

The North West Mounted Police

- One of the 1st problems facing Ottawa after taking control of the Northwest was a fur trade issue. American fur traders were causing trouble near present day Lethbridge, AB.
- They were trading cheap, strong liquor to the First Nations for furs. The whiskey trade led to alcoholism among the local Blackfoot people leading to malnutrition, disease, & death.
- The Canadian government was also concerned the presence of the whiskey traders might lead to a loss of territory to the Americans.
- 1872: The government established the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) as both a police & paramilitary organization.

Cypress Hills Massacre

- June 1873: A group of Nakoda were attacked & killed by a party of American trappers. In response the government sent a force of 275 NWMP to drive the whiskey traders out of Canada.

The Treaty Process

- The Canadian government wanted to open the prairies to Canadian & European settlers. It was eager to arrange treaties with the FNs as quickly & cheaply as possible.
- Commissioner Wemyss Simpson began talks with the Cree & Anishinabé. The FNs wanted 60% of the land in Manitoba, but Simpson was authorized to only offer 160 acres/family of five.
- The government did agree to provide FNs farm equipment, supplies & instructions on how to farm.
- Aug. 1871: Treaties 1 & 2 were signed & gave title to southern Manitoba's land to the Canadian government. By 1877 the government concluded five more treaties on the prairies.
- First Nation people agreed to share their land for specific rights including:
 - Hunting & fishing rights on traditional territory.
 - Access to education & health care.

First Nation Farming

- The government never provided the farming instruction & supplies as promised.
- The government did not actually want the FNs to farm or sell any wheat for money. Soon they abandoned farming & had to depend on the government to survive. As a result, the standards of living declined rapidly for the FNs as poverty took over.

The Indian Act

- 1876: The government introduced the Indian Act formalizing the assimilation of First Nations in Canada. The government made decisions on behalf of FN people, but most decisions would be influenced either by prejudice or misunderstanding.
- The Indian Act:
 - Declared all FNs to be “wards of the state” & be required to live on reserves.
 - Banned traditional ways of self-governance & ceremonies like the Sundance & potlatch.
 - Forced FN children to attend residential schools which would have devastating effects.