

PART VIII.

REPORT OF HALF-BREED COMMISSIONERS

CALGARY, ALBERTA, September 30, 1899.

The Honourable CLIFFORD SIFTON,
Minister of the Interior,
Ottawa.

SIR,—Conformably with the terms of the Commission issued to us on May 6, last, we have the honour to report upon the result of our operations, during last season, in investigating and dealing with the claims of Half-breeds resident in the district of Athabasca.

We left Edmonton, with our party, on the afternoon of May 29 last, and returned safely to the same point on the 23rd instant, after covering a distance of about two thousand miles, by land and water. Although, owing to circumstances over which we had no control, we were prevented from reaching the different points for scrip distribution on the dates specified in our public notices previously issued, we are glad to be in a position to report that, with the exception of small groups of Half-breeds living in the vicinity of White-Fish and Sturgeon lakes, who had been duly notified to meet the Commission at Lesser Slave lake, but who obstinately refused to appear, the entire Half-breed population resident within the boundaries of the territory covered by Treaty No. 8, which was being concurrently entered into with the Indians, has been carefully enumerated and every claim satisfactorily dealt with. In all 1,195 money scrip certificates were issued, representing a value of \$286,800, and 48 land scrip certificates, covering an area of 11,520 acres.

The following is a statement showing the different places visited by the Commission, the number of certificates issued and declarations taken at each point:—

Name of place.	No. of declarations.	No. of money certi- ficates.	No. of land certifi- cates.	No. of land declara- tions.
Lesser Slave Lake.....	276	562	33	71
Peace River Crossing.....	62	110	8	26
Fort Dumvegan.....	22	53		9
Wolverine Point.....	16	35		4
Fort Vermillion.....	56	166	2	49
Fort Chipewyan.....	68	130	2	1
Smith's Landing.....	15	17		
Fort McMurray.....	6	18		
Lake Wabascaw.....	27	62	2	2
Pelican Portage.....	12	5	1	
Grand Rapids.....	1	1		
Calling River Portage.....	13	36		
Athabasca Landing.....	28			
Totals.....	602	1,195	48	162

Hereto annexed will be found the original of a minute of a joint meeting of the Indian Treaty and Half-breed Commissions, held at Lesser Slave lake, on June 22 last, embodying the decisions unanimously agreed upon, with regard to certain general questions affecting our work. In this relation we beg to refer to our letter of June 24, which dealt more particularly with the change which was deemed necessary in the form of the money scrip certificate. As this letter fully set forth the grounds upon which such change was made, we consider it advisable to insert here the text of the same, which read as follows:—

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' HALF-BREED COMMISSION,

' LESSER SLAVE LAKE, June 24, 1899.

' The Honourable CLIFFORD SIFTON,
' Minister of the Interior,
' Ottawa.

' SIR,—We beg to inclose herewith a copy of an extract from a minute of a joint meeting of the Indian Treaty and Half-breed Commissions, held here on the 22nd instant, together with one copy each of the two forms of certificates as they now stand. The reasons which led to the change in the wording of Form (A) are fully set out in the minute, but we deem it advisable to state further in this relation that, apart altogether from the protests and general dissatisfaction which resulted from our announcement as to the terms upon which it was originally intended to issue money scrip, it was felt that the object which the Government had in view in providing for the assignment of the same, namely, the protection of the rights of minors, would be totally defeated, by the fact that their parents, in the great majority of cases, had fully made up their minds to refuse land scrip, and that the scrip buyers were prepared to purchase the money scrip certificates of minors from their parents. According to the wording of certificate (A), as it stood before the change, and as it now stands, the money scrip called for thereunder is made "payable to bearer," and as there would appear to be a legal point involved as to the right of parents to act as the legal guardians of their minor children, and to thus appoint agents or attorneys to receive the scrip of the former, scrip buyers signified their intention to take their chances as to the ultimate result of the Government's decision on this point, and to buy the scrip certificates of minors at a much depreciated value. The consequence of this would have been that while the rights of the minors would not have been safeguarded, the interests of the whole Half-breed community throughout the district of Athabasca would have suffered considerably. As a result of the change in the wording of the certificate, the value of scrip has risen considerably, and some of the claimants are now holding out from sale in the expectancy of a further rise.

' We also beg to inclose herewith a copy of a letter on this subject, dated 22nd instant, addressed by the Very Reverend Father Lacombe to the Hon. Mr. Laird, chairman of the Indian Treaty Commission, in which the former urges very strong reasons for the change which was decided upon by the commissioners.

' The work of the Half-breed Commissioners at this point, although only commenced two days ago, is now progressing favourably, but in view of the large settlement of Half-breeds in the vicinity of Lesser Slave Lake, it is not likely that we will be able to complete our labours here for some twelve or fifteen days more.

' After mature consideration, we have decided to follow the Indian Treaty Commission and visit all the points advertised this year. It was feared that there might be trouble in making Indian treaties at Fort Chipewyan and other places in the north, if it were known that the Half-breeds there were not to be dealt with this year, so we have concluded to follow the Indian Treaty Commission as quickly as possible, but on the other hand we will not be able to make as complete an examination into the squatters' claims here as we first intended to do. We will no doubt experience some difficulties and hardships in making the round trip after this late date, but by working long hours and hard travelling, we believe we can accomplish it and get out to Edmonton before winter sets in.'

It may be further stated that it was urged by the claimants that the Government might not be in a position, eighteen years hence, to offer Half-breed children, who would by that time become of age, suitable lands on which to locate their scrip. The strongest consideration, however, which prompted the commissioners in changing the form of the money certificate was the fact that if the wishes of the Half-breeds in this relation had not been complied with, the success of the Indian Treaty Commission in coming to terms with the Indian bands of the north would have been

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seriously compromised, as the dissatisfaction of the Half-breeds, who are in a great number of cases allied and in immediate touch with the Indians, would at once have spread amongst the latter and possibly prevented them from coming into treaty.

We also inclose herewith the original of the letter from the Very Reverend Father Lacombe, above referred to. Father Lacombe has been constantly engaged in missionary work amongst the Indians and Half-breeds in the North-west for the last fifty years, and the opinion of one who has spent the best part of his life in efforts to advance their spiritual and material welfare, particularly in a matter of such moment to the Half-breed community, is, the commissioners feel, entitled to much consideration.

We also inclose a letter from the Reverend Messrs. George Holmes, W. G. White, H. Robinson and C. D. White, who are in charge of some of the most important missions of the Church of England in the district of Athabasca, fully endorsing the action of the commission with regard to the change in the money scrip certificate. We regret that this letter was not received in time for transmission to the Government, along with our communication of June 24, above mentioned.

We also regret that the remoteness, from postal or telegraphic facilities, of the territory in which we were operating should have precluded our communicating with the government before finally deciding upon the change which was made. But in view of the urgency and of the extraordinary circumstances connected with this matter, we felt it to be our duty, in the public interest, to act upon our judgment, with the advice of the Indian Treaty Commission, and to assume full responsibility for our act. It is satisfactory to note, however, that the mission of both the Indian Treaty and Half-breed Commissions has been entirely successful; that the whole population of Indian and Half-breeds throughout the district of Athabasca are perfectly satisfied with the liberal manner in which they have been dealt with by the Government of Canada, and that in consequence no trouble or friction whatever need be apprehended in bringing the country under government control.

We desire to call attention to a difficulty which has arisen in dealing with the claims of Half-breeds who have for years been residents of the district of Athabasca, and whose children were born there, but who have latterly moved out of that territory. In Manitoba, only such Half-breeds as were in residence in that province on July 15, 1870, were entitled to scrip, and in the North-west Territories that privilege is being extended to all those born before December 31, 1885, but in the district of Athabasca only such Half-breeds as were in actual residence there at the time of treaty are entitled to share in the grant, so that a Half-breed who was born in the district of Athabasca, or who has lived there the greatest part of his life, but who now resides outside of that territory, is shut out altogether from receiving scrip. A few cases of that kind were submitted to the commission at Athabasca Landing and Edmonton, but in the absence of any specific instructions on the subject no action could be taken.

LAND CLAIMS.

The time at the disposal of the commission did not permit of this class of claims being as thoroughly gone into as desired, but in the absence of any surveys it was considered sufficient to take the declarations of settlers who were in actual occupation of holdings, or who had made certain improvements thereon in the way of buildings or cultivation. These declarations, which are forwarded herewith, were chiefly taken at Lesser Slave Lake and Vermillion, the two most important points in the district, although a few were also taken at most of the places visited, as shown in the above statement.

HAY LANDS.

The question of hay lands is one of paramount importance to most of the settlements in the district of Athabasca, as settlers who do not rely exclusively upon fishing,

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hunting and freighting for subsistence, have given some attention to stock raising, and appear to be deriving much benefit from that enterprise. This again applies more particularly to Lesser Slave Lake and Vermillion, where considerable numbers of cattle of good quality are being raised. A number of applications for hay lands were taken at the former point, and much anxiety was expressed by the parties interested as to the policy of the Government with regard to this class of lands. In several cases proprietary rights have been exercised for years to portions of the large stretches of meadows extending along the shore of the lake, and it is felt by these settlers that they should be protected by the Government in the possession of their respective holdings. In fact, this question was brought specially to the attention of the commission by the leading representatives of the Half-breeds at Lesser Slave lake, when it was urged that steps should be taken by the Government to prevent outsiders from staking large areas of these hay lands, for stock-raising purposes, to the detriment of the older occupants of lands in the neighbourhood. We informed the parties interested that the commission was not in a position to advise them definitely as to what policy would be followed by the Government in this matter, but at the same time we assured them that whatever that policy might be it would not prejudicially affect their interests. This matter is one of serious moment to the Half-breed residents of Lesser Slave lake, and we would suggest that the public should be warned that the staking of hay lands, without authority, will not be recognized by the Government as giving squatters any right to the same. We would further recommend that the claims of old residents of the country to portions of these hay lands receive the most favourable treatment possible at the hands of the Government, consistently with any general regulations that may be adopted in this relation. These observations apply with equal force to other settlements in the district of Athabasca, notably to Vermillion, Chipewyan and Lake Wabasca, where settlers are largely dependent upon the raising of stock for subsistence.

GENERAL REMARKS.

It is gratifying to note that the Half-breeds, throughout the vast territory visited by the commission, with very rare exceptions, are peaceful, honest and law-abiding. This, we consider, is chiefly due to the moral influence exercised upon the population by the missionaries who are stationed at the various settlements, and also to the stringency with which the provisions of the law with regard to spirituous liquors are being enforced. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that as facilities of communication with those regions are increased, it will be necessary to extend the police service to every important point in the district. The few constables who have already been stationed in the territory have rendered valuable services, especially during the recent rush of miners through that country, and it is quite certain that their presence there contributed largely to the preservation of law and order.

In this connection, we desire to place on record here our high appreciation of the manner in which the members of the North-west Mounted Police, who formed our escort, discharged their duties. It having been learned that it would be impossible, owing to the approaching treaty with the Indians and the issue of scrip to Half-breeds, to procure the required number of men to haul our boat up the river from Athabasca landing to Lesser Slave lake, a distance of one hundred and twenty-five miles, through difficult rapids, the officer in command, the sergeant and constables composing the escort kindly volunteered to undertake the work themselves, a work which they performed manfully and successfully, notwithstanding the numerous hardships they had to undergo. There is no doubt that but for their timely assistance the commissions would have experienced much delay in reaching their destination, which would have involved considerable expense to the Government in providing rations to the Indians in the meantime. These are the names of the members of the contingent who took part in this arduous work, under command of Inspector Snyder:—Sergeant

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Anderson, Corporal Fitzgerald, and Constables McLaren, Burke, Vernon, Lett, Burman, McLennan and Kerr.

We also have much pleasure in testifying to the zeal and ability with which the secretaries of the commission, Messrs. J. F. Prud'homme and C. Mair discharged their onerous duties.

The thanks of the commission are due to the missionaries, the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company and traders throughout the district of Athabasca, for their many courtesies, and also for their kindly assistance in furthering the end which we had in view in our mission.

We have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient servants,

JAMES WALKER,
J. ARTHUR COTE,
Half-breed Commissioners.

MINUTE of a joint meeting of the Indian Treaty and Half-breed Commissions, held at Lesser Slave lake, Athabasca district, on June 22, 1899.

Hon. DAVID LAIRD in the Chair.

PRESENT: Hon. J. H. Ross, and Messrs. J. A. J. McKenna, James Walker and J. A. Côté.

This meeting was called by the Half-breed Commissioners, conformably with the terms of their instructions to that effect, for the purpose of discussing and deciding certain points which are likely to arise in dealing with the claims of Half-breeds resident within the boundaries of the district of Athabasca at the time of Treaty.

After a full discussion of the questions submitted, the following decisions were unanimously agreed upon, namely:—

1. That in the case of North-west Half-breeds whose claims were extinguished in 1885, only such of their children as were born between the 15th July, 1870, and the end of the year 1885, are entitled to scrip.

2. That in the case of a Half-breed where only one of whose parents' claims has already been dealt with, the claim of such Half-breed is to be allowed up to the date of treaty, namely, June 21, 1899.

3. That the claims of deceased North-west Half-breeds, born between July 15, 1870, and the end of the year 1885, may be presented, but reserved for the minister's decision.

4. Certificates in the case of minors are to be delivered to the father, if alive, if not, to the mother or guardian.

5. The Half-breeds of Lesser Slave lake, at a public meeting held this day with the Commissioners, objected to the form of the scrip certificate (Form A.), and claimed that it should be in the same form as was employed in other portions of the territories. They claimed the right to use the scrip of their children for the latter's benefit during their minority and urged that to do so would be more in the interest of the children than would be the locking up of their scrip through the requirement of an assignment of the certificate before the issue of the scrip to any one but the person named in the certificate. Inquiry has shown that the Half-breeds are determined not to take land scrip but money scrip for themselves and their children, with the object of immediately realizing upon it, and that scrip buyers are prepared to purchase the certificates of old and young notwithstanding the requirement as to

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assignment, but at a very low rate on account of that requirement. The requirement intended to benefit the Half-breeds is therefore being turned to their disadvantage, but at the same time the dissatisfaction thus created is likely to spread in advance of the Commissioners and lead the Half-breeds, at the points at which the Indians have yet to be met, to use their influence to prevent the further extension of the treaty. The Half-breeds of this district have evinced much intelligence and industry and are much better able to look after their own interest and the interest of their children than were the Half-breeds of the older portions of the territories. Consultation with the natural advisers of the Half-breeds has led to the conviction that they would make good use of their children's scrip and that it would be in their interest to have it at their disposal. It has therefore been decided to strike out from the scrip certificate, Form A, the words 'and to be delivered to the said..... or assigns,' which appear at fifth and sixth lines between the word 'bearer' on the fourth line and the word 'and' on the sixth line.

DAVID LAIRD,
 Chairman.
 J. H. ROSS,
 J. A. J. MCKENNA,
 JAMES WALKER,
 J. ARTHUR COTE.

LESSER SLAVE LAKE, June 22, 1899.

SIR,—Referring to the meeting of the Half-breeds to-day, at which I acted as intermediary and adviser, after careful consideration of what was urged as to the form of scrip, I have come to the conclusion that very much trouble will arise if the parents be not able to make use of their children's scrip for their benefit during their minority. As you have no doubt observed, the Half-breeds here have evinced more intelligence and industry than did the Half-breeds to whom scrip was issued in 1870 and 1885, and although I came here strongly impressed with the desirability of doing everything possible to prevent the parents from using the scrip of their children, and from freely disposing of their own, the conditions here have led me to the conclusion, that action in that direction will not result in any benefit to the Half-breeds here, but to their disadvantage, for they are determined to make prompt use of their scrip and that of their children. I find that the Half-breeds here, when they heard that scrip was to be issued, counted upon turning it into money for investment in cattle for themselves and their children. Very, very few, if any, of them will take land scrip, and I am convinced that none of those who take money scrip will use it in direct payment for land, and the result of the impediment to free disposition will therefore be the depreciation of the scrip. They are bound to dispose of it and it is in their interest that they should be in a position to get the best return possible for it. The dissatisfaction with the form of certificate is so great and so widespread that I fear, if the Commissioners have to persist in using it the dissatisfaction will spread in advance of the Indian Commission and make it very difficult, if not impossible, to further extend the treaty which I am so anxious to have all the Indians enter into. In the interest of the Half-breeds and in the public interest, I would therefore advise that if it be in the power of the Commissioners, they should take upon themselves to amend the scrip as to meet the wishes of the Half-breeds.

With respect and consideration, I remain sincerely,

Truly your devoted servant ,

FATHER A. LACOMBE,
As Adviser in the Commission.

Hon. DAVID LAIRD,
 Chairman of Indian Commission.

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ST. PETER'S MISSION,
LESSER SLAVE LAKE,
June 26, 1899.

To Her Majesty's Commissioner,
The Honourable D. LAIRD.

HONOURABLE SIR,—We, the undersigned, desire to express our conviction that in conceding to the request of the Half-breeds, i.e., to give the parents control of their children's 'scrip' you have adopted the wisest course open to you. Only those acquainted with the Half-breeds in this district can understand the bitter disappointment it was to them to hear the proposed terms in reference to their children's 'scrip'; as many of them are industrious, and were looking forward to this time as their only opportunity of being able to procure the necessary implements and stock for making a start in agriculture.

Considering the attitude of the Half-breeds towards the proposal of the Government to enter into this country, we believe that serious trouble might have resulted had not this point been conceded to them.

We are most thankful to Her Majesty's Commissioners for the able manner in which they have brought their mission to a peaceful and successful issue in this place (Lesser Slave lake).

REV. GEO. HOLMES,
REV. W. G. WHITE,
REV. H. ROBINSON,
C. D. WHITE.