

- What actually do you want to know - which part of centralization.
Lil - I am doing a study on centralization - I would like to know how centralization started - what happened before - during cent. for e.g. if ~~do~~ you remember hearing promises of any kind - what was offered for you if you move to Eskasoni. Tell me what you know.

- Well, I would say centralization originated from here. In 1938, a meeting was held in Whycocomagh. It was about cent. I attended the meeting at that time and I even took minutes of it. Centralization was discussed and a lot of people there agreed to the centralization plan.

Lil - Who was present at that meeting.

- Ben Christmas was heading this meeting, he set it up, the chiefs were there, William Young, Grand Chief Sylliboy and some other leaders were there. They called the meeting and all who were there agreed to be centralized in one place but it wasn't known where - but Eskasoni wasn't mentioned.

Since Ben C. was heading this thing he was further instructed by the people there to pick a delegation and look for a suitable place where the people would eventually be centralized. I didn't go with that certain party at that time.

The old man Ben never mentioned receiving promises of any kind at that time - not at that time and thereafter I don't know if he received any.

When the delegation finished their tour, Ben came to see me. He said, I have found a place and we selected it and I think you will like the location. I said, "Where?" and he said, "I've been all over Cape Breton and I couldn't find a suitable place but there is one place which I think is the most suitable and I think the rest of the Indians will like it. I was a councillor. There were two councillors here on the reserve at that time, I and Albert Doucette. He said, "I think you two men know the geography of Cape Breton Island. I said, "Well, I've a fair knowledge of it. He said, "I found a place North West Arm - I think is the best location. I said, I know where North West Arm and it sounds good to me - I agree with you it's a good location.

Albert Doucette further added, "One thing there's a lot of wood there and it's handy to fishing because it's all along the coast and the inlet goes in about 3-4 miles. Furthermore, I said, it's suitable because it's right in between Sydney and North Sydney. I said, I don't know where you can find another place like it. ~~I said, I don't know where you can find another place like it.~~ I said, if you want to fish e.g. in North Sydney commercial fishing you could buy a boat. There is general fishing off the coast of Glace Bay and besides the harbour is sheltered. Ben said, If this is accepted by the government we may be able to convince the government to buy that strip of land from North West Arm right straight through to Eskasoni. Well, anyway, he said, "I am sending in this suggestion before Parliament opens. He said, " the Parliament will open in a month's time. And I know two MP's from this area. So Anyway the two M'P's attended the opening of Parliament.

You will find out that not one person moved from here to Eskasoni just because the people were disappointed. The reason why they were disappointed was because all that month instead of (the two members) preparing for Parliament. They went to Eskasoni (Castle Bay and they bought out the Scotchmen and they went to Ottawa - they knew the Indians wanted to be centralized and they (members) didn't know about Indians as much as we did and we knew the best location. Castle Bay it's right in the middle of Bras'D or Lake but they figured that the Indians should be isolated.

Lil - The two members

Well, the (Chief) didn't have a backing here and they had a lot ^(Cem) of backing just because they were members. The Dept. was useless couldn't help it but to accept the place that they selected without too much consultations from here. Indians) So when the old man, Ben wanted to fight back, see, he was beaten out every time.

Lil - Didn't the Grand Chief signed the letter agreeing to centralization.

- I can't say he signed it but the vote was unanimous.

Lil - You mean the meeting that was held in Whycocomagah.

- Yes

That was in 1938. For this reason the people didn't move from here except one family, my brother Stephen Paul. The reason why he went was because his wife was used to country life. My mother also moved but she was glad when she came back home again. That is why they bought the place - Castle Bay buying out the (MP's) residents, I think they received a lot of money and they sold it to the Indian Dept. they bought the people out I would say, "they bought the place for a song." I don't know what they offered the people besides, outside of that, I don't know there has to be something else, they must have got some kind of compensation. But anyway I am not sure if they got compensation but I am sure that they got the money for the sale of their lands. Because I know the Indians occupied the places that they vacated the ones that didn't have house ready for them. When they moved to Castle Bay. The people from Membertou were so disappointed, I heard one person saying, I don't think the government will give us cement for our houses - because of our ^{DISAGREEMENT WITH} ~~condemnation~~ of the two members. We couldn't do too much because ~~wasn't much~~ you could say, they ^{HAD} ~~have~~ too much drag because their constituencies covered two - three counties - but those men are ^{NOT} ~~around~~ today. They have sons that are lawyers today.

Lil - Was one from North Sydney.

They were partners in this area. They were both from Sydney. One represented North Sydney- Cape Breton North and South. That was the first part of centralization. You would call this the first chapter. In 1939 I left I moved to Portland, Maine. I stayed a long time - I came back and I didn't know what happened but occasionally I heard that progress was being made in Eskasoni. I was thinking about this not too long ago well, I said, after all the way they wanted to isolate the Indians to centralize them in Castle Bay but instead for them to continue on being poor I believe that they ^{me} ~~it~~ helped better through the supreme being, they grew now they can be independent next three - five years. All the businesses that are going on today like the oyster industry going on today and the people are not poor today but at that time, Holy Man, ^{I HEARD A MAN} ~~talking~~ he was an agent there - he was a priest his name was Fr. MacDonald. He was from Christmas Island. ^(RESERVES) Parish Priest from there. They send in their budgets - even this reservation we had to submit our budget at that time.

I think our budget we send in was about \$4,000.00 - 5,000.00 because the reserve is small ^{THERE} ~~their~~ were many people in Eskasoni - two or three times as many people. Fr. MacDonald said, look at this 2,000.00 he sent in. There were some priests who favoured the Indians more than others but some said that the Indians were drunkards and they were lazy. If I remember that other part when the Indian started moving - start of cent. movement I never gave it too much thought. So I could only tell you from the beginning you could say it originated = it started from here. And a meeting was held in Whycocomagh but I guess the other parties held meetings in other reserves but I couldn't say for sure because I didn't participate in them but the meeting ~~was~~ was held in Whycocomagh. Lil - From what I heard - I don't think you were around at that time - about 41, Indians from Barra Head made a brief on their grievances e/g/ they didn't get enough welfare not enough medical care for T.B. patients and a lot of other things.

- All the things going on today, starting from death to education ~~today~~ it was done here - and one man is responsible for it. One man here and that was Ben Christmas because he was the only educated man, you would say in Cape Breton and one who was capable of doing business in Ottawa. But sometimes he was hard up on funds that he practically hoboed to Ottawa from Sydney just to help the Indians, and he didn't get too much in return. He got hospitalization from there - he got more help - he established agents in every reserve. There was one Indian agent, A.J. Boyd and he lived in River Bourgeois. He was the Indian superintendent. You only saw him once a year - you got relief - you only get 10.00 a month. Well, you had to go to means test if you qualify you get relief. If you work on, there was an income of sorts coming in you wouldn't get it.

Lil - How did the Indians make a living here before centralization. - I don't know too much about the other reserves but here in Sydney it was mostly trades work. Take my father for instance - a lot of men worked for him, the people from the outside (Indians from other reserves). My father was a mason and plaster contractor All his life you know but before that his father was a bricklayer.

He didn't struggle too much for life you know because he was called to work in places like Nfld., Que. all the places in the wintertime because he was a good tradesman. And when he took on a job in Sydney, he would hire 4-5 men to work for him. Besides people here worked. They had horses and they worked for miners they made shafts for the pit - to haul out the coal and they also used to use baskets the Mining Co was using baskets made out of ^{BLACK-}ASH for coal baskets because ^{BLACK-}ASH is very durable and every party - people in Eskasoni and Whycomagh and Barra Head they brought their own wares such as baskets etc. to sell in Glace Bay.

I praise that town for Indians - the town of Glace Bay. I've been thinking of writing an article sometimes and praise ^{ING} those people. In Sydney if you were starving and you tried to sell one loaf of bread to a rich man he wouldn't buy it. On the other hand you go ~~to~~ selling in Glace Bay they would buy ~~whatever you~~ ~~had~~ ~~to~~ ~~sell~~ from you. Majority of the people in Glace Bay are foreign people but over here you might say the majority of them are Scotch except:

That priest in Eskasoni I was talking about came from this side of Sydney. He was a P.P. here at that time Fr. Mac ----- he liked the Indians just the same and he couldn't help them because he had a lot of responsibility here in the Parish but I say Indians did pretty good - although ^{they} ~~baskets~~ didn't get too much for their ^{WARES} ~~baskets~~ but they came to sell in places like Glace Bay, New Waterford, Reserve and Port Morian - all through the Mining communities. They did this for a living ^{IN} ~~hood~~ until pulp business started - the people got a lift - a lot of income went into Barra Head because of the pulp business.

Lil - What about the Membertou ^{PEOPLE} ~~U~~ did they make baskets ~~other~~ Indian handicrafts.

- oh yes. but not too much maybe an odd party would make Indian handicrafts. I know 2-3 parties worked. they made mocassins and sold them. They were ~~made~~ ~~so~~ so nicely made that I know one woman she made a pair for King George. These were given to him at the presentation. I don't remember if they were sent to him or if they were presented to him I don't know if he came here or some representative of the King on an official visit here.

Lil - I think we have a copy of the speech that he made at that time.

- oh yeah - he read it to them. He always ~~wrote~~ wrote his own speeches he never had to depend on anybody to help him.

Lil - I know. I've read some of his correspondence that we have in the office.

- He was a good writer. He knew how to express himself. He was very smart. That is why is ^I say that person is responsible for all the help we are getting today. There was nobody else but I wonder why two other men that I know who had more education why they didn't fight for the Indian ~~problems~~ situation at that time. These two men graduated from ST. John College in 1900. Charlie Bernard and Frank Cabot of Eskasoni. They both lived in Whycocomagh at that time.

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