

A Social and Cultural Study of Split Lake,  
Manitoba, with Special Emphasis on Education

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In partial fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Education

by

Donald Serge Tessier

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A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDY OF SPLIT LAKE,  
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DONALD SERGE TESSIER

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## ABSTRACT

It is the intention of this thesis to examine a system of education which does not achieve the expectations of either its students, or the educators who are in direct contact with these students. The specific reference area for this study is the community of Split Lake, Manitoba. An examination of the historical and cultural influences of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Department of Indian Affairs, the Medical Services Branch and the Anglican Church are also included. The approach is generally chronological.

A discussion of the Swampy Cree's religious beliefs and social history before White contact is first presented. The emphasis of the narrative shifts to the impact and influence of the four major social institutions on the community. An examination of the reserve, as it exists today, is also included, to outline and assess the problems facing the educators in Split Lake. A study of the hopes and aspirations of the residents of Split Lake is also undertaken. Projection and analysis is made as to the role of education in resolving these problems.

There are many problems facing Split Lake, but it is claimed in this thesis that many can be resolved through an improved and more effective system of education.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Topic

A Social and Cultural Study of Split Lake, Manitoba, with Special Emphasis on Education.

#### The Problem

Northern communities such as Split Lake are faced with difficulties arising from their isolated location, lack of natural resources, and from cultural backgrounds and attitudes held by and about their Indian inhabitants. In most northern communities, only limited types and amounts of secondary industry are viable, so meagre earnings are eked out of depletable resources. As a result of physical location, the necessities of life are more expensive than they would be in any other location. Despite these problems, the elders of Split Lake believe that their children can improve their well-being if they receive greater educational opportunity.<sup>1</sup> Providing greater equality of opportunity in the education field is, however, a very difficult task. It is particularly challenging in northern Indian settlements, where both the availability and the relevancy of education are being questioned. The desires of the Indians themselves regarding education have been clearly stated by the National Indian Brotherhood as follows:

Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of the Indian people. We want education to give...a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability. We believe in education:

..... as a preparation for total living,

..... as a means of free choice of where to live and work,

..... as a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political and educational advancement.

We do not regard the educational process as an 'either-or' operation. We must have the freedom to choose among many options and alternatives.<sup>2</sup>

These educational objectives are very closely related to the desires of most educators, but such an education, unfortunately, has not been provided in Split Lake., or in northern Indian communities generally.

#### Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to analyze a system of education which does not achieve the expectations of either its students, parents or the teachers who are in direct contact with these students. The specific reference area for this study is the community of Split Lake.

This study will be a historical account of the influence of religious, political, commercial, and social factors on the educational development of the Split Lake reserve where, in the past 150 years, education has been controlled successively by the Indian adults, missionaries, and the Department of Indian Affairs.

#### Importance of the Study

Many university instructors and classroom teachers do not receive exposure to, and therefore are not always aware of, the situations and circumstances that face a northern educator. They are seldom aware of the cultural processes of the people who live in these communities. Hopefully, by reflecting on the problem identified in this study, the teacher of the northern sector will gain some insight into the conditions which

are about to confront him. Instructors who will never be exposed to such circumstances should be able to apply the insights gleaned from this study to their own classroom situations.

Another aim and value of this study is to analyze and assess the importance of the roles played by the Church, the Hudson's Bay Company, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and the Medical Services Branch in the development of the Split Lake community, particularly as they relate directly and indirectly to education.

#### Procedure

Chapter I--an introduction to the thesis is provided in this chapter. Consideration is separately given to the outline of contents, purpose, importance, methodology, sources, limitations, and definitions of terms.

Chapter II--a review of related available literature is included.

Chapter III--an anthropological analysis and social history of the Woodlands Indians, primarily the Swampy Cree, and their settlement patterns, are provided. This profile will consider the necessary background against which the community's and the people's ancestry may be viewed from pre-European contact up to the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter IV--an overview is provided of the political, economic, and social structures of Split Lake. This section includes a study of various institutions--the Anglican Church, the Hudson's Bay Company, the Department of Indian Affairs, the Medical Branch, and the school. An assessment is made of their importance to the development of Split Lake.

Chapter V--Split Lake today. The physical nature of the reserve is described, including a housing comparison. The Indian Act and the local government are treated in this chapter. Information obtained from inter-

views with natives is also presented.

Chapter VI--assessment of the problems facing the educational institution in Split Lake today.

Chapter VII--the major physical, economic, social and educational concerns facing the community of Split Lake are analyzed.

Chapter VIII--this final section of the thesis again points to the hopes and aspirations of the residents. Projection and analysis are made as to the role of education in resolving these problems.

Appendix A--Anglican Church Correspondence.

Appendix B--Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Correspondence.

Appendix C--Hudson's Bay Company Correspondence.

Appendix D--Summary of the Indian Position on Education, as presented by the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood.

Appendix E--The Churchill River Diversion Project. A brief summary of a government newsletter is presented.

Appendix F--Five Year Plan for Education in Split Lake.

Appendix G--Source Newspaper Articles.

Appendix H--Teacher Interviews--Transcript.

Appendix I--Resident Interviews--Transcript.

Appendix J--Treaty #5 and Adhesions.

#### Methodology and Sources

The primary source material for this study was found in: the Manitoba Provincial Archives; the Public Archives of Canada; the Hudson's Bay Company Archives; those of the Anglican Church Diocese in Kenora; the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Thompson; the Medical Branch, Thompson; and the

Split Lake community members and institutions. Other primary material was gathered by personal interviews with hunters, fishermen, tradesmen, and teachers who live in the community.

Secondary sources have also been consulted. Subject books include those on the Swampy Cree, education of minorities, ethnicity, and northern education. Published studies and journal articles have also been consulted.

### Limitations

This study is limited to a brief historical and cultural study of Split Lake. No attempt is made to provide a detailed analysis of all the contributions of the external forces on the community over approximately two hundred years.

Other limitations result mainly from the lack of primary and secondary resource material. In addition, interviews with elders of the Split Lake Band had to be conducted through an interpreter because they could converse fluently only in Cree whereas the author speaks only English. This indirect method of communication undoubtedly detracts to a degree from the accuracy of the information gathered in this survey.

### Definition of Terms

Some specialized terms will be used in the study and it was therefore decided to define the main ones at this point.

Annuity--The term refers to a sum of money guaranteed payable annually over a set period of time, or for the life of the annuitant.<sup>3</sup>

Dry Reserve--A reserve is designated dry when the decision has been reached by the Chief and Council to keep it free of alcoholic intoxicants.

Enfranchise--This term denotes "...to set free (as from slavery, prison, or obligation); 2: to endow with a franchise: admit to the pri-

vileges of a freeman or citizen; 3: to admit (a town or city) to political privileges: give political rights to (a town or city)...."<sup>5</sup>

Enfranchisement--This term implies "...the releasing from slavery or custody; b: admission to the freedom of a corporation or body politic."<sup>6</sup>

Indian Act--The standard regulations and privileges governing the Indians of Canada are stipulated by the Government of Canada in the Indian Act.

Band--This term denotes "...a body of Indians, a: for whose use and benefit in common, lands, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, have been set apart before, on or after the 4th day of September 1951; b: for whose use and benefit in common, moneys are held by Her Majesty; or c: declared by the Governor in Council to be band for the purposes of this Act..."<sup>7</sup>

Rehabilitation Phase--A term coined by L. Mason to describe the efforts of the Europeans to assist the now culturally dependent Indians.<sup>8</sup>



Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See the transcripts of interviews, Appendix I.
- <sup>2</sup> National Indian Brotherhood, Indian Control of Indian Education (Ottawa: National Indian Brotherhood, 1972), p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from Life Insurance Law and Terms, CLU Course Material, Life Underwriter's Association of Canada, 1976.
- <sup>4</sup> Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1967.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 275.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Indian Act, R.S., c. 149, s. 1, p. 4249.
- <sup>8</sup> Mason, Leonard, The Swampy Cree: A Study in Acculturation (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller, 1967), p. 8.

## CHAPTER II

### A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Anthropology

There are a number of studies available dealing with the anthropological background of the Swampy Cree. One valuable study consulted was Robert Surtees'. The Original People, which deals specifically with the arrival of Europeans in North America and the effect of them on the life-style of the Indians, both directly and indirectly. He identifies and discusses three main catalysts for change, namely, the introduction of horses, firearms, and the establishment of the fur trade.<sup>1</sup> This work was useful in the preparation of Chapter III.

Diamond Jenness, author of The Indians of Canada, overviews the various Indian tribes of Canada. This work is rather sketchy and dated, but an attempt was made to provide a degree of detail.<sup>2</sup>

Leonard Mason, author of The Swampy Cree: A Study in Acculturation, traces the social and cultural history of the Swampy Cree. His vivid descriptions of these unique people add life to his study. He traces their development from pre-European contact to the mid-twentieth century. This book contains the most accurate source material available and is invaluable to anyone conducting an investigation into the Swampy Cree Nations.<sup>3</sup> Mason's work formed the model for the third chapter of this thesis.

Another work, by Palmer Patterson, The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500, outlines many of the cultural changes undergone by the Indians

since 1500. According to the author, politics have been a major factor in these cultural shifts. He traces attempts to assimilate the Indian into Euro-Canadian culture. The plight of the Indian people is compared to that of other aboriginal groups around the world. The author outlines the move of the Indian from a position of autonomy in 1500 to one of cultural and economic subservience today. It is an extremely well-documented account of the Indian's history in Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Arthur Ray provides a thorough, yet concise, account of the Cree and Assiniboine Indians who lived in the area lying southwest of the Hudson Bay. He traces the migration of these Indians and their life-styles from 1660 to 1870. Numerous maps and diagrams are included, emphasizing points and demonstrating adaptations made by these natives. He elaborates on such points as tribal distribution, food sources, and the major trading areas. These maps greatly aid the reader's comprehension of this period in history. It is a very helpful and well-researched book.<sup>5</sup>

Jean Trudeau, in his dissertation, Culture Change Among the Swampy Cree Indians of Winisk, Ontario, provides an extremely detailed social and cultural study of a tribe of Swampy Cree who live near the southwest coast of Hudson Bay. Trudeau traces the changes in life-style from the Minimal Contact Phase, through the Sustained Contact Phase, to the Maximum Contact Phase. This well-written work should be used as a standard source in the study of cultural adaptations, and was found indispensable in the third chapter of this study.<sup>6</sup>

The writer found George Quimby's work a very valuable study. This collection of essays, entitled, Indian Culture and European Trade Goods, traces the history of the Indians of the Great Lakes region. The major

topic of the book is the influence which the French had upon the Indians of this area.<sup>7</sup>

#### History of Social Institutions

An important journal concerned with the history of the Hudson Bay Company is The Beaver. This monthly publication is considered the base resource for any study of the Hudson Bay Lowlands area. It is generally quite helpful, but must not be assumed to be totally accurate. In my research, I have found discrepancies and one or two errors; therefore, this source must be used judiciously.<sup>8</sup>

E. E. Rich, in The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857, traces the development of the fur trade in Canada from Cartier until 1857. Well-written, factual and well-organized, it traces, in chronological order, the growth of the fur trade from the mouth of the St. Lawrence north to the Hudson Bay, and west to the Rockies and the Pacific. The explorers and their various explorations are discussed in detail.<sup>9</sup>

#### Contemporary Issues

The Indian: Assimilation, Integration, or Separation? by R. Bowles, J. Hanley, B. Hodgins, and G. Rawlyk, is an anthology of articles, opinions, and government documents. The subject of this anthology is the life-style and social position of the Indian in Canada today.<sup>10</sup>

Another useful anthology is entitled Conflicts of Culture: Problems of Developmental Change Among the Cree, edited by Norman Chance. This anthology comprises seven separate papers. The Indian subjects are the Cree of northern Ontario and Quebec. The subject matter involves assimilation, education presently being received, and occupations presently held

by Indian populations in the White culture.<sup>11</sup>

Harold Cardinal's book, The Unjust Society, The Tragedy of Canada's Indians, provides a unique approach to contemporary issues. Cardinal does not appear concerned with what the Indian could do about his lot. Instead, he laments that the Indian has been oppressed by government bureaucrats and the White Man in general. He feels a strong disregard for human rights has taken place in the past, is happening in the present, and will take place in the future. His primary concern, however, appears to be what has happened in the past. The book does not prove extremely helpful for anyone interested in obtaining factual information, but does provide one Indian's point of view.<sup>12</sup>

A somewhat dated but relevant doctoral dissertation written by H. Hoffmann in 1957, Assessment of Cultural Homogeneity Among the James Bay Cree, deals with the Cree Indians around James Bay. Hoffmann spent a summer gathering data at several settlements in the James Bay area, and in one of these communities he was able to make a detailed study of both the Cree and Eskimo cultures. The major value of his study is the cultural data he amassed on emotional reactions, as they relate to cultural behavior. Thematic Apperception Test plates (TAT), developed for use with American Indians, were used. His use of personal interviews is particularly effective.<sup>13</sup>

An interesting book by Robert Jamieson, A Review of Indian Education in North America, is a fairly recently published account of some of the successes and failures of various educational programs that have been implemented in the United States and Canada. These programs are analyzed at both the primary and secondary school levels.<sup>14</sup>

A most valuable publication, cited by the writer quite extensively throughout this thesis, is Wahbung. Written and published by the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, it is a comprehensive statement on the mistreatment of the Manitoba Indians, presented from the viewpoint of this Indian organization. This work is well-researched and extremely easy to read. It covers topics which include treaties, the Indian Act, culture, housing, education, social development, and reserve government.<sup>15</sup>

Margaret Mead deals specifically with culture change caused by increasing contact with a dominant society in her book, Culture and Commitment. The author discusses three stages of development in the advancement of a culture: Pre-figurative, Post-Figurative, and Configurative. Although the concepts are interesting, they are rather terse and vague. It is extremely difficult to formulate a general description of the learning process based upon studies conducted on only a few aboriginal tribes. Because of these forced generalizations, this book was not found to be as useful as it might have been.<sup>16</sup>

A study undertaken by Underwood, McLennan and Associates Ltd., entitled Community Study of Split Lake Indian Reserve, was conducted in 1966. It provides a very general and somewhat superficial view of the reserve, and therefore was only of limited use for this study.<sup>17</sup>

Another source concerning contemporary issues is William Wuttunee's book, Ruffled Feathers (1971). Wuttunee is a Canadian lawyer, and this book presents his views on the integration of the Indian into Canadian society. He has been criticized by many Indian groups in Canada. He has also been banned from many Canadian reserves, including the one on which he was raised. Wuttunee puts forward some interesting insights into the problems facing the

Indian today. His viewpoint could best be summarized by stating that the Indian must assume more control over his own destiny. If this is to be accomplished, he must also assume greater responsibility for his leaders' actions.<sup>18</sup>

Henry Zentner's book, The Indian Identity Crisis, contains essays on contemporary Indian issues. One of the basic concepts common to all of the essays is the assimilation process, and how it is affecting today's Indian. Except for the introduction, this book is informative and easy reading.<sup>19</sup>

#### Miscellaneous

Glazer and Moynihan compiled an excellent, scholarly reference anthology of several essays entitled Ethnicity: Theory and Experience (1975). This book is one of the best research pieces available for the study of the mechanisms of cultural adaptation, progress and change in a multi-ethnic situation.<sup>20</sup>