



TREATY No. 6 N.W.T.

Survey

OF

INDIAN RESERVE No. 126

for the band of

Chief Muskegwatic

AT

WASHATANOW OR HOLLOW HILL CREEK

Area 12.25 Sq. Miles



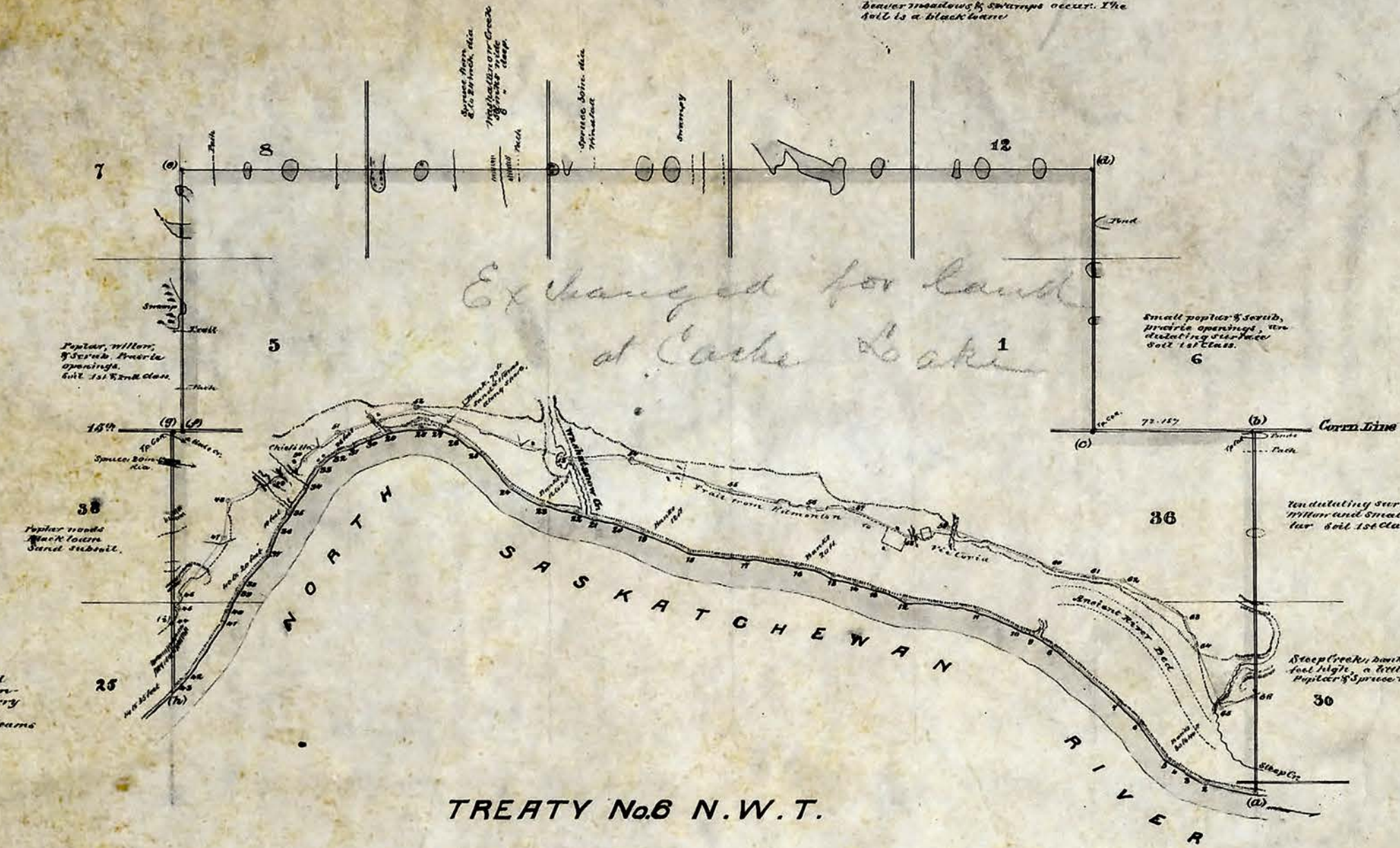
(h) (g) North 116.26
 (g) (f) East 4.88
 (f) (e) North 117.59
 942.73

11.12	N	22.30	N	52.96
12.13	N	64.11	N	14.177
13.14	N	73.10	N	8.66
14.15	N	71.33	N	10.33
15.16	N	73.13	N	17.10
16.17	N	82.49	N	23.46
17.18	N	82.33	N	34.24
18.19	N	56.00	N	22.48
19.20	N	71.35	N	12.84
20.21	N	78.53	N	18.89
21.22	N	59.08	N	8.115
22.23	N	78.02	N	15.94
23.24	N	61.41	N	13.66
24.25	N	38.54	N	20.05
25.26	N	53.11	N	13.73
26.27	N	69.04	N	8.57
27.28	N	84.43	N	8.38
28.29	S	88.17	N	15.06
29.30	S	68.00	N	9.85
30.31	S	66.00	N	8.75
31.32	S	78.11	N	7.62
32.33	S	49.11	N	11.38
33.34	S	29.30	N	10.47
34.35	S	33.39	N	13.12
35.36	S	35.08	N	9.52
36.37	S	21.37	N	11.53
37.38	S	40.19	N	17.82
38.39	S	27.26	N	4.85
39.40	S	29.05	N	9.20
40.41	S	17.82	N	5.78
41.42	S	34.22	N	22.48
42.43	S	44.49	N	6.56

Traverse Table

Sta.	Bearing	Dist.
44.45	N 22.49 E	6.66
45.46	N 2.17 E	6.30
46.47	N 87.06 E	32.72
47.48	N 5.55 E	16.96
48.49	N 68.16 E	22.00
49.50	N 55.09 E	18.94
50.51	N 49.14 E	19.13
51.52	N 72.10 E	33.00
52.53	S 78.03 E	23.07
53.54	N 88.06 E	24.95
54.55	S 72.34 E	46.26
55.56	S 74.48 E	35.03
56.57	S 89.50 E	19.40
57.58	S 64.05 E	27.81
58.59	N 79.48 E	19.30
59.60	S 68.39 E	49.90
60.61	S 79.10 E	17.73
61.62	S 63.55 E	13.16
62.63	S 38.44 E	32.82
63.64	S 23.57 E	13.68
64.65	S 22.14 E	29.15
65.66	N 69.46 E	13.79

Along the Northern Boundary the country is almost level and covered with poplar & willow. Some large scattered spruce in the valleys of creeks. Small shallow prairie openings and numerous smaller meadows & swamps occur. The soil is a black loam.



579.05
 Tp. 59

Tp. 58

TREATY No. 6 N.W.T.

R. XX

R. XIX

R. XIX

R. XVIII, W. 4TH I.M.

Survey
 OF
INDIAN RESERVE No. 126
 for the band of
Chief Muskegwatic

AT

WASHATANOW OR HOLLOW HILL CREEK

INDIAN AFFAIRS SURVEY RECORDS
 No. **291**
 SCALE 40 CHAINS = 1 INCH

Although the village of Waskatenau derives its name from an Indian band, versions of the name to denote a body of water have been in use for nearly 200 years—perhaps more. When Stanford Fleming made his Canadian expedition in 1792 he passed by what he called the Wassetemow, noting that the name meant an opening in the bank, which indeed the water had made as it flowed to the North Saskatchewan River. Later, in 1809, Alexander Henry crossed Smoky Creek and the so-called Waskatenaw River as he proceeded eastward.

(References: Grant, G.M., *Ocean to Ocean*. Edmonton: M.G Hurtig Ltd., 1967. MacGregor, J.G., *Blankets and Beads*. Edmonton: Institute of Applied Art, 1949.)

OUR INDIAN HISTORY

by Sharon Phillips

Waskatenau owes its name to a band of Cree Indians whose reserve was situated at Waskatenau Creek, about sixteen miles northwest of Fort Victoria on the Victoria Trail to Edmonton. The Indian agent at Saddle Lake was in charge of the reserve, which was visited annually by the inspector of Indian agencies. The inspector reported to the Indian Commissioner for Manitoba and the North-West Territories at Regina, N.W.T., who was in turn responsible to the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa.

In the various letters, reports and documents of these branches of government, the name of the band and of the creek appears as Wahsahatanow, Wahsahtanow, Wahastanow, Wahsatanow, Wahsatanaw, Washatanow, Wasahatinaw and Wahsatowona. The creek is also named Hollow Creek, Hollow Hill Creek, Hollow-in-the-Hill Creek and Hollow Bank Creek. For the purposes of this article, whatever version appears in the particular document supplying the information will be used. The name describes the shape of the land where the North Saskatchewan River bends like a horseshoe.

Wāsāhatinaw

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One of the many versions of Waskatenau, in English and Cree

The reserve, known as Bear's Ears Reserve or Washatanow Indian Reserve No. 126, was surveyed by John C. Nelson, Dominion Land Surveyor, in October, 1886 and established on May 17, 1889. Its 7840 acres or twelve and a quarter square miles comprised Sections One, Two, Three, Four and Five and the south halves of Sections Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven and Twelve in Township 59, Range Nineteen, and the portion of Township 58, Range Nineteen north of the North Saskatchewan River.

Topographical features of the reserve were described as follows in a Department of Indian Affairs document:

"Along the northern boundary the surface is almost level and covered with poplar and willow. There are some small sheltered prairie openings and numerous beaver meadows and swamps. The soil is a black loam. There are fine alluvial bottoms along the Saskatchewan River affording rich pasture, groves of poplar, hummocks of spruce, and a variety of berry bearing bushes. The surface is much broken by the valleys of the numerous streams flowing into the Saskatchewan River."

Inspector Alexander McGibbon, reporting on the Saddle Lake Agency in November, 1890, listed the following reserves with their population:

No. 125	Saddle Lake	116
No. 126	Wahsatanow	40
No. 127	Blue Quill	36
No. 128	White Fish Lake	308
No. 130	Heart Lake	66
No. 131	Beaver Lake	144

While visiting Wahsatanow, which he described as 57 miles from Saddle Lake Agency and halfway between the agency and Edmonton, Mr. McGibbon noted the following crops, acreages and yields:

wheat	3 1/2 acres	0 bushels
barley	6 1/4 acres	92 bushels
potatoes	3 1/2 acres	103 bushels

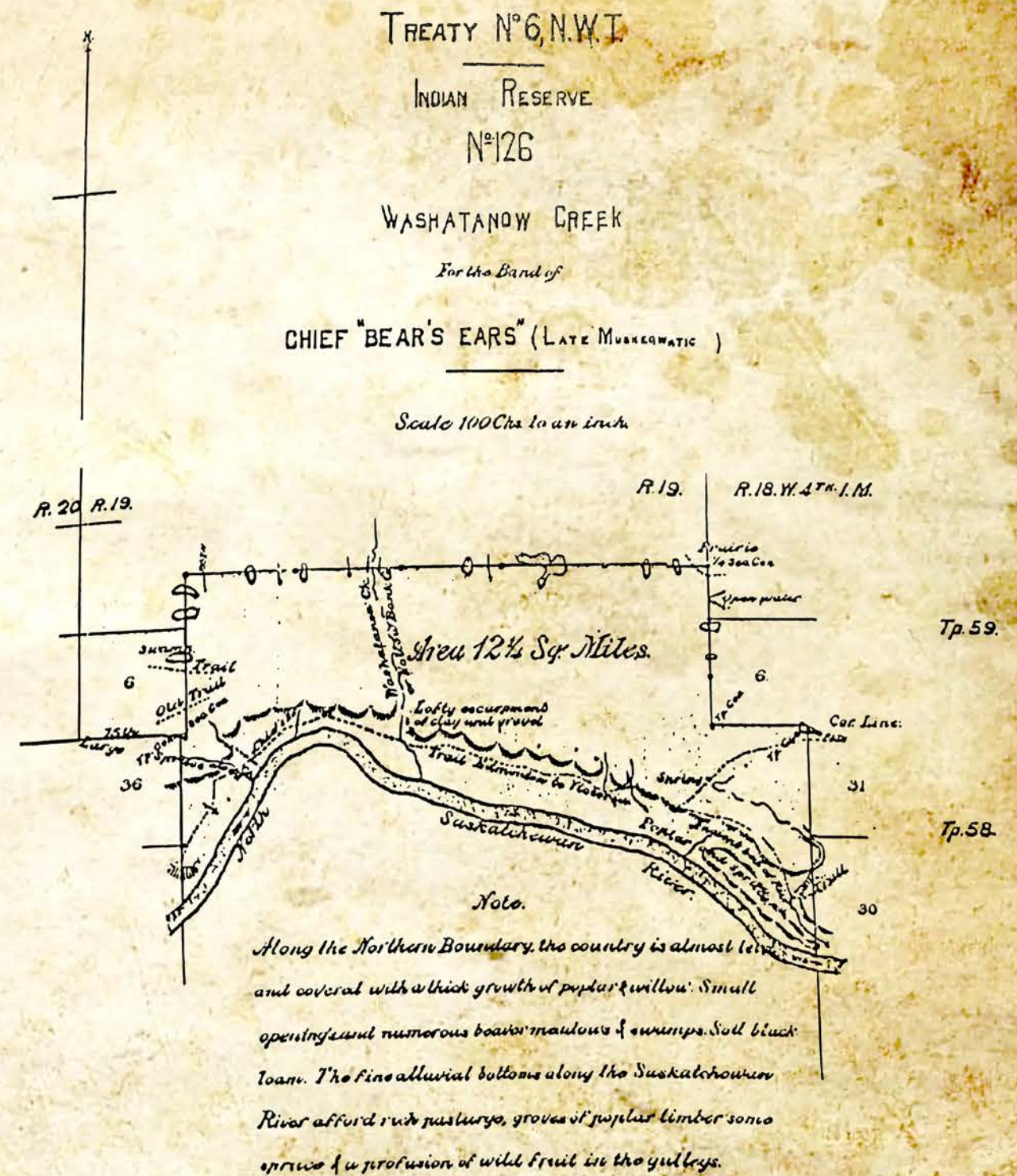
Livestock consisted of five oxen, one bull, four cows, six heifers, one bull calf and one heifer calf, as well as ten horses.

Mr. McGibbon stated that the Indian agent from the Saddle Lake Agency, John Ross, had visited Wahsatanow twice a month. He also indicated that the original "40 souls" had been reduced to 28 because eleven had "removed" to Saddle Lake and one had died. Only Chief Bear's Ears and his brother Matoosk and their families were present at the time of Mr. McGibbon's visit.

Describing the reserve as "very pretty," Mr. McGibbon found that 130 tons of hay had been stacked, enough to feed the cattle and to sell to freighters travelling along the Victoria Trail to Edmonton.

Chief Bear's Ears was crippled and unable to work very much. As well, two of his children were handicapped. Mr. McGibbon felt that the distance of the reserve from the agency deprived the Wahsatanow Band of the supervision they required. Mr. Ross had been trying to persuade them to settle at Saddle Lake and, as noted above, eleven had already left, but the chief was reluctant to abandon his reserve. Mr. McGibbon wrote:

"This is to be regretted as the Band is away from school privileges and being such a small Band, and the men old, not much can be expected in the way of raising crops. Another objection is that when they get assistance they are visited by halfbreeds who share in the supplies. For all these reasons the move made by Mr. Ross to get them settled at Saddle Lake is a wise one. It now takes three days every two weeks to visit the place. The old



Approved
John C. Nelson
 In charge Indian Reserve Surveys
 Ottawa 23rd Jan 1889.

Surveyed by
 John C. Nelson D.L.S.
 Sept. & Oct. 1886

Chief spoke very sensibly and said no matter what their hardships might be, he would never resort to killing cattle without authority."

In a letter to the Indian Commissioner dated June 30, 1891, agent Ross wrote that he was "now almost satisfied that the remainder of Band No. 126 will remove from Wahsatanow to Thomas Hunter's reserve after harvesting their crops. Bear's Ears appears now to recognize the futility of following a course not approved by the Department and I have but little doubt that he will with his band winter at Saddle Lake."

The chief must have already moved to Saddle Lake when this letter was written, for he died there six days later, July 6, 1891, from congestion of the lungs. Agent Ross had stayed with him that entire day.

On August 1, 1891 Mr. Ross informed Regina that after many conferences Bear's Ears' Band had agreed to come to Saddle Lake in the spring, giving up all claim to the Wahsatanow Reserve if they "guaranteed in writing" that an equal area of land would be added to the Saddle Lake Reserve. The Indian Commissioner, however, opposed this condition of surrender, as did the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. Correspondence from Ottawa to Regina in November, 1891 proposed that the Wahsatanow Band surrender its land and amalgamate with the Indians owning the Saddle Lake Reserve — the bands of Little Hunter and of Chief Pakan, the latter having moved there from White Fish Lake. Blue Quill's Band also dwelt on the Saddle Lake Reserve, having moved there from Egg Lake (now Andrew), but they had insisted upon being treated as a separate band from the others at Saddle Lake, so their joint ownership of the reserve was debatable. The proceeds of the sale of Reserve 126 were to be shared among the owners of Reserve 125, which would include the Wahsatanow Band. Years passed, as we shall see, before a transaction was agreed upon and enacted.



Chief Pakan and his wife

Meanwhile, in November of 1891, Inspector McGibbon reported that some families had left Hunter's and Blue Quill's Bands during the year and that some families expected from Wahsatanow's Band would be given the vacant houses and fields. Wahsatanow's population was 26. Seeded land had increased to eighteen acres, yielding 100 bushels of barley, 100 of potatoes and twenty of turnips. The cattle herd had increased to twenty, while the horses remained at ten.

Only four families now remained on the reserve. To eliminate the 114-mile trip every two weeks, Mr. Ross had arranged with the Hudson's Bay agent at Victoria to give out the rations. The late chief's brother Matoosk was the only man present during Mr. McGibbon's visit in 1891. He was unwilling to leave the reserve. Mr. McGibbon felt it was because of a little profit he was realizing from keeping a stopping place along the Victoria Trail.

Bear's Ears' widow and her children were back at Wahsatanow. The inspector described their house as comfortable but was concerned about the handicapped children. He stated that he had asked Mr. Ross "in no account to neglect the widow and her poor children," and reiterated his desire to have them move to Saddle Lake:

"It would be well for various reasons to have them all removed to Saddle Lake and for a small gift of some kind I think it could be carried out. I took the opportunity of telling them that if they persistently opposed the wishes of the Agent, that probably all the assistance would be withdrawn."

John Ross wrote to Regina in August, 1892 that upon completion of harvest the proposed surrender would be enacted. But three months later he wrote again to say that "at a meeting held at Saddle Lake and at which the chief, headmen and the Wahsatanow Indians were present, the representatives of the Saddle Lake and White Fish Lake reserves broke their promises and reverted to the original proposal." Mr. Ross recommended that the situation be left alone for the time being, "as it is possible that in time the wishes of the Department will be acceded to."

In his 1891-92 annual report of November, 1892, Inspector McGibbon noted that houses on the Saddle Lake Reserve left vacant when families moved to Blue Quills were being inhabited by families from the Wahsatanow Reserve.

"The widow of the late Chief "Bear's Ears" has been located on a very pretty spot near the Methodist Mission. The house is a comfortable one and the Agent has given the widow a very good field, well fenced and will see that her crop is properly put in each year."

Because the band had moved to Saddle Lake, the cattle, numbering 23 head, had also been moved. Most of the crop was at Saddle Lake, except six acres of barley and two of potatoes sown at Wahsatanow, which yielded 70 and 80 bushels respectively. Five tons of hay had also been stacked there for Matoosk's winter stopping place.

More unrest came in 1893. In March the agent reported to the Indian Commissioner that the Wahsatanow Indians intended to return to their old reserve because they had not been welcomed at Saddle Lake and because the Department of Indian Affairs was unwilling to enlarge Saddle Lake Reserve as requested. Mr. Ross wrote:

"They are very difficult Indians to manage are these Wahsatanow men and incapable of making the slightest exertion to assist themselves. I do not see what I can do with them, excepting to refuse all assistance until they find that they must work."

It is not the purpose of this article to take sides, but rather to report as accurately and fairly as possible from the information available. When the writer consulted some members of the present Saddle Lake Band, another view of the situation emerged:

"The elders say in unison that the Indian agent named 'Mohkahas' (English name not known), because of his lazy attitude travelling by team to Wasahatinaw and Andrew, forced and bribed the people to amalgamate with Saddle Lake When Mohkahas went to Wasahatinaw to try to relocate these people the Chief or Okimaw Bear Ear did not want to relocate but Mohkahas forced them to come and live at Saddle Lake. Mohkahas and Bear Ear argued and Mohkahas slapped the Chief. The Chief was very angry and went for his gun to shoot Mohkahas, but the other braves talked to him not to do anything in a hasty manner, so he stopped and eventually moved to Saddle Lake and shortly died there."

"Mohkahas" was undoubtedly John Ross. How

unfortunate that so much misunderstanding prevailed.

By April of 1893 Ottawa was prepared to entertain the enlargement proposal and asked the Indian commissioner to state an exact location. However, by this time Bear's Ears' brother Matoosk had decided on his own course of action. He and his family left Saddle Lake on April 13, headed for Wahsatanow with sixteen head of cattle. When the interpreter at Saddle Lake, Mr. Favel, communicated this information to Mr. Ross, who was at Victoria, the latter wired Mr. Favel to meet him the next day. Mr. Ross reported: "I met Favel near the Vermilion (River) and in about twenty minutes Matoosk, family and the cattle hove in view. The oxen were hitched to sleighs upon which was loaded a wagon I gave him for promising to remain at Saddle Lake."

According to Mr. Ross he spoke at length with Matoosk, informing him of the intended extension of Saddle Lake Reserve and urging him to return, but Matoosk was firm. The agent said he would not try to stop him but would drive the cattle back to Saddle Lake, which he did.

In September of 1893 Chief James Seenum of Saddle Lake informed Mr. Ross that the land chosen for the extension "lies in the vicinity of Cache Lake, on the trail to Whitefish Lake, summer trail. The nearest point of this Lake is about twelve miles distant from the Agency."

It appears that some members of the Wahsatanow Band travelled back and forth from Saddle Lake to Wahsatanow during this unsettled period. Inspector McGibbon's report of December, 1893 notes three or four houses on the Saddle Lake Reserve left vacant when some of the Wahsatanow Band returned to the old reserve for the winter. At the time of the report Band 126 numbered 27 people and owned 28 head of cattle. Two families were on the Saddle Lake Reserve; the others were at Wahsatanow, including Bear's Ears' widow. Since their rations had been withdrawn it was felt they would soon return to Saddle Lake. Two of the chief's children had died during the year.

Mr. McGibbon stated in his 1893-94 report that one Augustine Steinhauer had moved to Cache Lake with his own cattle and those of Band 126 (27 head). In reference to this, the elders now residing at Saddle Lake say that "a man named Mistastenam, Augustine Steinhauer, went to



**Onchaminahos
(Little Hunter)
Chief — 1883**



Sweet grass is held over fire in crock for Cree purification ceremony. Courtesy of Saddle Lake Indian Reserve

round out the cattle from Wasahatinaw. When he brought them back to Saddle Lake the people from Wasahatinaw did not receive any of their cattle back, which is a mystery as to how he got rid of all these cattle." The above report would appear to shed some light on the mystery, and a later report, dated May, 1896, states that Agent Ross had been managing the cattle of Band 126. He had disposed of some and deposited the proceeds in the Savings Bank to the credit of the band. The 22 head had been wintered by Augustine Steinhauer, who was compensated with two steers from the herd.

In a letter dated August, 1895 from Matoosk (also known as Charlie Cryer or "The Crier") to a Mr. Mitchell, who apparently preceded Mr. Ross, Matoosk gives his version of the 1893 incident described earlier. Hoping Mr. Mitchell could help him recover his cattle which he said Mr. Ross had robbed from him, he explained that while he, Matoosk, was at Wasahatinaw in the winter and spring of 1892 Mr. Ross tried to persuade him and the other Indians there to move, promising him a house, a wagon, clothing, rations, a cow and proper care for his aged mother. In actuality only the house and the running gear of the wagon were supplied. Having been advised that if these promises were not fulfilled he would be justified in returning to the old reserve, he decided to do so. He had informed Mr. Ross previously, in the presence of two of the chiefs at Saddle Lake, that he was going, so felt that he was not deceiving him. The cattle he took were those he had raised himself; the nucleus of the herd had originated not with the government but with his deceased brother Bear's Ears, who had received them as a gift from a friend. This was common knowledge at Victoria, he claimed.

To this Mr. Mitchell replied that he would not interfere with Mr. Ross' work but had shown the letter to the commissioner who would discuss it with Mr. Ross. He added that in his opinion Matoosk and his family would be much better off at Saddle Lake because his children would receive an education, and that his cattle had been taken probably only because he would not stay.

The commissioner advised Mr. Ross to offer to return the cattle to Matoosk as an inducement to settle at Saddle Lake. Accordingly, in January of 1896, Matoosk, "in consideration of receiving land of an area equal to that of Wahsatanow Reserve at Hollow Creek, and my cattle back and those belonging to the other members of the band, and young cattle for the money held in deposit to the credit of the band," promised to take up residence on the Cache Lake extension that spring.

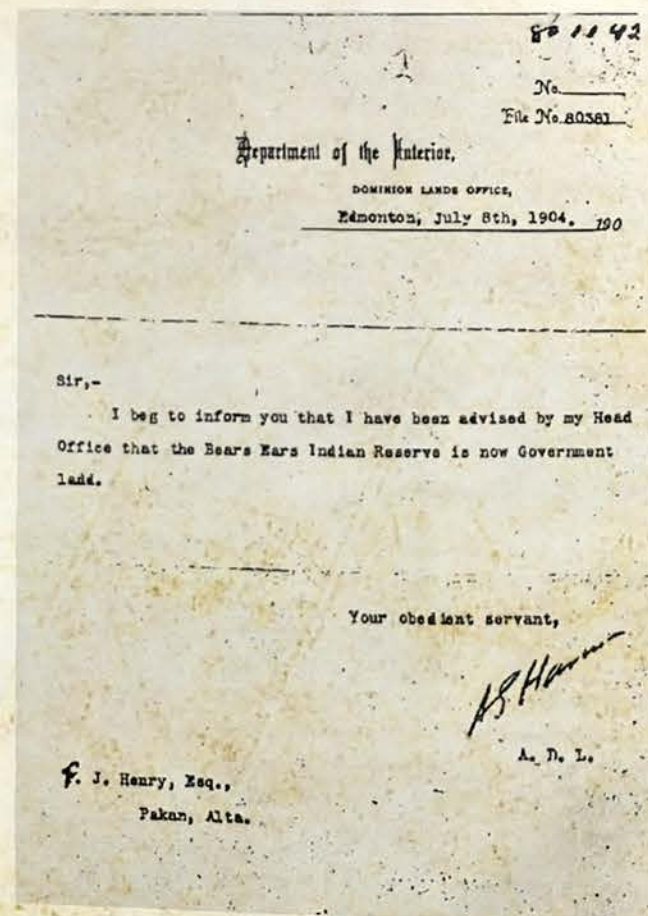
John Ross' letter to Regina in the summer of 1896 indicated that Matoosk would soon be arriving to stay, followed by the others as soon as the roads would permit travelling by cart. "The fanning mill, ploughs and harness have been carted from Wahsatanow to Saddle Lake already, and the other implements etc. will follow shortly."

On September 26, 1896 the principal men of the Wahsatanow Band, in the absence of a chief or councillors, surrendered Reserve 126 to the Queen in exchange for "certain lands to be hereafter defined and surveyed in the vicinity of Cache Lake." It was not until January 5, 1900 that the amalgamation of the

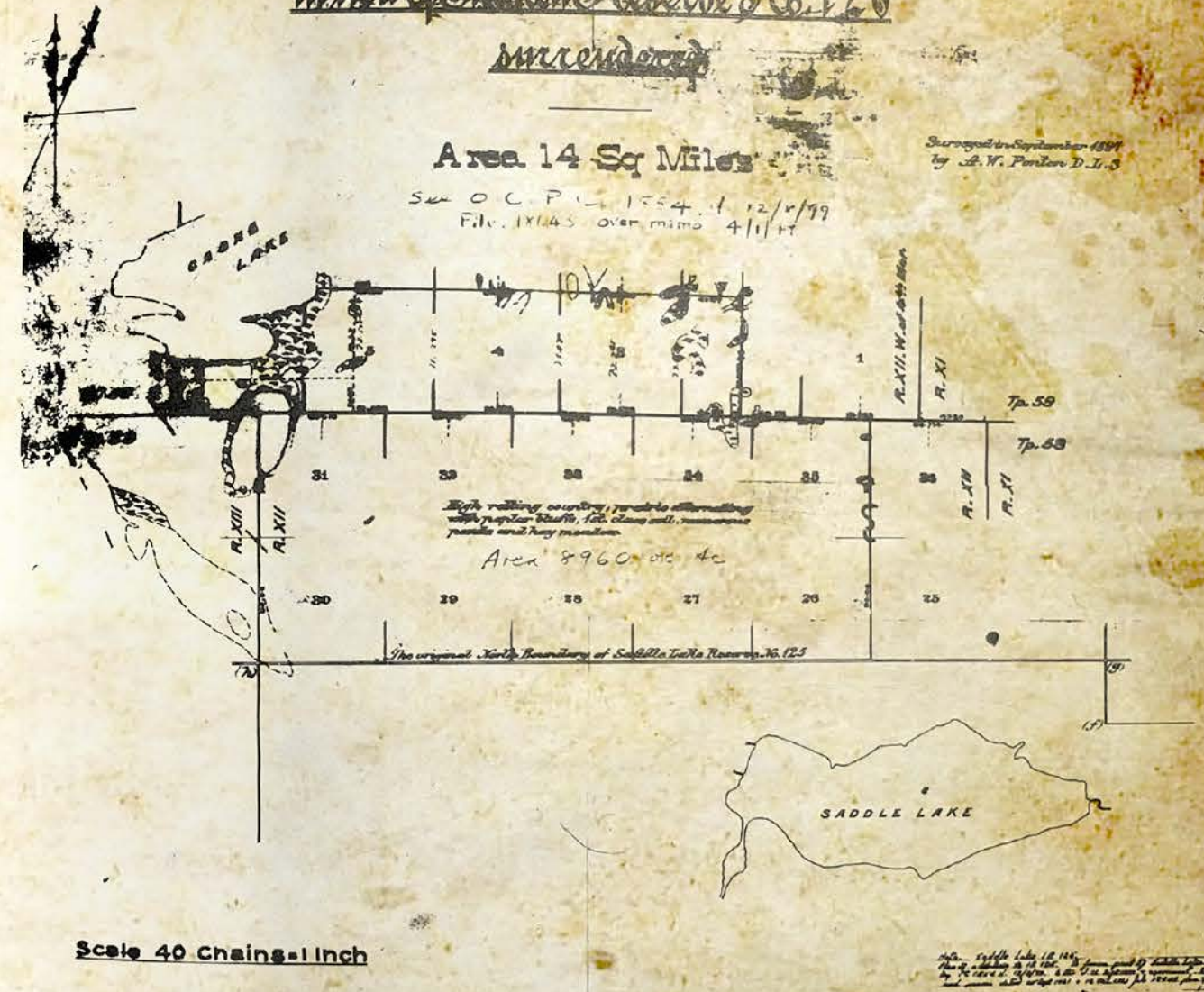
Wahsatanow Band with the bands at Saddle Lake, and the addition of fourteen square miles onto the northern boundary of the Saddle Lake Reserve, were legally documented.

Thus ended the brief, unsettled and at times unhappy existence of the Cree Indian reserve at Waskatenau — a seven-year period from May, 1889 to September, 1896. According to the information recently obtained at Saddle Lake, this is what became of the six families who once lived on the Wasahatinaw Reserve:

1. "Jack" became Jackson, and one Johnny Jackson lives in Goodfish Lake now.
2. "Wasahatinaw" moved to Saddle Lake. Thomas Wasahatinaw, who was a young boy when the band left the old reserve, passed away October 30, 1984 at over 90 years of age.
3. "Naiwatahtik" became Breretton; descendants live at Saddle Lake, including Eddie Breretton, who supplied some information for this article.
4. "Wihpemes" became Halfe, and descendants live at Saddle Lake.
5. "Maskohtawakay" moved to Saddle Lake. Some descendants still reside there.
6. "Matosk" (Charlie Cryer) moved to Saddle Lake. His sons are the late Johnny Cryer, and Albert and Alex Cryer who still live in Saddle Lake.



Treaty No. 6, N.W.T.
Plan of Addition to Indian Reserve No. 125
in lieu of Indian Reserve No. 126



-  **Iron Horse Trail**
-  **Victoria Trail**
-  **Waskatenau Creek Pr. Trail**
-  **Pine Creek Trail**
-  **Historical North Sask. River**

1. **Victoria Trail** - First "highway" in Alberta; last leg of the Carlton Trail. Used by Explorers, Traders, Freighters, Mounties and Settlers

2. **The Elbow** (Waskatenau namesake in Cree) - Most Northerly point on The North Saskatchewan River
Resting place for travellers and their horses through the centuries and potential Sacred Site - Chief Bears Ears & Sons Burial Site.

3. **Waskatenau Ferry Crossing** - Years of operation: 1919-1963; ferry built by local farmers

4. **Elsey's Hill** - Became known as Elsey's "Hill" after vehicles having trouble on the muddy or icy steep slope, ended up in Elsey's yard at the bottom of the hill.

5. **St. Nicholas Anglican Cemetery** - Known in the community as the Old Timers Cemetery

6. **Henry House** - Jack Henry operated the first store in the district, 1905-1919. First post office and land sub-agency in the area

7. **Bear's Ears Reserve Interpretive Sign** - Years of occupation: 1889-1896; wheat, barley, hay, potatoes, turnips grown here. Land was supposed to be exchanged for land at Saddle Lake.

8. **Fine Creek Stopping House** - Sam McDonald built a log home/general store in 1908; post office 1913-1920
Designated as a Registered Historic Resource 1993

Petro-Canada Gas Station
& Petro-Pass Truck Stop

Waskatenau

28

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831

28

831

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Waskatenau
AB-831 Bridge

831

Victoria Trail
Campground & RV

Pine Creek Retreat

Victoria District
National Historic Site

Cree, Metis & Settlement History of the Former Bears Ears Reserve, 126

Pine Creek Retreat, located in the Waskatenau District within Reserve 126 and Bears Ears Reserve, offers a rich array of self-directed experiences centred around the cultural and historical focus of Cree, Metis, and settlement history within the district. These signature experiences allow visitors to explore and understand the heritage and natural beauty of the area.

*****Historical North Saskatchewan River:** Explore the historical significance of the North Saskatchewan River, a vital waterway that played a pivotal role in trade, transportation, and settlement in the region. Learn about its importance to the indigenous peoples and early settlers, shaping the area's cultural and economic development.

****Historical Victoria Trail:** Delve into the rich history of the Victoria Trail, an ancient Indigenous trade route that later became an essential fur trade and transportation route connecting Fort Edmonton to Victoria Settlement and beyond. Discover the challenges and adventures faced by early travellers along this trail.

****Victoria Trail District:** Immerse yourself in the unique culture and history of the Victoria Trail District. Gain insights into the cultural exchange, trading practices, and interactions that took place among Indigenous communities and European traders along this historic trail.

****Victoria Trail Interpretive Signs:** Engage with informative interpretive signs that guide you through the historical context and cultural significance of the Victoria Trail. These signs provide detailed narratives about the trail's history, showcasing its evolution over time.

*****Chief Bears Ears and Sons Sacred Burial Site:** Visit the sacred burial site of Chief Bears Ears and Sons, where you can pay homage and learn about the spiritual and cultural significance associated with this revered location. Gain insight into the beliefs and practices of the Indigenous people.

***Pine Creek Ravine Trails and Historical Significance:** Explore the Pine Creek Ravine trails, appreciating the natural beauty and biodiversity of the area. Learn about the historical events and cultural significance tied to these trails, which may have been essential routes for Indigenous peoples and early settlers.

****Two Creek Area:** Take in the breathtaking views from the Two Creek area, the most northerly point of the river. Marvel at the expansive river valley and surrounding landscape, gaining a sense of the geographical and environmental features that shaped the region's history.

*****Waskatenau or "Hollow" Creek Trail & Immersive Nature Walks:** Embark on immersive nature walks along the Waskatenau Creek trail, allowing you to connect with the natural environment and learn about the local flora, fauna, and ecosystems. Understand the cultural and historical relationship the indigenous people had with this land

****Village of Waskatenau:** Explore Waskatenau Village, understanding its historical significance and its role as the namesake of Reserve 126. Learn about the early settlers, their way of life, and how the town has evolved over time.

***Historical Pine Creek Stopping House:** Visit the Pine Creek Stopping House, a registered historical resource. Discover the history of this significant stopover point for travellers and traders, offering insights into the early transportation and settlement patterns of the region.

****Alberta Iron Horse Trail:** Learn about the Alberta Iron Horse Trail, its development, and its historical importance as a transportation route. Gain an understanding of how this trail facilitated trade and connectivity, shaping the region's economic landscape even today at the Iron Horse Trail.

***Pine Creek Retreat River Walk & Direct Access (Onsite):** Enjoy a leisurely river walk and direct access to the river at Pine Creek Retreat. Immerse yourself in the tranquility of the river setting, appreciating the natural beauty and serenity it offers.

These self-directed experiences offer a comprehensive and immersive journey through the cultural and historical aspects of the Waskatenau District, Reserve 126, and Bears Ears Reserve. Visitors can engage with interpretive assets, hike trails, and explore significant sites to deepen their understanding of the area's heritage and natural landscape.

* *Walk only*

** *Walk, scooter, bike, vehicle*

*** *Walk, scooter, bike, vehicle access*

Waskatenau: A Historical Odyssey of Transition and Legacy

The history of Waskatenau is a tapestry woven with the threads of time, intricately entwining Indigenous heritage, shifting circumstances, and the unyielding spirit of its inhabitants. The name "Waskatenau" is rooted in an Indigenous band and a river, tracing its origins back to Stanhope Fleming's 1722 expedition, which revealed its etymology as an opening in the flowing Waskatenaw River. Alexander Henry's 1809 expedition redirected its course, setting the stage for Waskatenau's transformative journey.

This village's nomenclature ties it to the Cree Indian band that once occupied a reserve alongside Waskatenau Creek, located northwest of Fort Victoria. Managed by the Indian agent at Saddle Lake, this reserve underwent annual reviews by the Indian agency inspector and was ultimately overseen by the Indian Commissioner for Manitoba and the Northwest Territories in Regina, with the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa holding the ultimate responsibility.

The historical records reflect a multitude of name variations—Wahsahatanow, Wahsahtanow, Wahastanow, Wahsatanow, Wahsatanaw, Washatanow, Wasahatinaw, and Wahsatowona – each a testament to the intricate history woven into this place. These names pay homage to the horseshoe bend shape of the North Saskatchewan River.

Bear's Ears Reserve, or Washatanow Indian Reserve No. 126, came into being in 1886 through John C. Nelson's Dominion Land Survey. Spanning twelve and a quarter square miles, this territory encompassed Township 59 Range Eleven and Township 58 Range Nineteen, including Sections One to Four and Eight to Twelve. Its landscape was shaped by the meandering North Saskatchewan River and the features adorning its banks.

A Department of Indian Affairs document paints a vivid picture of the reserve's topography:

"The northern boundary boasts a nearly level expanse adorned with poplar and willow. Sheltered prairies and abundant beaver habitats intermingle with marshes. The soil is a rich black loam. The riverbanks offer lush pastures, poplar groves, spruce hummocks, and assorted berry-bearing shrubs. Valleys crisscross the land due to the presence of several streams flowing into the Saskatchewan River."

Inspector Alexander McGibbon's November 1890 report on Saddle Lake Agency unveiled multiple reserves along with their populations, including Wahsatanow (No. 126) with 40 inhabitants. Located equidistantly between the agency and Edmonton, Wahsatanow's cultivated crops included wheat, barley, and potatoes, recorded with precision based on acreage.

Livestock on the reserve numbered five oxen, one bull, four cows, six heifers, a bull calf, a heifer calf, and ten horses. Chief Bear's Ears and his family were the primary residents during McGibbon's visit. However, the population had dwindled to 28, with some individuals relocating to Saddle Lake and one person passing away. Though the allure of the landscape was undeniable, challenges abounded. Chief Bear's Ears grappled with physical limitations, and two of his children faced disabilities. The reserve's remoteness hindered oversight, prompting Indian agent John Ross to advocate for resettlement at Saddle Lake. Ross's initiatives yielded partial results as some members moved, yet Chief Bear's Ears remained steadfast in safeguarding the reserve's legacy. McGibbon lamented this decision, noting the Band's distance from educational facilities and the influence of visiting "half-breeds" during aid distribution.

In essence, the history of Waskatenau intertwines with its Indigenous roots, bearing witness to the tenacity of the Cree Indian band amid evolving circumstances and the relentless march of time.

A Resolute Path: The Journey from Struggle to Resolution

In the face of adversities, Chief Bear's Ears stood steadfast, prioritizing lawful actions over cattle killings and advocating for solutions through authorized channels. A pivotal moment arose with a letter dated June 30, 1891, where Commissioner acknowledged Agent Ross's belief that Chief Bear's Ears' Band would willingly leave the Wahsatanow Reserve after the harvest, seeking to resolve their struggles within the confines of legitimacy.

A subsequent letter from Agent Ross to the Indian Commissioner painted a picture of evolving dynamics. Chief Bear's Ears' Band, after numerous consultations, agreed to relocate to Saddle Lake in the upcoming spring. Their willingness was contingent upon a written guarantee of equivalent land being added to the Saddle Lake Reserve, in exchange for surrendering all claims to the Wahsatanow Reserve. This condition faced opposition from the Indian Commissioner and the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa.

As the year progressed, the proposition emerged that the Washatanow Band should surrender their land and amalgamate with other bands residing on the Saddle Lake Reserve. These included the bands of Little Hunter and Chief Pakan (formerly from White Fish Lake). Blue Quill's Band, originating from Egg Lake, also called Saddle Lake home, though their distinct identity spurred debates over shared ownership.

Meanwhile, Inspector McGibbon's November 1891 report unveiled ongoing developments. Families had departed from Hunter's and Blue Quill's Bands, and Wahsatanow's population numbered 26. The cultivated land had expanded to eighteen acres, yielding a harvest of barley,

potatoes, and turnips. The cattle herd had grown to twenty, accompanied by ten horses. With only four families remaining on the reserve, logistical adjustments were imperative. The biweekly 114-mile journey for ration distribution was replaced with a more streamlined process—Hudson's Bay agent at Victoria taking charge. Matoosk, Chief Bear's Ears' brother, persisted on the reserve, deriving income from operating a rest stop along the Victoria Trail. However, Chief Bear's Ears' widow and her children returned to Wahsatanow. Inspector McGibbon observed their comfortable dwelling but expressed concerns about the children's disabilities. Urging Mr. Ross to ensure their well-being, he reiterated the importance of relocating them to Saddle Lake:

"By facilitating their move to Saddle Lake, a small gesture and a sincere conversation could be the catalyst. I implored Mr. Ross to prioritize the widow and her children, as their relocation to Saddle Lake aligns with their best interests."

The road ahead was a blend of challenges and possibilities, as the Wahsatanow Band navigated transitions and negotiations, guided by their shared history and a vision of a resilient community.

Unfolding Chapters: Challenges, Shifts, and Unveiled Resolutions

The history of Wahsatanow's journey continued to unfold with complexities that mirrored the intricacies of life itself. Amidst the uncertainties, Chief Bear's Ears' wisdom resonated, prioritizing lawful paths over rash actions. A letter dated August 1892 from Agent Ross offered a glimpse of the Band's anticipated surrender of the Wahsatanow Reserve, a prospect poised to crystallize within months. Yet, like the unpredictable currents of a river, complications surged forth.

Shortly thereafter, a pivotal meeting at Saddle Lake with Chief Okimaw Bear Ear, Wahsatanow Band members, and representatives from Saddle Lake and White Fish Lake shattered promises and reverberated with the echoes of unresolved grievances. Name variations were not the sole testament to the intricate history; the Band's intentions were equally multi-layered, and the journey was marred by misunderstandings.

The 1891-92 annual report reflected a new chapter: vacant houses on Saddle Lake Reserve were inhabited by families from Wahsatanow. Chief Bear's Ears' widow, now dwelling near the Methodist Mission, was bestowed a fertile, well-fenced field. By 1892, most of the cattle (23 head) and crops had migrated to Saddle Lake, yet six acres of barley and two of potatoes remained on the Wahsatanow Reserve, yielding 70 and 80 bushels respectively. As 1893 dawned, fresh unrest emerged. The Wahsatanow Band voiced their intent to return to their former reserve due to dissatisfaction at Saddle Lake and aspirations for a larger Saddle Lake Reserve. Amidst this turbulent period, communication gaps deepened the complexities, and Chief Bear's Ears' brother, Matoosk, embarked on his own odyssey.

On April 13, 1893, Matoosk, accompanied by sixteen cattle, embarked on a journey from Saddle Lake to Wahsatanow. This move stirred swift intervention by Agent Ross, orchestrating a meeting with interpreter Mr. Favel. While Matoosk's departure was short-lived, his resolve remained unshaken.

By September 1893, Chief James Seenum of Saddle Lake pinpointed an extension of land near Cache Lake as a potential enlargement site for the Reserve. Amid geographical shifts and evolving allegiances, Matoosk's narrative unfolded, with Augustine Steinhauer leading his cattle to Cache Lake on behalf of Band 126.

As the tapestry of time advanced, the narrative's twists and turns forged a legacy. Legal processes culminated in the surrender of the Wahsatanow Reserve on September 26, 1896. The curtain closed on the Band's independent reserve existence, as they amalgamated with other bands at Saddle Lake. Their seven-year sojourn from 1889 to 1896 marked an era of transformation and resilience. Descendants of those who once inhabited Wahsatanow's grounds carried their stories to new horizons. Some remained rooted at Saddle Lake, nurturing legacies that resonated through generations and added layers to the intricate tapestry of indigenous history.

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Historic Points in the Waskatenau Community (1900 - 1920)

