

LIFE AT STONEY POINT PRIOR
TO THE APPROPRIATION BY THE
CANADIAN GOVERNMENT

3.1 Introduction

Three generations of Aboriginal witnesses testified at the Inquiry about life at the Stoney Point Reserve before the 1942 appropriation by the federal government. Some of the Aboriginal witnesses, such as Clifford George, Rose Manning, and Bonnie Bressette, were born on the reserve and spent some or all of their childhood at Stoney Point. Others, such as Marcia Simon, Dudley George's sister Carolyn George, Tina George, Roderick George, and Elwood George, to name but a few, had parents who spent many years living, working, and participating in communal activities on the Stoney Point Reserve before they were forced to leave their land. And finally, there was a third generation, teenagers and younger children, who learned about life at Stoney Point from accounts of their grandparents and parents, by visiting the land with their relatives, and by listening to stories from Elders. Some of these witnesses included Nicholas Cottrelle, Kevin Simon, J.T. Cousins, Wesley George, and Glen Bressette. These witnesses of various ages described a self-sustaining Aboriginal community deeply attached to their land, a sharing community that operated to a great extent by consensus.

This chapter provides a description of life on the Stoney Point Reserve, as recounted by Aboriginal witnesses at the Inquiry.

3.2 The Stoney Point Reserve Before the 1942 Appropriation

Clifford George¹ was born in 1920 and lived on the reserve for nearly two decades before the Canadian government appropriated the land pursuant to the *War Measures Act*. As Mr. George said at the hearings, on March 11, 1920, midwife Lena Lunhem delivered him at the Stoney Point Reserve:

... she's the one that brought me into this earth — into this world ...
[S]he was a great lady, a great medical lady ... she was a midwife for
just about everybody

¹ Clifford George, an Elder, died on September 30, 2005, during the Part I hearings. He gave his evidence at the Inquiry on September 10, 20, 21, 2004. Mr. George attended the hearings almost daily before his death.

... when I was born, she delivered another young woman in Kettle Point first, and she walked through the bush [for 3½ to 4 miles] to Stoney Point and she got there in time to ... bring me into the world.

Clifford George's grandparents, Levi Johnson and Hanna Johnson White, had an eighty-acre farm on the reserve. They had two barns, animals, and a large garden in which fruit and vegetables were grown. His grandfather constructed the first brick building on the reserve. Their land was on what later became the military base. Many other family and friends also had property in this area. Clifford George said some members of the community, such as Albert George, lived on what later became Ipperwash Provincial Park. Albert George was Dudley George's great-grandfather.

Clifford George described a self-sufficient reserve. The land provided their food, medicine, and the resources necessary for their livelihoods: "We had everything in that reservation for our needs ..." In spring, morels appeared, followed by strawberries, raspberries, and thimbleberries. Various plants and herbs were the source of their medicines. Clifford George's father, William George, and other Stoney Point residents (such as Robert George) were carpenters. They collected cedar to build furniture, tables, and various kinds of chairs. As Clifford George said, the reserve land basically provided all of their necessities — it was "ideal for just about anything ... through the different seasons."

Stoney Point residents had a communal orientation.² People on the reserve helped each other and shared resources. For example, when a deer was killed during the hunting season, they "split it with all the other people."

Clifford George was educated on the Stoney Point Reserve in a one-room schoolhouse. His teacher, Liz McKinnon, taught Grades 1 to 8. She had forty acres on the reserve next to his grandparents' property. Mr. George's education ended at the age of fourteen after he completed eighth grade. He and other witnesses stressed that substantial barriers existed for First Nations people who wished to pursue higher education, such as professional degrees. Aboriginal people who decided to continue their studies and become lawyers or doctors, for example, were required to enfranchise under the *Indian Act*.³ In other words, they were forced to relinquish their Indian status and they were no longer permitted to

2 Such communal orientation is common of Aboriginal people.

3 The *Indian Act* provision, which has been repealed, stated: "Any Indian who may be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Medicine, or to any other degree by any University of Learning, or who may be admitted in any Province of the Dominion to practice law either as an Advocate or as a Barrister or Counsellor or Solicitor or Attorney or to be a Notary Public, or who may enter Holy Orders or who may be licensed by any denomination of Christians as a Minister of the Gospel, shall *ipso facto* become and be enfranchised under this Act."

live on the reserve. In the words of Clifford George, “you were now classed as a white man.” His four sisters were among the many children who were forced by the federal government to attend residential schools.⁴ Like other First Nations children, they suffered the loss of their language and much of their culture.

It was clear from the testimony that Stoney Point residents have a deep connection to their land. Mr. George echoed the view of the Aboriginal witnesses that they had been placed on their self-sustaining reserve by the Creator:

... the Creator put us there on account of all the essentials ... that we needed on the reserve itself, the medicines and all that, the wood lots and everything that goes with it. So, we have a very strong conviction about all that, that they were spiritually given to us many years ago.

Clifford George’s mother, Mabel, died in 1939, a few years before the federal appropriation. She was buried on the Stoney Point Reserve.

Rose Manning was born at Stoney Point in 1933 and spent almost a decade of her life on the reserve. She clearly recollected her early childhood, which she described as wonderful years: “I had the best years in Stoney Point.”⁵

Rose Manning’s life was centred on the reserve. She went to school and church at Stoney Point. Anishnabe is her first language. As Rose Manning said, “[W]e talked nothing but our own language at that time.” Mrs. Manning’s father, Willington Elijah, was Chief Councillor of the Stoney Point Reserve.

Rose Manning’s grandparents and parents shared a house, and they jointly raised her and her siblings. They had ample land, and a farm with chickens and horses. The milk they drank came from their cows. They “never went hungry. There was always plenty of food there and they were always well dressed.”

Her childhood memories include gathering nuts and picking morels and berries, “the biggest thimbleberries that you can ... find anywhere.” She helped hunt game such as rabbits and squirrels, and she remembers the tasty rabbit stew that was a regular part of her diet. People on the reserve canned their produce, which sustained them in the winter months. Her mother weaved baskets, and Rose Manning was taught to make quilts. Other Stoney Point residents crafted axe and other types of handles used for tools and farm implements. A handle constructed from hickory “was the best” and “the most expensive.”

4 Residential schools were boarding schools for Aboriginal children that operated throughout Canada for over a century. The Canadian government and religious organizations operated the schools. Abuses were committed against the children. According to Statistics Canada, approximately 80,000 living Aboriginal children are former students of the residential school system. Indian Residential Schools Resolution, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca

5 Rose Manning died in the summer of 2006 before the Final Submissions at the Inquiry.

Rose Manning felt secure on Stoney Point Reserve. She knew all the members of her community: “I knew all the people there and I trusted all the people there and they trusted each other ... it was a sharing, caring community.” She said, “[W]e had a good life there ... we had lots of land.” She “was a happy child.”

Rose Manning’s grandfather passed away before the 1942 appropriation, and he was buried in the cemetery at Stoney Point. Her sister died before him in the same year, and her gravesite is also on the reserve.

Rose Manning had twelve children and is the grandmother of approximately sixty grandchildren.

Bonnie Bressette, Chief of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation from 1988 to 1990,⁶ was also born at Stoney Point and spent her early childhood on the reserve. Like Clifford George and Rose Manning, she described the self-sufficiency of her people and their deep connection to the land. Her parents, Bruce and Hilda George, had land on the reserve along Highway 21. They cleared an area on which they had a house and garden. They also had bush lots for timber and medicinal herbs. Her grandparents, Robert and Laura George, had a farm west of their property with horses, ducks, geese, chicken, and a large garden. As Bonnie Bressette said, her family and other members of her reserve sustained themselves largely from the land.

Bonnie Bressette discussed the separate identities of the Kettle Point and Stoney Point Reserves prior to 1942. They were two self-reliant communities, each with their unique attachment to the land on which they lived. Relations between the two communities were good. Representatives from each reserve met regularly to discuss matters of joint interest. Chief Tom Bressette confirmed that prior to the taking of the lands in 1942, Aboriginal people who lived at Stoney Point and at Kettle Point operated on the Anishnabek principle of consensus.

Bonnie Bressette lamented the deplorable years her people spent in residential schools and she discussed the assault on the traditions of the Anishnabek people. Many people in her community were forced to attend residential schools, where they were taught that “our ways were not the right way.” Her mother, Hilda George, was sent by the government to the residential school at Mount Elgin, as was her Aunt Melva George and her Uncle Calvin. Teachers beat her mother when she spoke Anishnabe, the only language Hilda George knew. Bonnie Bressette recounted an incident told to her by her mother:

6 Bonnie Bressette has also been a Band Councillor since 1968, with the exception of the two years in which she served as Chief of the Band 1988–1990.

My mother ... she was sewing, they had these big sewing machines, and she was sewing this thick material. And she said ... when she was pulling on that thick material — and it happened to me a couple of years ago, same thing — the needle went right through her thumb and she forgot her English and start[ed] yelling for help in the language ... [T]he headmistress that was there told her she was not going to help her till she spoke in English, and my mum said that was the hardest thing when she was hurting, to remember English to ask for help.

Hilda George snuck food to her younger brother, who she worried would become sick from malnourishment. As Bonnie Bressette said, it

[d]estroyed a whole family when you had to live under Indian Affairs, that's the way life was ... they could dictate to you on practically who you could have as a neighbour.

The strong attachment of Stoney Point people to their land was evident. Bonnie Bressette described the deep connection that her father, her uncles, and their friends had to the reserve: “[T]hey had such a feeling for that land.” As the former Chief stated, “as a Anishnabek person ... the land is life.” She also said:

We are the Anishnaa people, Anishnabek, and we were placed on this land by the Creator, and we were given this land to look after.

... the Creator put us here on Turtle Island, North America ...

... That's why Anishnaabe people, you don't see us in other countries, we didn't move to Africa, we didn't move to France, we didn't move to Germany. We were placed here in North America, Turtle Island, that's why the land means so much to us.

Bonnie Bressette maintained that the 1928 surrender was not a valid or legitimate transfer of the lands that later became Ipperwash Provincial Park. She said:

I believe it's one of the many wrongs that was done ... for our people when they knew how important land is for life. And when the newcomers came over to this land, that's why they shared the land with them ... it's our meaning of the land. The land is our life. Our life here today, and it's life for the future generations. So I believe that's why people shared the land. But that 1928 surrender, as far as I'm concerned, was just ... another rip-off that we have to address.

3.3 Children of Former Stoney Point Residents

Many of the children learned about life on the reserve by listening to the stories of Elders, their parents, and grandparents. They also visited the land to gather food, to collect medicines, to visit the burial sites of their ancestors, and for recreational purposes. Several Stoney Point descendants also read historical documents and examined Department of Indian Affairs records to learn about their roots.

Abraham (“Hamster”) and Muriel Elsie George were the parents of Roderick (“Judas”), Tina, Stewart (“Worm”), and Elwood George. Abraham George was a young married man when he, his wife, and his parents, Robert and Laura George, were forced to leave Stoney Point Reserve in 1942. He often talked to his children about life on the reserve.

As recounted by his son Roderick George, forty acres of reserve land were set aside for Abraham George and his young wife before the federal appropriation. Community members helped each other with work on their respective farms. Abraham George regularly went into the bush to cut logs and hunt game. He and his brother Dan George made maple syrup on the reserve in big kettles made of cast iron. Roderick also learned that the park was a gathering spot for Native people. Medicine and herbs from the surrounding area were brought to the park, which served as a health “clinic.”

Roderick George learned about the history of Stoney Point and the surrounding land. He said that prior to the Treaty of 1827, the land at Stoney Point, as well as land surrounding the reserve, belonged to his people. By virtue of the Treaty of 1827, First Nations people ceded some of their land in the region to the British Crown. However, he claimed that the land at the provincial park remained the property of the Aboriginal people; it is ceded land reserved for First Nations people in perpetuity. Roderick George considers the park the property of his people and contests the validity of the 1928 sale; it remains part of “Aazhoodena.”⁷ This view was shared by many other Aboriginal witnesses.

Abraham George told his children Elwood, Stewart, and Tina that their ancestors’ gravesites are in what is now Ipperwash Provincial Park. He said his younger brother Fletcher was buried in the park, as was his grandfather Albert George (“Komani”), whose grave is “amongst the big willow trees ... on the east side of the pump house.”

Abraham’s children visited the Stoney Point land. They went into the bush to pick morels, they cut wood, and they went to the beach.

7 Many of the occupiers referred to the former Stoney Point Reserve as “Aazhoodena.”

Ron (“Spike”) George’s father, Robert, was ten years old when he was moved from the Stoney Point Reserve. Ron’s grandparents⁸ had property on what became known as the grenade or sten range at the Ipperwash military base. Dudley George’s father, Reginald Ransford George,⁹ and Abraham George (“Hamster”) were brothers.

Throughout his childhood, Ron George was aware of the connection between his family, his community, and the Stoney Point lands. He often heard his father and uncle discuss these attachments, and Ron George regularly visited Stoney Point during his youth. He spent time in the bush hunting with his cousins, Wayne Bressette and Bruce George Jr., and he swam and fished for bass on the inland lakes.

His grandfather and father cared for the gravesites at Stoney Point. Ron George visited these burial grounds, which were east of the area where he picked morels. His father showed him his aunt’s grave¹⁰ and he knew his Uncle Fletcher was also buried at Stoney Point. When Ron was about sixteen or seventeen years old, his Uncle Abe told him there was a burial site in the provincial park.

Marcia Simon’s father was twenty-one years old when he was forced to leave the Stoney Point reserve in 1942. Her understanding of life on Stoney Point was acquired through stories told to her by her parents and Elders, by her visits to Stoney Point during her childhood, and by reading historical records.

Marcia Simon’s parents, Dan and Melva George, would pack their car with their twelve children and drive to the former reserve. In winter they skated at the military base on a lake along Highway 21, and in the warm weather they swam at the beach. Her father, a skilled craftsman, collected cedar to make furniture. Marcia Simon loved her trips to Stoney Point, and particularly her visits to the inland lakes, which she described as

... really beautiful ... it’s like food for your soul. You go in there and you can become restored ...

Marcia Simon and her family also visited the sacred burial grounds of relatives on the reserve.¹¹ She saw the grave markers of her father’s sister, Marlene, but did not know the precise location of her Uncle Fletcher’s burial site.

Marcia Simon was told that her grandfather Albert George (“Komani”) lived on what became Ipperwash Provincial Park. She considered both the land at

8 Robert George Sr. and Laura George

9 Reginald (Reg) Ransford George Sr.

10 Ron George thinks it was either Aunt Marlene or Nora.

11 All burial grounds in Aboriginal culture are considered sacred. Darlene Johnston, July 14, 2004, p. 205.

the military base and at the park her people’s ancestral lands. Like other Aboriginal witnesses who testified, Marcia Simon did not consider the 1928 surrender of treaty lands, which later became Ipperwash Provincial Park, a fair or valid transfer of First Nations lands. As she said at the hearings, “I always felt that the history was forgotten, they weren’t aware of the laws, the treaties that pertain to us.”

Marcia Simon described the “horrible, horrible experiences in our families of what was done to our people in the residential schools” and the “scars with many of us.” As mentioned, her mother, Melva George, was sent to Mount Elgin residential school. As an adult, Melva George would “cry, broken-heartedly over what was done to them.” Her young brother, Calvin, was knocked to the floor for speaking his Aboriginal language.

Elizabeth Stevens, a Band Councillor at Kettle and Stony Point for six years and a Band Administrator for another six years, shared a similar view of the history of her people.¹² Her father, Gordon, and grandparents Sheldon and Jeanette Cloud, were from Stoney Point. Her mother was from Kettle Point.

Ms. Stevens’ understanding of the history of Stoney Point was that the Crown made promises to her people in the Treaty of 1827. The British confirmed that ancestral lands, which encompassed the Stoney Point and Kettle Point Reserves including the land that is now Ipperwash Provincial Park, would remain in their possession in perpetuity. In the early 1900s and at the time of the 1928 surrender, the federal government’s goal was assimilation and the disappearance of First Nations people as a distinct people. Ms. Stevens stressed that although her people relied on the Indian Agents to represent them, as required under the *Indian Act*, they rarely acted in the best interests of First Nations people. Great pressure was placed on First Nations people to surrender their treaty land, which in “the majority of cases, possibly all of them, were never in favour of the people.”

Dudley George’s sister Carolyn (“Cully”) explained that traditional knowledge and information about life at Stoney Point as it existed before the 1942 appropriation were passed on by her father, Reginald George Sr., and grandfather Robert George. An excerpt of her evidence follows:

He told me a lot about when he lived there ... how they used to go cut wood, and he’d have to take the horses out to haul the wood back in.
He told me about how deep the snow used to get then, where they

¹² Elizabeth Stevens was a Councillor from 1997–2001 and was re-elected in 2004. She was Band Administrator from 1991–1997.

couldn't get out the door. And he told me, too, about going with my grandparents to the market to take things that they had made to sell ...

My grandfather used to make axe handles and other woodwork and things, and my grandmother made baskets ... lace, and quilts. I don't ever recall ... like they had gardens and stuff, but I don't think they ever took their produce there.

Carolyn George also remembers visits with her father to the sacred burial sites at Stoney Point. She recalls hunting on the land with her brother Reggie and cleaning the squirrels and rabbits that he shot.

Gerald George's mother was born at Stoney Point reserve in 1937. His grandfather Sheldon Cloud and his mother, Eloise, described their way of life, and the interaction between people at the Kettle Point and Stoney Point Reserves. Although two separate tracts of land and two separate communities, the Stoney and Kettle Point Reserves were administered by one First Nations Council. There were constant visits, much intermarriage, and consequently many people in the two reserves were related. This was confirmed by Elizabeth Stevens, Band Councillor and Administrator for many years of the Kettle and Stony Point Band. As she said at the hearings, "almost anybody in the band can trace some descendant back to Stoney Point."

As a child, Gerald George went to the beach with his father in the summer months, and every winter they entered their former reserve to cut down a Christmas tree. Mr. George fished bluegills in the lakes, and hunted deer and muskrat to the north and east of what became the mortar range.

3.4 Grandchildren of Former Stoney Point Residents

And finally, a third generation of witnesses, children, teenagers, and young adults at the time of the occupations in the 1990s, discussed the history of the land as it was conveyed to them, and the attachment they felt to the Stoney Point Reserve. It is well known that in Aboriginal culture, history and customs are transmitted orally through the generations by stories and teachings.

Children such as David George, Nicholas Cottrelle, and Wesley George were told by their grandfather Abraham George that their ancestors were buried in the park and on the military base. They learned the traditional teachings about the sacred sites and how to care for their deceased relatives. As Wesley George explained, "you're supposed to feed the spirits and give them tobacco when you talk to them or sage, cedar."

Abraham (“Hamster”) George told Nicholas Cottrelle about the gravesites in the park on the road next to the maintenance shed. He described to his grandson the many picnics in the park he had enjoyed as a child.¹³

Kevin Simon spent much of his youth with his grandfather, who helped raise him while his mother, Marcia, attended school. Kevin’s grandparents, Dan and Melva George, lived next door. Dan George recounted stories about Stoney Point, where he spent the first two decades of his life. He often drove his grandson around the perimeter of the reserve, describing the muskrats he trapped in the bush and the wood he cut to make axe handles and cedar fence posts. Dan George also spent time talking to Kevin about the park. He said this land was part of the Stoney Point Reserve, that his grandfather George Mandika had lived in the park, and that First Nations people were buried there. Kevin Simon learned that cedar in the park was used for Aboriginal cleansing ceremonies.

J.T. Cousins and Jeremiah George were two other children who learned about life in Stoney Point from Rachel Skawkence, an Elder, who was also J.T. Cousins’s great-grandmother. Rachel Skawkence took Jeremiah George to Stoney Point to teach him about the medicines on the land. She showed him ginseng root, which apparently only grows in two places on the reserve. J.T. Cousins learned about the burial grounds in the park, and he swam in the lake and played in the dunes of the army camp. Jeremiah hunted with his brothers and cousins during deer and rabbit season. Jeremiah was the youngest of ten children; his brothers are Stacey (“Burger”) George and Cecil Bernard George.

3.5 Conclusion

It was clear from the three generations of Aboriginal witnesses who testified at the Inquiry that the Stoney Point people have a deep emotional and spiritual attachment to their reserve. They believe the Creator placed them on that land with the lakes, bush, and plants necessary to provide food, shelter, and medicine. They also have a deep connection to the gravesites in which their ancestors were buried.

¹³ Wesley George was thirteen years old at the time of the 1993 occupation and Nicholas Cottrelle was fourteen. Nicholas Cottrelle is the son of Roderick (“Judas”) George. Wesley’s father is Elwood George.