

PSB-20
The following article by J.W. McLeod, published in the London Free Press, concerns the early history of the Indians in Bruce County.

In the confines of Bruce County are two Indian Reservations, which serve as a reminder to the people of the county, that at one time all Bruce was a part of the vast domain over which the red man roamed and ruled.

The Saugeen Reserve, near Southampton is close to the site of a decisive Indian battle of the 17th Century. The other, at Cape Croker, near Wiarton, is a part of land once familiar to Indians and early traders. Only once since Bruce was opened to early settlers have the Indians shown signs of uprising. In 1855, they prepared to don war-paint and wreak vengeance on the settlers over a dispute as to the boundary of the Saugeen Reserve.

While the history of the red man in Bruce County extends over centuries, the first records are scanty 17th century documents showing that explorers, fur traders, and Jesuit missionaries came into brief contact with the Indians, most of whom were Ottawas in the Peninsula, and further south, Petuns, or Tobacco Indians.

Etienne Brule is credited with being the first white man to visit Bruce Indians, when he explored the district in 1610 to 1613. Samuel de Champlain also visited the Indians in Bruce in 1616, and on a map of the time the explorer marked an Indian village in Bruce County. The French explorer, Baillon, visited the county ten years later, in 1626, while the early Jesuit and Recollet friars whose companions met their deaths around Fort Ste. Marie, at Midland, visited the district, and endeavoured, without much success, to establish missions. As late as 1660 efforts were made to win the tribes in the district to the Christian faith.

On their way to Sault Ste. Marie and the west, Dollier de Casson and Gelinne, French fur traders and explorers, passed up the west shore-line of Bruce County, visiting Indian encampments. As far as can be learned, in the latter part of the 17th century, there were Indian villages at Wiarton, Southampton, Paisley, and in the Bruce Peninsula at Tobermory, Flower Pot Island, Cove Island, Dunks Bay, Stokes Bay, Red Bay, and Cape Croker. When Paul Kane visited Southampton, (then Saugeen), in 1845, he was shown a huge mound in which were many human bones, and told by the Indians that, 200 years earlier, a battle had been fought there, with the Iriquois driving out other tribes. Nearly all the Hurons were exterminated in this battle, fought about 1648. The Iriquois then settled the district, adopting members of other tribes, the scattered remnants of the battle. In time, the Iriquois were driven out by the Chippewas, who came from Manitoulin Island and Lake Superior district. It is their descendants who now live at the Cape Croker and Chippewa Hill reserves.

After the land was opened to white settlers, relations between them and the Chippewas were amicable. In 1836, on August 9th, the Indians deeded over most of their title to Bruce County. The documents were signed by Sir Francis Bond Head, and by the various chiefs. Saugeen, Arran, Bruce, Eiderslie, Kincardine, Huron, Greenock, Brant, Kinloss, Culross and Carrick townships were included in the land deeded over. For this, the Indians were promised 1250 pounds sterling per annum, "as long as grass grows or water runs." On June 29, 1847, the Bruce Peninsula was deeded over by the Indians, with reserves being kept out. The Indians were promised the proceeds of the sale of lands, and separate titles to farm lots. The latter stipulation was not carried out for some time, and was the cause of hard feeling.

Matters came to a head in May, 1855, when George Gould was surveying around the Chippewa reserve. The Indians tore up the stakes, and refused to allow the survey to continue. With Rev. Conrad van Dusen, they sent four chiefs to see the Governor-General, and protest. After making the long trip to Quebec, the party was informed it must have a letter from the Superintendent of Indian affairs, Capt. T.G. Anderson, who resided at Cobourg. Back in Bruce, the tribesmen considered this an insult to their chiefs, and the younger element was preparing to make an issue of it. By arranging a pow-wow at Floodwood Crossing (now Allenford) Capt. Anderson reached a compromise with the Indians, and all talk of an uprising was stilled. In 1861, Colpoy Bay lands were deeded over, and in 1855 the Fishing Islands were surrendered to the Crown.

Since that time life has gone on peacefully on the reserves. The Indian population is not large, it is neither increasing nor decreasing noticeably. The Red man, who once ruled Bruce, now keeps to himself, thinking perchance of a happier day. If so, he gives no indication of his thoughts.