Tuesday November 14, 2017 Chair: James Arreak
Recorder: Richard Cywink

Presenter: James R. Miller (Professor-Emeritus, U of Saskatchewan)

The onset of the fur-trade made the first interactions of Canada's First Nations with the European culture. The Indigenous peoples in the trade network found it crucial to bring their new trade partners into a kin-relationship that was to be renewed annually. The agreements were the first treaties of peace and friendship between the Europeans and the First Nations. Sir William Johnson understood the importance of the relationships with the First Nations and the importance of the bringing of gifts.[1] The presents had to given to the First Nations to provide a continued relationship. Tecumseh and Joseph Brant made such treaties with the Crown through Sir Wm. Johnson.

In 1763, the Royal Proclamation was made in Paris France, recognizing the importance of indigenous lands being available to other nations, only through the Crown of England. King George III was the royal reigning at this time. The Proclamation also enforced the trade lands to be public and only through a Crown – First Nations relationship only. The territorial treaties would be refined and later entrenched into Canada and its government as a standard for other Indigenous agreements within Canada. The Robinson-Huron and Robinson-Superior treaties were the first of the larger treaties made for hunting and trapping rights. Shortly after the war of 1812 with the United States, treaties and reserves would go hand and hand with all the Indigenous groups in Canada. By 1840, the aspect of making treaties with ceremonial aspects disappeared and at this time the state of Canada began their assimilation policies.

After Confederation in 1867, Canada made seven numbered treaties across the prairies to build the railroad and assess farming in new lands. However, not all the First Nations north of the 49th parallel were jumping to make treaties with the new trade partners. Why were they not jumping? Because, the decline in buffalo from the south, disease and war casualties had decreased their numbers. The government (thinking they reintroduced presents) started to give presents once again in the 1870's to enhance their treaty process. The acceptance of the Queens hand in protection from the war in the south played a large part in these processes.[2]

Looking deeper into the treaties we find they were two sided and very much a covenant to peace. However, the government had a different agenda, interpreting the treaties as peace treaties, when they were land transfer and ward relationship contracts. The final treaties in the north would have the government/ colonial state make treaties with the First Nations, once again without the "prodigal treaty" formats of the past.

In 1975 Canada would once again intrude on First Nations lands in Quebec to build a hydro-electric dam. This time they would meet a stronger native leadership, resulting in the James Bay, Northern Quebec Agreement.

The final relationship status is: The Crown has always been the center of all Indigenous-Crown relationships.

[1] (His Majesty's sole Agent and Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Northern parts of North America; Colonel of the Six United Nations, their Allies and Dependents.)

[2] . The United States was in their revolution from 1860 to 1865.