

Tiny reserve has about 900 residents

OHSWEKEN — As you travel East on Indian Line, along the southern boundary of the Six Nations and New Credit reserves, the highway passes between two small cemeteries. The one on the right is the Hagersville Cemetery and on the left is the New Credit Cemetery. In the New Credit Cemetery, easily seen from the road is a tombstone with the single word CHECHOCK in large letters.

As a young teacher at the New Credit School on the reserve, I often wondered what Chechock meant. There was no one on the New Credit Reserve with a name even vaguely like that. Later as I learned something of the Ojibway Indian language, I found out that chechock or chee-chalk was the Ojibway word for crane. I also discovered that one of the men, possibly a chief of the Mississauga Ojibways when they lived along the Mississauga River, was named James Chechock. Sometime in the last 140 years that the New Credit Band has lived here, the name Chechock was apparently changed to the present spelling, Crain.

The New Credit Reserve is in the southeast corner of the much larger Six Nations Reserve. According to one source, the land was sold to the Mississaugas to keep white squatters off that corner of the reserve, which is farthest from the Grand River. If this was the intention, it has done remarkably well in holding back the village of Hagersville from sprawling over that corner of the reserve.

Our Town

George
Beaver



In size, the New Credit Reserve is only about three square miles. There are about 900 people on the band list but several hundred live away from the reserve, coming back only to visit.

The Ojibway or Ojibwa are called Chippewa in the U.S. In their own language they call themselves Anishinabe (A-nee-she-naw-be) or in the plural form, Anishinabeg. It means "human beings" or "men par excellence".

Ottawas or Odawas, Algonquins or Algonkians, Potawatomis, as well as Mississaugas, were all Ojibways and they spoke the same language except for a few local differences. This large tribe stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to west of the Great Lakes. One group, the Saulteux (Soo-doh) moved out on the plains and became buffalo hunters, just before the buffalo were killed off. Most of them lived by hunting, fishing, making maple syrup and sugar, gathering wild rice and trading.

Like the Six Nations Iroquois, the Ojibway had clans. Some clans were the Eagle, Otter, Reindeer, Bear, Buffalo, Beaver, Catfish, Pike, Birchbark, White Oak Tree and Bear's Liver. People of the same clan were not supposed to marry.

The animals represented by the clans, such as the reindeer, indicate that the Ojibway hunters ranged quite far north. The buffalo, however, were quite common in the Great Lakes area. Buffalo, N.Y., is not misnamed. Wood buffalo, or bison, once roamed much farther east in what was to become New York State.

A few years ago, I met a young man in Toronto at a hockey tournament. I knew he was an Ojibway when he greeted me with, "Ah-nee, Anishnabe". I told him I was a Six Nations Iroquois but he didn't hold it against me. A mere 300 years ago, the Iroquois and Ojibway were deadly enemies but we were soon friends. He told me many interesting things about his reserve on the shores of Georgian Bay. One of these things was the practice of sorcery, which they call Bearwalking. I will tell you about Bearwalking in another column.