

# WALKING TOGETHER

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum



Aboriginal and Treaty Rights  
**Treaties:**  
**The Major Treaties in Canada**  
**1850-1921**

Excerpt from  
*Aboriginal Perspectives*  
*Teacher Resource*

**Government of Alberta** ■





## **TREATIES: THE MAJOR TREATIES IN CANADA, 1850–1921**

Aboriginal and Treaty Rights

Excerpt from *Aboriginal Perspectives Teacher Resource*

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*Note: This information is adapted from the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Names and language used and any perspectives presented are theirs.*

### **The Robinson Treaties**

In the 1850s attention turned for the first time to northern areas still occupied by bands of Indian hunters. The attraction was minerals discovered along the shores of Lake Superior and Lake Huron. Commissioner W.B. Robinson was sent to negotiate with the Anishinabe for surrender of their title to the land in question.

The treaties he negotiated were called the Robinson-Huron and Robinson-Superior treaties. Through them, the Indian peoples agreed “to surrender, cede, grant and convey unto Her Majesty, Her heirs and successors forever, all their rights, title and interest to the land, and the right to fish and hunt in the lands they surrendered, until these lands are sold or leased to individuals or companies.”

### **Numbered Treaties**

In 1871 the far western colony of British Columbia agreed to join Canada on condition that a rail link be built to the rest of the country within ten years. At that time, the Indian peoples numbered perhaps 25 000 across the prairies, but non-Indian peoples had begun to enter the territory in vast numbers. In 1871, to prepare the way, Canada began to obtain surrender of title to all the land that the new settlers would require.

The country’s geographical unity was thus the driving force behind a series of “numbered” treaties signed in rapid succession throughout the fertile belt — the area of prime agricultural land north of the American border between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains.

For the most part, Treaty Nos. 1 to 11 featured similar provisions. With a few subtle differences, all the western treaties provided for reserve lands, monetary payments, suits of clothing every three years to chiefs and headmen, yearly ammunition and twine payments (Treaty Nos. 1, 2 and 9 excepted) and some allowances for schooling. Treaty No. 6 was the only agreement providing for medical treatment and for “assistance in the case of pestilence or famine.”

Treaty activity began in Manitoba and the Northwest Angle of the Lake of the Woods. It continued on throughout the prairies and the northwest, then back again to include all of northern Ontario.

In 1871 Treaty Nos. 1 and 2 took in all of Manitoba, including lands north and west of its initial boundaries. Under Treaty No. 1, the Chippewa and the Swampy Cree surrendered a tract of land covering some 41 750 square kilometres. Under Treaty No. 2 the negotiators secured a

surrender of agricultural and timber lands to the north and west of Manitoba from the Dene. The area ceded was 89 250 square kilometres.

The object of Treaty No. 3, negotiated in 1873, was to secure safe passage for immigrants' travel between Ontario and Manitoba. Often referred to as the Lake of the Woods link, the territory ceded by the Anishinabeg and others under Treaty No. 3 provided clear access to the west. This made future European expansion and development possible.

By Treaty No. 4, known as the Qu'Appelle Treaty, the negotiators obtained a surrender of 194 000 square kilometres from the Cree and Anishinabeg in 1874. This huge tract of land, later to become the province of Saskatchewan, lay between the South Saskatchewan River and the United States Border.

Treaty No. 5, the Lake Winnipeg Treaty, was negotiated in 1875. The Anishinabeg and the Swampy Cree surrendered 260 000 square kilometres of land surrounding lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba. The land was required by the government because of the importance of the Saskatchewan River as a transportation route into the interior. The significance of this river route diminished, however, when the railway was built a few years later.

By Treaty No. 6 in 1876, the Plains and Woodland Cree and the Nakota surrendered title to the rest of the mid-prairie area of Alberta (approximately 310 000 square kilometres). Only Chief Big Bear of the Plains Cree refused to sign.

In 1877 Treaty No. 7 was signed with the Siksika, Kainai, Piegan, Sarcee, and Stoney nations for the remainder of the fertile belt, southern Alberta. By that time the ban on liquor by the North-West Mounted Police had enabled the Siksika to recover some of their former stability and economic independence. Partly for this reason, their chief, Crowfoot, therefore refused the government rations that the treaty commissioners normally supplied when Indian leaders were assembled for negotiations.

Once the Resistance of 1885 was over, treaty negotiations resumed. In 1899, Treaty No. 8 was negotiated in response to the discovery of gold in the Klondike, its objective being to provide safe passage for the thousands of newcomers seeking their fortune. More than 812 000 square kilometres were surrendered, covering the northern half of Alberta, the southern portion of the Mackenzie District in the Northwest Territories, and the northeast corner of British Columbia. Because of their unique geographical position and close relationship with neighbouring Alberta Indian nations, the bands of northeastern B.C. were also brought under this treaty.

Other than land surrenders undertaken when British Columbia was still a colony, this inclusion of the northeast corner of the province in Treaty 8 represents the only formal treaty activity in which the Indian peoples of B.C. have participated.

Treaty Nos. 9 and 10 were signed in 1905 and 1906 respectively, covering all the remaining northern lands of the provinces. Under Treaty No. 9, the Anishinabeg and the Cree surrendered more than 550 000 square kilometres. By Treaty No. 10, the Dene and Cree surrendered to the Crown a large tract of land in northern Saskatchewan and a small area at the 55<sup>th</sup> parallel in Alberta.

The discovery of oil in the far north prompted the government to sign Treaty No. 11 with the Indian peoples in the Northwest Territories in 1921. Slave, Dogrib, Hare, and Loucheux surrendered approximately 930 000 square kilometres.



Many historians speculate that while the commissioners saw the treaties in one way, the Indian peoples have a different perspective. Often the two groups came together with vastly different expectations. The Indian peoples sought protection from invading land-hungry settlers and the disruptions they sensed would follow these newcomers. They sought wide ranges which they could call their own and where they could live traditionally. They also often-times looked to the future and demanded guarantees that Whiteman's education would provide, as well as medicines. Negotiations by the Indian peoples were done as sovereign nations.

The commissioners, on the other hand, saw Indian reserves as places where Indian peoples could learn to be settlers and farmers, places for assimilation, holding pens for future Canadian citizens. For this and other reasons, the treaties left a number of concerns and issues in doubt and unresolved to this day.

Adapted from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *The Canadian Indian* (Ottawa, ON: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1990), pp 56, 57-59, 60. The complete text of various treaties is available on the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada website:  
[www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028574/1100100028578](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028574/1100100028578)