

With impressive endnotes, *The Name of War and the Origins of American*

*Identity* is well worth reading. The subject matter is both relevant and interesting.

### *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*

Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt,  
Sarah Carter, and Dorothy First Rider

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press,  
1996. 408 pp. Illus, maps. \$19.95 paper.

By Kenichi Matsui

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**I**N 1991, THE TREATY 7 TRIBAL Council of southern Alberta began extensively collecting elders' oral accounts concerning their ancestors' "true spirit and original intent" in signing the 1877 agreement. Adding interviews of elders collected in the 1970s, this significant effort enabled *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* to provide the voices of nearly ninety elders from the Blood Tribe and the Peigan, Siksika (Blackfoot), Stoney, and Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee) Nations. The elders of these First Nations have passed on the memories of the treaty-making process to their people for more than a century. Now they have decided to publicize their voices for the education of their youths and non-Indian people. The elders and the tribal council believe that the elders' accounts should be an important part of our understanding of treaty-making history in Canada.

In the book, the elders' voices are fragmented according to topics, but they all persistently indicate that their ancestors never meant to surrender their land by signing Treaty 7. The elders contend that it was a sacred alliance of peace with the government

of Canada and other First Nations peoples. The Blackfoot call Treaty 7 *istsist aohkotspi*, translated in this book as "the time when we made a sacred alliance" (4). The Native leaders who signed the treaty believed that their people would benefit politically and economically from making peace because it would secure their physical, cultural, and spiritual survival after the disappearance of the buffalo. It would also bring alternative ways of life with new farming technology, medical care, and education. They initially welcomed the newcomers, being willing to share the land for harvesting crops. However, as Red Crow, a prominent leader at the treaty negotiation, stated clearly to government commissioners in 1877, the land was not for sale because "it was put there by the Creator for the Indians' benefit and use" (114).

The testimony of the elders also indicates that poor communication led the First Nations and the government to interpret the treaty differently. The problems translators had in attempting to explain the Western legal concept of land surrender made it more difficult for First Nations peoples to comprehend what treaty commis-

sioners said to them. For example, they did not understand the concept of "cede" or "surrender," nor did they understand the idea of measuring land by the square mile. In addition, the commissioners did not deal with oral culture properly when they asked the tribal leaders to sign the treaty. According to the elders' recollections, the commissioners had already written X's on the treaty document and asked the elders simply to touch the pen to them to acknowledge the signature. After signing the treaty, the practice of favouritism by Indian agents resulted in the unequal treatment of Native people with regard to the distribution of government aid as well as to White ranchers further encroaching upon reserve land. Today the elders still bitterly and vividly recall these experiences.

*The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* serves its original intent well, giving readers a First Nations perspective on the treaty-making process. Chapters in Parts 2 and 3 also provide scholarly interpretations of the treaty. The problem with these

chapters, however, is that they include many redundancies and fail to use important historical documents. In addition, Chapters 4 and 5, which analyze the effect of Treaty 7, should have examined the impact of implementing the Indian Act, the Dominion Lands Act, 1872; the North-West Territories Act, 1886; and the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement, 1930. This would have been especially helpful to readers because some elders mention that the conflicts between the treaty and these acts affected the lives of the Treaty 7 Nations. The North-West Territories Act and the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement, for example, had a grave impact on the rights of the Treaty 7 Nations. They are currently challenging these acts in court. In spite of these problems, this book makes readers aware of the importance of listening to First Nations voices in order to gain a more balanced understanding of the history of Indian/non-Indian relations in Canada and the origins of current legal disputes.

### *On the North Trail: The Treaty 8 Diary of O.C. Edwards*

David Leonard and Beverly Whalen, editors

Edmonton: Historical Society of Alberta, 1998. 122 pp.

Illus., maps. \$19.95 paper

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**I**N THE SUMMER OF 1900, the federal government sent a third commission to the District of Athabaska to secure additional treaty adhesions and scrip arrangements under the provisions of Treaty 8. Headed

by James Ansdell Macrae, inspector of Indian agencies, the commission of 1900 also included Dr. Oliver Cromwell Edwards. *On the North Trail* is O.C. Edwards' diary of the commission's travels in the Athabaska