

**THE FORT FRANCES TIME SUBMISSION:**

Open Letter to the Fort Frances Times

Dear Editor,

As Chief of Couchiching First Nation, I am honoured to share our reflections on the 150th anniversary of many of our families' adhesion to Treaty #3, which took place on September 12, 1875. This sacred agreement has always held the promise of mutual kinship and alliance between the Anishinaabeg peoples and the Crown. It is an essential part of our community's identity and cultural heritage, deeply intertwined with the integration of so-called 'half-breed' peoples into our society.

During the contact period, our ancestors developed enduring relationships with Europeans, and where trading forts were present, these "half-breed" marriages were honoured as crucial to diplomatic and sustained relations. These individuals were truly Anishinaabe. The term "half-breeds" was imposed through colonial racism, which unjustly regarded Caucasian blood as superior. These relatives lived among us, embraced by our community, and shared our identity. Treaty Commissioner Alexander Morris noted that they were "families of half-breeds who were recognized as Indians and lived with them."

Nicholas Chatelaine, a prominent figure of French Canadian and Anishinaabe descent, played a crucial role in this integration. Present at the signing of the Robinson Treaties in 1850 and a participant in the War of 1812, Nicholas signed the 1875 adhesion to Treaty 3 and was referred to by colonial figures as the "Chief" of the half-breeds. However, Chatelaine refused to take on the role of Chief despite the establishment of a new reserve territory. He always viewed his Anishinaabe identity as integral to his character and refused to distance himself from this heritage.

The "half-breed" adherents and members of Couchiching did not view themselves as culturally separate from the Anishinaabeg context in which they lived. They integrated into Anishinaabe society and became part of the treaty relationship as Anishinaabe. The 1875 adhesion resulted in lands being set aside for the use and benefit of "half-breed" Anishinaabe families that existed alongside Rainy Lake Band 18B and would become fully amalgamated as Couchiching First Nation in 1967.

It is important to note that the 1875 "half-breed" adhesion is not a Métis addition to Treaty #3. This directly reflects Couchiching First Nation today, where many of our members trace their families back to these "half-breed" families who were officially included in our 1875 Treaty adhesion. Both Chief Mawendopenais (Long Sault) and Chief Mikiseesis (Rainy Lake) played pivotal roles in welcoming these families into the Treaty in 1875. This integration was not merely symbolic; it was a recognition of the shared identity and belonging of these individuals within Anishinaabeg society.

Unfortunately, divide and conquer strategies have taken root again, with the self-proclaimed Métis Nation of Ontario appropriating the term “Halfbreed” within our 1875 adhesion. This misappropriation presents an existential threat to the existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights of the peoples who constitute the Anishinaabe Nation in Treaty #3. We recognize the damage that the Indian status provisions in the Indian Act have done to our families, past and present. The fact that Canada has allowed the MNO to display our treaty adhesion as a celebration of their identity is something that I, and other leaders of Grand Council Treaty 3 will never forget.

The history of Couchiching First Nation and the integration of “half-breed” peoples into Anishinaabeg society highlights the importance of Anishinaabe identity and belonging. It is a story of resilience, unity, and the enduring strength of a people who have always seen ourselves as one, despite external attempts to categorize and divide us. As we reflect on this history, we are reminded of the power of identity and the importance of recognizing and honouring our commitment to inclusion in 1875 that contribute to the richly woven bundle that is, and will forever be, Anishinaabe inheritance.

Sincerely,



Chief Richard Bruyere, Couchiching First Nation