

## EFFECTS OF THE APPROPRIATION

### 5.1 Introduction

The appropriation of the Stoney Point Reserve by the federal government was very difficult for the Aboriginal people. Soldiers from the Stoney Point Reserve returned from serving in the Canadian military to find their homes and community had disappeared. Elderly members of the Stoney Point Reserve found the relocation a tumultuous experience that affected them emotionally and physically. The Stoney Point people also struggled economically to sustain themselves on small parcels of land they were compelled to move to at Kettle Point. The transplantation of people from the Stoney Point Reserve to Kettle Point also created friction between the two communities. And, importantly, Stoney Point residents were devastated that the gravesites and burial grounds at their reserve were not protected as promised by the Canadian government.

This section chronicles some of the struggles encountered by the Stoney Point people after they were transplanted from their reserve to the Kettle Point Reserve.

### 5.2 Soldiers Return from War and Economic and Emotional Hardship

Upon their return from military service in World War II, Aboriginal soldiers from the Stoney Point Reserve were greatly affected by the disappearance of their homes and their community. They had witnessed severely and fatally wounded soldiers and civilians in Europe, and they had endured difficult physical conditions. They very much needed the comfort and support of their community to help them recuperate from the horrors of war. Yet they returned to find army barracks in place of their homes on the reserve, and the dislocation of their parents, siblings, friends, and Elders. Reserve members struggled to adjust, emotionally and economically, to the forced relocation.

Clifford George testified that his brother Kenneth was in “bad shape” when he returned to Canada from his overseas military service. He had been “shell-shocked” in Italy and was medicated. In uniform, Kenneth George hitchhiked from Guelph to Stoney Point and was disoriented and confused when he arrived at his reserve. Barracks had replaced the homes, farms, and gardens at the Stoney Point Reserve.

Not knowing where he should go, Kenneth walked down the road and slept the night in a ditch. A segment of Clifford George's testimony is reproduced:

So, when he got there, to where his home was, he looked around and found that it was a barracks, and he couldn't understand and he lost it again on account of, you know, "where am I now?" So, what he [did was] he walked a little ways down the road ... and he slept in the ditch for the rest of the night because he didn't know where to go, didn't know what to do ... But he recovered by morning when he looked around, and then he suddenly realized this is Stoney Point, my home, and it is now a barracks, and then all the recollection c[a]me back to him, and so he walked the rest of the ways to Kettle Point, to my grandmother's.

Before Clifford George left the reserve to fight overseas in the Canadian military, he had selected four acres of land next to the park where he intended to live upon his return from Europe. He returned to Canada a newlywed, having married a woman in London, England. Because of the federal appropriation during the war, Mr. George contacted Mr. McCracken, the Indian Agent, to ask for a piece of land at Kettle Point on which to build a home. Mr. George soon learned he had enfranchised involuntarily. He never received the four acres of land to which he was entitled on his reserve at Stoney Point, or his inheritance from his parents on Stoney Point. Mr. George said:

... What happened to these people that weren't registered as Natives, they just disappeared ... that's the term they used to use, you don't belong. I was one of them.

Bonnie Bressette and other Aboriginal witnesses also confirmed they "had family members who lost their status and they weren't even aware of it."

The Stoney Point people no longer had adequate land on which to sustain themselves. Many could not farm or grow produce. They had insufficient acreage, and the quality of the land was not always suitable for cultivating vegetables or fruit. Before the appropriation, the Stoney Point people harvested produce from their gardens in summer and fall for the winter months. But after 1942, people began to lose their self-sufficiency. As former Chief Bonnie Bressette said, without an economic base, people become dependent on the social system; people who have traditionally been economically independent are never happy in that dependency. At the hearings, she stressed that her people are entitled to an adequate land and resource base; they should be able to prosper and thrive socially,

economically, and culturally as Anishnabek people, living on the land on which they were originally placed.

The appropriation was particularly difficult on older members of the community. Clifford George believed it precipitated the deaths of some of the elderly:

Some of them old people [who had] never drank in their life started drinking. They grew big families and then ... they ended up drinking, you know, just to relieve all the problems that they were facing in the deal, and they couldn't handle [them] ... [A] lot of old people passed away on account of that. You know, their own lands, which they called their own, and then to be moved ... and not wanted where they [we]re and then the government just didn't ... realize, you know, the feelings of some of these people that [were] moved at that time ...

Access of the Stoney Point people to the military base changed. Initially military officials did not object to the collection of firewood, plants for medicines, or other resources needed by the First Nation people, but that gradually changed. The military began to build fences to limit access to the base. Permission to enter was imposed on former residents of Stoney Point who wished to collect firewood or medicinal plants. Even when permission was granted, "the army [was] right on our backs." Bonnie Bressette recounted the following incident:

... I took Bessie Bressette and Rachel ... they were Elders and I used to take them to get their medicine, and we had a hard time to get back in there. They let us go back in but they sent a jeep with two soldiers to follow us around back in there. All these women [were] doing was picking our herbal medicines.

### 5.3 Desecration of the Burial Grounds

The military promised to protect the burial sites when the Stoney Point people were evicted from their reserve in 1942. It quickly became apparent that no such measures had been taken to ensure the sacred grounds were either maintained or protected. On the contrary, from the broken tombstones to the graves full of bullet holes, it was clearly visible to the Stoney Point people that the military had desecrated their burial grounds. The disrespect and insensitivity of the military to these sacred sites deeply affected the First Nation people.

Clifford George's mother died in 1939 at the age of thirty-nine and was buried on the Stoney Point Reserve before the federal appropriation. Clifford's father, William George, wrote to his son who was fighting overseas, assuring him that

the army would maintain and protect his mother Mabel's grave. When Clifford and his two brothers, Kenneth and Clarence, returned from military service overseas, they were required to ask the army's permission to visit their mother's gravesite. As the George brothers approached the cemetery, they were devastated to see the missing and broken headstones, the rifle holes, and the trenches dug in the cemetery. Clifford and his brothers were unable to identify their mother's gravesite because of this desecration:

So we went there, and then it was absolute devastation to see the mess that the gravesite was. We couldn't even tell where my mother was buried, we just had an idea where she was buried, because at that time, nobody, not very many people, — [could afford a] headstone. But there [was] a headstone there for some, and it was all [pock]marked with rifle marks and ... shells just hung over the posts and stuff like that there, blanks of course, you know, where they're playing soldier.

Clifford George described the emotional reaction of his brothers and himself, three "hardened soldiers," when they saw the state of their mother's burial site:

Good hardened soldiers crying, crying our eyes out ... I told the people there ... that's a shame, you know, what they've done ... [W]e only had just a rough idea where my mother was buried.

Clifford George was surprised by the lack of respect and gratitude shown by the military to himself, his brothers, and other Stoney Point residents who served in the Canadian military during World War II:

It was bad for us, coming home from overseas after thinking that we helped the war out, and I always say to myself, I found all my enemies when I got home.

Shortly after the 1942 appropriation and the establishment of Camp Ipperwash, Bonnie Bressette visited the graveyards at the Stoney Point Reserve with her father. The fence around the cemetery was still standing, and she saw about six headstones at the graves. About a year later, Bonnie Bressette returned to the cemetery where only one headstone remained — it was lying on the ground, and the fence surrounding the cemetery was broken. She remembers that her father and his friend Sheldon Cloud were very distraught about the condition of the burial grounds. They pulled out weeds and tried to clean up the sacred site.

Bruce George, Bonnie Bressette's father, was from the Stoney Point Reserve. Among his last wishes before his death was to be buried at Stoney Point. The federal government refused permission, arguing that there was "unexploded ammunition" at the base, which Bonnie Bressette claimed has "always been their excuse." Bruce George died in 1968. He was buried at Kettle Point.

Both older and younger Aboriginal people were deeply upset by the military's lack of respect for their gravesites. The army's broken promises and the desecration of the sacred burial grounds saddened the First Nation people. Rose Manning, born at the Stoney Point Reserve in 1933, said:

... the Army promised us that they would look after the graveyard, and they would take good care of it, but they never did. It was all shot to pieces and there was no regard for the people that [were] buried there. I guess they just thought, well ... they're dead, and they don't know anything. They're just Natives. But if I were to go and dance on somebody else's graveyard I think they would jail me, right off — right away, but, you know, it's a sad situation.

Stewart George, born in 1957, remembers visiting the graveyards in his early teens. They were overgrown and the tombstones had been penetrated by bullets. And then there were younger Stoney Point descendants, people such as David George, born in 1970, who were also deeply affected by the desecration of the cemetery. He learned from his grandfather Abraham George that soldiers at Camp Ipperwash used the headstones for target practice. His grandfather's distress about the poor state of the cemetery was evident to David, who himself saw the bullet holes and destroyed tombstones:

I [saw] bullet marks. I [saw] headstones that have been destroyed and headstones that, you know, there's nothing left but a nub in the ground. Pieces broken off of the corners on other ones and, yeah, it's like that. Some — a lot of graves didn't even have headstones. It's kind of hard to find them because there's nothing there.

#### **5.4 Friction Between Stoney Point and Kettle Point**

A significant and fairly predictable problem created by the 1942 appropriation was friction between Aboriginal people from Stoney Point and Kettle Point. Despite the fact that Aboriginal people at both reserves had voted against the surrender, Stoney Point residents were forced to relocate to the Kettle Point Reserve. As

previously mentioned, the size of the land they moved to was much smaller and lacked the resources necessary for them to raise their families. They were also viewed as outsiders by the Kettle Point residents. This was perceived by adults as well as children, such as Gerald George's mother and aunt who were ostracized by Kettle Point children at school.

On the other hand, residents of Kettle Point were unhappy that their land was crowded with people from a neighbouring reserve. They were placed in a situation where they were forced to share their resources and their land. As Chief Tom Bressette said at the hearings:

It would be like me moving onto your property, and would you get upset with me? ... I think that's probably the kind of friction that [was] generated ... by the forced appropriation that was imposed, because there was a vote and everybody voted unanimously, and Kettle and Stony Point rejected that surrender. I mean, that's what the government wanted, and it was totally rejected by everyone ...

Clifford George also described the difficult situation imposed by the federal government on the two Aboriginal communities, many of whom were related:

The people were told that you must accommodate these Stoney Point people, which, by the way, they didn't want us over there and we didn't want to go there. So it was an awful lot of controvers[y] and ... like I say, they didn't want us there and we didn't want to go there. So it was very difficult. My father used to write to me about that. So it was difficult, you know, and yet we're all interrelated and intermarried but there was still — still a difference there. And because the government [did] that to us ...

Former Chief Bonnie Bressette and Band Councillor and Administrator Elizabeth Stevens echoed similar sentiments. People at Stoney Point were uprooted from lands they had lived on for generations and placed in an area that they had no desire to go.

Tension between these two groups continued and was further exacerbated when Stoney Point people occupied the military camp in July 1995, and when they occupied Ipperwash Provincial Park in September 1995. This is discussed in detail in the following chapters of the report. And as Bonnie Bressette, Elizabeth Stevens and other Aboriginal witnesses sadly stated, friction and adjustment problems continue to exist in these Aboriginal communities, sixty-four years after the appropriation by the federal government.