadian society greatly influenced by the values implied in the European ideologies of modernity, imperialism, and liberalism. In many ways, the arrival of Euro-Canadians to the place we now call Canada was viewed as part of a natural, God-given process by which European superiority would civilize and modernize the untamed wilderness and make it habitable for future generations. In this way, European perceptions of human knowledge and experience made a shift from the transcendent plane to the immanent plane in that the human project of modernity and imperialism became one of translating the will of God into the acts of transforming and civilizing nature on earth (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 72). The Aboriginal people of the Americas became part of this paradigm shift from the moment of conquest, subjugation, and colonization because they represented, in concrete ways, the uncivilized people that modernity (and imperialism) needed in its definition (Dussel, 1998, p. 18). An important aspect of this mindset of 'manifest destiny' is the way in which the



individual was seen as playing a vital role in the creation of a new civilization.

The plane of immanence is the one on which the powers of singularity are realized and the one on which the truth of the new humanity is determined historically, technically, and politically. For this very fact, because there cannot be any external mediation, the singular is presented as the multitude. (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 73)

Thus, Euro-Canadians have tended to regard Aboriginal people antagonistically, as a people whose adherence to the values of tradition and collectivity could not be comprehended, as standing in the way of Canada realizing its true potential as a nation built on the legal, political, and economic concepts of individual and civic liberties. When the expropriation of the Papaschase Reserve finally occurred, it was viewed by the Euro-Canadians of the time as a fact already predetermined by history. The Indians should have viewed their involuntary enfranchisement as an opportunity to participate in the national dream of the economic and political development of the country. Any nostalgic feelings for the land would soon be forgotten if they would only pick up some tools and hustle to get ahead like everyone else. The story of Frank Oliver is a fitting example of the benefits that come from living a life based on the ethics of individualism and hard work.

The trouble with these values and this interpretation of history is that it assumes that perceived freedoms and equalities apply to all citizens in the same ways. "If we invoke the equality argument without looking at [other interpretations of] history, we gloss over the fact that Aboriginal peoples became citizens in many different ways, most of them unjust" (Turner, 2000. p. 146). Interpretations of history can thus play pivotal roles in determining the meaning of Aboriginal reality in the past, present, and future. "The frustrating problem for Aboriginal people is that their interpretations of history have not been considered legitimate" (p. 145).

How, then, have Aboriginal people expressed their interpretations of history during this era of oppression, disenfranchisement, and displacement? I wish to suggest that Aboriginal people in Canada have crafted replies to these forces of power and control using modes of communication appropriate to their cultures. More often than not, these replies have been misunderstood or misinterpreted by the larger society. Chambers (1989) has explained that storytellers from different cultures have different reasons for telling their stories, as well as different ways of making the purposes of the story known to the listeners (p. 269). In specific reference to Aboriginal modes of communication, she goes on to argue that the practice of avoiding direct and explicit reference to a specific issue enables Aboriginal people to communicate their ideas and

feelings in ways appropriate to their cultures. "Aboriginal speakers appear to resist making the relationship between topics explicit to the audience, in order to allow the audience the right and responsibility to make the connections between the topics themselves" (p. 268). This puts the onus on the listener, the translator, or the interpreter to 'listen' closely to what has been communicated and decide on its applicability to the subject or topic under consideration.

Larsen (1983), in a similar view, has argued that the history of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal contact can be viewed as series of communicative encounters in which new interpretations are tried out, and through which an understanding of how the Aboriginal bricolage of experiences can be used to construct a statement designed to make Euro-Canadians see things differently (p. 39).

In so doing, Indians give new import to old facts, juxtapose ideas that have not been related previously and endow forgotten events with new significance. The Indians' purpose is to effect an upheaval in Indian/white relations, to turn conventional wisdom upside down and to clear a new space for Indians in Canadian society. The means at their disposal are those of every artist, prophet, and entrepreneur: techniques of symbolism by means of which they manage to transform, recontextualize and reinterpret known facts and events. (Larsen, 1983, pp. 39-40)

To follow this suggestion would mean a much more detailed and careful re-reading of interpretations of the history of Aboriginal people in the place we call Canada. There is surely much to learn about history and memory by paying closer attention to the stories and narratives describing micro-events of everyday life.

Could Betsy be standing in front of Frank Oliver's home? Why would she do that?

My parents' home is located on the very land that was surrendered that day. I grew up in that part of the city of Edmonton, went to school, ran in the parks, rode my bike on the streets, threw rocks in the river, played hockey, shoveled snow, kissed girls, walked my dog, went to the movie theatre, visited my grandparents, shopped at the farmers' market, studied at the University of Alberta (which, ironically, has a Papaschase Room in its Faculty Club), and no one ever said a word about it. No one knew about it. How do these things get swept under the carpet so completely? How do people's lives get erased from collective memory so easily?

## Re-constructing *Amiskwaciy*: Re-imagining *Nêhiyâwiwin*<sup>10</sup> in the Place Called Edmonton

The official history of the city of Edmonton—and the history of most settlements in Canada for that matter—has been founded on small acts of capitalism and entrepreneurship by individuals operating according to the dream of open spaces and unfettered frontier lands ripe for development and exploitation in the interests of economic gain. This national dream of Canada has been based on a materialist teleology (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 63). In short, what this means is that the project of the settlement and development of Canada has been largely focused on the capitalist model of the production of material goods and physical matter as a way to achieve a state of economic prosperity. This form of materialism became teleological in the sense that it was viewed as a major goal or end point of the activities of the nation's citizens. This means that Canadian history has been interpreted predominantly by evaluating the activities of settlers and pioneers according to the purposes they served in achieving the ultimate goals of the nation. Thus, we are reminded once again that European modernity and colonialism is inseparable from capitalism, and that these values and activities associated with frontier capitalism ascend to the transcendental whenever and wherever they are done in the interests of building the nation (pp. 85-86). The transcendental requires some form of apparatus for it to function effectively. "Putting this society to work and ensuring obedience to its rule and its mechanisms of inclusion and/or exclusion are accomplished through disciplinary institutions...that structure the social terrain and present logics adequate to the 'reason' of discipline" (p. 23). This logic becomes "distributed throughout the bodies and brains of the citizens" as a biopolitical form of power called "[b]iopower...that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it" (pp. 23-24). In the case of the history of Edmonton, we can say that biopolitical power was expressed through the displacement, removal, and dispersal of Aboriginal populations from the land, acts that allowed the history of the place to be re-imagined and re-constructed.

Obviously, the official history of Edmonton, as it was re-imagined, did not include detailed interpretations of the contributions made by Aboriginal people to the overall development of the area. Aboriginal people have not been considered an integral part of this process because their interpretations of history do not easily conform to teleological versions of the settlement of Canada. In other words, they are still seen as fixed in a traditional way of being that renders them strangers to

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<sup>10</sup> This concept refers to 'Creeness' or Cree collective memory (McLeod, 2002, p.35).

progress, unable or unwilling to adjust to the complications of the modern world. A related problem concerns the issue of historicity as described by Chakrabarty (2002):

“Historicism” is a mode of thinking. . . [that]. . . tells us that in order to understand the nature of anything in this world we must see it as an historically developing entity, that is, first, as an individual and unique whole—as some kind of unity at least in potentia—and second, as something that develops over time. Historicism typically can allow for complexities and zigzags in this development; it seeks to find the general in the particular . . . but the idea of development and the assumption that a certain amount of time elapses in the very process of development are critical to this understanding. (pp. 22-23)

The idea of historicism, as suggested by Chakrabarty, is that history is viewed as a unitary movement of events towards a certain goal or endpoint. This imposes linearity and the assumption that life will improve and society will progress as history moves forward. Historicism has thus been used to posit historical time, and institutional development or underdevelopment, as a measure of the cultural distance between the West and the Other (p.7). Euro-Canadian settlement in Canada has been viewed as an historical development towards an imagined end in which progress, improvement, and prosperity were givens. Anyone who came to this country would have a role to play in this history if they embraced this image of the future. Anyone, or any group, that seemed to oppose this version of history was considered outside of the progress being made. In this way, historicist consciousness consigned the colonized nations of the world to “an imaginary waiting room of history” by making the assumption that nonEuropeans were “not yet civilized enough to rule themselves,” and that a certain amount of “historical time and development (colonial rule and education, to be precise) had to elapse before they could be considered prepared for such a task” (p. 8). So, in the same way that Aboriginal people used to be allowed inside the trading fort to wait for the opportunity to trade, and in the same way that they were isolated on reserves, the logic of historicism has relegated Aboriginal interpretations of history to a waiting room of Canadian history. Even though these interpretations are about this place, Aboriginal versions of history are still seen as *stories* separate from the common threads of history and memory that unite Euro-Canadians.

To escape from the logic of historicism, and subvert the image of *Indian* as a relic of the past, we need to reconceptualize the present (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 249). When such a project is undertaken, however, we are often confronted by narrative form problems. Such problems are linked to the traditional question posed by a narrative: Why is it that significant events occur when and where they do rather than in some other time and place (Mookerjea, 2002, p. 107)? In attempting to answer

this question, and in the process of telling a story, a narrative has to take into account, or mediate between, the conflicting and multiple meanings that comprise it (p. 107). What this means is that the story that someone wants to tell cannot be told because it is impossible to represent all the multiple meaning that comprise it. Therefore, to relate a narrative requires us to mix many different stories as a way to try to fill the different conceptual holes that become evident as the story is created (McLeod, 2002, p. 37). What I have uncovered in relating the narrative of this paper, in terms of history, identity, and memory, must somehow be able to stand in for what this story needs to represent but cannot: the differences between the official history of the city of Edmonton and the memories of the Papaschase Cree (Mookerjea, 2002, p. 108). In doing so, I must remain mindful of the paradoxical situation created when one tries to relate a story as though it were new when it is clear that the story itself is a reaction to present circumstances, and that it has also existed in many different forms before this version was told (Jameson, 1981, pp. 81-82). What this paradox implies is

that history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious. (Jameson, 1981, p. 35)

If we take seriously the argument that history is not a text or narrative, and also “a process without a *telos* or a subject,” then a serious problem confronting anyone dealing with history and story is representation (Jameson, 1981, p. 29). After all, what gives anyone the right to act as a translator or meaning-giver, to pass judgment on events that have multiple meanings (Crowell, 2003, p. 226)? How do you tell the stories of suppressed groups when the traces they have left are fragmentary and disjointed? I would argue that the responsibility to tell a story is given to all of us because stories are all that we are (King, 2003). The problems start when one story has precedence over the others to the extent that it becomes a master narrative inscribing its influence on all texts, as well as controlling and limiting our collective thinking about history and reality (Jameson, 1981, p. 34). This is how and why the importance of writing “History 2”—versions of history that function to disrupt the dominant and totalizing effects of “universal and necessary history”—is related to the idea of provoking intercultural dialogue between Aboriginal and nonAboriginal people in Canada (Chakrabarty, 2002, pp. 63-66).

On what terms can we speak to each other about history and memory? I have tried to show that historical narratives are intimately connected as texts of the past, present, and future, and that both the

individual and the collective are implicated in any meaning we derive from them. To tell this story, I have engaged in a form of “transcoding” in which I have used the photos, images, and my personal narrative to create a particular set of terms and ideas as a way to bring unity to the fragmentary nature of the story and the tensions contained in telling it.

Such momentary reunification would remain purely symbolic, a mere methodological fiction, were it not understood that social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process, in which there is no need to invent ways of linking language events and social upheavals or economic contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another. (Jameson, 1981, p. 40)

If memory is indeed a public process then we must also re-conceptualize cultural understanding and identity as enormously more complex, contextualized, open-ended, and dynamic than the old interpretations have presumed. Aboriginal and nonAboriginal people have been interacting in western Canada for over three hundred years. Surely, something significant has passed between them during this time that has directly impacted the culture and identity of both. The hope of a renewed relationship, based on commonalities linking Aboriginal and nonAboriginal, could be expressed as intercultural dialogue, but this does not mean that it would not be perfect or ideal. As we have seen, the topography of this “inherited intercultural middle ground” is characterized by inequality, discrimination, stereotypes, paternalism, isolation, distrust, and misunderstanding (Tully, 2000. p. 55). Yet, despite these tensions, a transactional engagement with these public histories and narratives

underscores the potential radical pedagogical authority of memory, in that it may make apparent the insufficiency of the present, its (and our own) incompleteness, the inadequacy of our experience, the requirement that we revise not only our own stories but also the very presumptions, which regulate their coherence and intelligibility. (Simon, 2000, p. 30)

The current leaders of the re-established Papaschase Band have filed court documents outlining their case against the Canadian government in which they seek compensation for the wrongful removal of Treaty and land rights. My dad, his family, and our relatives are considered Papaschase members, and we stand to benefit from any court decisions that favour the Papaschase case. In all likelihood, some form of compensation will result. This raises the possibility that my family and I could receive some form of “official” recognition as Indians with membership in the Papaschase Band. Finally, I could answer the question

that has been plaguing me for so many years with a clear and definite answer:

“Where are you from?”  
“Papaschase.”  
“Where’s that?”  
“Edmonton.”

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