

Stephanie MacLaurin. The Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850. Fort William First Nation

Stephanie talks about the history of the development of Fort William First Nation's (FWFN) treaty agreement with the Crown (federal government of Canada).

Length: 5:51 minutes

Summary: Stephanie introduces herself, she is the Governance Coordinator for FWFN. It is important to look at what led to the Robinson-Superior Treaty (1850). That was the Royal Proclamation of 1763 made by King George III. When he got acquisition of all the French territory, in what is now North America, Canada, specifically, King George wanted to stop the Ojibwe from selling land to whoever and the complications that arose from it, such as selling to more than one person or getting ripped off by the people to whom they were selling. The Royal Proclamation outlined Indian Territory and in Indian Territory, the settlers wouldn't be able to settle until the land was sold properly to the Crown.

The Robinson-Superior Treaty was an agreement made between the Ojibways of Lake Superior (including Stephanie's ancestors from FWFN) and the Crown who was represented by William B. Robinson, which is why the treaty is called the Robinson-Superior Treaty. There were two Robinson treaties: the Robinson-Superior Treaty and the Robinson-Huron treaty, down by Lake Huron.

FWFN was the community who pushed for the Robinson-Superior Treaty. The Canadian government was giving out mining certificates without settling the treaty with FWFN, which was in direct violation of the Royal Proclamation. FWFN representatives understood that and started to push for the treaty. Their complaints and concerns fell on deaf ears; they were being ignored. In the summer of 1849, FWFN representatives told the Crown that if they did not stop giving out mining certificates to settlers, FWFN were going to do something about it and would take whatever steps necessary to remove settlers from their territory. FWFN first tried unsuccessfully to dispossess one mine claim, but in November of 1849, they successfully

dispossessed a mine (at Mika Bay) and in taking over that mining location, they were arrested and put in jail in Toronto. William B. Robinson went and had them released from jail and stated that they were eager to sign a treaty.

There were absentee communities when the treaty was signed: Pic River, Long Lake, Red Rock, Jackfish Bay, McIntyre Bay and others. It's important to note that history, that there were communities who were not there. Some of the treaty documents stated that some communities were worried about being arrested when they arrived at Sault Ste. Marie. They were wary of government intentions; the communities were not sure if they were really going to sign the treaty or if it was a ruse to get people there to arrest them for dispossessions that had been occurring.

The Robinson Treaty is unique in that it they had an escalation clause. It stated that if the Crown had extra money, from extraction of natural resources, that they would then increase the annuity amount, but that they didn't have to if it meant that the Crown would suffer, that it would be a detriment to settling the rest of Canada. So it was ambiguous.

The settlers benefitted in that the language of the treaty stated that they (The Ojibways of Fort William) were ceding all rights to the land at the time, so the settlers then had a huge tract of land to settle on. That came from the treaty. After the treaty, dispossessions continued to occur. So FWFN lost thousands of acres of land from settlers coming in and just settling in what was FWFN territory at that time. So the original reserve was a lot larger than it is today.

When they made the treaty agreement, they were talking in French leagues. When they actually came in to survey and create the boundary of the reserve, they used a different measurement (French miles, she thinks). But the French were not sovereign in this territory. Almost immediately FWFN made it clear that that they felt deceived. One of their larger land claims was the reserve and what

they received (the reserve boundaries) were much smaller than what they agreed to in the treaty negotiations.

The treaties crowned our sovereignty (as First Nations), especially on reserve land. It speaks to the land that we ceded and it also speaks to our sovereignty on the land. Reserves in Canada are not part of Canada. We sit outside of Canada. As long as First Nations sit outside of Canada, they are sovereign nations. First Nations should be very concerned if the day comes that the reserves are not outside of Canada, as this may be seen as representative of ceding their sovereignty as well.