

The Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians and The Uses of Their Natural Environment

Mark Mozuch

Introduction

The origin of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians began in the year 1400, somewhere near the east shores of Lake Huron. The Chippewa, Ottawa and Potawatomi tribes were located in this area. When climates cooled, the Chippewa and Potawatomi tribes started to move west. In 1500 the Potawatomi moved into Lower Michigan, while the Chippewa continued into parts of Upper Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota concentrating around Lake Superior. After 1687, the Chippewa expanded to the east, south, and west. During their wars with the Iroquois, the Chippewa pushed down both sides of Lake Huron, and by 1701 controlled most of Lower Michigan and Southern Ontario. Then the Chippewa moved beyond Lake Superior and into Northern Minnesota and Wisconsin.ⁱ The Chippewa encountered the Sioux Indians when they arrived in Northern Minnesota, resulting in a war lasting two years, when the Chippewa defeated the Sioux and claimed Northern Minnesota their territory. This is where the Red Lake Indians decided to settle their band. At the same time, other Chippewa moved south to settle in Northern Illinois. By 1800 Chippewa were living in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Michigan, Minnesota, Michigan, North Dakota, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. No other tribe has ever come close to controlling so vast an area as the Chippewa did at this time.ⁱⁱ

One of the first contacts with the white man occurred in 1660, when the Chippewa met with the French in the Great Lakes area. The tribe traded furs with

the French, and some of the Chippewa bands joined military forces with the French during the French-British wars between 1689 and 1763. The Chippewa moved west in search for thicker furs that were worth more when trading with the French. When the Chippewa moved into Northern Minnesota, they again encountered Sioux, entering into a war lasting nearly a century. It was during this period that war also broke out between the French and the British. Some of the Chippewa were involved, except for the bands of Chippewa located in Northern Wisconsin, Minnesota and the southern shore of Lake Superior.ⁱⁱⁱ

Treaties Affecting the Red Lake Nation

Initial treaties with the tribe were made so the U.S. could cede land from the Red Lake Indians. The Treaty of 1863 ceded millions of acres from the Red Lake Band drastically reducing their land on which they used to hunt and gather. In 1864, this treaty was amended to give the Red Lake Indians more money than originally allotted. Article 2 of the amendment includes that Stated in article 2 the Red Lake Indians will receive an annual stipend of ten thousand dollars, so long as the President agrees. This replaces the original sum of the twenty thousand dollars for a period of twenty years, as stipulated in the 1863 treaty. The 1864 amendment also mentioned that the U.S. would provide the Indians with some essential items that would aid them in the loss of their lands. “The United States will also expend annually, for the period of fifteen years, for the Red Lake Band of Chippewa, for the purpose of supplying them with gilling-twine, cotton mater, calico, linsey, blankets, sheeting, flannels, provisions, farming-tools, and for such other useful articles”^{iv} When the Allotment Act, a bill passed in 1887 to force Indians on to

smaller lands, was enacted, Red Lake Chiefs protested, refusing to allow the government take their reservation land. A Red Lake Reservation website, *The Chiefs of Red Lake*, explained how the chiefs resisted the allotment to keep the reservation for future generations. It also states the “closed reservation” status with land never allotted.^v The Red Lake reservation didn’t experience what the tribes of Wisconsin did when the white man ceded their territory; timber resources weren’t destroyed as in Wisconsin. Below are the treaties that have affected the Red Lake Indians.

Treaty of 1863

ARTICLE 2.

The said Red Lake and Pembina bands of Chippewa Indians do hereby cede, sell, and convey to the United States all their right, title, and interest in and to all the lands now owned and claimed by them in the State of Minnesota and in the Territory of Dakota within the following described boundaries, to wit: Beginning at the point where the international boundary between the United States and the British possessions intersects the shore of the Lake of the Woods; thence in a direct line southwesterly to the head of Thief River; thence down the main channel of said Thief River to its mouth on the Red Lake River; thence in a southeasterly direction, in a direct line toward the head of Wild Rice River, to the point where such line would intersect the northwestern boundary of a tract ceded to the United States by a treaty concluded at Washington on the 22d day of February, in the year eighteen hundred and fifty-five, with the Mississippi, Pillager, and Lake Winnebigoshish bands of Chippewa Indians; thence along the said boundary-line of the said cession to the mouth of Wild Rice River; thence up the main channel of the Red River to the mouth of the Shayenne; thence up the main channel of the Shayenne River to Poplar Grove; thence in a direct line to the Place of Stumps, otherwise called Lake Chicot; thence in a direct line to the head of the main branch of Salt River; thence in a direct line due north to the point where such line would intersect the international boundary aforesaid; thence eastwardly along said boundary to the place of beginning.

ARTICLE 3.

In consideration of the foregoing cession, the United States agree to pay to the said Red Lake and Pembina bands of Chippewa Indians the following sums, to wit: Twenty thousand dollars per annum for twenty years; the said sum to be distributed among the Chippewa Indians of the said bands in equal amounts per capita, and for this purpose an accurate enumeration and enrollment of the members of the respective bands and families shall be made by the officers of the United States: *Provided*, That so much of this sum as the President of the United States shall direct, not exceeding five thousand dollars per year, may be reserved from the above sum, and applied to agriculture, education, the purchase of goods, powder, lead, &c., for their use, and to such other beneficial purposes, calculated to promote the prosperity and happiness of the said Chippewa Indians, as he may prescribe.

ARTICLE 4.

And in further consideration of the foregoing cession, and of their promise to abstain from such acts in future, the United States agree that the said Red Lake and Pembina bands of Chippewa Indians shall not be held liable to punishment for past offences. And in order to make compensation to the injured parties for the depredations committed by the said Indians on the goods of certain British and American traders at the mouth of Red Lake River, and for exactions forcibly levied by them on the proprietors of the steamboat plying on the Red River, and to enable them to pay their just debts, the United States agree to appropriate the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, it being understood and agreed that the claims of individuals for damages or debt under this article shall be ascertained and audited, in consultation with the chiefs of said bands, by a commissioner or commissioners appointed by the President of the United States; furthermore, the sum of two thousand dollars shall be expended for powder, lead, twine, or such

other beneficial purposes as the chiefs may request, to be equitably distributed among the said bands at the first payment: *Provided*, That no part of the sum of one hundred thousand dollars shall be appropriated or paid to make compensation for damages or for the payment of any debts owing from said Indians until the said commissioner or commissioners shall report each case, with the proofs thereof, to the Secretary of the Interior, to be submitted to Congress, with his opinion thereon, for its action; and that, after such damages and debts shall have been paid, the residue of said sum shall be added to the annuity funds of said Indians, to be divided equally upon said annuities.

ARTICLE 5.

To encourage and aid the chiefs of said bands in preserving order and inducing, by their example and advice, the members of their respective bands to adopt the habits and pursuits of civilized life, there shall be paid to each of the said chiefs annually, out of the annuities of the said bands, a sum not exceeding one hundred and fifty dollars, to be determined by their agents according to their respective merits. And for the better promotion of the above objects, a further sum of five hundred dollars shall be paid at the first payment to each of the said chiefs to enable him to build for himself a house. Also, the sum of five thousand dollars shall be appropriated by the United States for cutting out a road from Leach Lake to Red Lake.

ARTICLE 6.

The President shall appoint a board of visitors, to consist of not less than two nor more than three persons, to be selected from such Christian denominations as he may designate, whose duty it shall be to attend at all annuity payments of the said Chippewa Indians, to inspect their field and other improvements, and to report annually thereon on or before the first day of November, and also as to the qualifications and moral deportment of all persons residing upon the reservation under the authority of law; and they shall receive for their services five dollars a day for the time actually employed, and ten cents per mile for travelling expenses: *Provided*, That no one shall be paid in any one year for more than twenty days' service or for more than three hundred miles' travel.

ARTICLE 7.

The laws of the United States now in force, or that may hereafter be enacted, prohibiting the introduction and sale of spirituous liquors in the Indian country, shall be in full force and effect throughout the country hereby ceded, until otherwise directed by Congress or the President of the United States.

ARTICLE 8.

In further consideration of the foregoing cession, it is hereby agreed that the United States shall grant to each male adult half-breed or mixed-blood who is related by blood to the said Chippewas of the said Red Lake or Pembina bands who has adopted the habits and customs of civilized life, and who is a citizen of the United States, a homestead of one hundred and sixty acres of land, to be selected at his option, within the limits of the tract of country hereby ceded to the United States, on any land not previously occupied by actual settlers or covered by prior grants, the boundaries thereof to be adjusted in conformity with the lines of the official surveys when the same shall be made, and with the laws and regulations of the United States affecting the location and entry of the same: *Provided*, That no scrip shall be issued under the provisions of this article, and no assignments shall be made of any right, title, or interest at law or in equity until a patent shall issue, and no patent shall be issued until due proof of five years' actual residence and cultivation, as required by the act entitled "An act to secure homesteads on the public domain."

ARTICLE 9.

Upon the urgent request of the Indians, parties to this treaty, there shall be set apart from the tract hereby ceded a reservation of (640) six hundred and forty acres near the mouth of Thief River for the chief "Moose Dung," and a like reservation of (640) six hundred and forty acres for the chief "Red Bear," on the north side of Pembina River.

In witness whereof, the said Alexander Ramsey and Ashley C. Morrill, commissioners on the part of the United States, and the chiefs, headmen, and warriors of the Red Lake and Pembina bands of Chippewa Indians, have hereunto set their hands, at the Old Crossing of Red Lake River, in the State of Minnesota, this second day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three.^{vi}

Treaty of 1864***ARTICLE 1.***

The said Red Lake and Pembina bands of Chippewa Indians do hereby agree and assent to the provisions of the said treaty, concluded at the Old Crossing of Red Lake River, as amended by the Senate of the United States by resolution bearing date the first of March, in the year eighteen hundred and sixty-four.

ARTICLE 2.

In consideration of the cession made by said treaty, concluded at the Old Crossing of Red Lake River, and in lieu of the annuity payment provided for by the third article of said last-mentioned treaty, the United States will pay annually, during the pleasure of the President of the United States, to the Red Lake band of Chippewas the sum of ten thousand dollars, and to the Pembina band of Chippewas the sum of five thousand dollars, which said sums shall be distributed to the members of said bands, respectively, in equal amounts per capita, for which purpose an accurate enumeration and enrollment of the members of the respective bands shall be made by the officers of the United States.

ARTICLE 3.

The United States will also expend annually, for the period of fifteen years, for the Red Lake band of Chippewas, for the purpose of supplying them with gilling-twine, cotton mater, calico, linsey, blankets, sheeting, flannels, provisions, farming-tools, and for such other useful articles, and for such other useful purposes as may be deemed for their best interests, the sum of eight thousand dollars: and will expend in like manner, and for a like period, and for like purposes, for the Pembina band of Chippewas, the sum of four thousand dollars.

ARTICLE 4.

The United States also agree to furnish said bands of Indians, for the period of fifteen years, one blacksmith, one physician, one miller, and one farmer; and will also furnish them annually, during the same period, with fifteen hundred dollars' worth of iron, steel, and other articles for blacksmithing purposes, and one thousand dollars for carpentering, and other purposes.

ARTICLE 5.

The United States also agree to furnish for said Indians at some suitable point, to be determined by the Secretary of the Interior, a saw-mill with a run of millstones attached.

ARTICLE 6.

It is further agreed, by and between the parties hereto, that article four of the said treaty, concluded at the Old Crossing of Red Lake River, and the amendment to said article, shall be modified as follows: that is to say, twenty-five thousand dollars of the amount thereby stipulated shall be paid to the chiefs of said bands, through their agent, upon the ratification of these articles, or so soon thereafter as practicable, to enable them to purchase provisions and clothing, presents to be distributed to their people upon their return to their homes; of which amount five thousand dollars shall be expended for the benefit of their chief, May-dwa-gwa-no-nind; and that from the remaining seventy-five thousand dollars the claims of injured parties for depredations committed by said Indians on the goods of certain British and American traders at the mouth of Red Lake River, and for exactions forcibly levied by them on the proprietors of the steam-boat plying on the Red River, shall have priority of payment, and be paid in full, and the remainder thereof shall be paid pro rata upon the debts of said tribe incurred since the first day of January, in the year eighteen hundred and fifty-nine, to be ascertained by their agent in connection with the chiefs, in lieu of the commissioner or commissioners provided for in the fourth article of said treaty concluded at the Old Crossing of Red Lake River.

ARTICLE 7.

It is further agreed by the parties hereto, that, in lieu of the lands provided for the mixed-bloods by article eight of said treaty, concluded at the Old Crossing of Red Lake River, scrip shall be issued to such of said mixed-bloods as shall so elect, which shall entitle the holder to a like amount of land, and may be located upon any of the lands ceded by said treaty, but not elsewhere, and shall be accepted by said mixed-bloods in lieu of all future claims for annuities.

In testimony whereof, the said commissioners, on behalf of the United States, and the said chiefs, headmen, and war[r]iors, on behalf of the Red Lake and Pembina bands of Chippewa Indians, have hereunto affixed their hands and seals this twelfth day of April, in the year eighteen hundred and sixty-four.^{vii}

Red Lake: A Closed Reservation

“This property under discussion, called Red Lake, is my property. These persons whom you see before you are my children. They own this place the same as I own it. My friends, I ask that we reserve the whole of the lake as ours and that of our grandchildren hereafter.”

May-dway-gwa-no-nind, Head Chief
of Red Lake, during the
Seventh Open Council to discuss
the Treaty of 1889^{viii}

The Red Lake Nation has the privilege of living on a closed reservation, making this reservation quite unique. Unlike most other reservations, Red Lake has complete control of its operations, except jurisdiction of federal crimes. The closed reservation exists because the Red Lake Nation refused allotment of the reservation during the General Allotment Act of 1887. This act, signed by President Grover Cleveland, designated acreage to each tribal family belonging to the reservation. White settlers bought the leftover land, and soon encroached on the Indian people.

Indian reservations were dotted with white settlements during this time. This is not the case of the Red Lake reservation because tribal leaders like Chief May-dway-gwa-no-nind (He That Is Spoken To), helped elect Chairman of Tribal Council Roger Jourdain, who refused this allotment. Over one hundred years of negotiations and treaties,

the reservation remains closed.^{ix} The signs that are posted on any road going into the reservation state:

WARNING. THIS IS INDIAN LAND. NO TRESPASSING. NO FISHING, HUNTING, CAMPING, BERRY PICKING, PEDDLING OR SOLICITING WITHOUT AUTHORIZED PERMIT FROM RED LAKE TRIBAL COUNCIL OFFICE. VIOLATORS AND TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED UNDER FEDERAL LAW 86-634.

ALL AREAS PATROLLED^x

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council of Red Lake report that the Red Lake Reservation is one of few that have total control of their reservation land, which totals more than 564,426 acres. This allows the tribe to continue to hunting and gathering on native lands.

The band can also restrict who can enter the reservation. The Red Lake Band are also set up their own hunting and fishing regulations, and handle minor criminal matters. The only outside jurisdiction is by the federal government for major crimes, as stated by federal law. The band has a local court system, and tribal police who govern the Red Lake Reservation. Having a closed reservation and this is what allows the tribe to create their own rules and regulations.^{xi}

As mentioned earlier, Red Lake Chiefs made it clear that they would not permit allotment. It was important that the land remain with in the tribe's purview for future generations. Allen Branchaud, a seventh grader at St. Mary's Mission School said, "We can go hunting any time of the season and fishing too. Not all people have that privilege. We can do this because we have a closed reservation. If our reservation was open, all or most of our wildlife would die. Red Lake is a closed reservation and I hope it will stay that way."^{xii} A closed reservation gives them the right to exclude any unwanted intrusion

from their lands. After giving up millions of acres through various treaties, the Red Lake Indians hoped their closed reservation status would allow them to keep what land they had left.

Culture

A major part of the Red Lake and Chippewa Indian culture is the powwow; a ceremony that combines singing, drumming, and dancing. For nearly half a century, the largest such event for the tribe has been the Fourth of July celebration. The celebration is held near the Village of Red Lake and lasts four days. It is the climax of summer events; many relatives and visitors come to the reservation to witness the traditional ceremony. The sound of the drum is considered the heartbeat of the ceremony and the tribe. The dancers dance to the beat of the drum and the singing can be planned or spontaneous, depending on the mood of the song. The singers are usually men and are encouraged to begin at a very young age. The powwow does have religious meaning, and even more powwows are held as a social event for tribal and non-tribal members. A peace pipe is also passed to smoke ceremonial tobacco.^{xiii}

It is common to find three generations of a family living in close proximity of each other, so to share common experiences and learn from one another. Elders are respected and cared for by the younger family members. While the reservation is closed to non-tribal members, the members of Red Lake themselves are not restricted to the reservation. Many Red Lakers travel to the nearby cities to work and shop. In fact, many members have moved off the reservation to the city, only to return because they enjoy the peace and harmony of the reservation.

Seasons of the Chippewa

In the winter months, the Chippewa Indians split into smaller groups, which consisted of extended families. Separating into smaller groups helped the band of Indians work land with little or no competition among hunters. Each family would migrate to hunting camps where they would stay for the duration of the winter months. At this camp, the men would trap beavers and take the furs from the beaver. These furs would then be traded to the French, once the group had migrated back for the warmer months. “The colder weather in their homeland gave their beaver thicker coats resulting in a high quality fur.”^{xiv} The men would also go hunting for food while the women stayed in the wigwam and dried the meat their men brought. These wigwams were constructed to keep the occupants warm and dry; consisted of log framework, Evergreen boughs and packed snow for insulation, and a birch bark roof. The journey between the two camps was made easier by the use of toboggans, which were made of hard wood harvested in the fall of the year. Once spring was near the long, narrow sleds were loaded with all the supplies, meat and furs that were harvested in the winter. The toboggan was pulled by the Indians or by their only domesticated animal, dogs.

In the warmer months, the Chippewa Indians gathered in bigger bands of 300-400 people. The bands would go to certain areas where fish, berries, rice or sugar were abundant and could be gathered. They would also grow corn and squash during these months. Corn and squash were the only major agricultural crops that the tribe grew; the people obtained all other necessities from native plants.

In the spring of the year the big task was to gather sap from the Maple trees. One group would take to the Maple stands where they would collect sap for two weeks.

During this time large amounts of sap were collected. Sap was then down and to make syrup or sugar. Since the tribe rarely had access to salt, maple sugar was a primary source of seasoning for any type of food that they consumed. Once all of the sugar was made, they would pack it into containers made of birch bark to store and carry easily.

Maple Sugar Camp

Chippewa men were also accustomed to ice fishing; during the winter months, as the water was frozen over, holes were cut in the ice, so spear- fishing could continue. According to the website *Traditional Native Maple Sugar*, food caches were located in immediate proximity of the sugar camps. The caches were abundant with food from the fall harvest. This food was used to survive while the Indians migrated to their summer location

In the summer, the Chippewa Indians would migrate to yet another location where they would plant their summer gardens with squash and corn. Other plants, including berries, were gathered this time of year also, many of which ad duel uses as medicine. While they waited for the crops to grow, the tribe survived on the dried meat and sugar they had gathered from the fall before. In late summer, other tribes were located on the lakes where wild rice grew; “The harvesting of wild rice has always been an important part of life for Ojibway people... Wild Rice has always been regarded by the Ojibway as the sacred gift of their chosen ground”^{xv}

A group of 300-400 tribal members would watch and wait for the right time to harvest the rice. Birch bark canoes and beating sticks were used in the collection of the rice. One man and two women were in each canoe, with the man rowing the canoe while

the women would knock, or tap, the rice from the stalk with sticks, leaving the rice in the bottom of the canoe.

Presently, a license is required to collect the rice on the Red Lake reservation for members and non-members alike, during a specific harvest time each year. “Wild Rice became a commercial enterprise in 1968 for the Chippewa people. There are 300 acres in production...with an estimated 55,000 acres considered potentially suitable for cultivation^{xvi}. The *Turtle Island* website says that most non-Indians that try to commercialize wild rice fail because the rice is over harvested; “Wild Rice has always been generous to those who gather and use in a respectful way.”^{xvii}

Ponemah

Ponemah is a village on the reservation that is located where Upper and Lower Red Lakes connect. Near Ponemah, a traditional site of an early burial ground and village can be found. The 140 families here live a much more traditional life than other Indians living on the reservation. Marriage to non-tribal members is rare. The families of Ponemah consider themselves one big family, sharing experiences and helping one another when in time of need. The people here still partake in modern-day activities; watching T.V., building modern homes and driving automobiles. The tradition is rooted in hunting and gathering techniques, but these ways are fading. Only two Shaman priests, are still in existence on the reservation residing in Ponemah; Dan and Nodin Raincloud. Jr. While the tribe still practices its ancient religion, Midewiwin, ninety-eight year old Nodin can no longer practice; it is Dan who has taken his place as head Shaman.

Raincloud is very concerned about the disappearance of Shamans on the Red Lake Reservation. Raincloud is nearing seventy, but his only possible successor is the

Reverend Hayes from the Northern Gospel Mission, an Evangelical Church. The Chippewa are worried of what will come if Midewiwin fades away.^{xviii}

Economic Resources

There are two economic resources that the Red Lake Nation utilizes. Timber production is a big part of the economy on the reservation. The commercial timberland occupies 330,000 acres of the reservation.

The Red Lake Indian Mill has been on the reservation since 1868. This sawmill now produces 9 to 11 million board feet per year running a budget of \$1,247,000. Adjacent to the sawmill are two allied wood product companies: Red Lake Chippewa Cedar Fence Plant and Red Lake Pre-Fab Housing Plant. Ninety-eight percent of the employees of these three companies are local to the Red Lake Reservation.

The other economic resource of the Red Lake Reservation is commercial fishing. This is a very dangerous job, and the men that fish for a living take their job seriously. Commercially, the fish of choice is the Walleye; half a million pounds of Walleye, Perch and Whitefish are harvested from Lower and Upper Red Lake annually, with a target area of Mahquan Bay to Ponemah Point. In the past, nearly half of the Red Lake Nation members were involved in commercial fishing, but due to better opportunities and poor fish crops, only 100 families still fish commercially. For these families, fishing is a summer income, which extends from May until mid-November. These families add to their income by joining the Commercial Profit-Sharing Cooperative, created in 1929. Out of the annual \$500,000 budget, members of the cooperative are paid not only for the fish that they harvest, but also a share in the profits in the form of a Christmas bonus.^{xix}

The Red Lake Bands have come a long way and, are living productive lives on the reservation today. Logging, lumber and fishing are the economic support for the reservation, and this doesn't look to change. Red Lake is a beautiful place where Native Americans still practice tradition and culture.

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