Notes re Buck (Carleton) Island by Susanna McLeod

Calm waves rippling along the shoreline gave no clue that the small island in the St. Lawrence River was a hubbub of action. Holding a significant position of power in the late 1700s, the land was first known as Buck Island. With its strategic location, the early home of the Iroquois delighted British military authorities and they claimed control during the American Revolution.

Renamed for Sir Guy Carleton, previous governor of Quebec, the island saw the building of Fort Haldimand, the construction of warships, and anxious fleeing Loyalists. Carleton Island also witnessed the negotiation of the Crawford Purchase.

Wishing to secure property for the many Loyalist settlers, Gov. Frederick Haldimand wanted land for Mohawk allies relocating to Ontario away from the hostile American patriots. The governor also realized the British needed First Nations assistance to keep the province out of American hands.

Using the wilderness as productive hunting grounds along Lake Ontario and part of the St. Lawrence River, Mississauga members were also familiar residents in the Belleville area. “In 1779, Captain Butler had travelled from Niagara to the Eastern end of Lake Ontario at ‘Caderoghqua’ (Cataraqui), and reported that several bands of Misissaugas were located along the lake shore and throughout the back country,” Brian S. Osborne and Peter Ripmeester wrote in “Kingston, Bedford, Grape Island, Almwick: The Odyssey of the Kingston Mississauga” (Historic Kingston, Vol. 43: 1995: 84-111)

Over the summer of 1783, the British discussed their plan of settling Loyalists onto the area held by the natives. There was hesitation by the Mississaugas, described by Sir John Johnson in at letter to Gov. Haldimand in mid-August.

“They seem to have no Objection to White People settling there, but say that If their Brothers the Six Nations come there, they are so numerous they will overrun their hunting grounds, and oblige them to retire to New and distant grounds not so good or convenient to them. …”

Capt. William Redford Crawford, a young officer with the Kings Royal Regiment of New York, was assigned to lead negotiations with the Mississauga at Carleton Island. Meeting with Chief Mynass and other chiefs on Oct. 9, 1783, Crawford

arranged a very imprecise treaty for large tracts of land. Spanning from Brockville's Toniata Creek (Jones River) to the Bay of Quinte, the area reached "within Eight Leagues of the Bottom of Said Bay including all the Islands," Joan Holmes and Associates said in "Report on the Algonquins of Golden Lake Claim," Volume 3, Oct. 30, 1993 (Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada).

Extending a good distance back from the shore of Lake Ontario, the verbal accord included land "as far as a man can Travel in a Day." Crawford accepted the chief's word at face value that he and his Mississauga members controlled such a substantial swath of the region.

No money was exchanged for the purchase. No deed was transferred, no treaty papers were signed. "There is only a letter between Captain Crawford and the Indian Agent, John Johnson, and another between Johnson and Governor Haldimand," Marijke Huitema, Brian S. Osborne and Michael Ripmeester stated in "Imagined Spaces, Constructed Boundaries, Conflicting Claims: A Legacy of Postcolonial Conflict in Eastern Ontario" (International Journal of Canadian Studies 25: Spring 2002)

Crawford promised the Mississauga members "that all the families belonging to them shall be clothed and that those that have not fusees (flintlock guns) shall receive new ones, some powder and ball for their winter hunting, as much coarse red cloth as will make about a dozen coats and as many laced hats," Janet and William R. Lunn noted in "The County: The first Hundred Years in Loyalist Prince Edward" (Prince Edward County Council, 1967). "This I have promised they should receive as soon as I could get it and hope you will send the articles mentioned as soon as convenient."

"In return for the lands ceded by Mynass, the Crown agreed to clothe his family for his lifetime, though he died shortly afterwards," David Shanahan said in "Land for Goods: the Crawford Purchase," Anishinabek News, Nov. 8, 2018. The chief's family continued to receive the promised goods. Every summer, Mississauga members canoed to Kingston's waterfront, meeting at what is now Macdonald Park to receive their negotiated payment.

Although the transaction went well for the British and Loyalists, the Mississauga were not so pleased. Over time, their natural rights held little weight. Misinterpretation was no doubt a problem, and it seems that Mynass and the chiefs thought they were generously granting the Loyalists permission to live among them, not to completely take over and claim ownership. No reserves were

set aside for the tribes, and the First Nations were eventually squeezed out of their beloved traditional territory.

As surveying progressed, the British learned that Chief Mynass did not control the vast lands that he asserted were Mississauga territory. Crawford accepted the elder chief's word that land along the St. Lawrence River onward to the Ottawa River were under his control, and so that area was included in Crawford's agreement. It turned out that Mynass was too generous. Much of that region belonged to Algonquin tribes.

"It is interesting to note that at the time of this surrender, Algonquins and Nipissings had already presented petitions describing the traditional lands as including all of the Ottawa Valley above Long Sault," Holmes said.

Before negotiations were underway, Haldimand sent Deputy Surveyor-General John Collins to Cataraqui to begin laying out the initial major township surveys under civil government in the province. "The necessary land was purchased from Mississauga Indians, and on 27 October (1783) the first survey marker was planted," according to the Ontario Historical Plaque in Kington's City Park, near West Street. "By year's end the front concessions of four townships, stretching from Cataraqui to the Bay of Quinte, had been surveyed."

Designated as a National Historic Event in 1929, Crawford's Purchase was recognized as one of the first treaties with First Nations to be made in Ontario. A plaque honouring the negotiation is located at the arched entrance of Fort Frontenac on Ontario Street.

On occasion, the Crawford Purchase has been referred to as the Gunshot Treaty. A separate treaty, the Johnson-Butler Purchase was negotiated five years after the Crawford Purchase in 1788, between Anishinaabe members and Crown representatives Sir John Johnson and Lt.-Col. John Butler.

"The treaty covers the north shore of Lake Ontario, beginning at the eastern boundary of the Toronto Purchase and continuing east to the Bay of Quinte, where it meets the Crawford Purchase," according to Ontario's Ministry of Indigenous Affairs. Dubbed the Gunshot Treaty, the agreement's territory covered the land from the lakeshore to as far as a person could hear a gunshot. It appears that that would be a lot less land than the Crawford Purchase achieved.

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