

If these Walls Could Talk: A Study of St. Stephen's Relationship with Indigenous People Truth and Reconciliation Matters

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Essay One, first published on October 5, 2024, described the Residential Schools of Canada; highlighted Anglican church leader apologies and illustrated the trauma experienced by Indigenous children and their families from the permanent harm perpetrated on them by Christian churches.

Essay Two, first published on November 22, 2024, highlights colonial thinking with respect to Indigenous peoples and describes the impact of that thinking on the residential school system with its stated goal of Assimilation and its devolution into maltreatment of indigenous children.

Essay Three, first published on January 17, 2025, provides a view, based on examination of historical records, into the thinking and attitude of The First Anglican Bishop of Calgary toward Indigenous people. The purpose of understanding his mindset is to have a backdrop as to how his thinking and attitude as a Diocesan leader may have influenced and/or aligned with Anglican clergy thinking, particularly for this study, the clergy of St. Stephen's.

Essay Four, published in early 2025, explores the residential school legacy of two schools: St. Dunstan's Calgary Industrial School 1896-1907 and Dunbow Industrial School/St. Joseph's Industrial Residential School 1883-1924

Essay Five: Treaty 7 Region of Southern Alberta Métis Nation, Battle River Territory (Districts 1-6)

Numbered Treaties

In 1870, the newly created nation of Canada acquired Rupert's land from the Hudson's Bay Company. Rupert's Land was a large area of land stretching north and west from the Hudson's Bay flood lands.

The lands of the Hudson's Bay Company; Rupert's Land and the North-West Territory were of particular interest to expansionists. They were sources of valuable natural resources and vast space, which could be used for European immigration and industrial and commercial developments

In order to facilitate unencumbered Euro-Canadian settlement of the territory, the government set out to negotiate the surrender of Aboriginal land title claims.

Numbered Treaties were developed by the government for a negotiation process to "protect" the Indigenous nations in exchange for the surrender of title to the territory. In Western Canada, the Numbered Treaties 1 to 11 are a series of historic post-Confederation Treaties

that were made in rapid succession over a short period of time from 1871 to 1921 between First Nations peoples and the Crown (Canada). They are as relevant today as they were when they were signed.

The Numbered Treaties promised reserve lands, annuities, and the continued right to hunt and fish on unoccupied Crown lands in exchange for “Aboriginal” title. All treaties had clauses for schools or teachers to educate children, and agricultural implements were promised to assist Aboriginal signatories in their transition towards an agricultural lifestyle. Aboriginal signatories would be required for settlement on reserve lands

A total of 11 Numbered Treaties were negotiated. They were written such that they included assimilation policies not made clear or understood by the Indigenous signatories.

Treaty 7 Region of Southern Alberta

Treaty 7 was the last of the Numbered Treaties made between the Government of Canada and the Plains First Nations. It was signed in 1877 by five First Nations: the Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), Piikani (Peigan), Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut’ina (Sarcee).

Treaty 7 ceded lands within The Anglican Diocese of Calgary boundaries. The Diocese is bordered east and west by Saskatchewan and British Columbia and north from the Canada/USA border to a line north of Rimbey.

The written Treaty 7 ceded a massive 130,000 km² of land from the Rocky Mountains to the west, the Cypress Hills to the east, the Red Deer River to the north, and the US border to the south. All nations kept the rights to use the land for hunting.

The Siksika, Tsuut’ina, and Kainai, were given a reserve along the Bow River; the Piikani were assigned a reserve near the Porcupine Hills and the Stoney-Nakoda, were granted a reserve near Morleyville.

None of Indigenous nations involved in the treaty realized they were surrendering their land, and none would have agreed to it had they understood the consequences. The promised support for the transition from hunting to an agricultural lifestyle did not take place. In some of the reserves the land was unsuitable for agriculture.

Two years after the treaties were signed a local priest who was instrumental in having nations sign the treaties described the resultant poverty:

“I have never seen them so depressed as they are now; I have never seen them before in want of food. They have suffered fearfully from hunger.” He went on to argue that, as to the question of whether the Treaty 7 nations understood “the real nature of the treaty” — land surrender — “my answer to this question is unhesitatingly negative.” There was, and remains, widespread feeling that the government has not lived up to its promises or dealt fairly with them.

The difference between written and oral cultures, translation difficulties, differing cultural understandings of binding agreements and the speed with which the government concluded the negotiations resulted in agreements that excluded many promises made to the nations during the negotiations. All the nations involved in Treaty 7 — now represented by the Treaty 7 Management Corporation — have since been involved in claims negotiations with the federal government relating to land surrenders, improperly performed surveys and fraudulent deals, many of which are still ongoing.

Métis Nation

Battle River Territory, Districts 1- 6

The Otipemisiwak⁽¹⁾ Métis⁽²⁾ Government is now the government of the Métis Nation within Alberta and is recognized by the Canadian Government through a self-government agreement signed between the parties in 2023.

Métis people are a post-contact Indigenous nation, born from the unions of European fur traders and First Nations women in the 18th century. The descendants of these marriages, the Métis⁽³⁾, would form a distinctive culture, a collective consciousness, and strong sense of nation hood.

There are five Métis Nation Territories in Alberta. The Métis Government subdivided the five territories of the Métis Nation into Districts for more effective localized representation.

One of the five, The Battle River territory, is within the Anglican Diocese of Calgary Southern Alberta boundaries.

The Battle River Territory Districts are: 1. Foothills' Métis District 2. Medicine Hat Métis District, 3. Red Deer Métis District, 4. Rocky View Métis District, 5. Calgary Nose Hill Métis District, 6. Calgary Elbow Métis District. These six districts as well as the Treaty 7 lands are within The Anglican Diocese of Calgary boundaries.

In 1885, Canada began offering scrip to the Métis residing in the Northwest Territories, including present day Alberta. Scrip was meant to address Métis claims to land and was a certificate that could be traded for land or money to purchase land.

The scrip system was rife with fraud and abuse. The bulk of scrip ended up in the hands of land speculators who resold scrip certificates, often fraudulently through Métis impersonators, for profit and left the Métis with next to nothing, including rights and claims to the land. Many Métis were pushed out of their homes and lived along road allowances and railway lines.

More than a century later, the Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged this dark chapter and said, "The history of scrip speculation and devaluation is a sorry chapter in our nation's history."

In November 2017, Canada took steps toward reconciliation by co-signing the Métis Nation of Alberta – Canada Framework Agreement, which included a priority to explore ways of settling outstanding Métis land claims.

Métis children are considered to be a “forgotten nation” due to a misconception that only First Nations and Inuit attended residential schools.

Many Métis children also attended residential schools. School records often mislabelled Métis children as First Nations and moved them to First Nation and Inuit schools to maintain government funding.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land acknowledgments are an act of reconciliation that recognize Indigenous people and the land they live on. Recent versions of land acknowledgements have been inspired by the 94 Calls-to-Action published in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report.

Reconciliation requires a commitment to understand the past, recognize Treaty agreements, build equitable relationships and support the restoration of Indigenous Peoples language and culture.

St. Stephen’s Land Acknowledgement

As an outward expression of the Creator’s love and in the spirit of reconciliation, St. Stephen’s acknowledges that we gather on traditional Indigenous territory: Treaty 7 Region of Southern Alberta and Métis Nation, Battle River territory (Districts 1-6). Through our worship and outreach St. Stephen’s moves forward seeking a new, honourable, and respectful relationship with the Original Peoples of this land.

As a community we commit to learning their stories and following their lead in the holy work of decolonization...

Written and researched by Chris Bain

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Endnotes

⁽¹⁾“Otipemisiwak” is a Plains Cree word that has been used to describe the Métis people, meaning “those that rule themselves.” The Métis have **always** possessed the inherent right of self-determination and self-government.

⁽²⁾In French, the word métis is an adjective referring to someone of mixed ancestry. Since the 18th century, the word has been used to describe individuals with mixed Indigenous and European ancestry.

⁽³⁾Métis are descendants of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry. English colonials referred to them in a derogatory way as “**Half Breeds**”.