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That Is What Happened



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Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre

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That Is What Happened



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Preface

The stories that follow were told in Oji-Cree by the elders of the Nishnawbe-Aski area. These stories, gathered from 1975 to 1987, were taken from a collection of audio tapes housed at the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre in Timmins, Ontario. The recording of these tapes took place under different conditions and purposes that ranged from an informal interview situation for personal information to a formal interview setting on treaty issues. These tapes were transcribed from the original Oji-Cree into syllabics and later translated into English by Evelyn Baxter. The text was edited by Evelyn Baxter (Oji-Cree) and Jim Hollander (English) to make it readable, while attempting to preserve the feeling and meaning of the original spoken Oji-Cree.

The Oji-Cree elders told two types of stories: (1) *atesokawenan* or scared stories about legendary, supernatural, and mythological events; and (2) *tepaachimonewa* or stories about local history and real or apparently real events. Most of the stories in this collection are *tepaachimonewa*, but there are some *atesokawenan* found within. These stories provide accounts of personal experiences and remembrances of the elders. They deal with a lifestyle and a world view that are vastly different from that of today. Understanding what happened in the past can create an improved understanding of the present. Hopefully, the stories of the Oji-Cree elders may lead us to a better future.

These texts were gathered to provide authentic reading material for Oji-Cree speakers in their own language, to supply a primary source of Oji-Cree word and sentence structures, to provide examples of Oji-Cree literature for English speakers, and to portray a changing Oji-Cree way of life.

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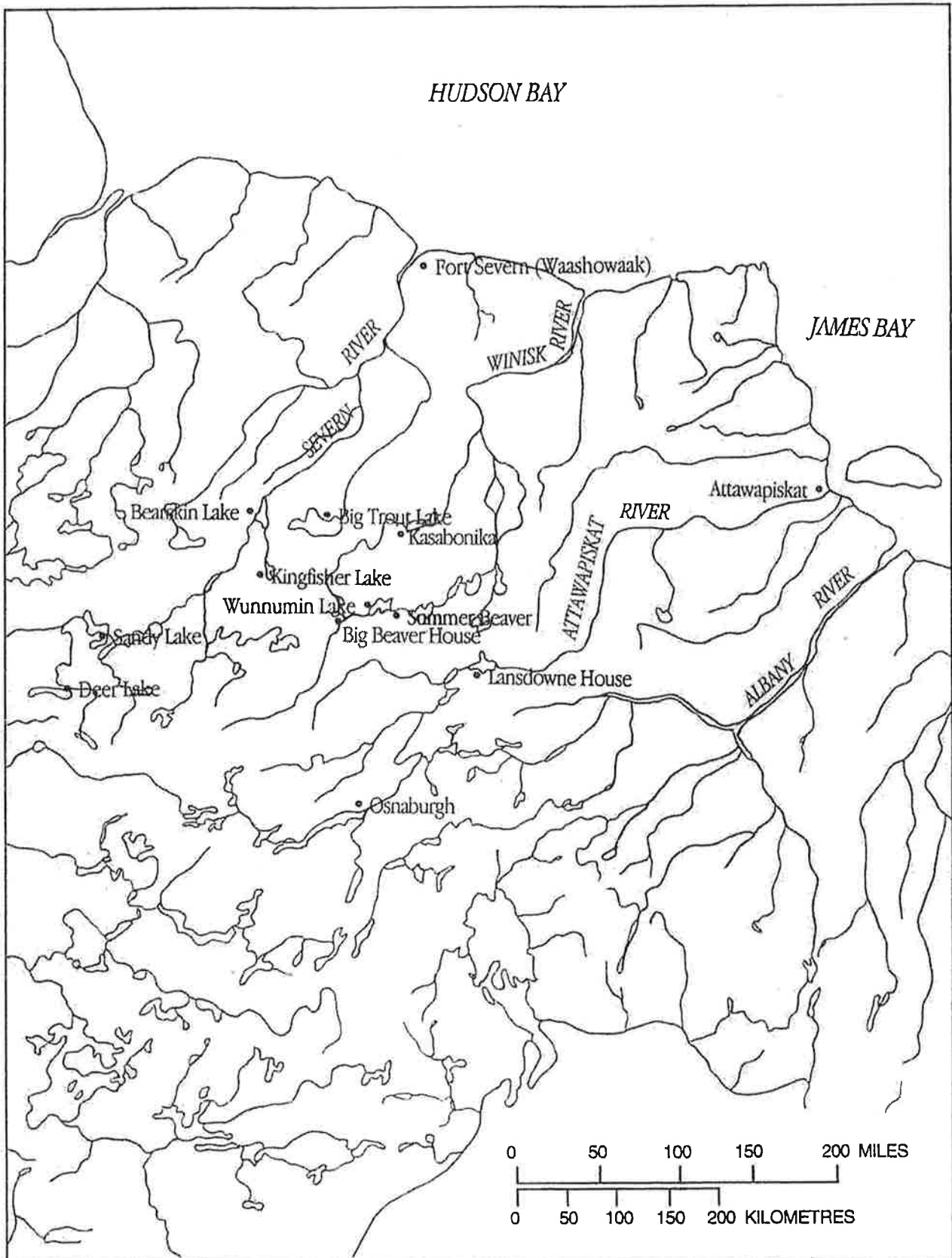
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Traditional Nishnawbe-Aski (Oji-Cree) Territory



6

1 That is how poor the people were

told by Ellen Sainnawap
recorded on July 27, 1975
Wunnumin Lake

This is about one old lady who told me a story. I went to visit her at Trout Lake. The person I was visiting was fishing. I went over to her. She said, "I don't think I have any food. I will not have anything to eat unless I catch fish." That was just recently, during the time of the treaty. She said, "Go to my home and my husband will give you tea."

People were poor long ago. That was the poverty of people we heard about in those days. If they did not catch fish at all, they would go to bed hungry. Sometimes a person would have only two eels to feed his children. This was food for one day. I really saw that happen. The people looked so poor, especially if they did not catch anything, even those with nets. Not every one had a net, as far as I can remember. If a person had a net, they would catch something to eat. In the winter they would ice fish. The people would eat anything they caught. They would have an evening meal of pike. The women would do all the fishing. I was but a small child then. That is what was done. They would fish anywhere.

I will tell you a story about what happened once. While I was fishing, there was a tug on my line. It was a hard tug, I stood up quickly and ran with my line towards the shore. My line felt light as I pulled it out of the hole. I glanced back. There was an otter hopping around on the ice. He almost bit me. After that I walked home to eat the otter that I caught. I recall hearing the same thing happening to another lady. She also caught an otter. I heard them talk about that. I know that old lady who caught the otter. I saw her. That is how poor people were, especially in the east. Some of them even froze to death. I remember people telling me about it.

There was also a sickness among the people. People were afraid to catch a chill. They knew not to get too cold and chilly. The people did not really know enough to stay inside when there was sickness around. That is what happened to the people.

There was only one store. It was at Trout Lake long ago. The people went together to shop a long time ago. They stayed at Trout Lake. I would pull a sled while we were moving around. I got so dizzy from not having food that I

fainted. I felt the person walking behind trying to shake me awake. I could hear her yelling. I saw her take out a rabbit skin bag full of rabbit gravy. She gave me a drink of this gravy. That is what my grandmother told me. Sometimes I cut wood without having any food all day. You can eat the pike later is what I was told. That is how poor they were long ago.

The people would move from camp site to camp site. Women would pitch the tents after clearing the snow around the area where their tents would be placed. Men would snare rabbits when we got to the camp sites, and they would also go ice fishing. Men and women did everything to survive. The people also used tree boughs for shelter during the cold winter months. I saw them do that too. They would spread the boughs around the shelter. Then they would throw snow on top. The shelter was warm when they did that. That is what people did when they traveled around a long time ago. They moved around often.

Wherever they moved, they fished. Fishing was one of their means of survival. Sometimes the fish would break their lines. There was no other food in those days. Sometimes her partner would catch only one small sturgeon. I would drink the gravy made from it.

She told me that there were caribou around. People did not see caribou often while moving around. I really do not know where the caribou migrated. If they were unable to kill anything, they would surely starve.

The people would all move to a big lake and make a fish trap. Once there was a woman who came upon people using a fish trap, she was very glad to see fish and cleaned one right away. Her husband did not live very long after they arrived there. She had many children. They came upon the fish trap while roaming around looking for food. She struggled to feed her children and took them to Trout Lake. She managed to get her children to Trout Lake. I do not know how she did it.

They told me about the shaking tent. There would be an image standing in the shaking tent. It looked like the image of a Whiteman standing there. The people would ask the image for a cigarette. The cigarette looked real to those people who saw this. Animals would enter the shaking tent and tell stories. All the animals would go into the shaking tent that the Indian built long ago. The Native people were able to know many things from the shaking tent. If they wanted to know whether a person died or if someone was lost, they used the shaking tent. If a person was alive, the shaman would say so inside the tent. They said that the shaman would tell

if the person was going to die. The shaman would know if someone passed away by talking to them in the shaking tent. All the animals would tell stories. The animals would tell the shaman why the people were unable to kill them at that time, but the animals knew they would be killed eventually. The Natives knew how to look after things well. They also knew how to make each other suffer by using the shaking tent. Even while they were fishing, they would see the image of the Whiteman standing around. Just as if he landed from above. He looked like snow floating by. The image was like a Whiteman standing there. They do not know who came to them while they were fishing. I am not making up the story I am telling. That is what was told to me.

The people could make a fire immediately. Someone could appear suddenly too. I do not know what they used to travel around so fast. I was told that long ago people were able to walk on water. That was one sure thing the Natives did. That was one of the wonders the Natives did before the Whiteman arrived. That is what my grandmother told me. She would tell me many things about the wonders that the people did long ago, but not in detail. She would tell me about the people who performed these wonders and those who received these wonders. I heard that the Indians long ago performed many mysterious wonders. I was not told exactly what they did. They would leave their women on an island so they could also find out things. They left them there. She would be gone for ten days and nights but she would not say anything about what she found out. That is what the people did long ago, leave suddenly. They wanted to find out about other things too.

When I was about ten years old, I went to the village where I went fishing. I went with my little sister and I said, "I wish I would catch many fish so that I could sell them." That is how poor we were. I could not afford to buy anything. My father was sick. He was dragged to the place we made camp so that we could fish. I caught about three fish. We were able to have an evening meal before going to bed. That is how poor we were during our childhood. We almost starved then. We could not even catch fish with a net. We had nothing to live on when we were camping there. All we did was fish for pike. That is what we ate.

I did not think of eating. I guess I was starving. Someone would give us bread. There was bread already then. I saw the ones that worked in the stores use syrup. I wondered what it was, even jam. I did not eat it because I did not know it was food. It was not until I had a husband that I used the Whiteman's food. I would eat the Whiteman's food once in a while when the men went to Waashowaak. My husband would leave me tea and a can of sugar. That is how long he would be gone. Sometimes they would be gone for three days, the ones that went to get

supplies. There were five of them in a big boat. I thought it was along time waiting to eat bread. When the men got back, my husband bought back a little bit too. I would set a net to catch fish while he was gone.

The people also had dogs to feed. It was much work trying to feed the dogs. They would ice fish and set nets to catch fish to feed the dogs. Not everyone had a dog. They would raise the dogs to use them. That is what they did. That is why people had much work long ago. They also snared rabbits to feed the dogs. That is how the people survived by using dogs to carry their things. Many dogs starved too, if the person was unable to kill or catch fish to feed them. Also, people used dogs to go trapping far away. I heard many times that the dogs did not come back. The dogs starved because the person who took them did not have anything to feed them. That is how poor the people were and that is what they did.

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Commissioners issuing treaty money, 1929
archival source unknown

2 That is one of the many wonders

told by Gabriel Kam

recorded on July 28, 1977

Bearskin Lake

I will talk about the mysterious wonders people had long ago. A long time ago people knew how to find out things by using these powers. They had the gift to know. They used this mysterious gift to know things.

One of the things they used to find out about things was known as communication through thoughts. They knew how people were at their campsites, even though no one else knew. Another thing they did was to find out about the animals they hunted like moose and caribou. These were the animals that the people depended upon for their survival. If they did not kill the animals they were after they would ask the animal why. They used their thoughts to ask the animal, and the animal would reply to the people through their thoughts. The animal would reply in a human voice, just like a person. The moose and the caribou would be heard as if a person was talking to them. They would ask the animals why they could not kill them and why they teased the hunters. The moose would tell them. The moose would say that someone is telling me to do so. The people did the same when they could not kill the caribou. They asked the caribou why. The caribou would tell them why. After they listened to what the animals had to say, they would let them go. They did that to all the animals. That was one of the many mysterious wonders that the people did.

If a person was away from his home and if they wanted to know if anything happened to him, they would ask a shaman who knew how to use communication through thoughts to find out how he was. The shaman would know how he was because the missing person could be heard talking as if he were alive. If the person died, the shaman would know how the person died by asking others that were still alive. They would tell what happened to the person. The shaman would relate to the people when that person would be back. That was another one of the mysterious wonders of the people.

Another mysterious wonder was the use of thought communication to ask people why they teased a person. The shaman could be heard talking to the other person as he interrogated them. That is what he used it for.

Communication through thoughts was used to settle disputes between the Natives. The shaman could talk to a person and interrogate him through his thoughts. That was one of the capabilities of these mysterious wonders. Sometimes he used his powers to destroy his enemies.

Another thing they used was the shaking tent in which the people used to gather all the animals to talk to them. All the animals could be heard inside the shaking tent talking about their lives here on earth. Animals such as the mouse and the frog, all talked about their lives as they roamed about the earth. We don't understand today how the animals were able to know how they were here on earth, because we don't understand the language that the animals speak. That is one of the things a person was able to do long ago.

Now I am going to tell you a story about when a person got badly injured by an animal. He did not go to a doctor. This person did not go, because he would be in pain too long and he did not want to go. Furthermore, he did not want the help of a doctor when he was hurt by an animal even though he was hurting badly. He only wanted to be by himself where he was hurt. Many months passed. The people saw him lying there and waited. Finally they saw him as he was before he got hurt. They did not know who healed him. There was no doctor or no nurse there. They did not know who was with him. He was healed completely. There were no scars on his body nor did he have a limp. He had no visible scars like those shown after a doctor operates.

Whatever this person used to heal himself, it left no scars or marks. This was one of his powers. No one knows what he used. He was not asked all the time for help, although he healed sickness. He was able to heal himself. Long ago they helped each another by sharing medicine. The medicine that they used would help them get better just like the medicine today, but they were not doctors. They knew what was used to heal the sick.

The Natives with these powers were capable of just about anything. I am taking about a long time ago.

When the Native person wanted to go somewhere else, he was able to do so, just by thinking. He did not use a plane as we do today. He was able to fly by himself. He had everything. One time there was a man who went to the store to get supplies. He had two dogs and a sled. While he was inside the store it snowed heavily. The dogs had a hard time pulling him home on the ground, so he walked over the clouds with his dogs where it was good to walk. The people he visited on his way to the store could hear him as he yelled to his dogs as he went by. That is how they knew he went home. He landed right at home. They do not know what he used. There was no plane. He only used his powers. This was another one of the many wonders that the people used long ago. That is what the Natives did long ago. They used their powers and their strength through thought. The Natives also used their powers to destroy other people. The people would take their powers away when they used them the wrong way. They would have let them keep their powers if these shamans would have used their powers properly. That is all I am going to say about these powers.

The law of the land says that the Natives were made for this earth. The Natives did not know the rules and regulations that the Whiteman made. The Whiteman did not talk to nor did they give notice to the Natives. They came suddenly and asked the Natives to use their land. It has not been right for the Natives since then. The Whiteman did that to them. They came to ask him suddenly. The Natives did not have time to think things through. They did not have the time to think how they should reply to the Whiteman. The Natives had a hard time when the first treaty came. If the Whiteman would have let the Natives know ahead of time, that the Whiteman was coming to set the laws for them, they would have known how to reply regarding his land. The Natives replied any old way to what they were asked. The signing of the treaty has not been good for the Native people of today. The first person to set the laws appointed a chief to become the head of the band and that is who they came to see. There was much confusion. That is how I feel when someone comes and asks me, I feel confused because I do not understand. I feel confused because I don't know how to answer nor do I understand

what the future holds. That is why the Natives today have a hard time, when the Whiteman came to them suddenly long ago.

The Natives did not think carefully about how to answer regarding their land. They did not know of the things they were asked, the Natives just replied. The first chief did not think ahead to those who would be affected by his decisions. That is what I think. I remember the first treaty and how it was. I heard the treaty rights that the Natives were given, and if they listened to what they were asked. I also heard the treaty rights when the Whiteman came to see them. The treaty rights were small at first. Then as time went on, the Natives were given more treaty rights to govern themselves. The Whiteman promised the Natives that as long as the sun is in the sky, I will look after you, when I use your land. The Whiteman's promises were very good the first time he came. Now you can hardly see the good promises he made about caring for the Natives today. I know that the first Whiteman who made these promises is not alive. Their promises were broken. They do whatever they want and do not keep the promises that were made to the Natives. The Natives do not hold back anything from the Whiteman they just try to get along. The Native people do not make things difficult for the Whiteman as he lives here on this earth. I think that people should just get along as we are. That is what I think, not that I know a lot. That is all.

I am going to talk about the medical treatment that the Native people got. I know what happens when sickness comes to the Natives. I am going to talk about how the Natives looked. I remember when a great sickness came to Trout Lake. When there was no medicine. The Natives tried their best to cure themselves. They no longer had the power to heal themselves. There was no longer a shaman to go to when you got sick. There was nothing the Natives could use to heal themselves or to help each other with regarding their sickness. There was a person who came on the plane to see them when there was a great sickness here at Trout Lake, but many people died.

One time there was a family who lived in a tent when it was very cold. The parents died and only the children survived. That was when there was a great sickness. Both of the parents died, both the father and the mother. One child died as well. Only a girl, a boy,

and a baby survived. They were far from the reserve. That is what happened. They left the camp along with their dog because they also had no food. They took the baby and started to walk. We do not know how many days and nights they walked, but they tried to get to settlement where the people were. All of them eventually managed to get to the settlement. The boy was small. He was not even ten years old. He left his sister and the baby behind because he thought that they would not make it. The boy tried to get to the settlement. When he got to the settlement, he got help. It was very hard for the Natives in those days when sickness reached the settlements. Those children whose parents died were very poor. The people waited until after the sickness passed to bury their dead. Then they would bury them. That is what happened before there was help.

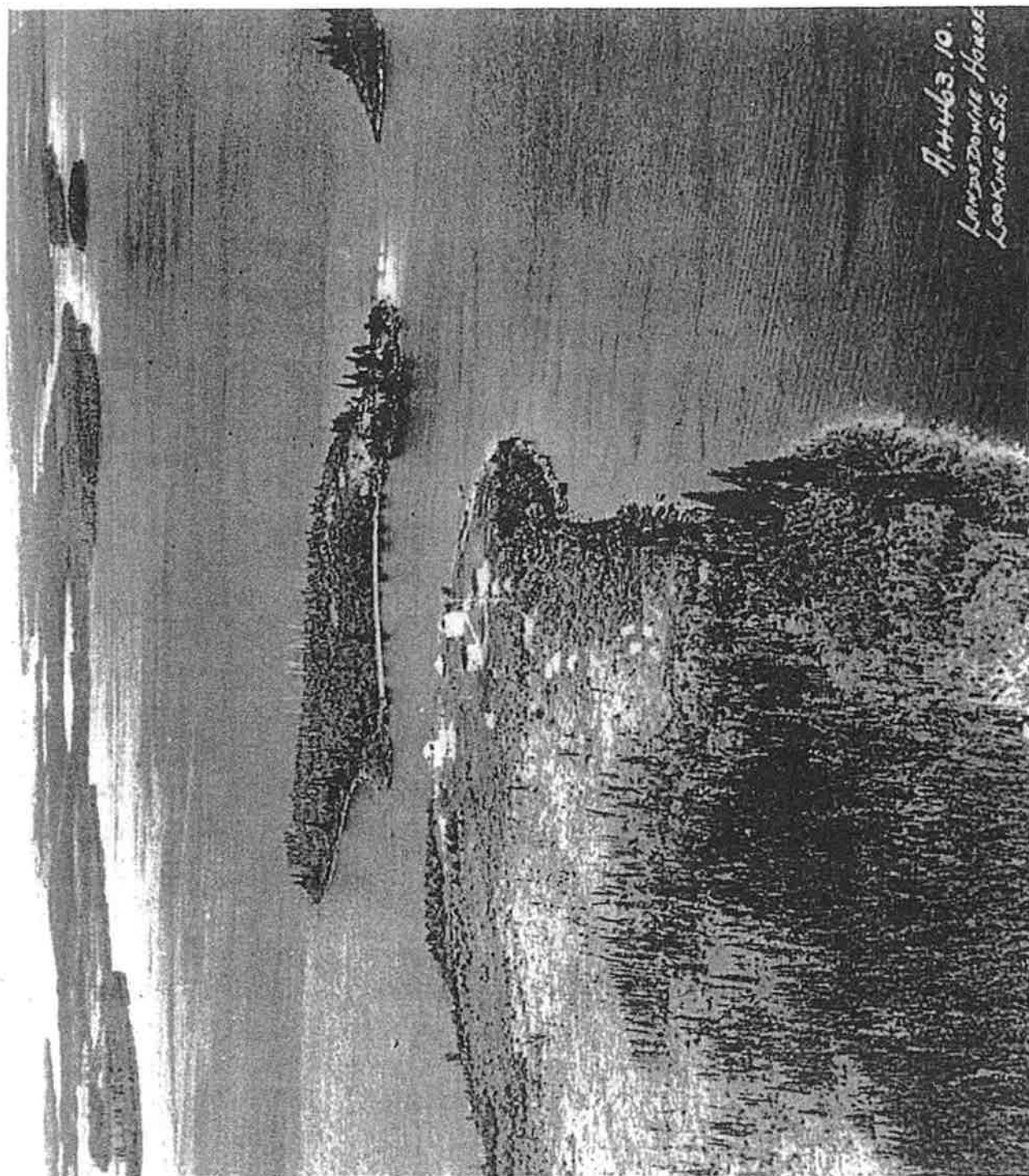
When people were very sick, when they had a boil, they were like that for a long time. There was no one to help them back to health like there is today when they take people away to nurse them back to good health. There was no help like that, in those days, that I am talking about. It was a very depressing time. There were no planes or cars, just a canoe that was made out of birch. The people made their own means of transportation. That is what I'm talking about. They would keep a sick person in the bush, because they were unable to get them to Big Trout Lake. They often waited in the bush with them until they died in the bush. I'm talking about when people were very poor. They could not help sick people because they were too far away.

Now there is help for anyone who is sick. There is air and land transportation now. We have good help now. The Natives are getting help today as they should. When people were by themselves in the bush and they got sick, they would try to come back and let the other people know what was happening with them. They would tell about the death of their wife or husband. They would show that they needed help. That is how poor they were long ago. The Natives were very poor. They could not help themselves back to good health. The things I talked about first, about the Natives being able to nurse themselves to good health, that really happened. A Native person was able to heal and help themselves as I remember then. I saw this happen. Medical help was given to the Native people. I heard many children died with their parents when they passed away. Those children that lived tried to return home. This is what happened a long time ago.

When two people went hunting and something happened to one of them, if one drowned or got shot accidentally, the one alive would try to return home and let the other people know what happened. This was very hard. There was no air or land transportation then, just the people themselves. They had to go and get the body. They had to get the body out so that could they could bury it. The people did the same thing for a person who drowned. That is what happened to the Natives during that time when life was poor.

Now people are easier to reach and can be helped when sickness comes upon them. The Native gets much help regarding sickness. This is what happens regarding sickness today. I have never seen anyone die so suddenly. As far as I can remember, when a person passed away he went slowly, not suddenly. A long time ago, when a person was going to pass away, he was sick for a long time. Now a person gets checkups and medicine for their sickness. People get taken to the hospital if they are really sick. People die very quickly now. A person does not live not even one hour if they die of a sickness. This is what is happening now when people die off. They do not know why this is happening here on earth. This is what I see. As long as I have been living, this is what I see. Many times I see this happening. I know how hard it is for those who passed away. This happened to those I used to work with too. They died off suddenly. Now the doctor does his best to heal. This is here now. This is one of the things that is destroying the people. When sickness reached the people, the doctor was able to cure them because he has the skills to do so. This is one of the things I am talking about. This did not happen a long time ago. The times have changed from what it was before. The life of a Native is no longer hard the way it was once.

There is very little hardship now. That is what I know, I have not lived a long life. I know that times are changing. I did not know that life for the Natives would get better, not like the way it was before and that he would be looked after medically. That is what I know. That is all for now.



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Lansdowne House
Looking S.E.

National Archives of Canada PA 94992 Lansdowne House, 1935

3 **We were taught how to do everything**

told by Helen Mckay

recorded on September 24, 1987

Summer Beaver

I am forty years old. I have been married twenty years. My husband is from Big Trout Lake. My last name was Wabasse. I am related to all the people whose last name is Wabasse. Thomas Wabasse was my father. My mother's name was Liza Beaver. My father and mother raised me. I was raised at a place called Butterfly Lake. That place is half way between here and Lansdowne. The lake is very big. There are whitefish, pickerel, and sucker, but no sturgeon or trout. I did not know my grandfather or my grandmother at all. They passed away a long time ago. They passed away one week apart. That's what I am told. There was a great sickness then. Butterfly Lake was where all the people whose last name is Wabasse were born and raised. That is where we were given a trap line when trap lines were issued.

My mother taught us how to make moccasins. She also taught us how to weave the moose sinew on the snowshoes, on the top, bottom, and middle parts. She taught us all we had to know about making things. She also taught us how to make fish nets. We had to learn how to make a net because there were no store bought nets at that time. She showed me how to set the net as well, and how to put up rabbit snares. We were taught how to do everything. At an early age, between eight and ten, we were sent to bed in the evening. My father would say prayers in the evening and early in the morning. He did that every day. That was our way of being taught about religion. We were also taught how to read and write in syllabics. The lessons started with easy words and then get harder as we went along. That is how we learned. We were not taught the sounds of the symbols first. That is how they taught us.

We were taught how to prepare food when animals were killed. We were taught how to prepare fish. My father would show us how to get fat from the back and stomach lining of fish. Then he would put the fat on the end of a stick and roast these parts over a fire. After roasting them, he would stick them into a pail of water. That is how he got the grease. He would gather this grease as it floated on top of the water. Later, he got the stomach and intestine from a fish, and blew them into a balloon. He used to store the grease in these parts. That was our lard. The Natives long ago also used a moose bladder bag to store fat. That is where they would keep it. This fat was also mixed into the fish powder. That is what we ate in the winter. My father also prepared sturgeon and whitefish for storage by drying them. He would prepare whitefish the same way he did sturgeon. These fish never went bad.

They prepared moose meat the same way. When a moose was killed, the meat was prepared quickly before it went bad. We ate the intestines of a beaver and the stomach part. We ate the intestines of a rabbit too. We would eat the rest of a beaver and a rabbit as well. That is what we ate when we were children.

We were taught how to prepare beaver hides too. I would skin a beaver. The people prepared the skins differently in the spring, not like stretching it in a circle. In the winter, fat was scraped from the skins with an ax. They also used the handle of an old trap to make a scraper. My relatives know what I am talking about because they saw this done.

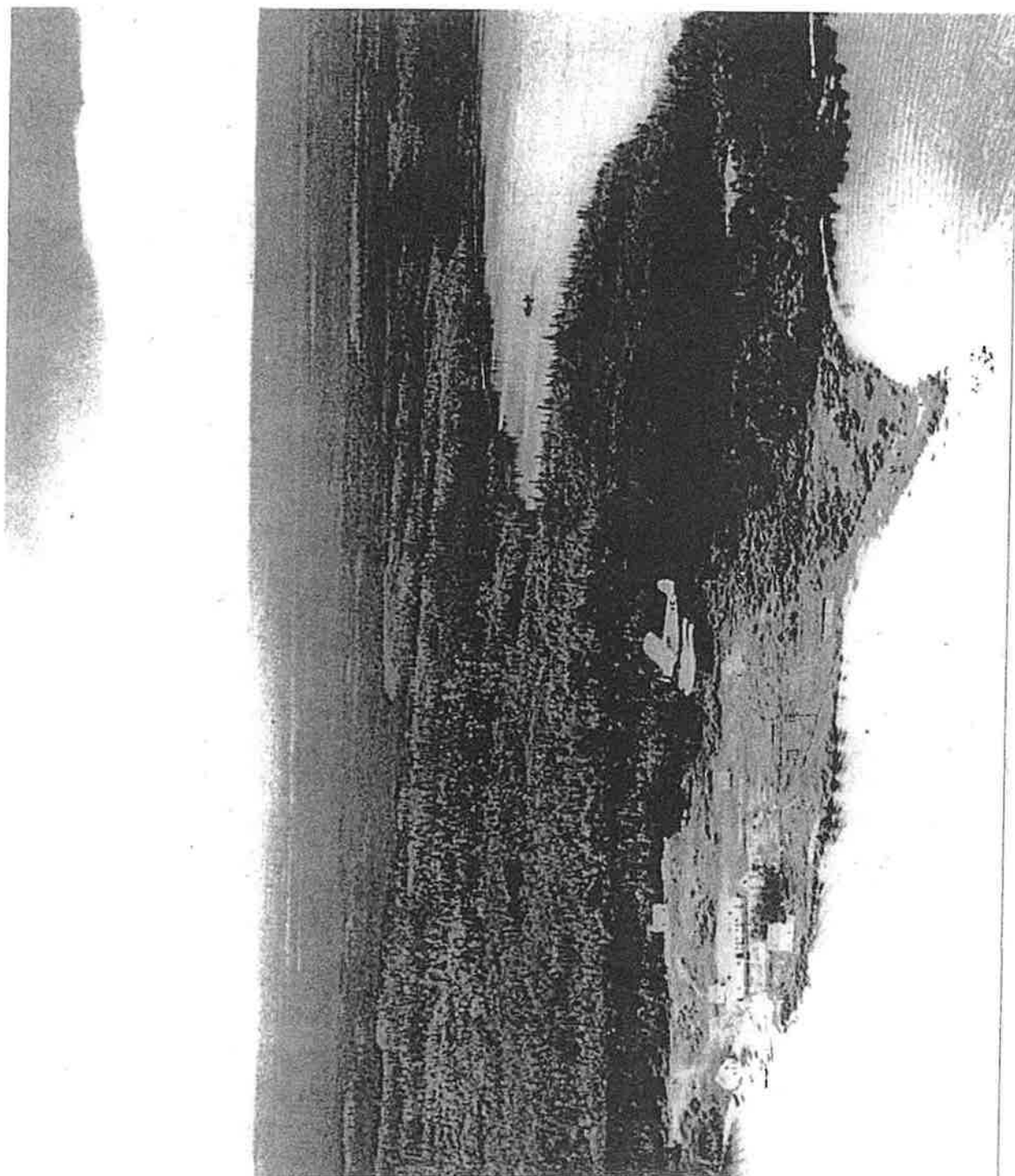
We were also taught how to do beading. That is why I am able to make things today. I make mitts and other kinds of bead work.

We would stay at Lansdowne during the summer. School was held at the agency cabin for three months. Some of the children left for town schools after they were taught here. My parents did not let me go. We were taught the Whiteman's language in the school, not the Native language.

I do not know anything about the treaty. Planes were already used when I was small. We would go to Lansdowne for the treaty. My father used to tell us that the Indian Affairs man and the minister used a boat. They travelled around by boat if they wanted to go to different places. The Natives would travel by boat to get their treaty moneys. Sometimes we used a plane to get our treaty moneys. I do not know why people were given these moneys. My father was told that he got four dollars for his land for one year of use. That is what I remember being told. I don't remember much about what happened a long time ago. My parents did not tell me much about the past.

I remember that there were only two religions. Now there are lots. My father told us that we would have a hard time in the future and that everything would change. I am beginning to see what he was talking about. There are too many things today.

[illegible][illegible]



National Archives of Canada PA 94991 Osnaburgh, 1935

4 That is what would make us happy

told by James Masakeyash

recorded on May 9, 1978

Osnaburgh

I do not remember exactly what was said at the first treaty because I was born at the time of the first treaty. From what I understand, it took the Whiteman three months to settle matters regarding the treaty. He told the people that their rights would not be affected. The Whiteman told us that he would not make life difficult for the Natives regarding the hunting of moose, fish, and ducks. He said that these animals will all be yours. You will have much food, the Whiteman promised, once you have this treaty. We would like very much to use what food we could get. We know the price of food is high here in the north and people do get welfare for food and for their children. Native people have plenty of food around. The prices of things are high. When a person buys twenty dollars worth of food, he does not have enough for an evening meal. That is what happens with the high price of food. Those that freight food up north charge a lot too. Planes are used to haul food which cost a lot as in addition to paying the Whiteman. That is what that happens up north. If the Natives could use some of the Native food, that would be good. The Natives cannot even kill game on the road going north. Native people are scared to hunt anymore. It would be good if the Native could eat what he wants such as the different kinds of grouse, rabbit, moose, caribou, deer, and bear. This is what would make us happy. This was the promise of the first Whiteman that came.

I want to talk about the schooling of the children, and what I would like to see done. I would like to see the children taught about hunting, trapping, sewing, and carpentry, so that they would be able to help themselves on their own reserves. It would be good if we could hunt for one month, if the Natives could go to their hunting areas and teach their children how to hunt and survive in the future. I would like to see students allowed to go to their parents' hunting grounds during the hunting season. I would like to see students being taught all winter. Sometimes the parents leave to go hunting, and they should take their children with them to their trap lines.

It would be good if the older students could go hunting and trapping with their parents for one month. That is what I say.

I want to talk about something else, the natural gas pipeline that is going to be piped through here from the north. I am afraid for the reserves up north and for Osnaburgh. I am afraid of what is going to happen to them. It will be unsafe for those people that hunt and trap on their trap lines. The Native people do not about natural gas. The Whiteman does not know about everything he makes. If the pipeline bursts wherever it will lie, it will not take five minutes for the Whiteman to know. Whatever destruction the natural gas will cause, it will destroy quite a lot of the earth. Maybe in the spring, it will cause a forest fire. Wherever the natural gas will flow, things will go wrong. Whoever looks after the pipeline will have to be very careful. It should always be watched and not handled carelessly. The Whiteman should find a better way of keeping watch on it because the Natives' life is involved and it is their land. They should help the Natives with everything. Everything, that the Whiteman uses, is made here. That is why they should listen to the Natives too, because the Natives want this for their homeland. We all know how beautiful the earth was when we first came. There were plenty of trees. Now everywhere we look, it is bare. The Whiteman uses everything to make money. That is why the Natives should be helped to improve their life conditions, not just the Whiteman who gets wealthy and gets everything. They should look at how to improve the living conditions of the Natives on their reserve. That is what I say about this issue this morning.

Another thing I would like to talk about is the mining of ore. What are they going to do to us about the mining? They shouldn't mine anywhere carelessly. They should see how this is going to help the Natives. The mining companies should make sure that mining does not affect the water, so that the water on the reserve does not get affected. They should find out how to best handle this situation before the mining begins, so that the Whiteman does not bother or disturb the reserve. Then they should go ahead and mine once everything is settled with the Natives and their settlement. We all use everything here on the earth. Not only the Natives use the earth, the Whiteman also uses the earth. The Whiteman should listen to the needs and wants of the Natives so that things can be

better on their reserve. The Natives are not against the Whiteman making money. All the Native wants is for life to be good, for the Whiteman not to bother or disturb the Native where he makes his living, and for the Whiteman to stay where he makes his living. That is what I would like, if there was mining here.

I would like to talk about one other thing. One man by the name of Albert Keeyash saw the Ministry of Natural Resources while hunting on the road here to Osnaburgh. The Ministry of Natural Resources saw him kill a duck and made him pay for killing it. Some people were camped near a river and they could not kill ducks. The Ministry of Natural Resources would not allow them to kill ducks or fish. The Ministry of Natural Resources does not allow them to set a net. It is not right to treat the Natives this way. Native people were told that they have the right to use Native food to eat, and yet, the Ministry of Natural Resources will not allow them to hunt. There are many Native families there, but the Ministry of Natural Resources will not allow them to hunt for food at all. They are scared that the Ministry of Natural Resources will throw them in jail. We don't want the Natives to pay for jail from the welfare they are given. Its not right for the Whiteman to come and kill the game that the Natives depend on. That is the Native's main way of survival travelling around in the bush in the fall. He kills for survival. We are limited to how many beaver to kill. It is our land. Why is the Ministry of Natural Resources able to sell animals? They sell licenses to Americans to kill moose on our trap lines. It is on our trap lines where the moose is hunted and killed. Yet we are not allowed to hunt or kill anything on our trap lines. We can't even sell one pound of anything. Why does the Whiteman do that? There are many moose hunters in the fall. No money is given to the Natives. Moose licenses cost a lot. It's as if all the revenues that the Natives should get are taken away. That's how it looks. The Native does not get a little even though it's his trap line where the moose are killed. The Native pays for his trap line every year. We would like it very much if there was a way to help the Natives about this. Whoever our leaders are, they are very smart here in Canada.



National Archives of Canada C 68929

5 That is what I know

told by Jane Nothing

recorded on January 17, 1978

Big Trout Lake

Q: What kind of clothing did the Native people use long ago in the winter and in the summer?

A: I don't where they got the material long ago. I know where they got the clothes that my mother and my father wore. They only had one pair of clothes. There were many rabbits long ago. There wasn't any unbroken snow, that's how many rabbits there were then. Rabbit skins were used to make clothes in the winter. Rabbit skins were cut in a circular manner to make long strips that would be woven together to make pants, dresses, and coats. Moose hide was used for shoes. There were plenty of moose long ago.

Denim cloth, that was brought from the trading post called Waashowaak, was also used. It looked like a spool of dress material. That is what dresses were made from. The dresses women wore were straight. We wore the same kind of dresses in the summer. We wore dresses when we were small too. There was no underclothing at all. All summer people went barefoot. That is how poor they were. There were no shoes in the stores at all.

Q: What about medicine? What was their medicine? What did they use to treat themselves?

A: An alder tree was used for those who got sick with the cold. They drank the water remaining after it was boiled. This water loosened up the mucus of those who had a cold for a long time. An alder was used for taking the cold away. For anyone who had a bad cough, they used Tiger alder which they cut up and boiled. This liquid which they drank had a very strong taste. It was one of the best medicines for anyone who had a bad cough.

Q: What was used for anyone who suffered from aches?

A: Long ago, I saw them use ashes from their big bonfires. They would gather the warm ashes from these fires in a cloth and tie them up. They would then put the warm bag of ashes on either side of the person's feet. This was very good for people who had aching legs. The same went for anyone who had aching joints. The Native people would warm the body up. In the summer they used sand for aching joints as well. From what I saw, the people used sand for a very good purpose.

Q: What did they make from the animals they killed?

A: This is what I saw. In the fall months, I saw them make a fish trap out of sticks. They would make this in the narrow part of the river. They would set these traps up in the early part of the fall. They also killed marten in wooden traps. These traps were put out before the fur was good. When the fur was good, the traps were opened. The animal would set off the trap by grabbing the bait and get caught by a stick that was set across the mouth of the trap. That is how my father got animals. I saw my mother do the same things.

Q: Did you ever hear that Reed Paper wanted to dam the southern part of the river? What do you think would have happened if the people let this occur?

A: I think that if this would have happened nothing would have been good. They would have cut all the trees down and have destroyed things. The land animals and the water animals would have been taken and destroyed as well, not just trees. Something would have happened to them. They would have destroyed other things too. Nothing would have been good if they did that. That is what I know.

Q: What were tools and awls made from?

A: They used the handle of an old pail, that they were going to throw away, to make an awl. They did not throw anything away that they could make things from such as the handles of pails. These handles were cut and sharpened to make an awl. For the handle part of the awl they used a piece of wood. An awl was used for making holes in anything that had to be sewn together.

Q: Did they use bones for anything? What did they make their cups, plates, and spoons from?

A: They also used a bone as an awl for making canoes. They used this bone to make holes in the birch bark that was sewn together and other things that were made from bark. They had no utensils or tools of any kind. There were hardly any cooking utensils to cook with. Sometimes a person had a frying pan to use for cooking. They went to the trading post, at Waashowaak, to get pots and pans. That is where the freighter boats came in and brought the things. I remember what my mother and father used for plates and other utensils. They used birch bark for plates. They used tree roots to sew this bark together and small sticks for the rims of these plates. I also saw my mother peel the bark of a tree to make a big bowl that was also used as a plate. That is how plates looked long ago. They also used wood to make spoons. From a cedar tree trunk, they made bigger spoons. They used different trees to make their utensils.

Q: What do you think is going to happen to the Natives if they run their own government, their own lives, and handle their own funds and affairs?

A: I think, they would be able to govern themselves if they know what they are doing. I think they would be able to handle some of the funds they get. I would not know how that would work, but I think that if the Natives could handle some of their affairs some good would come out of it. That is one thing that I am not sure of. The Natives should be able to handle and look after their welfare and the funds they are given, but I would not know anything about that. I have no idea how the laws and regulations work for the Natives. What will happen? I do not know.

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БДПРБШ: РНКА.Д, ш.срш, 1978

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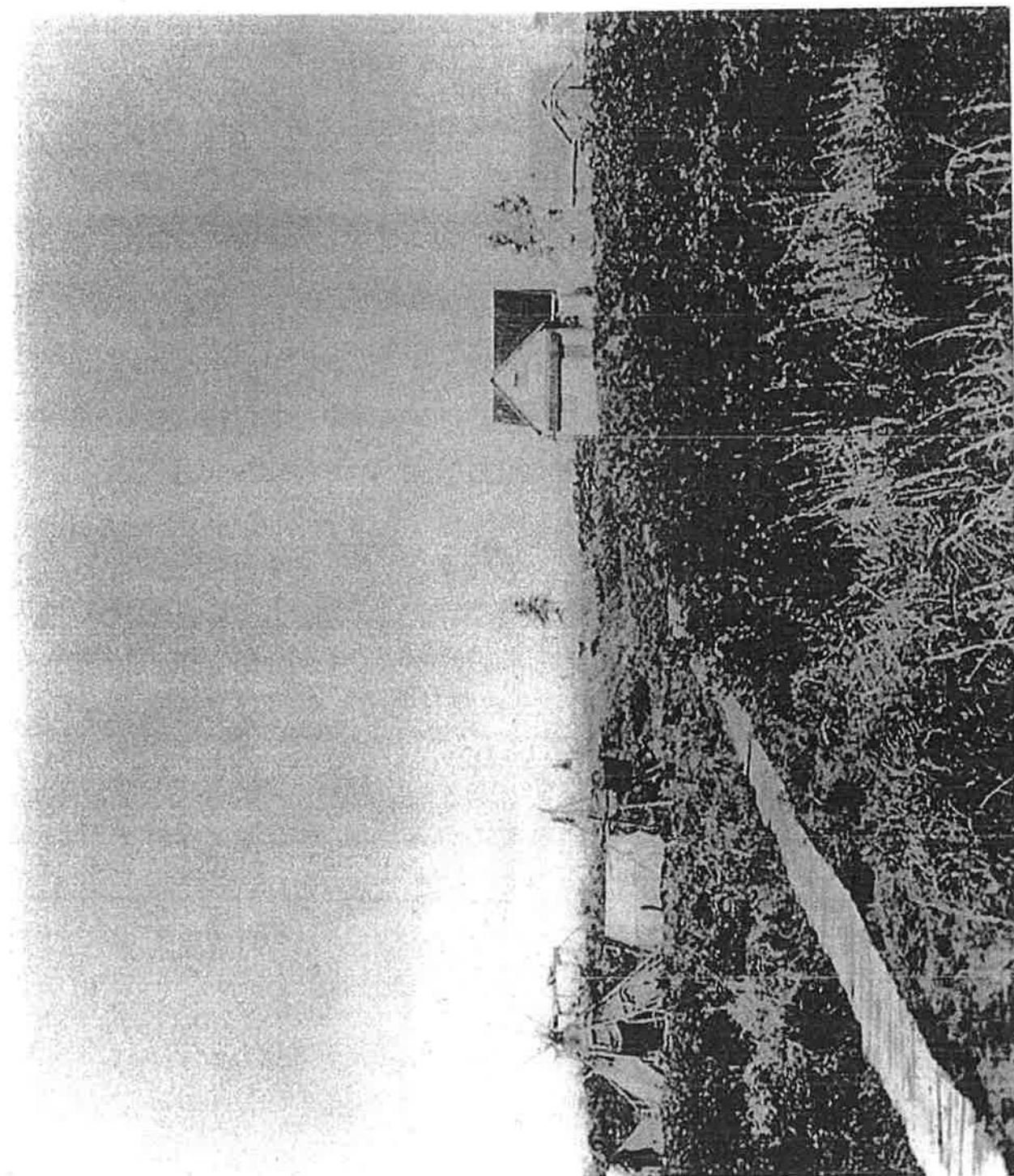
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National Archives of Canada C 68996

6 That is what happened back then

told by Jeremiah McKay

recorded on January 17, 1978

Big Trout Lake

Q. Can you tell us, what happened on Christmas long ago?

A. Long ago people gathered here at Big Trout Lake. They danced, went sliding on hills, and held races when all the people had dogs. That is one of the stories.

Q: What about religion? What did the people do before there was any? What did they do first?

A: I did not see it, but this is what I heard they did first. They drummed, danced around the fire, and sang rituals. I do not know what they sang about. I know they danced around in a circle and sang ritual songs. The animals they used for the ceremonies were beaver and caribou. They cooked the beaver and the caribou whole. The men would eat the whole animal, but women were not allowed to. After they ate, they would dance in a circle inside a teepee and eat a little at that time. That is what the people did before there was religion. They also used the shaking tent for worship. They used the tent just like the way we use the telephone. The people did not really want to use the modern method of worship at first but were convinced by the minister. I wasn't around at that time. There were some people who did not leave their kind of worship. The people held services anywhere, even in the bush. When there was a group of three or more families living in one place, they used one tent to gather in for a service. They held morning services no matter where they were. As I saw it, the people prayed three times during the day, in the morning, mid-afternoon, and evening. These services were carried on no matter where the people lived. This is how they carried on their services at first. The first minister's name was William. He arrived here in 1888 and left 1918. The plate he left is there in the church.

Q: What laws did the government set out to be followed by the Natives?

A: I do not know. I could not tell you exactly what was said or set. This is what I heard regarding church services. The people were afraid to break the laws of worship. They were very careful not to break any rules regarding the church just like the way they treated the shaking tent. After they ate an animal, they would gather all the bones of that animal and tie them very high in a tree so that there would be no bones lying around on the ground. If they did not eat the whole animal in one night, and other people saw the remains in the morning, they would be cast out. That was the reason they did not break the rules. That is what I was told.

Q: What law was followed when a man wanted to marry a woman? What did they do about marriage? Did he court her?

A: The parents of the man and the woman decided whom they would marry. They asked the father of the child if they wanted his child to marry his son or daughter. Both parents would get together to decide about the marriage. That is how it was. The couple was not allowed to live together until they had a house. There was no courting. All they could do was except the decision. They all went to the church to say their vows. They went to the home of the man after the marriage was performed. That was when people first got married. Sometimes there was no one to marry them off. Sometimes a woman who was by herself had to bring her daughter to church to get married, but would not allow her to live with or see her husband-to-be until after the marriage ceremony. Before the marriage both slept in different places. This was the law when people wanted to get married. That is what was followed.

Q: What did they do when two people did not want to get married? What did they do back then?

A: The minister followed the same process for marriage. Christianity was used for people who supported those getting married. A couple was married off as soon as a decision was made and when the minister arrived. The minister only came once a year.

Today, the couples are asked if this is what they really want, or they are asked three times. That is what happened at first, but not like long ago.

Q: What was done when a couple broke up or had a hard time?

A: I do not remember anything like that happening. Maybe a long time ago that happened. I remember sometimes that a wife and a husband did not get along. They sometimes fought. There was no jealousy then not like the way it is now. They did not break up even though they fought each other, they just went back together again. That is what happened a long time ago. It is not like today when a couple breaks up as soon as something goes wrong.

Q: How was the relationship between the parents, the son-in-law, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, and the father-in-law. How did they get along?

A. It was the same as the way it is now. No one disliked or bothered their relations no matter who. No one quarreled with their in-laws. I guess there were dislikes among the relations, the son-in-law, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, and father-in-law, but that happens everywhere. The women liked their sons-in-law and their daughters-in-law. The men liked their sons-in-law. They liked them just like their own children. As for me, my wife's parents liked me. My father-in-law took me all the time when he went hunting. He liked me very much. The same for my mother-in-law, she liked me as well. I knew she wanted me around. She always liked me. This is what happened.

Q: What about raising children when they were born, an infant, an adolescent, a teenager, a young adult, and an adult? How was the child raised?

A: This is what was done. When a child was an infant, the parents looked after the child well. The woman was in charge in her own home. She would wake the child up in the morning before sunrise, whether or not the child wanted to sleep. She would put the baby in a tikinagan, and make a swing outside before the sun came up. The baby sleeps for along time, when the mother does this. The woman would finish whatever she had

to do before the child woke up. When the child is able to go in and out, he was trained to take wood in one a time. They would set muskrat traps for him to look after. When he was much bigger, he was given a pail to get snow in the winter. When he became older, the parent would make him a bow so he can learn to kill things. This is how he learned to feed himself by killing animals. That is what they did to the child. A boy was taught at a very early age. They would put a trap nearby for him to check once in awhile. He would trap weasel and mink, and in the spring he would trap muskrat. He learned by what he saw. He learned how to trap very fast. That is what was done about child raising. Everybody did that until the child was an adult. If the child didn't take or learn what he was taught, he did not know how to do things well. Just like today, some children do not know how to do things well.

Q: At what age was a young man allowed to work?

A: When there were wooden boats, a young man was put to work at the age of twenty. A boy had to finish growing before making money. That was when a boy was given a job. He had to completely finish growing. He had to be in good health and fully grown out of his childhood before they took him.

Q: How about their schooling, their lives, their religion, how did they look at it long ago?

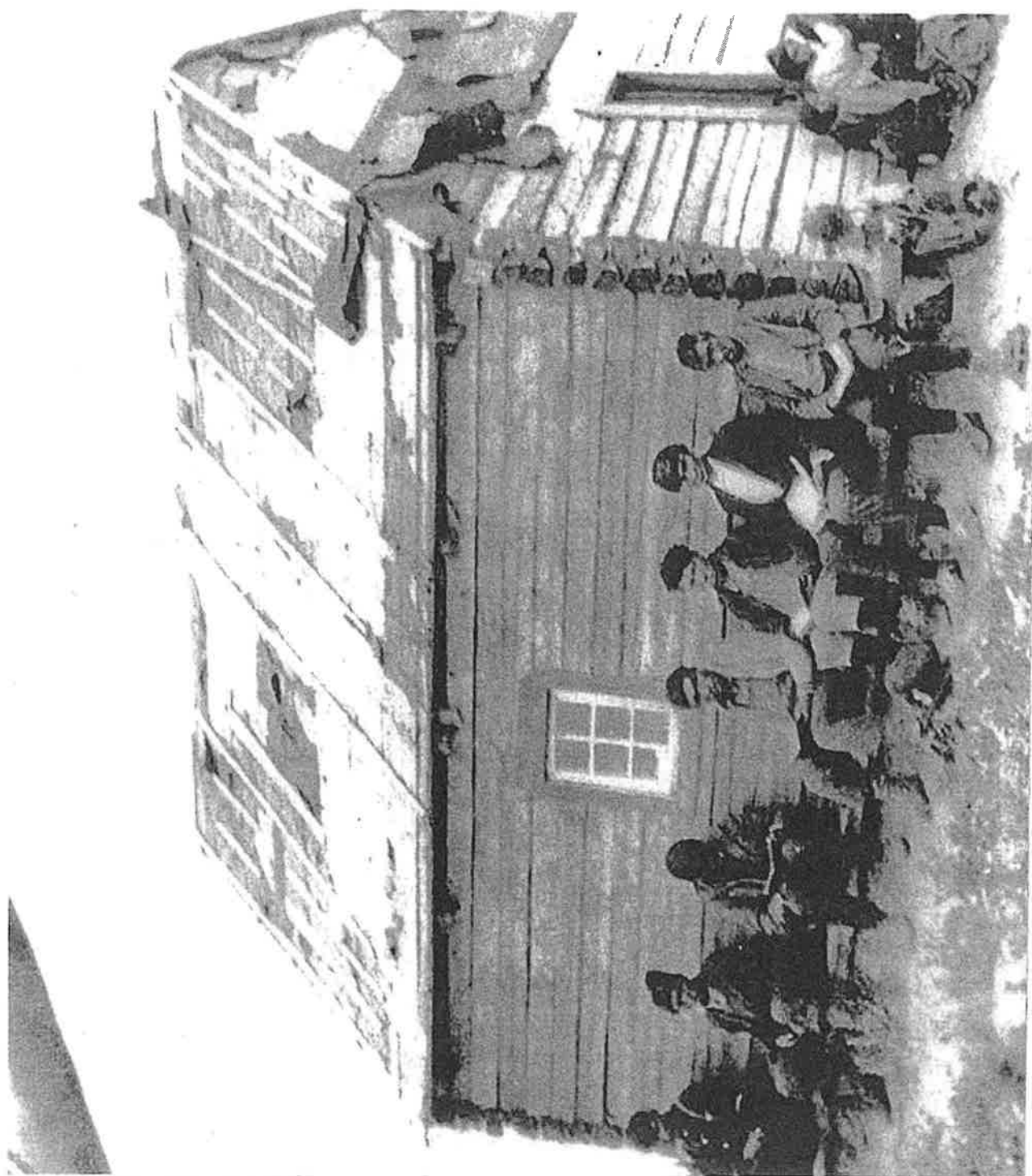
A: The young people in those days looked at things the same way as we do today. They were very religious and kept their faith right to when they were full-grown adults. Young people were very dedicated. They would say their prayers every day. They would not miss a prayer. They would pray in the morning. In the winter, when they were traveling about, if they missed a prayer session, they would regret missing their prayers. I was also like that. I was very sad when I missed my prayers.

Q: What guidelines did the Natives set about the law? How did they look after their political affairs, how did they manage their life and know what to follow? What did they do when things went wrong? What laws did they make?

A: The people did not do all the things they were told to do. The chief and the government people were the ones who set the laws to be followed. They counted all the people, even those that went trapping. There was one person appointed to look after the festive offerings and the minister's offerings. No money was taken for offerings long ago. They gave offerings of food and this was given to the minister to look after. One person looked after the chief's offerings. He had to follow whatever the customs set out for him. When the chief returns at Christmas, this person took the offerings to the chief's place. Offerings that the minister was given were brought to the chief's house. The minister came and gave him the food. That is what was done. That was one of the customs that was set up for the people.

People that were healthy looked after those who were short of supplies, those who had a hard time, and those who were sick. They were responsible for letting these people know who was close by. That is how they got help. That is how they looked after the sick.

This is what they did for a woman who had a child by herself. They handled this situation carefully. They asked the girl carefully. The chief, the government person, and the minister asked her repeatedly who the father was. Once they found out whose child it was, then couple was asked to get married. The adults of the couple got together and decided when the couple should get married. It is not like today, when a woman has a baby, she is not asked whose child it is. That is not what was done. They would find out whose child it was. That is what happened.



National Archives of Canada C 68923

7 **It is not like the way it used to be**

told by John Bighead

recorded on July 17, 1975

Wunnumin Lake

I am here in Wunnumin Lake, and I am going to tell you a story. I am the chief of Wunnumin Lake. I would like to tell you a little about what happened to us in the past. I am going to talk about the time when I was at a place called Big Beaver House. I spent time with some of the people there. I was a councillor at Big Beaver House. That is what I did first. I was asked by the people of Wunnumin Lake about how to start a business, because they had no one to help them. They called me there. I accidentally met up with one of their leaders from Wunnumin Lake. After I saw that person, they asked me how I would feel about helping them to start a business. I told them I would try. They let me live with them. From there we started what we called an Indian store at Wunnumin Lake. That is what the people at Wunnumin Lake called it. They used their own money to start this store. I went home to get my family. My relatives also followed me to a place called Opatakwaa. That was where the first treaty was signed at the big dam. This place is five miles east of Wunnumin Lake. That is where the people put me to start their store. That is what happened to me. They gathered their money together to get some freight. They made the store and a place for me to live. We were able to have the freight bought in by plane. It landed many times. That is all I have to say for now.

I am going to tell you a story about myself and how I was raised in the past by my father. We had some very hard times when I was born. We lived half way between Big Beaver House and Wunnumin Lake. I was born there on December 23. Somewhere around that time my mother passed away. My father had a very difficult time when I was just a baby because I was always crying. There was no one around to help because we were on the trap line. My father used the stomach of a fish to feed me. That was my bottle. He fed me rabbit gravy because there was no sugar or flour. That is what happened when my father was raising me. My father had a very difficult time.

I remember many of the things that I was told during my upbringing. That is what I was taught. I was taught to work. That is what happened to me when things did not go right. I learned how to trap because my father taught me how. It wasn't long before I would no longer see my father. He wouldn't be around to teach me things. There came a time when I got married. At the time I did get married, my father was still alive. It wasn't long after, that my father passed away. Not much longer after I got married. I had only my brother and three other relatives alive. That was all there was of us. I only had one brother during that time, after my father passed away. My brother was not married then. At the time of his death, my father was down south working for the Hudson's Bay Company. That's where they were. I was at Big Beaver House and sometimes at Wunnumin Lake too. When I was at Wunnumin Lake, I heard of my father's death. My brother took over my father's place with the Hudson's Bay Company. That is what happened as I was growing up. This is the story I am telling you.

My father taught us much about working and trapping. He taught us how to survive. My brother and I went back to my father's trap line. My brother and I built a house there. We were able to build one there. The Company came to see us many times. There was a Whiteman at Big Beaver House. He came to see where we built the house. He bought us things to use for survival. We also trapped animals. We would leave our place two weeks at a time to get food for my children. We had children at that time. I taught my children as well. They are all big boys now. All my boys have jobs. I taught them how to teach themselves the meaning of survival. That will be all for now.

I am the chief of Wunnumin Lake. This is where I am talking from. This is what my father and my grandfather told me. I never saw my grandmother. I lived here in Wunnumin Lake. I was told many things about the past. It's not even ten years ago that this went on.

This was during the time when there was not much available up here in the north, things like store materials. There was an old man who made a store. It was about two miles up the river. He built the store on the Tenwoojo River. The name of the old man was Kenawet. He was the one who built the store. We never knew or saw the people who

brought his freight. They would come during the night with the freight. We only heard the noises from their boats as they went by. The old man did not want anyone to help him at all. The old man stored his freight in a little house nearby. He sold only tobacco, matches, tea, and other main items that the people could use. That is what one of the grandfathers did long ago. That is what my very own grandfather told me. After he laid out all the stuff, he called for people to come and get what they wanted. They came to get whatever they wanted such as tobacco, matches, and tea. That is what he did. That was one of the mysterious wonders my grandfather was capable of doing. At the time when there was no Whiteman here and no food available for them to use. That was one of the things done here by one person in Wunnumin. That is all I have to say to those who will hear me.

I want to tell you this story about the things our forefathers did for survival long ago when people were starving. That is time I am talking about. There was no food around. There were no rabbits, there were no partridges, and there were no fish. There were no moose and there were no caribou. Moose came around only recently, but caribou were here a long time ago. There was an old man there where they had their main camp on the big river. It's about twelve miles (20 kilometres) south on the river where the two elders camped to fish for pike. That is where those two elders moved. They also had children with them. Their clothing was made from lynx fur that kept them warm in cold weather. The children skinned the lynx themselves. They used the legs for pants, the arms for jackets, and the head for hats. That is how it was during that time I am talking about.

The elders were camping near the mouth of the river. One made a fire on one side of their tent. They had no food. The other walked around looking for beaver in the evening, while his youngest son tried his best to fish. He fished the way you do in the winter. That is what he told him. He told his son that he will make a place for him to fish. The elder's name was Kenakonokopan. The child's name was Wakos. That was his name. He was used as a look out. He went to the fishing area after he drank. They melted snow to drink because they were starving. The man took one tree out on the ice. He cut down a tall tree. He took the tree to where he made the hole and he stood it up

into the hole. Then he took the tree out of the hole and put it nearby. He made bedding near the hole. He sat the child down on the ice. He showed his child how far to put the hook in the hole. He tied something on the hook for bait and left the child there. The child stuck the bait in the hole. The fish grabbed the bait right away. The boy caught fish one after another. The child caught many fish. His father came to get him because he was catching lots. He took his hook out of the hole. That is what happened to him. They dragged the fish to their camp. They cleaned and roasted the fish. The parents and the child ate them. That is what happened to all of them there. They stored many fish. The man prepared the fish. All of those people who were starving ate. Some were unable to come because they were too weak to make it there. They dragged these people there, especially those who could not make it on their own. The people gathered many fish.

That is how they managed to survive a long time ago. That is what happened to the people before the Whiteman came up north. There were already Whiteman's tents and a store down south at the time of this story. This is just a little about what happened that I am telling you.

This is what I want to tell you again. This happened about ten years ago to someone on our trap line. There was an old man living there at the time when they used the shaking tent. I think this happened just recently. I cannot remember exactly how the story goes. This happened where they camped. There were no beavers. They asked the elder if there was a way that they could have beavers. The elder made beavers. He used a poplar tree to make a beaver, but he did not carve them. My grandfather was told how to make one male and one female beaver, and he made them. After he made the two beavers, he showed the old man. The old man said, "Go and hang them at the mouth of the river. Place them on each side of the river and hang them facing each other. Stake the beavers good using two strings to make it strong." That is what he did. My grandfather made sure that the beavers were secured to the stakes to ensure that they would not float away. That is how he made them. He went back in two days and took the elder to see the beavers that they made and see if they were alive. My grandfather took him by boat. As they came to the mouth of the river where they hung the beavers, they could see that the sticks were down. They did not see the beavers hanging there.

They had lost them. The beavers were taken. They went home again. My grandfather was told by the elder to return in two days. That is when they went back to the river. The markings of beavers were everywhere to be seen in the river, but they could not see any beavers. They saw only the markings of beavers. They went quite a way up the river and could see their markings all over. That is what happened long ago. That is what our forefathers were capable of doing to survive long ago. Maybe they used their dreams or whoever told them how to survive when there was hardly anything. That is all I am going to say.

I want to tell those young people about how our life was when we travelled around to survive. You probably would not be able to survive. The methods we used to survive were taught to us by our forefathers. You probably do not know how to make a fire. We had to bed down anywhere in the snow. We gathered many sticks to make a fire. The people would use a pail to melt snow. They would drink the water and a little bit of food like fish or rabbit. There were no cups. The people would constantly move in need for something else to trap. They made their sleds out of birch and tamarack. The people pulled it along whenever they moved. They used their sleds for trapping and hunting, and for moose hunting. That is what they did

They used snowshoes to dig a clearing in the snow and tree boughs for flooring and shelter. The people would gather a lot of wood. They would keep a fire going all night long. The people slept wherever they found food. That is what they did long ago. That is how they survived. There were no sleeping bags of any kind. There wasn't much of any thing. There was only a little bit of rabbit. They made clothes, to keep them warm, from the animals they killed. That is what happened back then. That is why you young people today would not be able to survive, because you have been bought up in the Whiteman's way of life. If the elders do not teach you how things were done in the past, you will not be able to survive in the north. The way they did things when they slept. You would not be able to sleep just anywhere in the snow or know how to use tree boughs to use as roof if it snowed during the night. That was when they would use only tree boughs for shelter. They would make half a shelter and leave the one side open so that the young people they were with could get shelter. This is how they were taught while

being raised by their parents to survive. The young men in those days were taught how to hunt. We were brought up the same way too.

My father's teachings were the same. As soon as we were able to walk, we were taught to do things such as how to make a fire, how to prepare a place to sleep, how to cook, and how to trap. That is what I taught my children. I had four sons who I taught. I took two of my sons when I travelled around with my dog team that I had. We would be gone one week. The other two small ones stayed with their mother. We had a tent then. I would leave my home to go trapping for Christmas. I would leave in the fall. That is what I did when I was young. I did not run short of anything to use because of my children. I taught my children the same way as I was taught. I was never short of Whiteman's food or Indian food. That is what I did. I loved them. I never taught them anything that would harm them. Today they are working here in Wunnumin Lake. They work for the church. One is a councillor and two others are ministers here. That is what my father told me. I see what my father taught me.

9 That is what I saw

told by Mary Ann Kaomi

recorded on July 29, 1977

Kingfisher

Onajewak is the name of the place where I was born, over there where Joseph traps. That was where we were born. We moved further away from there, always moving from place to place. My father killed caribou. We picked up dead fish to eat then. He killed beaver a long time ago and he killed moose too. That is what we ate. The people had guns already. They chased moose when the snow was hard on top. Guns were here for quite awhile. I went hunting with bow and arrows with my grandmother. She made many bows. I saw her make lots of them. I would carry them for her. That is one way we survived. My father and mother would go in different directions snaring partridges by their necks. My father would trap and my mother would set snares. She was the one who kept care of us. She cut wood when she got home. She would cook for us. My mother sometimes made a fish trap to catch fish. When I was able to work, the first things I did were get water, check snares, and bring wood in from outside. I also got ice. I would use one pail to bring the ice up. There weren't many pails in those days. We also used big plates and birch bark baskets to put ice in. That is what I saw being done. When I was able to work, I would go snaring with Jeremiah. We wouldn't be able to carry everything we killed so we used a sled. We would use a sled made out of birch. We would pull it ourselves. That is what we did. During the winter we would set nets out and wait there.

My father did not live long. He did not see me grow up to be adult. My father talked to me for the last time about how I should live my life. He told me to look after myself and not to trouble anyone else. He told me not to think about my death but to my live life. That is how I lived my life.

Jeremiah would snare many rabbits. We wore rabbit skins on our backs for clothes. I wore dresses made from cloth and shoes made from moose hide. That is what my shoes were made from. We bought an ax head from the store with no handle. We made our own ax handle. That is what we always did. I always tanned moose hide. I would make shoes with embroidery and bead work. The people know me here. I am not lying.

When we went somewhere, we used a canoe. We used a carving knife, not a planer, to make a canoe. We used a birch bark canoe when we went to Trout Lake. My father would carve out and bend sticks into the shape of a canoe. My mother would dig up roots and gather tree gum. She would sew the birch bark canoe. After she sewed the canoe up, she would plaster tree gum on the underside of the canoe where she had sewed. After she did that, they would start on the top. Then my father would lay out flat sticks on the birch bark. The sticks my father carved were placed on top. Then he would bend dogwood sticks into shape. He would put these at the bow of the canoe. That is how I saw it done. He would put sticks right across the rim where they would get in and out of the canoe. They would twist dogwood around the rim. Then he would put another stick on top of this. That would make the sewing look neat. That is how he made the sticks. Then my mother would melt tree gum. Later she would rub the melted tree gum everywhere she sewed. We would also gather tree gum and she would rub the tree gum in areas where she sewed again. That is how she finished the canoe. Later she would get into the canoe and look for leaks. That is how she knew there were no leaks. If you made the canoe properly, there would be no leaks unless you ripped the birch bark. That is what I saw. That is one thing.

When we got to the rapids on our way to Trout Lake, the children would get out and walk over them. Our parents would go down the rapids in the canoe. We did not use the birch bark canoe very long. Jeremiah knows how to make a birch bark canoe too. We would finish that also. We made the same things that my mother and my father made. I was good at braiding and sewing the birch bark. I also used birch bark as a tarp. I would dig up the roots and boil them to use as well. I used the roots to sew birch bark together to make a big tarp. That was one of my jobs.

When we were children, we lived in a house made with moss. That is where we stayed. We made things properly. We put birch bark at the very top, where the hole for the smoke would go, so that it would not burn. That is another thing I learned to use birch bark for. I would make a fire inside and hang the pots over it. There was no stove then. We used dogwood sticks to hang the pots. We would change these sticks whenever they started to burn. That is where we hung our rabbits. This is what I saw being done all the time.

We also gathered water. We used a small hollowed out stick to bring water into our moss house. We did not put water inside the moss house. We hung water in a pail near the doorway of the house. We put a hollowed out stick along the side of the house so that water would run along it. Then we tied it with a string to another stick inside of our house. That is where the pail would hang. That is where they hung the pots after cooking too, so that no one would burn. A storage place was also made for food along the side walls of the house right above our head. That is what we did. That is where we kept our plates as well.

We went ice fishing in the winter. We used a chisel to make holes in the ice. We already had ice chisels in those days. We tied them together. They did not look like the ones we have today. It was a different type of metal that we used.

I was already trapping when I was fifteen years old. I was able to manage at whatever I worked on. My aunt would stay in the tent. She was finished raising me. She worked in the tent. She would fix up the tent and clean it.

We saw other children as well. I did not really play with other children because I was not well. We would go sliding down hills at Christmas time. They called that occasion Christmas long time ago. We would use a sled made out of birch. We made a clearing on the hill so that we would not damage the sled. We used the sled for hauling wood. There wasn't only one sled. We pulled it ourselves. Soon we had a dog team. We had four dogs. That is how many there were. The people would make a big sled. They used a birch tree to make them. We would hitch a dog team to the sled. We did not have to struggle too

much when we had dogs to pull the sled. We would make a trail where we would get wood. The sled for hauling wood was made special. This sled was about half a foot off the ground with runners. They placed sticks in certain places along the sled. They would chop the birch wood into shape, smooth it, and carve the wood out along the backside. They would rub mud along the backside of the sled and let it freeze. After the mud froze, they would apply water. The sled became slippery when this was done.

We made the trail so that the sled would not go off it or bump into trees along the way. The wood is heavy when you pull it. We were able to put one cord of wood on this sled. We did not go right away after we made the trail. We packed the trail hard when we used dogs. The dogs did not fight because they knew each other. We tied the dogs' harnesses to the sticks that were at the head of the sled. That is where we guided the sled from, so that the sled would not turn over. If the sled turns over into the snow, it is very hard to right. You have to unload all the wood. That is the only way to get the sled back on the trail. Dog harnesses were in the store then. That is what was used. Long ago they would shape sticks to fit the body of the dog and then wrap old cloth around these sticks. They would wrap rabbit skins around these sticks and then put cloth material on them. Also, they would braid old nets and use them for harnesses. They used moose hide babiche as well. Babiche was used by the Natives for along time.

This is what my mother said. There were no matches. They looked for a certain kind of fire stone. They dried grass and the soft round part grew on birch trees. There was this round piece of metal that they used. That was where they made fire. The people put a stone close to the mouth of the metal piece. They would hit the stone and make sparks. The sparks would land into a metal can with dried grass. Then they would blow on it. After they would put birch into the can. I saw this being done because matches were scarce. The fire never went out during the night inside the tent. They would put a big log on the fire. During the night the fire was fed with smaller pieces of wood. I saw that done too.

We had plates made out of birch bark. There were no other kinds of plates. We never saw a store, so it was always birch bark plates or small bowls. I saw them use plates

made out of birch bark. We would use these for holding our food to eat. Some people still make birch bark baskets. I also made everything out of birch bark.

When the weather turned warm, I moved away from my hunting grounds. I set snares and gathered rabbits. After four days, they came and got me. They used dogs to pull the rabbits home. We cut the rabbit skins into strips and made a blanket. We made a big blanket to cover us all. We did not use rabbit blankets when we were children. We used the rabbit skins for clothing. We also used the skins for socks inside our moose hide shoes. We also had shoes made out of cloth material if there was some. There wasn't much moose hide around then. I saw them wear caribou dresses made out of young caribou hides not the older ones. I made them too. I made a dress for my younger sister out of caribou hide with hair on one side. I tanned the hide. I did it just like the way they tanned a beaver skin. That's what I did to the caribou hide. That is what I would wear in the winter. I also made a coat out of young caribou hide for Jeremiah. I made almost anything. I would make beaded moose hide gloves as well.

There were three of us in the family. I carried a boat on my shoulders when we went to Trout Lake. My mother and I had our own boat. They would leave us behind. As long as I had someone else to follow when I traveled down the rapids, that is what I did. I knew how to make a net—even a surgeon net. There is only one thing I have not done and that is smoke.

I ate everything that was good to eat. I have even eaten a bear. When there was no rope or string, we would tear the bark off dogwood twigs during the time of the year when it was easy to tear it off. We braided this bark. We would use it to tie stones as sinkers for the net. We soaked these in the water so that the bark would not dry. That is what we did. You cannot see a net when you set it in Trout Lake. We would tie a stick on the net for a marking. That is how we would pick up the net. That is what we did first.

I was good at trapping too. There were traps then. I used wood traps. I used these to trap rabbits when they ate my string snares. We used string at first. I killed many rabbits using wood traps. Did you ever hear of a fish trap? I would make one so that we could

eat. That is what happened to me. I did not always have someone to go with. I used to trap with a lady by name of Jeannie. We would go just a little way from where our tent was set up. We would go there as soon as the weather got cold. That is when we would leave to trap.

At that time there were already people travelling around selling things. I was capable of looking after myself properly. There were books then too. There weren't many of them yet. It was not until the arrival of the minister when there were lots of books.

I was the one who was given babies to look after for those mothers who were unable to take care of them. I looked after ten babies. Some of them I kept for a long time. Then they would come and take them away. I would take the children as long they allowed me to keep them. I kept the babies as long as they could live if they were deformed. Sometimes it would be more then ten days for the babies to be picked up. There was no problem for the babies to be here ten days. Sometimes I had them for five days. That is what I did when they asked me. Some of the babies I looked after still live on the reserve.

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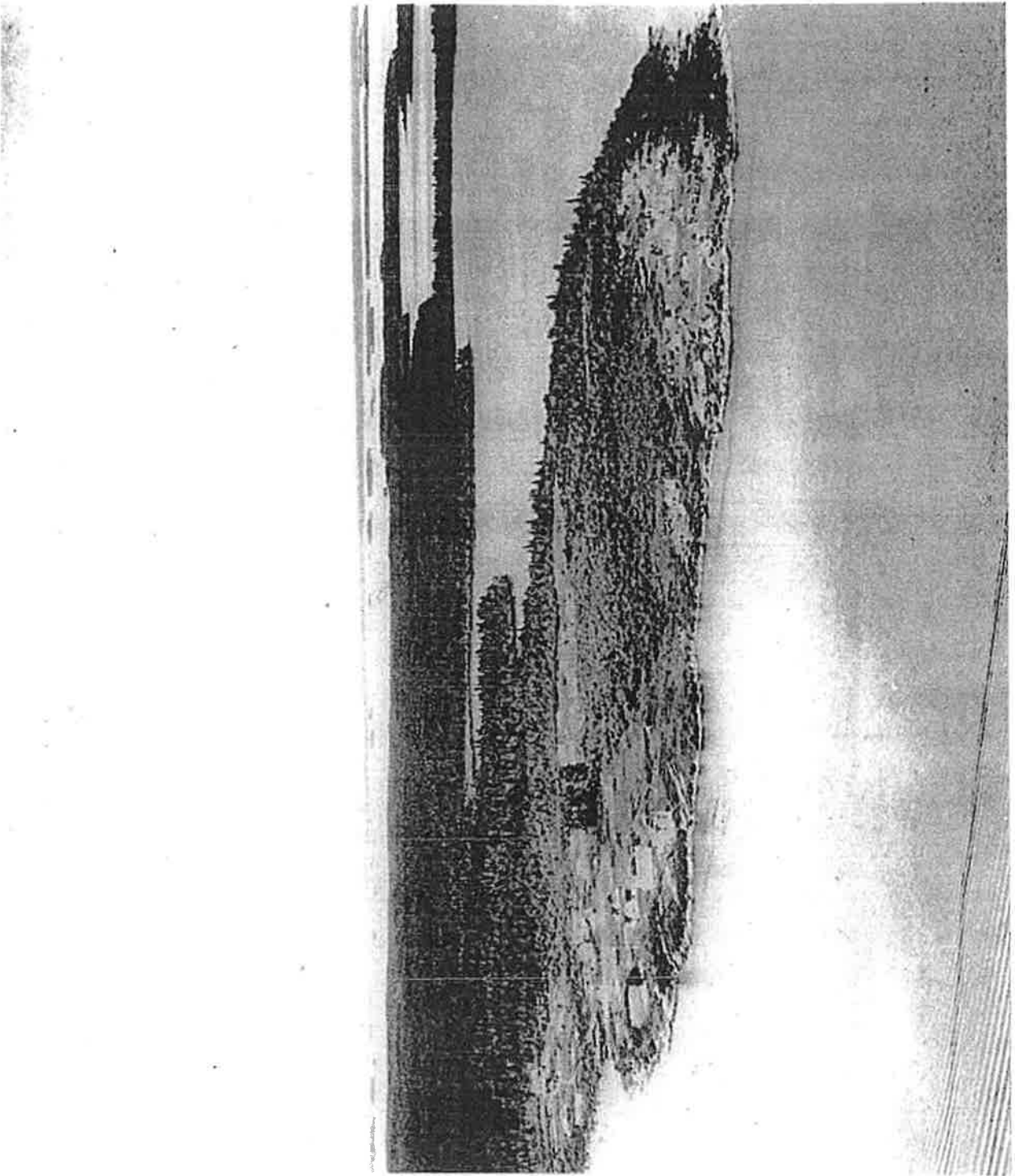
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National Archives of Canada PA 94988 Trout Lake, 1935

10 This is the way it was

told by Mary Fox
recorded on July 28, 1977
Bearskin Lake

I shall try to tell about the way life long ago as I remember it. I shall try to tell it as best as I can.

People had to fish early in the morning before they could eat. They had to kill fish if they wanted to eat. After the fishing was done, they would look for rabbit tracks if they wanted to eat rabbit. This is how the Indian survived by depending on the land for survival. There was no Whiteman's food like we have today. It was only recently that the Indian used the Whiteman's food. That is what I eat too. There was no food available to eat right away. People had to hunt early in the morning in order to feed their children.

This is the way it was.

After hunting was done, the people had to gather wood to keep their children warm. That is what happened. They had to have wood ready for the stove. They gathered wood for their own use. They used moss on the roof. This was very important in the winter. There were no houses then. When food was no longer available at a camping area, the people had to move. Those who used moss for homes had to use the boughs of trees and snow for a new roof. To feed their family they moved to new camping grounds to hunt. This is what they did to when they fished, and when they hunted for rabbits. These were the main activities of the people. That is what the people did—move from place to place when the food became scarce. In the spring, cloth was used for tents because of the warm weather. Only a little bit of cloth was used. When people had a net, even one net, they would set it out in the spring. People in those days didn't always have a net. That is the way they fed their children. This is the way it happened long ago.

We were very poor during our lives as far as hunting was concerned. We did not have Whiteman's food then. Now we use the Whiteman's food. That is what I use. Now there is an abundance of food and game. We are told about how it is going to be in the future, the way it was like in the past when times were hard. This is what is said in the Bible. There will be hunger in the future. This is what I know, for we are told what's going to happen.

I will tell a legend, not a very dirty legend. That is what I do, I tell legends. I have told legends before.

I will tell you a little about Weesakeyjak and what he did.

Weesakeyjak did many things during his travels. I will do my best to tell this legend. I will tell just a little bit about him. One day he saw partridges all in a flock. He asked them what they were called. The partridges told him that they were called Thunder Birds. They were called that because of the noise they make when they suddenly take off the ground. Weesakcyjak teased the partridges as they were in their flock. After teasing the partridges, he then went on his way. Soon he came to a river that he wanted to cross. He was sure he would be able to jump across it. As he attempted to jump, a partridge flew by suddenly. Instead of making the jump, he ended up jumping in the water. That is what he did. He ended up having to swim across the river. He even swam across the rapids. That is how the legend was told. That is all I will tell about Weesakeyjak.

Once there were old ladies who had pointed elbows. They liked to tease each other very much. They liked to do a lot of teasing. That is how some people looked long ago. They were always mean to each another because of their pointed elbows. There were two of these old ladies. They always liked to see who was the best. One day they were playfully teasing each other because of their pointed elbows. They kept poking at each other with their pointed elbows until all you could see was their tattered clothing. That is how some people looked long ago.

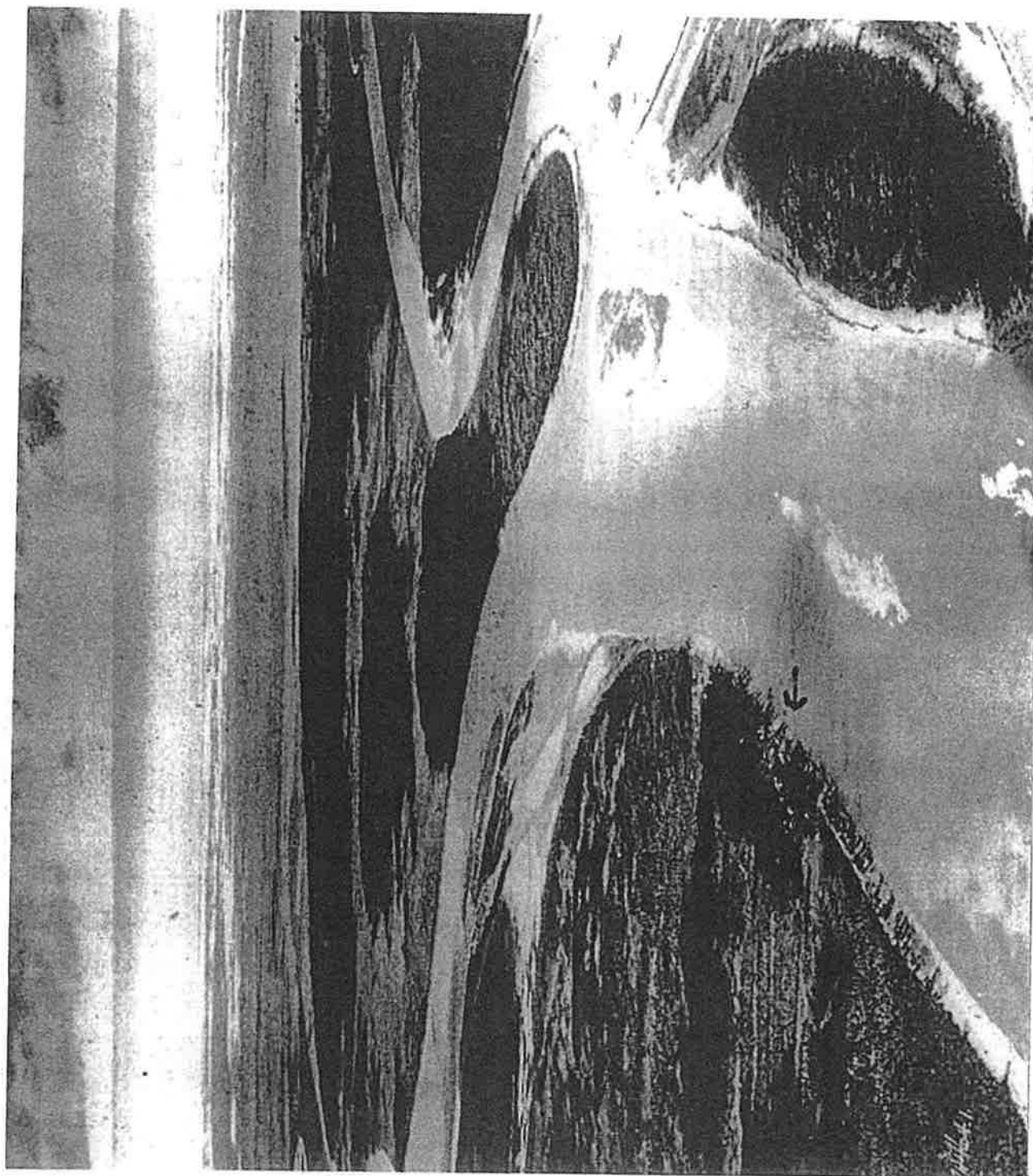
These are some of the many legends I tell.

When there was abundance of game animals, we camped along the shores. We would camp there because we had moose meat. There was no Whiteman's food, only moose meat and fish. There was very little food. We were always hunting moose. We had to keep moving our camp so that we could eat. That was the only way we survived. What I'm talking about happened recently. In the spring, we would prepare fish to make a very fine fish powder so that we would be able to take it along with us. This was one way of survival. We were able to live on this fish for a while. That is one of the stories.

A long time ago, the Natives set nets out to fish. From their catch, they would make fish powder. They were able to store this powder. The elders would make this stuff. They were able to survive by eating fish powder.

Long ago when they made canoes, they would gather lots of birch bark. They would gather sticks and roots from trees. In the early part of spring, as soon as it would get warm, they would start to make the frame for the canoe. The birch bark was prepared and they would spread it out where they wanted it. After setting up the framework, they would put it on the ground. Then they would prepare the birch bark. Later they would prepare the tree roots. They would bury them. Next they gather lots of tree gum. This is what was used to glue the canoe after putting it together. The tree roots were sorted out so that they could start sewing. They made sure that the sewing was strong. Then they prepared the sticks for inside the canoe. After all this was done, many people would help sew the canoe. They helped each other make the canoe. After it was finished, they were able use the canoe.

This is what they did when they wanted a new canoe. No money was needed, unlike today when you need much money to buy one buy one boat.



National Archives of Canada PA 95001 Fort Severn, 1935

11 The things people did long ago

told by Peter Surgeon

recorded on August 1, 1977

Kingfisher

This is what they did when a baby was unable to have a bowel movement. They would pump a liquid substance into the rectum of the baby. They used a mixture from a balsam tree. They would scrape the bark of the tree. It makes the water become a very slippery liquid. They would cut open a pike. Then they would fill the cheeks of the fish with the liquid and squirt this substance into the baby's rectum. The baby would then be able to have a normal bowel movement.

There was no medicine a long time ago. There was no medicine of any kind. I saw them use pepper when a person had a headache. They would shake the pepper near the person's head. They also used pepper for people who had stomach problems. That is what they used it for. When a person had several headaches, they would boil bulrushes, the ones that stink. A person would cover themselves, sit there for a long time, and inhale the vapour from this substance. Their headache would be gone by the time they were finished.

I saw them make a birch bark canoe too. That was how their canoes looked like long ago. The birch bark canoe was the only type that people had in those days. They took much time to make. I do not see them anymore. They would scrape the bark from the tree. That is where they would get the gum. They used a lot of tree gum. Then they used tree roots. They would dig those up. They would split the roots in half. Later they would twine the roots around the sticks. The people would sew the inside of the canoe with these roots. At the bow of the canoe, they used the dogwood twigs. There were four cross beams. There were two smaller pieces, one on the bow and one on the stern. The two larger pieces were in the middle. They were tied to the canoe with the tree roots. The people would use a tamarack or larch tree for these pieces. They would bend these pieces of the larch tree into the shapes they wanted and make them thin. Those were

for the floor of the canoe. Then they put the gunnels on the canoe. They would wedge a skin of a fur-bearing animal at the bow and stern of the canoe. They would bend these sticks, trim them off, and put the keel in place. After they finished that, they put clay on the seams. Next they would blacken them with black mud. Then they would put gum on the seams. After they were finished, they put the canoe in the water and looked for any leaks.

The people used wooden snowshoes long ago. They carved a hole where their toes would be. They made footings on the board to tie their feet on. Then they would walk on them. That is what they did long ago. Today snowshoes are different. I could make wooden snowshoes today. Once long ago, I was walking in a heavy snowstorm, pulling a sled. I had very far to go. I made those wooden snowshoes. I split the tree in half. I carved them and I made them. Then I walked. They did not fit properly, so I was unable to walk well. I could still make them for people to see how they looked.

I only heard about the shaking tent from the elders. I did not see it myself. I only heard them use it long ago. Those elders I spent time with did not use it. Nothing like that happened when I was small. There was no religion in those times. I did not know anyone who that used the shaking tent. I guess they used to do that. There was no religion. When religion came, they stopped using the shaking tent. Before religion they used the shaking tent all the time.

There were not too many ministers those days. The only one here was that Indian fellow who was a clergyman. That is the only one I heard of. When the minister did come, he would go to where the people camped. Sometimes he would leave and go back to his homeland. Even the Indian fellow who was a clergyman would leave too. They sometimes went to see him to baptize a baby. They went to see him at home.

A long time ago they told me that there was someone here who sold goods. James was the name of the Whiteman who ran the store. I used to see him. He did not stay long, maybe one winter. He would sell his merchandise from Trout Lake. That is what he did. He would go to their camps selling his goods. That is what they all did. I also helped sell

merchandise around. We would start from Trout Lake with the goods and go to the other stores from there. We would drop off the goods at every store. A man by the name of Lawrence was the manager. It seemed a short time ago that he was the manager. They used to only use two boats, sometimes three. That is what happened back then. It seemed that the company got all of our money.

All summer long, he would come and sell goods. We did not know it would be costly. The stuff would go to Waashowaak. The same thing happened and they got all the money. We did not know how costly things were. We thought everything was cheap. The merchandise was shipped from there. Now that I think about it, I see how costly all the company's stuff was. He did not spend much on us, nor did he hire any Natives. His prices for goods were high. He did not spend his money at all. I wonder about that sometimes. When a boat went to Waashowaak, there would be five men. There would be three in the middle of the boat and two at each end. The ones in the middle got the most pay. The ones in the middle got paid forty-five dollars each. Those at the ends got paid thirty-five each. Sometimes there were five boats. He was here all summer making money from us. That is why things are costly. That is what I hear today. Why did he charge so much? He did not spend money on himself.

There was an American who also had a store here. He had his store at Big Beaver House for a short time. I think he was here for two winters maybe even one. It wasn't long before the company got him broke because he did not have many supplies. The company wanted to be the only ones to sell here. The company moved to the place where the American had his store. The company took over that store when they paid him off. They wanted to be the only company there.

We would go up the river when we fished for sturgeon to sell. Today, they sell fish too. The people did not sell other fish in those days, just sturgeon. Many families moved there. That was their main source of living. There were no other jobs around. That was all they did, fish for a living. Now, there are many jobs. They used to give us sturgeon nets, but the mesh was not the right size. The mesh wasn't big enough for fishing, it was too small.

When there were no nets, they would fish with hooks, especially those that were good with hooks. It was tiresome fishing with hooks. They would check the hooks morning, midday, and evening. They would use carp for bait that would be soaked in salty water. The people would soak the bait in salty water for a long time. It was tiring checking the hooks all the time. They would put the hooks on a string. The strings were not very long. They would make them so that they did not touch the bottom of the river. They would use stones to weigh the string down. They also used floats to keep the string from touching the mud. Those that were good at using hooks were able to catch fish. I am not very good at using hooks. Sometimes I caught a small sturgeon. Not that I'm good at it. James was good at catching fish like that. He was good. He was good in knowing how to set hooks. Lines were set in the middle of the river. It did not like setting a net.



12 The Whiteman knew very little of the Native's heritage

told by Tom Fiddler

recorded on February 16, 1978

Sandy Lake

I was elected chief in 1940. There was no school here in Sandy Lake. I went to Winnipeg to listen to the other chiefs at the meeting there. I went to Winnipeg several times. I realized that there would be many Whitemen soon. We had no time to think things through about how we would handle the coming of the Whiteman. We did not know how we were going to talk with the Whiteman. There was no one here that spoke English in Sandy Lake.

I gathered all my people when I got home. I told them what I thought and what I was going to do. We gathered outside because we had no community hall.

I told them that I was going to let my children go to school. "You elected me to be your chief. If any one else thinks the same way please stand." One other person did stand up. "I too will let my children go to school," he said.

There was a seventy-four-year old man from Deer Lake who talked about what happened in the past. The first time the Whiteman came was in 1900. They bought laws with them. This is the old man's story. He kept records of what happened in the past. There was much confusion during the telling of this story. There was one thing that happened to the Natives that upset them. The Whiteman knew very little of the Natives heritage. He did not understand their cultural values.

There was one old man who went crazy. His craziness continued. The people saw that his teeth were growing longer. The old man ate his lips, his fingers, and his hands. The people realized he was turning into a windigo. They thought that if he gets bigger, he will eat them too. They knew that there would be no one left if he gets loose. The people

realized, that if they did not prevent him from becoming a windigo, he would eat them all. They knew that they had to save themselves. The Natives knew that they had to kill that windigo being.

The people asked Joseph Fiddler whom they thought was a brave man to prevent this from happening. They asked Jake Fiddler to help him. Jake helped the elder and they burnt the body.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police who were at Norway House heard about the killing. They sent a policeman to come and get Joseph and Jake. The two men were put in jail. They waited for many months to be sentenced. They did not know about sentencing like the people do today. Joseph died while waiting in jail for his sentencing.

This is what the elder said. The Whiteman did not tell them about the laws to be followed. They did not tell the people about the regulations that had to be followed. The ministers did not tell the people about their laws too. I do not think the people would have accepted any religion. The people did not really accept it then. They did not accept the laws of the Whiteman, but if they had bought religion along with them they would have felt differently. They told the Whiteman why they killed the elder but they were not understood.

The Natives in the north do not like to be told how to run their lives. They did not want that kind of treatment again today.

The stories contained in this collection provide accounts of personal experiences and remembrances of the Oji-Cree elders of the Nishnawbe-Aski area. They deal with a lifestyle and a world view that are vastly different from that of today. These stories are important records of the elders' way of life.

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