

Mrs. Joe Dennis
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Lil--Did you ever hear of Indians dividing up their land. All of Nova Scotia was divided up I understand. Each family was allotted so much land. We have a map in the office which show this land divisions. Each family was given a tract of land and he was told to make his living off this land. This was the way of the Indian. Indians governed themselves. Do you know any stories pertaining to this?

--I've lived in Eskasoni for 80 years. We lived in Sydney before this. Old man Doucette and the grand chief came to our house. The grand chief said, "I want to give you land, to live in." My uncle was Noel Doucette. The grand chief said, this is the reason why I came to see you because I am allotting you land lot. So our land extends to where Jim Prosper's barn is located and spreads out to the corner where the warehouse is located. This is how much land we own. These both sides.

Lil--This land wasn't given to you by the government this was when the Indians still followed the traditional way of allotting land to Indian families.

--Yes.

Lil--So it's true.

--We have all been ruined ever since the people came. (Centralization)

Lil--You are not the only ones. I've noticed that the same thing happened to all the reserves. I've done interviews on practically all the reserves on the effects of centralization. There were some successful farmers on some of the reserves and centralization broke them up. People were told that they had to move to Eskasoni or else they would pay for their education, doctors and hospitalization and pay taxes etc. In other words the people were threatened. So when a farmer moved to Eskasoni, he had to get rid of his cattle, horses he

had to give up farming. All those people down there, the Prosperers, they were the most successful farmers in Barra Head. When they moved over here they weren't able to continue their old way of life. So really if they didn't move over here maybe they would have been better off today.

--We had 6 milk cows and we also had a horse. When the people came, they took over our land.

Lil--And you weren't compensated at all?

--No.

Lil--Oh, your lot was given to you by the grand chief when Indians were still governing themselves.

--Yes.

Lil--From what you remember of the past, how did you make a livelihood?

--We made baskets, axe handles, we fished for eels, codfish.

Lil--I guess there wasn't too much happening here was there?

--No.

Lil--Did Indians go out to live in certain places like North Sydney or Sydney at certain times of the year to work there or fish or make baskets etc.

--Everything went to ruin when centralization started here a person would build a house wherever he chose to and the land was already cleared and fixed by us. I started clearing the land on the hill on the other side of my house, I let it go when the centralization started. I sold all my cows and my horse.

Lil--You always planted.

--Yes. When rhe people came the children ruined everything. The potatoes, turnips, they took out the corn. They threw stones at the animals and they chased them. The people weren't told to move over here.

Lil--Indians in the past received good religious training. Isn't that true.

--Oh yes, religious training was taught.

Lil--They were taught the principles to follow and it seems to me that people

got along more in the past than today. They didn't quarrel with each other as much.

Lil--I always believed that we had a system of our own to govern ourselves at one time similiar to the white people. e.g. we had leaders, to run things. They had an educational system whereby the men would teach their children the different ways in which to make a livlihood. Boys were taught how to hunt, how to skin an animal etc. girls were taught cooking and the different ways in which to prepare and preserve food. Indians had their own medicine. They made dye from plants and bark etc. Can you tell me anything about medicine, dye or Indian cooking?

--No answer.

Lil--Did they have festivities between Christmas and ^{EPHANY} Epthany?

--Yes.

Lil--When did this end?

--About 55 years ago.

Lil--Oh, some people have told me at the time of centralization.

--My wife and I taught catechism to children and we didn't get paid for our services.

Lil--What was your wife's name?

--Bridget.

Lil--Did she also teach in Chapel Island during the mission?

--Yes, both of us did.

Lil--I remember her. I received my 1st communion in Chapel Island.

--My wife knew a lot of prayers and she also knew a lot of hymns.

Lil--Did you used to go to Chapel Island at one time.

--Yes.

Lil--On what? boats - canoes?

--Boats

Lil--How long did it take one day.

--One day.

Lil--People coming from Whycocomagh to Chapel Island took them three days.

--When it was windy it took us longer, but when it was calm it didn't take long.

--I have relatives in Barra Head. I am related to the Marshall's, Johnson's and Battiste's. My mother used to tell me I had relatives in Barra Head. She told me I was related to all the people there except the Stevens.

Lil--Indians respected and knew their relations. I've noticed this in my time. I remember the old people who died 25 years ago like Ben Marshall, Paul Nicholas and others. They would address you as my sister or my brother. Micmacs don't use those kinship terms anymore.

Lil--Did you ever hear of Francis Tomma. He was a grand chief.

--I heard about John Denny's father. He was a grand chief. His father was a grand chief. He was a grand chief for 37 years.

Lil--I thought that maybe John Denny Sr. father might have been Francis Tomma.

Lil--Do you know the history of that rock that is in Chapel Island.

--No.

Lil--Do you know any stories concerning the Mohawk spies. I've heard a lot of stories of about them

--Yes, one was shot in Chapel Island near the Big Cross used to stand. I think he was buried there.

Lil--Why did they torment us the way they did. They stoned our wigwams and canoes. They didn't seem to want to hurt us. They didn't shoot us or harm us.

--Nowadays they don't let you know about how the chieftianship stands. Old people used to say no one can become chief unless he was of the Denny family. But now it doesn't apply, anybody can become chief.

Lil--I think it's only for the grand chief. That was followed for a long time, The hereditary chieftian ship over two hundred years.

There was one Michael Denny, who went to the Province government to ask aid in the erection of a chapel on Cape Breton Island.

--A lot of people ran away from Cape Breton. When the Chapel Island church was

erected. People from Barra Head, Whycomomagh etc.

Lil--Why.

--They didn't want to help out in the building of the church and they didn't want to donate any money towards it.

Lil--Where did they run away to the Mainland?

--Yes to Pictou, Afton, Truro, and Shubenacadie.

Lil--I heard that some of my relatives moved away for that reason. They moved to Shubie and they changed their name when they got there.

Lil--My father said, people had to pledge a lot of money. It was equivalent to 500 a year of today's money. I don't know now if he said 20.00 worth of gold pieces or what. Another question I would like to ask you is if you know anything about what the Indians called (Kwed -al-look-ta-timk). This was a big ceremony put on in honour of visitors to an Indian settlement.

--I don't know anything about that.

Lil--Do you know any Indian medicine.

--No, I have forgotten.

Lil--Indians had all kinds of Indian medicine at one time.

Lil--What is the Budoose's job? Do you know?

--He informs the people on what is to be done and why and what is required of them. He's like a town crier.

Lil--He's in charge of communications. He is the only one who reads the El-nopse-cook.

--Yes.

Lil--Were you ever present when they were read.

--Yes, but I didn't listen at that age I was the most mischievous.

Lil--They didn't let any young people in the Council wigwam.

--No.

Lil--They sang Neska-wet songs at the banquet.

--Yes.

Lil--Did each man sing a different Neska-wet song.

--People from each reserve had their own song.

Lil--They came from all over.

--Yes, Shubie, Truro and P.E.I.

Lil--They even came all the way from Nfld.

--Yes.

Mr. Dennis--One time ago a canoe load of Indians from Nfld were on their way to Chapel Island. This wasn't an Indian Reserve back then when they got to the middle of the lake here it was calm. One man told another (ala weg kwe stoken ek) way over there starts the spruce grove. This is why this place

is called Eskasoni. They named all the places as they went by, Malgawatch.

Lil--They must have had big canoes.

--Yes. The first St. Anne's was in St. Anne's. It was hard to get to so they moved it. They moved the statue to Malgawatch. They didn't find any place there because there were too many mosquitos. So they moved the mission to Chapel Island.

Lil--Mallard moved it to Chapel Island. I heard that the church that was in Chapel Island was burned the same time louisburg was seized. I say, somebody must have rescued the statue because it's still there today.

--Yes.

Lil--Did you ever hear of a church in Chapel Island, I understand it was made of logs.

--No. The reserve land there is ^called Bourdeaus's. When the Indians tried to pronounce it they called it Botloteg.

Lil--Indians used birchbark to make maps.

--They marked their hunting territories and in Cape Breton they had a common tract of land which belonged to everybody. This was berry picking ground and it was located somewheres in the Cape North area.
