

Using Evidence to Explore the Treaty Relationship

Background: Treaties

Treaties between the First Nations peoples and the Crown (Canadian government) are the building blocks in the creation of the country of Canada. They are agreements, voluntarily entered by both parties, which provide for peaceful relations between the two nations.

From 1871 to 1921, a series of eleven Treaties were negotiated by various Indian Commissioners with First Nations peoples who occupied lands covering the western provinces and northeastern British Columbia, northwestern Ontario, northern Ontario and the western portion of the Northwest Territories. The Treaties are held in high esteem by the descendants of the original signatories and serve to define the historical Treaty relationship between First Nations peoples and the Crown. Treaties 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10 cover areas in what is now Manitoba.

For First Nations peoples, the Treaties are more than simple written documents; they are sacred agreements between the First Nations, the Crown, and with the Creator as witness. They are “living,” permanent, foundational agreements based on the synthesis of two worldviews: the oral traditions (values & natural laws) of the First Nations peoples and the written traditions and common law of the Crown who represented the Newcomers.

How do Historians Explore the Past?

History is the study of change over time. The task of historians is to gather information from a particular time period when a significant change or development took place. In their research, historians look to answer two overarching questions: why did this event take place? and, what effects did this have on the people of the time and people afterwards?

Historians are cautious about jumping to conclusions too quickly. Before they express a theory or a viewpoint, they must follow a detailed process. To start with, they must gather as much data as possible from a wide variety of sources. These sources may include physical remains of plants, animals, and human beings themselves. They may include **artifacts**, human-made objects such as tools, shards of pottery, weapons, or even ruined buildings. Other very important sources are written records, including both primary documents and secondary accounts, written about past events. **Primary sources** are original documents or first-hand accounts written by someone who directly witnessed or participated in an event. **Secondary** sources are second-hand accounts recorded by someone who was not directly involved in the event.

Another integral part of piecing together the past is **oral history**. Oral history can be defined as the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information, based on the individual experiences and opinions/worldviews of the speaker. Oral history provides a fuller, more accurate picture of the past by augmenting the information provided by public records, statistical data, photographs, maps, letters, diaries, and other historical materials. Eyewitnesses to events contribute various viewpoints and perspectives that fill in the gaps in documented history. Oral historians come from academic settings, government offices, libraries and museums, medical and military sites, community centers, families, and anywhere people are studying people and the past. In First Nations communities, **Elders** are a key source of oral history.

Exploring Treaties: Worldviews

Understanding the different worldviews of First Nations peoples and the Newcomers is an integral part of understanding the Treaties and the historical processes or evidence we use to collect information. First Nations peoples believe the Treaties are based upon specific understandings of the relationship between the Creator, human beings, and the earth; they view the Treaties as permanent, sacred agreements to be honoured forever. The Anishinaabeg concepts of:

- **“Agowidiwinan”** (putting things together, bringing things together, is the word used for Treaties),
- **“aadizookaanan”** (means tell it as a story, referring to the oral tradition),
- and **“aanikoobijigewin”** (link the past and future, referring to the importance of generations and the oral tradition)

are foundational concepts to Treaties and First Nations oral tradition.

Let's Be a Treaty Historian!

Answer the following questions as instructed. Use complete sentences and detailed examples when necessary.

Imagine you are a historian whose task is to piece together the story of one of the Numbered Treaties in Manitoba. What evidence can you assemble? How will you tell the full story?

You may use the Internet, a textbook, or other sources to complete this activity. Access the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba's website at: www.trcm.ca

Let's begin

1. Choose a Treaty in Manitoba: Treaty # _____

a) In what year was the Treaty signed? _____

b) What First Nations communities were signatories:

c) Describe the physical location of the Treaty area:

d) List several Manitoba communities located in that Treaty area:

2. Primary Evidence.

a) Give an example of a piece of primary evidence that can be used to explore your Treaty. Be exact.

b) Where did find this piece of evidence?

3. Secondary Source.

a) List a secondary source that you may use in your investigation. Be detailed.

b) Where did you find it?

4. Artifacts.

a) What type of artifact strengthens your Treaty research? List one.

b) Where did you find this artifact?

5. Oral history.

a) What source did you use for oral history?

b) Where is the source from (hint: in person, online recording, etc.)?

c) List your source.

6. Why is First Nations' oral history an integral part of exploring the history of Treaties and the Treaty relationship in Manitoba?