

## 1913-1916 McKenna McBride Commission

**Monarch:** King George V

**Prime Minister:** Robert Borden

**Premier:** Richard McBride; William Bowser from December 1915

**Federal Ministry:** Department of the Interior

### ***In the News***

- 1913 April British suffragette Emily Pankhurst sentenced to 3 years in jail.
- 1913 May Nisga'a Land Committee send a petition to the British Privy Council to settle land issues.
- 1913 October: Duncan Campbell Scott promoted to Assistant Superintendent of Indian Affairs, which he held until 1932.
- 1914 February Railway construction causes a slide at Hell's Gate, bringing about the collapse of the salmon fishery and destruction of interior First Nations' major food supply.
- 1914 June Interior Tribes make statement addressed to PM Robert Borden.
- 1914-1918 World War One.
- 1916 Allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia formed to pursue land and title rights.
- 1916 May 13 First official observance of American Indian Day in New York, USA.

### **Backgrounder**

With encroachment on their traditional territories, First Nations of British Columbia continued to fight for a fair settlement of their land and title rights.

To try to resolve the "Indian Question" once and for all, a joint federal and provincial commission was struck, The Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia. It is usually referred to as the McKenna-McBride Commission, after the two men who signed the agreement creating it in 1912: federal commissioner J. McKenna and BC Premier Richard McBride.

The primary goal of the commission was "to adjust the acreage of Indian reserves in British Columbia." The governments believed that if additional reserves were set aside for them, First Nations bands would be satisfied.

The six man commission travelled throughout the province, visiting nearly every band, asking them what little pieces of their traditional territories they would like included as reserves. Some communities refused to meet with the Commissioners. Most tried to

discuss the basic question of Land and Title rights, which the commissioners refused to discuss as it was not in their mandate.

The testimony given at each meeting was written down and is still available to researchers today. While most of the discussion is about land use, the speakers bring up a variety of other topics of concern, including school and education.

The Commission held hearings throughout the province from 1913 to 1916, when it submitted its report. As well as adding reserves to most bands, it also removed land from previous reserves. These were usually in prime locations near urban settlements, and are known as "cut-off lands." The implementation of the report did not begin until 1923.

The documents included here are a small sample of the testimony given at the hearings, by both First Nations and non-First Nations. As you read them, remember that many of the First Nations leaders' testimony was being translated into English.

**1** ROYAL COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS FOR THE  
PROVINCE OF B.C.

Meeting with Scowitz Tribe of Indians at New Westminster  
Saturday, September 4th, 1913.

Chief Joe Hall addresses the Commission as follows:

(Here reads an address)

CHAIRMAN: In regard to this question of aboriginal rights title. The Indians have an aboriginal title having lived here before the white man came and while the white man has come and has of course established a good many industries which have given assistance to a great many of the Indians in being employed in these different industries. I may tell you that this question of aboriginal title has been presented to the Dominion Government and they have at least agreed that that question of aboriginal title should be submitted to the Exchequer Court - that is a court established by the Dominion Government in which the Indians will be allowed to come before the court and submit their claims just as you have done here. [...] And then, if the Exchequer Court should decide against the Indians claim, they will have the right to appeal to the Privy Council in London. I don't think you could get anything fairer than that. [...] We have nothing to do with that aboriginal claim and I am simply pointing out to you how the Dominion Government intends settling this matter. [...]

Now, about your school, at what school do you send your children?

A. We used to send them to St. Mary's Mission school.

Q. Why don't you send them there now.

A. We have had complaints about that school and a great many other children come out sickly.

Q. What is the matter with them?

A. Sometimes consumption and we get afraid to send any more there.

Q. And you are under the impression that they get consumption from that building?

A. Yes, because the Mission school there is no partitions to the rooms and all the children sleep in one room.

Q. And you think it comes from one to the other?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you send your children to any other school?

A. No.

Q. Where do you send them now?

A. We don't send them anywhere. Two of my children are down at the Sechelt Boarding school.

Q. Are they in good health there?

A. Yes, and it is a very good school.

Q. Now, the Mission School, you are pleased with the school except that you think the building is unsanitary?

A. Yes, and another thing we had to furnish clothes at the Mission school.

Q. Don't you have to furnish clothes at the Sechelt school?

A. Yes, but at the Coqualeetza school they don't have to furnish clothes for the children.

Q. Do they clothe the children there?

A. Yes.

Q. And that is an inducement to send them to that school because the children get their clothes?

A. Yes.

Q. And you think the education is just as good there as it is at the Mission?

A. Yes.

Q. So there are only two at school out of the ten children?

A. You are right.

Q. Would you like them to go to school?

A. Yes, I would like to have them go to school.

Q. What would you propose as to the best way to make these children go to school?

A. If there was room enough at Sechelt it would be alright - the Mission school is generally crowded and there is hardly any room in it.

Q. Supposing the Mission school were enlarged?

A. If it were enlarged it would be alright.

Q. Is there not a public school at Harrison Mills?

A. Yes.

Q. Could you send your children there?

A. No, because the white people don't allow Indian children to go there. We sent two there at one time and the Council they made a kick and we had to take them away.

Q. Would you be willing to pay to be allowed to send your children to the school at Harrison Mills?

A. I don't know whether I would if I could get any where else.

Q. Is there room at the Mission school?

A. No, there are only 40, in that school and I applied twice to have children to put in but I was informed there is no room.

Q. Supposing it were enlarged would you put your children in there?

A. Yes.

COMMISSIONER CARMICHAEL: Do you seriously consider, apart from the growing of the school, that the conditions at the Mission school are so injurious that you are afraid of sending your children there for fear of getting consumption?

A. I think so - the reason why I say it is because I was in that school myself when I was a boy and with other boys and they took consumption and died, and that is why I know the school is not safe. [...] The other school they have doctors to come and examine the children during all the time I was at Mission I only saw a doctor once.

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MEETING WITH THE SPULMACHEEN or ENDERBY BAND OF INDIANS ON THEIR RESERVE AT ENDERBY,  
B. C. October 2nd, 1913.

INDIAN AGENT J. ROBERT BROWN IS HEREUPON SWORN TO GIVE EVIDENCE. [p10]  
[p. 13]

DR. MCKENNA:- How many would there be of school age?

A. I can't tell you.

Q. Have they a day school on this reserve?

A. No sir.

Q. Where do the children go to school?

A. They don't go to school.

Q. Do none of the children go to school?

A. No sir.

Q. Is there no boarding school they could go to?

A. There is a boarding school at Kamloops, and I believe the Chief had a child who went there.

Q. Are the Indians anxious to have a school?

A. The late Inspector and myself were desirous of having a school and we wrote for seats, but the Indians refused to have anything to do with it.

Q. Why?

A. I can't tell you - They simply said they did not want to have a school.

ROYAL COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS FOR THE PROVINCE OF B. C.

BOARD ROOM, VICTORIA, B. C.

November 11, 1913.

T.J. Cumiskey, Inspector Of Indian Affairs, For The Okanagan And Kamloops Districts

In the Okanagan Agency there are 150 children within the School age. No educational facilities of any kind are provided for the children of the Okanagan Band of Indians. Attempts were made in 1909 to open a day school at head of Okanagan Lake, and in 1910 at Penticton and Enderby. This scheme was carried so far at Enderby that desks and seats were purchased by the Department and placed in the Old church building; but owing to the apathy and opposition of the Indians, no further progress was attempted.

I absolutely condemn day schools for the children of this land at their present state of civilization for many reasons which I can advance. The only true solution of the question, I consider, would be the establishing of an Industrial School, capable of accommodating 150 children under Government control at Whiteman's Creek, or on the West side of Okanagan Lake. Two or three hundred acres of land should be set apart from the reserve for this purpose.

[pp. 234-235]

## ROYAL COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS FOR THE PROVINCE OF B. C.

Meeting with the Chilcotin, or Too-sey Band or Tribe of Indians, on the Too-sey Reserve, on Tuesday, 21st July, 1914:

George Meyers sworn in as translator

Chief TOOSEY gives evidence

Q. Do the children here go to school?

A. There should have been a school around on some of these Reserves. If there was a school here, I would put all the boys in school. That Mission school is pretty sharp for the Indians. The boys over at the Mission work, and they get tired, and then they hike out home by themselves, and I don't like putting the children there.

Q. You mean, the children that go there are worked too hard?

A. Yes. The children say they are worked too hard when they go to that school.

Q. And your opinion is that the boys are worked too hard?

A. If you fellows put up a school at the Anaham, we would send all the children to school there.

Q. Do you mean a boarding school?

A. We don't want them to board there at all.

Q. Is it a day school you want there?

A. Whatever you wish. If you want to board them, it is all right. If you don't want to board them, we will do it ourselves, because we are so anxious to have the children taught.

Q. But the school where they would be boarded and kept and not overworked, would be the school you would prefer?

A. I would like to see the boys out to school, and put them right at it where they would be educated.

Q. And not devoting their time to toil. You would not object to the boys doing such work as would be necessary to train them?

A. At the school they can teach them any work they like, such as blacksmithing, farming, or cattlemen, or anything like that.

Q. You don't object to their being taught anything that will be for their good?

A. No.

Q. But you object to having them do hard labor?

A. Yes.

[Williams Lake Agency testimony, pp 73-74]

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Meeting with the Pemberton Band of Indians at Pemberton Meadows, on Friday, August 20th, 1915. WILLIAM BARCAL is sworn as Interpreter.

CHIEF JAMES STACKER addresses the Commission as follows:

I am glad to see you before us and I wish you to understand the feelings of all my people of this reserve. Ever since we have been here we have been longing to see you. There is just part of my people here – just half of them – the rest are all away and those people that are not here they have just the same feelings that we have here ourselves. Again we would like to tell you that we are pleased to see this body of men that has come here to straighten up our rights – that they have come here to straighten and tell us all about the past, and we will tell them what we think is right. Again I will let you know that we all feel glad that we have seen you.

There is one thing I wish you to understand and I am going to tell you that thing. It will be just a short story that hurts our feelings that we would like to have settled as soon as possible – yes, we are the inhabitants of this here province of British Columbia. Everything now is in the office at Ottawa that is everything we used to live on, and again I would call your attention to this matter. I suppose, gentlemen, you have seen it written by some of our men, but at the same time I suppose you have not heard it from any of us poor Indians, yes, we are really sorry and it hurts our feelings about our land and about our title to our land. Not only our title but our fishing, hunting and everything that we used to live on in the old days – the Government has taken it all and left us nothing. All my people are poor and living thin. Everything that we should live on now the Government has taken hold of it even the timber. [...]

There is another thing which I wish you to know that we did not know a long time ago. Now as soon as the first white man arrived in this country we began to get wise that we needed education – that education was as necessary to the Indian as to the white man that they might become wise so that all the Indians here think that that is necessary and they all agree to it. In this reserve here there are 92 children who are of school age so we wish you to understand the feelings of those who do not attend any school. Now, there are Indians who wish to put their children to school but being short cannot afford to supply them with clothing when they are in school. So, gentlemen, all these people here wish to have a school – an industrial school – where the Government will supply them with clothing, books, and everything necessary for them when they are in that school. That is all the Indians wish. They feel happy when their children are educated but on account of being short and not being able to supply them with clothing they are not able to send them to school or any where else. We want our children when go to school to learn a trade, such as blacksmithing, carpentering and all kinds of trades just like the white men do. We have been sending our children to Mission Junction a long time, and we have noticed that they never went very far ahead. So I am telling you we want an Industrial school here.

New Westminster Agency, p. 354, 357

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ROYAL COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS FOR THE PROVINCE OF B.C.

Meeting with the Cowtain Band Of Indians at Cheakamus on Tuesday, August 17th, 1916.

CHIEF ANDREW OF CHEAKAMUS ADDRESSES THE COMMISSION AS FOLLOWS

I will just say a few words to the Royal Commissioners. I am a very poor Indian in this part of the country. That is why today I am glad to see the Royal Commissioners here because I know they are going to help the poor Indians and I am glad the Royal Commissioners will help me with my troubles.

Q: Which do you think would be better, a day school or a boarding school?

A: I wish to see a good, nice Industrial school here, in which the children would obey and the Government would buy their clothing and teach them, but as it is now, when my children go only to school I have to buy clothes and food for them, and it takes nearly all my money. The Government should buy the clothes for them.

Q: Where do you think the Government is going to get all the money to do all that with?

A: I think if the Government got hold of all our land, they ought to have enough money to look after the Indians.

Royal Commission on Indian Affairs 1916, p 333

ROYAL COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS FOR THE PROVINCE OF B. C.  
 Meeting with the Municipality of Sumas, also the Farmers' Institute  
 and Women's Institute, at Huntingdon, B. C. on, Monday,  
 January 11, 1915.

MRS. FADDEN representing the Womens' Institute reads the following petition:

To the Commission on Indian Affairs , Dear Sirs:

On behalf of the Upper Sumas Womens' Institute may I state that we are greatly interested in the offers to obtain the quarter section of Indian reserve land near Whatcom Road for a public park. Our society is yet in its infancy, but we have made it a point to celebrate Empire Day each year with a public picnic, the school children taking a prominent part in the programme.

In looking for a central location for this picnic, our thoughts are directed towards this piece of land apparently abandoned by the Indians. It is in a central and convenient location bordered by improved farms on all sides, and it seems strange that a tract of land like this, which seems to be of no use to the parties claiming it, could not be converted to the public good.

We think it would induce a greater and not necessary spirit of patriotism and pride in our public possessions, especially among our young people of our community - our coming citizens - if we had this public park where recreation grounds, walks and drives, suitable buildings, etc. could be placed. Such things go far towards the successful upbuilding of a prosperous and contented community, and we tried to encourage this wholesome spirit. Our motto is "For home and country." We feel like we would be taking nothing from the Indians that they really desire or need. They have more land at the common rancherie than they can now farm.

It does not appear that their race will multiply to any great extent where this land would be necessary to them, and I am sure it is much better to have them all congregated in the one location at the mountain-side rancherie than to have these small holdings of land scattered here and there among the farms of the white settlers. They rarely improve their farms to any extent - their habits of living are quite different, and their success as neighbours to us, I am doubtful of. [...]

How can we keep our orchards free from pests, our lands free from noxious weeds, the mosquitoes that harbour in the underbrush and numerous other things that arise when this place is centred amongst the wild and uncontrolled. It is unfair to us as upbuilders of and members in this country, and I can assure you that our hardships as early settlers have been many.

We cannot find fault with the Indian. He is as he is allowed to be, and considers this land as his heritage, but time and circumstances work vast changes, and it is to the Governments of our country to whom we must look to bring about those changes in an amicable manner as they are able to do.

Thank you for this kind hearing, and with hopeful feelings

I have the honour to remain,

Yours sincerely,

(signed) F. Bertha Fadden,

Sec - Treas. Upper Sumas Women's Institute.

(pages 136-138)