

The Motivations Behind the Numbered Treaties

Both the Aboriginals and the federal government had very good reasons for wanting to pursue treaty negotiations in good faith from the 1870s to 1920s. This section will examine these reasons.

Treaty Benefits for the Federal Government

The federal government had much to gain from the Numbered Treaties, and very little to lose:

- They would get access to land that could be profitably used by industry for farming, forestry, and mining, among other industrial needs. These industries earned tax revenue for the government.
- The treaties would establish grounds for lasting ‘peace’ in the region, which had just seen a Métis rebellion in the Red River area in 1869.
- It was cheaper to feed or support the Aboriginals than to fight them. The Americans were spending \$20 million a year to forcibly remove Natives from land. Conversely, the Canadian government spent little more than \$700,000 on the Aboriginals during the late 1800s.
- It would ensure European settlement westward, thereby creating a national link of ‘civilized’ people with set beliefs and values from coast-to-coast. This was important because there were serious concerns throughout the 1800s that American expansionism could head north of the 49th parallel, and take this land from the Canadian government.

Treaty Benefits for Aboriginals

There were treaty benefits for the Aboriginals as well:

- The treaties would ensure that they would receive an annual income (or annuities) from the government – plus farm animals and tools that might help them to survive poverty and famine
- The treaties would give them access to non-Native ‘technology’ and skills that they desperately needed to get by in a changing world economy.

- Probably most importantly, it was believed that the treaties would prevent Aboriginal races and cultures from dying out completely due to European displacement, disease and the near-extinction of the buffalo herds.

Some Costs for Aboriginals

Despite these benefits there were some costs for the Aboriginals:

- They would lose much of their land as well as some cultural and self-government rights, since they would have to follow the rules of law set by the Canadian government. The Aboriginals under these treaties would now be treated like colonials.
- With the repeals of the Niagara Treaty in 1836 and the Selkirk Treaty in 1868, many Aboriginals – particularly those who had not been converted to Catholicism – wondered if they would be signing meaningless treaties whose terms could change over time on the federal government's whim.

For more information on the Aboriginal Treaties, visit:

- the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.
URL: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/trts/hti/site/mainindex_e.html
- the Atlas of Canada.
URL: <http://atlas.gc.ca/site/english/maps/historical/indiantreaties/historicaltreaties>
- the Canadian Encyclopedia.
URL: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?TCE_Version=A

Other Interesting or Important Documents

- *Indian treaties and surrenders, from 1680 to 1890, Volume I*
URL: <http://www.canadiana.org/ECO/ItemRecord/91942>
- *Indian treaties and surrenders, from 1680 to 1890, Volume II*
URL: <http://www.canadiana.org/ECO/ItemRecord/91943>