**Chapter Outline**

to accompany

*Indigenous Peoples within Canada: A Concise History*, Fifth Edition

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**Chapter 12: The First Numbered Treaties, Police, and the Indian Act**

This chapter discusses the numbered treaties, arrival of the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP), and portions of the 1876 Indian Act. It begins with an explanation of how both Indigenous Peoples and the government viewed treaties. Whereas the former saw treaties as living agreements that could be renegotiated over time, the government considered treaties as extinguishing Aboriginal title to land altogether. Different understandings of “what” treaties actually represent in terms of agreements are still subject to interpretation today.

Treaties One and Two set the terms for the allocation of reserve lands, and other provisions such as agricultural assistance, annuities and hunting and fishing rights; however, some of these oral promises made during negotiations did not show up in the later written drafts. Thus, the negotiations of Treaty Three were more prolonged and difficult, with more generous terms that set precedents for later treaties. Indigenous Peoples were now exerting more political assertiveness and were also more familiar with governmental negotiation processes and style. Treaty Six also added two significant provisions, that of a medicine chest and provisions for rations in case of famine. The last great gathering of independent First Nations took place at Blackfoot Crossing, for the signing of Treaty Seven, which essentially allowed the government to secure the western frontier for settlement. In total, between 1871 and 1921, 11 numbered treaties were signed. In exchange for access to land occupied by Indigenous nations, Canada provided guarantees of certain rights, some of which included reserves; annuities; health care; education; rights to hunt, fish, and trap; and, amounts of seed, livestock, and implements.

Additionally, in 1873 the Canadian government created and sent the North-West Mounted Police west to rid the area of American whisky traders and to enforce British justice on the Canadian prairies. All of these initiatives were pursued to help ready the West for settlement. As well, there was the 1877 movement into Canada of the American Hunkpapa Dakhóta (Sioux) under Tȟatȟaƞka Íyotake (Sitting Bull), adding to an already-tense situation as the buffalo continued to disappear and Indigenous nations of the prairies feared for their very existence.

Further, in the middle of treaty negotiations, the Canadian government quietly passed the Indian Act in 1876, making all Indians wards of the government. The Indian Act consolidated and revised earlier legislation, putting it into one piece of legislation and thus making it easier to administer. The Act also maintained its fundamental purpose to assimilate Indigenous Peoples, thereby introducing the enactment of sections that—to name but a few—banned the spiritual life of Indigenous Peoples with what became known as the Potlatch Law, established the voluntary and involuntary enfranchisement of people, undermined tribal leadership, and attacked women through the marriage sections of the Act. The superintendent-general of Indian Affairs was given wide-sweeping powers with the ability to impose an elected system of band governance; not only he could call for and supervise an election, he could also summon and preside over band meetings. This upward spiral of control saw various forms of Indigenous resistance and revitalization movements such as the Ghost Dance, a continuation of Indigenous movements of 1763 and 1812. However, despite government-stated objectives of assimilation, there was strong Indigenous opposition and the ultimate revocation of the Electoral Franchise Act (which would have given Indigenous Peoples the franchise by simply meeting minimum property qualifications).