

## **CHAPTER 10 FIGHTING THE LOYALISTS FOR LAND**

At the signing of the Royal Proclamation in 1763, Native groups still occupied most of their original lands in the east. However, they rapidly lost nearly all their Atlantic homelands, the territory south of the St Lawrence River, and most of present-day southern Ontario. Undoubtedly the single most important reason for this rapid transformation was the American War of Independence and the Loyalist migration to British North America that it triggered. Loyalists were not natural allies of the various Native nations, even though they had fought on the same side. They coveted “unsettled” Native land the same way Americans did. Because they believed land was owed to them in appreciation of their loyalty, they did not feel bound by the provisions of the Royal Proclamation.

In eastern British North America, the Loyalist migration forced the Aboriginal inhabitants to change the nature of their struggle for a land base. Instead of waging an armed fight, they increasingly had to engage in a war of “paper talk.” Needless to say, verbal warfare put the Native nations at a great disadvantage. On the battlefield their skills in guerrilla-style combat had given them an advantage. In the ensuing confrontation, they battled faceless bureaucrats and politicians according to rules and interpretations the outsiders imposed.

### **THE MI’KMAQ AND BEOTHUK**

Before the American War of Independence, a small number of Europeans had settled in three areas—along the southern and eastern shores of the Bay of Fundy (Acadia), in the St Lawrence valley between Quebec City and Montreal, and beside the sheltered bays of Newfoundland’s Avalon Peninsula, where the cod fishery was concentrated. The tidal-flat farming system of the Acadians barely interfered with the lives of the Mi’kmaq because it did not impinge on the large tracts of tribal hunting grounds. By contrast, in the St Lawrence valley, more than seventy thousand colonists had cleared extensive stretches of land to establish their river-based farms. However, this territory had been a hotly contested no-man’s land after the St Lawrence valley Iroquois abandoned it in the sixteenth century, so the colonists of New France were not as disruptive as might be suggested by their large-scale clearing of the forest. Circumstances were very different in Newfoundland during the pre-Loyalist era. European cod fishermen established seasonal fish-drying stations on many traditional Beothuk camping places. Worse, the intruders cleared land and recklessly burned the forests surrounding their operations on the Avalon Peninsula. Understandably, the local people did not welcome the fishermen. For their part, the newcomers resented the Beothuk, who sometimes plundered the drying stations during the winter to obtain nails and metal scraps. The opposing interests of the two groups were a recipe for disaster.

The expansion of the local cod fishery in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the Beothuk pushed out of the northern coastal portion of their homeland by the French and the eastern section by the English. Faced with these pressures, the Beothuk withdrew inland to the Red Indian Lake–Exploits River area. By the late eighteenth century, they found themselves cut off from the marine resources that had always sustained them. Continuing skirmishes, starvation, and European diseases (especially tuberculosis) took a heavy toll and eventually led to their extinction. The last known survivor was a young woman named Shanawdithit. Colonial officials captured her in 1823 in the hope of saving her, but she died of tuberculosis six years

later in St John's. While the world closed in on the Beothuk, the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet of the mainland came under relentless pressure from the Loyalists, who settled in the Atlantic area in large numbers. Between 1776 and 1784, an estimated 13,500 arrived in the New Brunswick area—particularly the fertile Saint John River valley—and another 19,000 colonized Nova Scotia. The two Native groups suddenly found themselves swamped by an alien population with a voracious appetite for their land and fisheries and very little sympathy for their well-being.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 should have protected the Mi'kmaq's land. The edict recognized two types of Aboriginal territory. One category, referred to as "Indian Country," or the "hundred per cent reserve," encompassed all territories lying beyond the colonial boundaries at the time of the conquest. In the other category were all those districts that had been reserved for Native people "within those parts of our colonies where, We [the Crown] have thought proper to allow settlement." The decree also specified that only the Crown could purchase these lands and only at a public meeting. Nonetheless, the new Loyalist government of Nova Scotia took the position that the Royal Proclamation did not apply to the colony. The Mi'kmaq experience in Nova Scotia (which included Prince Edward Island from 1763 to 1769 and New Brunswick until 1784) serves to highlight the general problem they faced in the Maritimes—and foreshadowed what other groups would confront from coast to coast.

In Nova Scotia, colonial politicians held the view that Britain had gained title to the area by defeating France and its Native allies. In other words, the Mi'kmaq had lost their lands to the British by right of conquest. Significantly, the Lords of Trade in London, who had drafted the Royal Proclamation of 1763, did not challenge this interpretation. In the Atlantic region, they simply left the matter in the hands of local colonial officials. As a result, the Mi'kmaq found themselves in the terrible position of having to petition the colonial government for grants to occupy the territories they traditionally used. The Mi'kmaq were particularly anxious to protect shoreline areas along the rivers and coasts for their use, because fishing and shellfish collecting remained crucial to their economy. However, the newcomers coveted the same areas. These strips of land included the fishing harbours, most of the best agricultural land, and the bulk of the water-power sites that were needed to develop mills for grain, lumber, and so on.

Between 1782 and 1784, the Nova Scotia government responded to the Mi'kmaq petitions by granting them ten "licences of occupation," but these were almost useless because the areas awarded were never surveyed and could be claimed by newcomers with ease. Nevertheless, the politicians thought they had taken care of the "Indian problem." The assembly even abolished the office of superintendent of Indian Affairs, which was a carryover from earlier times when the Mi'kmaq had been a credible military power in the region. Unfortunately, there was little the Mi'kmaq could do. An observer of the local scene in 1787 explained why: "[T]heir weakness, added to their prudence, will certainly prevent them from making any disturbances." Over the years, colonial officials showed only sporadic interest in helping the Mi'kmaq, who experienced increasing economic deprivation. Between 1793 and 1838, politicians held six inquiries. Their studies recognized identical causes for the Mi'kmaq's situation: the destruction of game, fur, and fish resources; the lack of any refuge for the traditional Mi'kmaq way of life; and the group's failure to develop a new agriculture-based livelihood. The colonial assembly offered economic assistance to the Mi'kmaq, but it was very stingy, allocating only enough funds to pay for blankets, coats, and some seed. The assemblymen were unwilling to make long-term

financial commitments. This might not have been a serious problem for the Mi'kmaq had the government dealt with the land issue in a meaningful way in the first place. Instead, between 1784 and the early 1840s, Nova Scotia approved various schemes to grant land to Mi'kmaq bands and individuals, but once more officials rarely surveyed the tracts properly and they did not eject intruders who invariably squatted on the most desirable sections.

The Mi'kmaq tried to fight back. In the 1840s they took their first tentative political steps aimed at halting this pernicious process. Chief Paussamigh Pemmeenauweet, an important leader for over twenty-five years, addressed Queen Victoria directly and powerfully in 1841.

Pemmeenauweet's petition, which was witnessed by other Mi'kmaq leaders, moved the Queen, who instructed the colonial secretary to look into the matter. The outcome was the Nova Scotia Indian Act of 1842, which was based on the recommendations of the reform-minded politician Joseph Howe. It provided for an Indian commissioner who was supposed to supervise reserves, take action against squatters, work with the chiefs to promote agricultural settlement, and arrange for the admission of Mi'kmaq children into local schools. It was the first of many such acts passed in various parts of British North America that would "protect ... this helpless race, and elevate them in the scale of humanity" by taking an assimilation approach. Howe became Indian commissioner. As one of his first official actions, he undertook yet another survey and concluded that the Mi'kmaq population was declining so rapidly—it numbered just over 1,425 in 1838—that they would disappear by the 1880s. Like others before him, Howe lacked the resolve to protect the Mi'kmaq reserves. Making matters worse, the education provision of the Indian Act proved to be ineffective. There were three primary reasons: the school boards did not want to admit hungry, shabbily dressed Mi'kmaq children into their classrooms; the assembly refused to pay the bills to educate them; and key officials asserted that the effort was a waste of time because the Mi'kmaq had to become farmers before formal schooling would have any positive influence on them.

Given these attitudes, it is easy to see why so little ever came of the initiative generated by Pemmeenauweet's letter. It was easier—and much less costly—to blame the Mi'kmaq for their increasingly grim situation. Nonetheless, Mi'kmaq leaders did not lose heart. In 1848, ten of them sent a petition to the assembly: "Some of your people say we are lazy, still we work. If you say we must go and hunt, we tell you again that to hunt is one thing and to find meat is another. They say to catch fish, and we try. They say make baskets, but we cannot sell them. They say make farms, this is very good; but will you help us till we cut away the trees and raise the crop. We cannot work without food. The potatoes and wheat we raised last year were killed by the poison wind [potato blight]. Help us and we will try again." Although a few colonial officials thought that the Mi'kmaq could be saved by turning them into farmers, a new Indian commissioner—William Chearnly—took office in 1853 and convinced the assembly that these people were doomed. Any expenditures of substantial public funds for education and health services, he argued, would be useless; instead, the government should give the unfortunate Mi'kmaq a few blankets and greatcoats to help them in their final days. This became policy, and it remained in place until 1862, when a new commissioner again tried to encourage agricultural development by subdividing reserve lands into hundred-acre lots. The government thought that leasing these plots to Mi'kmaq individuals would give them a strong incentive to work the land, but the Mi'kmaq wanted to hold the land in common in keeping with their traditions. Another major problem was that the program was supposed to be funded by money received from

cash-poor squatters. Not surprisingly, this arrangement did not end the continuing erosion of the Mi'kmaq land base—the root cause of their difficulties.

## TAKING NATIVE LAND IN THE CANADAS

In Quebec the takeover of Native land proceeded along two divergent paths, both of them quite unlike the one followed in the Maritimes. Article 60 of the Montreal Articles of Capitulation of 1760 guaranteed “The Savages or Indian allies of his most Christian Majesty [of France], shall be maintained in the Lands they inhabit; if they chuse to remain there; they shall not be molested on any pretence whatsoever, for having carried arms, and served his most Christian Majesty.” At the time of the conquest, the Native people of New France occupied two types of land: scattered reserves located within the settled part of the colony, and large hunting territories that lay beyond the settled areas.

The Catholic Church, acting through its various religious orders, served as trustee for the reserves’ Native converts. In some instances, such as at Sillery and Lorette, this meant that the French Crown granted the lands to the Native people and the Church acted as their legal trustee. In other instances, such as at Kahnawake, the religious order received a royal bequest to develop the tract on behalf of the residents. Regardless of the precise arrangement, the understanding was that these land grants would revert to the Crown if the Native inhabitants abandoned them. Although the Royal Proclamation of 1763 specifically excluded the new colony of Quebec from its provisions, the imperial government decided that it should ensure that the nations living there remained loyal to the Crown by giving them the same protection as those living elsewhere in British North America. Accordingly, a month after issuing the edict, the home government informed the Quebec governor, James Murray, that “[o]ur Province of Quebec is in part inhabited and possessed by several Nations and Tribes of Indians, with whom it is both necessary and expedient to cultivate and maintain a strict Friendship and good Correspondence....” Murray was “... upon no Account to molest or disturb them in the Possession of such Parts of the said Province as they at present occupy or possess.” With regard to the Royal Proclamation, the home government told the governor, “It is Our express Will and Pleasure, that you take the most effectual Care that Our Royal Directions herein be punctually complied with.” Immediately after the British government expanded the colony in 1774 under the terms of the Quebec Act, the new governor, Guy Carleton (later Lord Dorchester), received orders stating that Native lands should continue to be protected as specified in the 1763 decree.

The end of the American War of Independence and the arrival of approximately two thousand Loyalists in Quebec led to an abrupt change in British policy towards Native land there. The key priority became making land available for the newcomers. In 1791 the colonial government of Quebec passed an ordinance that allowed bona fide settlers to take up the “Waste Lands of the Crown.” In effect, this meant that any settler who took an oath of allegiance to the Crown could settle on Native land. Those who did not could be fined and ejected for having settled on it! In the year when this ordinance came into effect, the British Parliament passed the Constitutional Act, which divided Quebec into the colonies of Upper Canada and Lower Canada. The division would be important for Native people because the two Canadas followed divergent policies towards Aboriginal land. In Lower Canada the guidelines laid down in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 were largely ignored and settlers advanced steadily on Native land. Even the reserve

lands held in trust by religious orders for Catholic converts were not safe. Settler encroachment on one of them, at Oka (Kanesatake) on the shores of Lake of Two Mountains, ultimately led to an armed confrontation there in the summer of 1990.

At Oka, the French government made a seigniorial grant to the Seminary of St Sulpice of Paris in 1717, and augmented it with additional lands in 1733. In 1784, the Sulpicians of Paris transferred their rights to the land to the Sulpicians of Montreal, who subsequently treated it as their exclusive property. When the order began to sell parcels of the reserve to settlers, the Mohawk charged it with violating its sacred trust and launched legal challenges on several occasions. Oka's Mohawk residents, who had moved there from Montreal in 1721, and the Nipissing and Algonquin, who had joined them shortly thereafter, hunted and fished in territories adjacent to the reserve, as did Native people living on other reserves in the St Lawrence valley. But immigrants moved onto these lands too, disrupting the reserve economies. This set the stage for a number of Native land claims and disputes. As early as 1822, the people of the Kanesatake reserve claimed (unsuccessfully) all the Ottawa River valley between their reserve and Lake Nipissing in an effort to halt the settler advance. Until the end of the War of 1812, Upper Canada was highly vulnerable to attack by American forces. Consequently, courting Native support remained a corner-stone of British policy there until 1816. The earlier practice of adhering to the principles of the Royal Proclamation of 1763—or at least giving the appearance of doing so—continued. Accordingly, the Crown obtained Native land by negotiating treaties with various Ojibwa groups. All these accords were simple purchases in which the government made a single payment in cash and goods to the groups surrendering their land. Supposedly these were all voluntary sales. However, there is good reason to suspect that in many cases the Crown applied considerable pressure to obtain Ojibwa consent. A common ploy was to tell the Native people that if they did not sell their land, squatters would take it anyway. With the possible exception of the Grand River treaty creating Brant's reserve, probably none of the early treaties is better known than the 1787 Toronto Purchase, confirmed in 1805. In it the Mississauga surrendered title to all the land within what is now the greater metropolitan area of Toronto and the adjacent counties to the north, for a modest payment of "one thousand pounds Province currency, in goods at Montreal prices, to be delivered to us." Significantly, none of these early treaties made provisions for the setting aside of reserves because large tracts of territory were still available outside the areas settled by colonists. Ojibwa groups who sold some or all their territory simply migrated to adjacent areas, essentially retreating peacefully as the Loyalists advanced. Ojibwa oral tradition says that the reason that their ancestors were willing to do this was because the Crown promised to protect Native fisheries, which were so central to their economic life. Historian Mike Thoms' research shows that initially the Crown fulfilled this promise by amending colonial fish conservation legislation.

After the War of 1812, the character of the land surrenders changed in a fundamental way. In 1818 the Lords of the Treasury in England decided that in future the colonies, instead of the home country, would have to pay for acquisitions of Native land, but these governments had little money. Upper Canada's lieutenant-governor, Sir Peregrine Maitland, devised an ingenious solution. In essence, he turned to the Native people for credit. Maitland proposed to pay them annuities in perpetuity rather than the traditional lump sum at the time a treaty was signed. To obtain the income it would need to pay the annuities, the government would resell land to

development companies and settlers on credit. The annual interest payments of these buyers would supposedly fund the scheme. The arrangement never did operate as smoothly as Maitland had envisaged, but it became very popular with Native people because it guaranteed them and their descendants a small annual income. Annuity payments became an integral part of all later treaties with the Crown, and records show that this provision helped accelerate the rate of land surrenders after 1818. It is important to remember that the annuity payments are essentially deferred payments for land purchases—not a kind of welfare payment. By the 1820s, the steady westward advance of settlers was making it painfully clear to the Ojibwa that they were rapidly running out of lands to retreat to. They needed reserves. As a result, by the end of the decade, provisions for reserves became a common feature of the land surrenders.

Missionaries and social reformers strongly supported this development; they wanted the Native people to retain enough land to enable them to become self-supporting farmers. This of course raised the issue of where to locate the reserves. Some thought that Native groups should live near settlements where they could learn new ways by observing the immigrant farmers. Others favoured the alternative strategy of placing reserves in remote areas, arguing that this would shield the Native people from the worst aspects of colonial society. Government officials and settlers liked this idea, thinking it would draw Native people away from developing areas; needless to say, the bands' preferences were usually ignored.

Perhaps the most notorious scheme to remove Native people to isolated areas was the one Lieutenant-Governor Sir Francis Bond Head put forward in the 1830s. Bond Head was convinced that nations living in the south would be better off if they moved north away from colonial settlements. The first he wanted to relocate were the Saugeen River Ojibwa. On August 9, 1836, 1.5 million acres of their land on the Bruce Peninsula had been purchased by his government for the benefit of land speculators and some of his political supporters. The site he had in mind for their relocation was Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron. On the same day the Bond Head–Saugeen Treaty was concluded, Bond Head met fifteen hundred Ottawa and Ojibwa at the Native settlement of Manitowaning on Manitoulin Island. He distributed presents to them to obtain their agreement to "make them [Manitoulin and the adjacent islands] the property (under your Great Father's control) of all Indians whom he shall allow to reside on them."

The Saugeen group strongly objected to Bond Head's plan. They rallied the support of church groups to their cause—particularly the Anglicans, the various Methodists, and the recently organized and influential London-based Aborigines' Protection Society. These supporters petitioned the British Colonial Office to block any forced removal. They informed it that contrary to Sir Francis's claims that most Native people could not be "civilized," many groups were making good progress, they were adopting the Christian faith, and their farming operations were increasingly productive. The Saugeen campaign paid off and the Colonial Office did not approve the forced relocation scheme. The legality of the Bond Head–Saugeen Treaty was also in question at this time. Sir Francis claimed that the Saugeen River Ojibwa had willingly given up their land, even though only four of their people had signed the agreement and they lacked the authority to do so. The general superintendent of Wesleyan Missions, Joseph Stinson, reported that the lieutenant-governor "endeavoured to persuade them, and even threatened them, by telling them that he could not keep the white people from taking possession of their land, that

they (the Indians) had no right to it only as hunting-grounds...." Stinson continued, "They told him they could not live on the Mundedoolin Island, that they would not go there, that they wanted land that they could call their own." In spite of the band's and Stinson's strong objections, and the fact that a grand council had not been called for the surrender according to the provisions of the Royal Proclamation, Bond Head had his way and the land surrender was upheld. In the end, the Saugeen group had to accept small reserves on the Bruce Peninsula. This example and other similar incidents illustrate the fact that the landcession treaties of Upper Canada often merely created the illusion that colonial officials were abiding by the rules of the Royal Proclamation. Too often the southern Ojibwa groups who signed the early treaties did not fully understand what they meant or feared offending government officials if they refused to co-operate. Chiefs who made the agreements frequently lacked the authority to sign them; in some instances these men handed over land that did not belong to them or their followers. In addition, government agents usually made verbal concessions to persuade the bands to sell. Routine promises included guarantees of the right to hunt and fish at traditional places, assurances that settlers would not be allowed to encroach on the remaining Native lands, and the provision of education for those who wanted it. For the most part, the Crown ignored the oral versions of treaties.

The Ojibwa of Upper Canada probably would have given up their lands even if officials had not resorted to their various ploys. Other pressures gave them little choice. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, they were already greatly outnumbered by immigrants. After the War of 1812, the rapid expansion of the American settlement frontier into the Midwest swept away their traditional allies. This meant that they were now isolated and of little value as a potential military force. The changing political landscape had undermined their bargaining position with the government. New economic circumstances also weakened them. The spread of non-Native settlement into the area to the east of Lake Simcoe and into the Niagara Peninsula eroded the land base they needed for hunting, trapping, and fishing to the point that these activities yielded small returns. Meanwhile, groups living near the shores of Lake Ontario and other settled tracts had become highly dependent on trade goods and on alcohol. For these reasons the more southerly Ojibwa welcomed the prospect of receiving an annuity income. By the 1840s, the Ojibwa had signed away most of the arable sections of present-day southern Ontario, except for substantial tracts in the remote and beautiful Bruce Peninsula. But even here, settlers were pressing in, and by the late 1850s the peninsula's Ojibwa retained little more than some barren offshore islands.

The 1841 amalgamation of Upper and Lower Canada as the colony of Canada (creating Canada West and Canada East) had no immediate impact on land-acquisition policies. By this time, however, the firmly entrenched settler society of Canada West had little interest in continuing the long-established surrender formalities. When non-Native miners began uncovering copper deposits along the north shore of Lakes Huron and Superior in the late 1840s, the Crown Lands Department issued a number of mining licenses for the area, even though the Aboriginal people had not surrendered any of the territory. Leaders of the local Ojibwa and Métis settlements reminded the colonial government of their sovereignty in the area; in 1848 a party of Métis and Ojibwa from Canada and the United States burned a Lake Superior

mining operation to stress the point (an event known as the Mica Bay War). The local Métis threatened to invite their relatives living at Red River to join the struggle if the government did not respond. At this important juncture, the governor general of Canada, James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin, intervened and wrote the colonial secretary in London to say, "I am much annoyed by a difficulty which has occurred with some Indians on the shore of Lake Superior." He explained that the previous governor general had given licenses to certain mining companies "without making arrangements with the Indians." As a result of these interventions, the colonial government negotiated the Robinson-Huron and Robinson-Superior treaties in 1850.

The two treaties encompassed more territory than all the previous Upper Canadian cessions combined. The agreements included the major elements of previous treaties—annuities, a distribution of gifts at the conclusion of negotiations, and the establishment of reserves—and some very important new provisions. The most significant addition was the written guarantee that the Métis and Ojibwa could always hunt, trap, and fish on undeveloped Crown lands. Government treaty negotiator William Robinson reported that this clause, and his promise that they would be able to sell the produce of their hunts to incoming settlers, persuaded the Aboriginal people to agree to the treaties. Undoubtedly he would not have added this provision if the lands included in the Robinson treaties had been valued for agriculture rather than for mining. Mining development did not require large tracts of land, and indeed, in this remote area it seemed likely to be confined to scattered small properties along the shores of Lakes Huron and Superior. Government officials doubted that most of the area inland from these two lakes would ever be developed; therefore, it made good sense to grant the Métis and Ojibwa the right to continue using it. The Métis living beyond the Ojibwa reserves, especially those who operated small family farms at Sault Ste Marie, remained concerned about their land rights, however. To win them over, Robinson agreed to present their petition about this issue to the government. Although he did so subsequently, their property rights never were secured and most of them were displaced eventually. The conclusion of the Robinson agreements extended the surrendered area to the limits of the colony's political boundaries. Long before this happened, how-ever, settlers had begun to encroach on the reserve lands of Canada West. In at least one notable instance—that of the Six Nations reserve—the Native people eagerly facilitated the process. As soon as he had taken up residence in his new homeland, Joseph Brant began awarding grants of land to settlers. By 1797 the Six Nations had given away, sold, or leased some 350,000 acres of the nearly 675,000 they had originally received. The chief and those who backed him did so for several reasons. First, they wanted to award grants to Brant's friends and those of other Iroquois leaders. Second, Brant concluded that the tract his followers had received was much larger than they could farm or develop in other ways, and that settlers eventually would surround the reserve, cutting off the Six Nations from their hunting lands. However, if they sold and leased lands to settlers, they could generate an annuity. And finally, Brant argued that settlers could teach the Six Nations new farming methods and build some of the facilities, such as grist and sawmills, that his people would need. Not surprisingly, Brant's land deals were controversial. Some of the young Iroquois men questioned his motives and wisdom, but the fact that they were silenced by their "mothers and aunts," the traditional wielders of power, suggests that Brant had widespread support. In 1796 he obtained the formal backing of thirty-five of the chiefs, who "[c]onsented for themselves, and

their posterity: and to and for their future benefit and support ... to Surrender a part thereof as aforesaid to His Majesty in order and upon the express Condition of the same being regranted to such person or persons as the person hereinafter appointed by them shall Nominate." They designated Brant as "our true and lawful attorney for us and In our names and in behalf of our said several Nations." Nonetheless, colonial officials, especially Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe, argued that Brant had violated the provisions of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which dictated that Native land be sold only to the Crown. Simcoe also thought Brant set a bad precedent— one that would encourage unscrupulous land speculators to grab more Six Nations territory. Certainly this was a reasonable concern. Simcoe refused to allow any further surrenders, which left the legal status of the earlier sales in doubt. After lengthy wrangling and bullying by Brant, who threatened to attack the capital in 1797, the executive council of Upper Canada approved the Six Nations grants and leases.

Although the colonial government, particularly Simcoe, showed genuine concern about the disposal of Six Nations lands in the late eighteenth century, landhungry settlers and the politicians who served them put heavy pressure on most of the other reserve lands of Upper Canada. As in the Atlantic colonies and Lower Canada, newcomers freely squatted on the most desirable parts of these tracts. In 1856 the legislative assembly of Canada appointed a commission to investigate "Indian affairs." The commissioners, whose sympathies lay squarely on the side of colonial settlers, concluded that "[t]he hardy pioneer who in advance of his fellows, plunges with a half sullen resolution into the forest, determined to make a home for himself, is not likely to be over scrupulous in respecting reserved lands." They added, "In a country like Canada the tendency to take possession of waste lands is irresistible, and the feelings of the country at large will always sympathize with the Squatter who is earning his living by his labour." The commissioners' observations explain why the Ojibwa of Canada West fared little better than their counterparts elsewhere in British North America. Settler societies simply had no vested interest in protecting Aboriginal economic interests, no matter how legitimate. On the contrary, immigrants came primarily to acquire land, so they believed that reserving tracts for Native hunting, trapping, fishing, and collecting purposes could not be justified when they could put it to more intensive uses such as agriculture, forestry, and mining. Rationalizing their appetite for land in this way, colonists had no qualms about whittling away Native reserves. Even those groups who managed to develop highly productive farms could not escape the pressure to give up their lands. The Credit River Ojibwa were one of the groups Lieutenant-Governor Bond Head wanted to move to a common reserve on Manitoulin Island, even though they had made great strides towards becoming successful farmers. The chief of this band, Joseph Sawyer (Kawahjegezhewabe), predicted that Bond Head's proposal would be a disaster for his people: "Now we raise our own corn, potatoes, wheat; we have cattle, and many comforts, and conveniences. But if we go to Maneetoolin, we could not live; soon we should be extinct as a people; we could raise no potatoes, corn, pork, or beef; nothing would grow by putting the seed on the smooth rock." Eventually, in 1847, Sawyer's people had to yield to the mounting pressure of settler encroachment on their lands. The government refused to grant the band secure title to its reserve, so instead of letting settlers take their land for nothing, the Credit River band accepted the government's offer for it and relocated to the Grand River valley.

Chief Sawyer's complaint points out some basic conflicts in government policy that have persisted to the present. The government had a fiduciary obligation to protect Native economic interests, but it also had to finance and promote development and settlement. On the one hand, it had a vested interest in encouraging the economic advancement of Native people so that they would not become chronic burdens on the public treasury; on the other hand, it did not want to help Native people compete against settlers in the marketplace. By resettling most of the southern Ojibwa bands into areas where they had little chance of participating in the emerging agricultural economy, the settler society pushed the Ojibwa to the economic and geographic margins of Canada West before Confederation. Other groups would suffer the same fate when Canada colonized the prairie West after 1867.