

NEW CREDIT INDIAN RESERVE AND MISSION

The New Credit Reserve near Hagersville, Ontario, was established and occupied in 1847 by the Mississauga Indians of the Credit River settlement near Toronto. The Credit Indian Village had been established in 1825-26 as an agricultural community and Methodist mission. Because of encroaching white settlement and uncertain of their claim to the land, the Mississauga began in 1840 to consider seriously the relocation of the settlement. The problem was first brought before Council by Chiefs Joseph Sawyer and John Jones on August 6, 1840. Suitable farm land was subsequently sought near the large Indian settlements at the Saugeen River, Muncey Town, and finally near Owen Sound.

In 1846 the Mississauga prepared to transfer to the Owen Sound area, the sole location approved for them by the Indian Department. Anticipating their departure for Owen Sound, the Credit Indians placed their lands "in the hands of the Government to be sold". From reports of advance parties the Mississauga were shocked to learn that the selected tract was poor, infertile, and unsuitable for group settlement. The problem of relocation became critical when, in March 1847, the government nevertheless authorized the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Canada West to begin selling the Credit lands. The immediate need for new land and an uncertain future generated anxiety and fear among the Mississauga. The Reverend Peter Jones (1802-1856), a Mississauga Chief since 1828, Methodist Missionary, and leading native spokesman, summarized additional reasons for leaving the Credit settlement: the scarcity of wood, the need for a larger tract of land, the pressure of white settlement, the temptation of alcoholic drink, and the inconvenience of the village arrangement for farming.

The critical situation of the Mississauga was relieved in April, 1847, when the Six Nations unexpectedly offered assistance in the form of land on their reserve. Conscious of the Mississauga's surrender of extensive lands to them following the Revolutionary War, the Six Nations Council offered the Credit Band "a selection from any portion of their unoccupied land" subject to "the repayment of the money paid to the squatters on their retiring". The Six Nations were further anxious to discourage white squatters from occupying the south-eastern corner of their reserve and encouraged the Mississauga to select their land in that area. They accepted the offer and by mid-April Chief Peter Jones and others had selected a 4800 acre block (lots 1-12, Concession 1-2) in Tuscarora township 'which they desired to settle on, and on which there were no Indian families, and the improvements made by the squatters

were few." Under terms of settlement later specified by the government, timber rights and final approval of any land transaction remained with the Six Nations Council. Some 266 members of the Credit Band moved to Tuscarora "in time to plant", probably in May 1847. This was not the total population of the Credit Village as many had settled on other reserves between 1840 and 1847. At one of the first Council meetings at the new location, the settlement was named New Credit.

During the first year of settlement at New Credit, the Mississauga faced numerous hardships, including the absence of roads and large areas of uncleared land. Other prolonged problems involved the sale of the former Credit lands, Jones's repeated efforts to have the funds applied to New Credit's development, and the continued presence of squatters. The latter problem, not fully resolved in 1847, persisted for a number of years and discouraged some Mississauga from farming certain sections. But from 1847 it was generally evident that the Mississauga intended to re-establish their former farms. Log houses soon appeared and many began clearing and working 50 acre farm lots. Some fishing was done in Lake Erie to supplement food supplies. In March, 1848, Peter Jones reported that during a recent visit he had found the New Credit Indians "contented with their new homes". By December 1848 a frame sawmill constructed by a Brantford millwright was in operation. (The mill later burned but was rebuilt in September 1852.) During these early years both Chief Peter Jones and Chief Joseph Sawyer frequently requisitioned the Indian Department for funds to purchase hay, seed, fruit trees, other agricultural necessities, and provisions.

The growth of New Credit was particularly noticeable in 1849. Many had left the Band over the past two years but by April 1849 the population included 25 who had returned from Rice Lake, Owen Sound, Muncey Town, and the Six Nations Reserve. In February 1849 Peter Jones learned that Chief Joseph Sawyer had arranged with the Six Nations for the expansion of New Credit to include adjoining lots 1-6 in the first concession of Oneida township. The settlement of this section aggravated the squatter problem. Some observers complained of the Indians' prolonged absences and neglect of some farms, but reports throughout the 1850's and 1860's indicated gradual agricultural improvement.

Farming was actively encouraged by government agents, the Reverend Peter Jones, and other Methodist missionaries as a means for maintaining a permanent settlement and congregation. Jones paid constant attention to the Reserve's need for farm supplies, buildings, and financial aid from the Indian Department. His dedication extended even to personal demonstrations of farming techniques. David Thorburn (Superintendent of the Six Nations and the New Credit Reserves), Jones, and others further recognized the Indians' full participation in contemporary agrarian society as the means to success. As a Wesleyan Methodist missionary, Peter Jones

was also convinced of the need for actively propagating the gospel on the New Credit Reserve.

The Wesleyan Methodists were the most active churchmen among the Mississauga at the former Credit Village and on the New Credit Reserve. A mission was established on the Reserve in 1848 by the Reverend William Ryerson, former Chairman of the London District (1844-47). The congregation, which began with 80 members, was served by travelling missionaries until a resident minister, the Reverend David Wright, was appointed in 1852. A frame parsonage had been completed, reportedly in September 1851, and in July 1852 a simple frame church was finished. (Both buildings still stand, although the church was bricked over and renovated after 1870.) The early missionaries frequently met with what they considered to be discouraging results in their work among the Mississauga. Having taught school for a month in 1858, Wright expressed his dissatisfaction with the children's progress in English and the lack of books. "We want a geography of our country", he advised, "also a spelling book and definition of words, a short grammar in catechetical form, and then burn or destroy all Indian books and put an end to talking Indian in school." Such missionaries did not recognize the importance of maintaining Indian culture, and later observers repeatedly assessed the religious and agricultural development of New Credit by the standards of white society. In 1856 David Thorburn, for example, was impressed by the Mississauga's "strong desires to advance in the scale of civilization". Three years later the Reverend Thomas Williams was pleased to report that

a good number of people, long trained by the remembered Peter Jones, adorn their religious professions, and adopt the [religious] life which the venerable [William] Case so well recommended; and it now appears that new as their settlement is, thirty Indians, in 1857, raised, besides other crops, more than 4,500 bushels of wheat.

By 1860 many houses, barns, and fences had been erected, and the majority of farm lots were being worked. With this prosperity, and fearing repeated dislocation, the Mississauga became increasingly concerned over the security of their claim to the Oneida township land occupied after 1849. This had been confirmed only by verbal agreement and disputes arose between some members of the two Bands. In August 1865 these fears and controversies were temporarily allayed. At the request of Chief David Sawyer of New Credit, the Six Nations Council formally reassured the Mississauga of their security and placed the Oneida land under the same terms as the Tuscarora land given in 1847.

The prosperity achieved by the New Credit Mississauga after 1865 was noted by numerous observers. Thriving farms were observed by representatives attending the Seventh Grand General Indian Council, held 13-18 September 1882 at New Credit through

the initiative of a Mississauga chief, Peter Jones M. D., son of the Reverend Peter Jones and a graduate of Queen's University. The Grand General Council met at the present New Credit Council House, which was opened on September 15 as part of the Council proceedings. Eight years later the Reserve was visited by the Curator of the Provincial Archaeological Museum, David Boyle, who wrote that:

the whole band numbering 258 (213 in Tuscarora and 45 in Oneida), under the superintendence of Dr. Jones presents a model for imitation by those of Indian origin in other parts of America. Their farms are in a good state of cultivation, and well fenced. The live stock will compare favorably with that of the neighbouring whites; the houses, as a rule, are commodious, clean, and comfortable, and no stranger driving through the settlement could observe anything to indicate that the land was farmed by other than white men.

As late as 1913 a noted ethnologist recorded that "the Indian inhabitants have often won prizes against white competitors at the agricultural fairs. The New Credit Indians ... are the most advanced of the Mississauga and represent one of the most successful attempts of any American Indian group to assimilate the culture of the whites."

Throughout this period of agricultural prosperity and self-dependence, the Mississauga remained concerned over their title to the Reserve land. By 1900 the New Credit Council wanted a more permanent title than the Six Nations' affirmations of 1847 and 1865. In September 1900 a \$10,000.00 purchase agreement was reached between Councils whereby the Mississauga secured "for all time, in settlement of a dispute of many years standing, the right of undisturbed use and occupancy of the land on the Six Nations Reserve" occupied by the New Credit Band. The purchase was authorized by Order-in-Council on July 14, 1903.

Farming declined as the mainstay of the Reserve after the Great War and particularly during the Depression. Faced with the trend to larger farms, heavy capital expenditure, and unable to sell or mortgage reserve land, many farmers abandoned once prosperous fields. Increasing numbers of Mississauga obtained work off the Reserve and now they are employed at a variety of jobs in the surrounding district. The present population of New Credit is about 520, many of whom are direct descendants of the Mississauga who first settled in Tuscarora and Oneida townships. Descendants are also found in other reserves throughout the province, including Alwick, Curve Lake, Scugog Island, and Tyendinaga.