COLD WAR COLONIALISM: THE SERPENT RIVER FIRST NATION AND URANIUM MINING, 1953–1988

by

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ABSTRACT

The area surrounding the Serpent River watershed in Ontario has long been the traditional territory of the people of the Serpent River First Nation. As a result of the influx of uranium companies and settlers in the 1950s, the powerful narratives of mining and 'progress' silenced competing worldviews. In the context of a colonial relationship in transition in the Cold War period, the decision-making processes surrounding resource development excluded the Serpent River *Anishinaabek*. As effluent from mining tailings polluted the Serpent River threatened key community resources, so too did a sulphuric acid plant that was established on the reserve. As a result of both internal and external factors, the community began to successfully assert its traditional role as stewards after decades of inaction on the part of the federal and provincial government. This dissertation relies on both oral and archival sources, as well as media coverage to argue that colonialism in the Cold War period was in a time of transition, but its effects were no less pervasive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout the course of this research journey, I have been helped by many people along the way. As a young child I first heard about this story from my Nookomis, Gertrude Lewis, who also agreed to be interviewed for this study. It is to her that I owe a great debt of gratitude for passing on our community and family history and inspiring me to study it further at the graduate level, and so I have dedicated this work to her and to my grandfather, Lawrence Lewis. Susan Neylan at Wilfrid Laurier University also encouraged me to pursue an academic career and has been a very thorough and patient advisor. She and my committee members, Adam Crerar and Whitney Lackenbauer, offered invaluable critiques and have helped to improve this dissertation immensely. This project was made possible by a SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship.

Gloria MacKenzie at Library and Archives Canada was most helpful in locating documents, as well as navigating the Access to Information process that can be daunting to a new scholar. Merci to Marthe Brown and Janie Theoret at the Laurentian University Archives for their research assistance. Chief Day and the council of the Serpent River First Nation were encouraging and facilitated the band council resolution that allowed me to access many closed records at LAC and the Archives of Ontario, and also demonstrated community support for my project. Thanks also to Ray Ethelston of *The Standard.* John, Tam, and Imogen Maker, Chantal Bourret and Robert Hughes, as well as Dave and Erin Ethelston offered their

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Chi miigwetch to the elders of the Serpent River First Nation who shared their knowledge with me: Valerie Commanda, Arnelda Jacobs, Betty Jacobs, Terry Jacobs, and Peter Johnston. Janice Gamble and my auntie, Diane S. Meawasige, were helpful in pointing me toward resources available at the Serpent River First Nation Library.

My parents, Peter and Andrea Leddy, have provided unconditional love, support and encouragement throughout my twenty-five years of education. Miigwetch for the use of the Nitro! Thanks to my sister Patricia, her partner Stan, and my nephew Braeden for the visits, laughs, and much-needed Facebook distractions. Last but not least, miigwetch to my partner, Mark Osborne Humphries. Your maps, words of encouragement (even when it was dangerous to mention the diss-word) and willingness to traipse around tailings ponds with me are much appreciated. I promised it would be an adventure!

All my relations.

PREFACE

Elliot Lake Mining Camp – Evidence of radioactive ore prompted Aimé Breton and Karl Gunterman to stake claims south of here near Lauzon Lake in Long Township in 1948. Geologist Franc R. Joubin became interested and persuaded mining financier Joseph H. Hirshhorn to fund drilling operations. In 1953 they located the ore body that became the Pronto Uranium Mine. The discovery of further uranium deposits near Quirke and Elliot lakes led to a mining boom. The town of Elliot Lake flourished until the US stopped buying Canadian uranium in 1959. By the late 1960s, non-military uses for uranium were being developed, and mining activity revived. By 1970, the Elliot Lake camp had produced uranium oxide worth 1.3 billion.[1]

– Ontario Heritage plaque at Elliot Lake

I'm concerned about the fact that the mines have closed. The owners are moving away and leaving the mess that we have to live with. My Grandpa is a trapper. He tells me stories about the way the land was a long time ago. He

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[1] Ontario Heritage plaque at Elliot Lake, picture taken by author, Summer 2009. See Photos 6 and 7.

trapped in the Elliot Lake area. He tells us about how things have changed in the land and the animals and doesn't trust those things anymore. That makes me worried about the water, animals, and the land. This is very important to me and my community. Please make sure they clean it up right. Meegwetch.[2]

– Angela Lewis, 1993

The history of Elliot Lake and Serpent River First Nation (SRFN) is inextricably linked through the history of uranium. The above quotations point to very different understandings of that history. While the plaque commemorates man's victory over nature in the name of economic development, the speech of a young girl to a room full of people emphasizes the true cost of uranium operations. One narrative privileges the story a municipality's determination to overcome a boom-bust cycle, and the other demonstrates the social, cultural, and environmental consequences the development of settler society[3] has had on the First Nations in the area.[4]

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[2] Laurentian University Archives [LUL], USWA Local 5417, PO 24, Box 61, M43, 1 File 22 "Transcription of Scoping Session, Federal Environmental Assessment Review Panel on the Decommissioning of Uranium Mine Tailings Management Areas in Elliot Lake, Ontario," Serpent River First Nation,1993. This quotation is from Angela Lewis' presentation to the Decommissioning review panel.

[3] I purposely use the term "settler" rather than alternatives such as "newcomer" or "non-Indigenous" in this context. It is meant to underline the fact that the invasion

Elliot Lake as a settler town did not exist until the Cold War. Uranium, a substance in high-demand for the American nuclear weapons program, was found in the area, a staking frenzy ensued in 1953, and by the end of the decade, a modern town had been established at the site of an Anishinaabe village. Twelve mines operated in the area in its heyday, but it went the way of many single-industry towns as the boom period ended when Americans did not renew their contract. By the mid-1970s, a new purpose was found for Elliot Lake uranium and Ontario Hydro was interested in it for energy production.[5]

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of First Nations territory is decidedly not a phenomenon that is relegated to the past, but rather one that persistently challenges communication and co-operation between nations. See, for example, Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada,* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 4. Elizabeth Furniss also interrogates settler myths in *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999). An international comparative approach is taken in Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, eds., *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1995).

[5] A succinct overview of these developments can be found in Shawn Heard, "The City of Elliot Lake to 1991: Before the Roof Fell In," in *Boom Town Blues: Collapse and*

This study seeks to shed light on the complex relationship between settlers and the Serpent River First Nation that developed as a result of the uranium industry at Elliot Lake. Environmental damage related to uranium mining and its secondary industries had a profound impact on the First Nation community, which had rapid social and economic changes thrust upon them. This dissertation looks at the development of the government-planned settler community, the environmental impacts of uranium mining on the Serpent River, and as a result, the First Nation for which it is named. The politicization of community leadership will also be examined, as it would become apparent that this colonial relationship was in need of addressing.

As an *Anishinabe kwe* and new scholar, I strive to meet the challenges inherent in blending accepted non-Aboriginal academic standards and practices with traditional ways of learning through storytelling.[6] My interest in Aboriginal history stems from my own personal history. I am a member of the Serpent River

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Revival in a Single-Industry Community, eds. Anne-Marie Mawhiney and Jane Pitblado (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999).

[6] Kathleen Absolon has written of how Indigenous scholars use Indigenous research methodologies in their academic work, and how those methodologies are intimately tied to a person's experience and knowledge. See "*Kaandosswin*, This is How We Come to Know! Indigenous Graduate Research in the Academy: Worldviews and Methodologies," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2008.

First Nation (also known as Cutler or Genabaajing), where many of my family members continue to live. I was raised in nearby Elliot Lake, Ontario. My mother is Andrea Leddy (née Lewis), an *Anishinabe kwe* from Cutler, and my father is Peter Leddy, a miner, who is from Elliot Lake and of Irish-Canadian descent. I am a part of both these communities that have been joined by a history of environmental contamination of land and rivers as a result of Cold War uranium mining.[7]

Some of my earliest memories are about my Grandma taking me places and introducing me to cousins. As it turns out, I have a lot of them. Most people I met on a given Saturday afternoon were my cousins. It quickly became apparent, as I asked my Grandmother who someone was (politely, after we were no longer in earshot) she would simply reply, "She's you're cousin." It did not matter how we were related –although those lessons in genealogy and community history would follow as I got older—it mattered that I knew that person was family. I soon learned that the number of generations traced to a common ancestor meant very little in terms of the social relationships and expectations that formed the foundation of kinship and community.

With this sense of family history came one of the community, as in Anishinaabe culture, the two are inextricable. At the same time I was gaining an understanding of how we were related as community members, I grew up hearing the stories of the acid plant and the river pollution. Although there can be challenges to reconciling the role of "academic" historian with community

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[7] See Figure 1.

expectations, it is no exaggeration to say that I would not be writing this dissertation or pursuing a career in History if it were not for the solid foundation I was given while we were eating, walking, or just visiting at the kitchen table.

My own experience of hybridity from being both part of a settler and Anishinaabe family has led me to embrace community-based approaches in my own work, as they hold a great deal of promise for new avenues of historical research into environmental topics and themes. By practicing community-based history, I have been able to reflect on historical methodologies, as well as on my own growth as a scholar and as a community member. Furthermore, the sharing of oral traditions that convey Traditional Ecological Knowledge [TEK] and environmental history not only provide promising avenues for research, but they often help revitalize community relations and traditions.

SRFN's history celebrates a long relationship with territory along the North Shore of Lake Huron. It is far older than settler narratives suggest, and it began long before the arrival of people searching for uranium to fuel nuclear weapons and generate electricity. Health, wellness, history and community are inextricable in a culture that has connectivity at its core. Balance and respect for Creation are paramount, and this was reflected in the ways our ancestors interacted with the environment and in relations with settlers who came first for furs, then for trees, and then for finally and most destructively, uranium.

The Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 is remembered quite differently than what contemporary settler relations convey. Chief Windategonini was one of the

chiefs agreeing to the treaty on 9 September 1850, which, from the colonizers' perspective laid out the following terms:

> That for, and in consideration of the sum of two thousand pounds of good and lawful money of Upper Canada, to them in hand paid, and for the further perpetual annuity of six hundred pounds of like money, the same to be paid and delivered to the said Chiefs and their Tribes at a convenient season of each year, of which due notice will be given, at such places as may be appointed for that purpose, they the said Chiefs and Principal men, on behalf of their respective Tribes or Bands, do hereby fully, freely, and voluntarily *surrender, cede, grant,* and convey unto Her Majesty, her heirs and successors *for ever*, all their right, title, and interest to, and in the whole of, the territory above described, save and except the reservations set forth in the schedule hereunto annexed; which reservations shall be held and occupied by the said Chiefs and their Tribes in common, for their own use and benefit.[8]

The treaty then goes on to describe the piece of land reserved for us, the seventh group on the list. "Windawtegawinini and his Band, the Peninsula east of Serpent

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[8] Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, "Copy of the Robinson Treaty Made in the Year 1850 with the Ojibewa Indians of Lake Huron Conveying Certain Lands to the Crown" http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/al/hts/tgu/pubs/trob/rbt/rbt-eng.asp (accessed 1 March 2011). Author's emphasis.

River, and formed by it, now occupied by them."[9] The description in the treaty is of a small piece of land, constrained by water. This water would, through another stage of the colonial relationship in the 1950s, be threatened along with the Serpent said to live in it.

We refer to the treaty as the "sacred piece of paper."[10] We see the agreement as more than simply a written contract: it is a comprehensive living agreement based on a nation-to-nation relationship to share and align ourselves together. The fact that the paper is sacred has linguistic and cultural importance, as the primary distinction in Anishinaabemowin is whether or not something is animate.[11] In this case, *the paper and the agreement it represents*, are alive. There were verbal aspects to the treaty, in addition to the written part, but the latter is privileged by the

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[9] Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, "Copy of the Robinson Treaty Made in the Year 1850 with the Ojibewa Indians of Lake Huron Conveying Certain Lands to the Crown" http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/al/hts/tgu/pubs/trob/rbt/rbt-eng.asp (accessed 1 March 2011).

[10] Thanks to speakers and the program at the Engaging Indigenous Communities: Resources, Rebellions, Resurgence Conference, 9 August 2010.

[11] Patricia Ningewance, *Talking Gookum's Language: Learning Ojibwe* (Lac Seul, ON: Mazinaate Press, 2004).

western viewpoint of the federal government.[12] Nevertheless, the notion that this was and still is a sacred agreement is very much alive in our communities. From our point of view, the treaty did not represent a one-time transaction whereby land was surrendered permanently. Elders have told us there is no word for surrender in Anishinaabemowin,[13] underlining our worldview that land and resources cannot be bought or sold. Our responsibility is to act as stewards, not as owners. Our relationship with the land needs to be protected for seven generations in the future, a teaching that ensures that any decision-making process today needs to look at

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[12] There are some debates as to the use of the word "sign" when it comes to treaties. In the case of the Robinson Treaties, Blaine Belleau asked why Shingwaukonse, for example, did not sign with his dodem, but instead had an "x" beside his name. Engaging Indigenous Communities: Resources, Rebellions, Resurgence Conference, 9 August 2010. Janet E. Chute indicates that Shingwaukonse's dodem was a plover, but had relations to the Crane clan. *The Legacy of Shingwaukonse: A Century of Native Leadership* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 10. It is odd that every signatory marked an "x" beside their name, rather than their dodem.

[13] Anishinaabemowin refers to the Ojibway language. The absence of a translation for surrender is a well-known fact, but I want to thank Blaine Belleau of Garden River First Nation for articulating this so eloquently and passionately at Engaging Indigenous Communities: Resources, Rebellions, Resurgence Conference, 9 August 2010.

possible impacts seven generations in the future. Although members of our community had been living around the peninsula for some parts of the year long before the treaty was agreed to, the concept of a reserve—a small piece of land to which present and future generations were bound—would have been foreign and unacceptable.

The difference in worldview between settlers and First Nations would lead to environmental damage that would leave a legacy of pain and destruction. Rooster rock, where ancestors drew pictographs, is one of our sacred areas, and it is now accessible by a road to a tailings site.[14] Memories of a village camp near the present-day hospital at Elliot Lake are still alive and shared in the community.[15] The Serpent, a being that has been said to live in the river after which it was named, is a figure of importance in the story I am about to tell. Our tradition about the Serpent is that he is a protector, that the rivers and lakes are his home.[16] When the Serpent's home is damaged, however, this can lead to destruction.

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[14] See Map 1.

[15] Interview with Arnelda Jacobs 7 July 2009.

[16] In accordance with Anishinaabe ethics, I am only sharing general stories that have been shared with me during interviews for this project. That said, there is also non-Indigenous knowledge about the Serpent. Tom Haddow, "Serpent River Home of Giant Reptile: Ojibway," *The Standard* (Elliot Lake), 29 March 1983. Theresa S. Smith, *The Island of the Anishnaabeg: Thunderers and Water Monsters in the Traditional Ojibwe Life-World* (Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1995), 112.

Uranium mining north of the river has caused profound changes in the ways that people interact with the land and each other. The landscape has changed dramatically, along with the people now living in the area with whom we share our traditional territory, but this does not mean that we have forgotten how we used to live. As I discuss throughout this dissertation, uranium mining, which began in the 1950s, brought with it dangerous environmental practices that had a deleterious impact on the river system. Peoples' access to traditional pursuits was compromised by the very connectivity of resources that we value as Anishinaabe people. These mining operations also necessitated secondary industries, such as sulphuric acid manufacturing, which would in turn lead to environmental destruction and health consequences for the community. The teaching of the Serpent is significant in that disturbing his home and the balance of our homeland has led to a profound and irreversible sense of loss. The Serpent is still said to exist, and some continue to pay him tobacco in the usual way, but his home—and our home—will never be the same again.

In the chapters that follow, I will examine the Serpent River First Nation's experience with mining and industrialization and have interviewed community members (most of them elders) to better understand our past and present struggles. Central to these discussions are questions surrounding environmental and political power relationships which have affected my reserve throughout the past half-

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Andrea Gutsche, Barbara Chisholm and Russell Floren, *The North Channel and St. Mary's River: A Guide to the History* (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2008), 119-122.

century. Questions about the environmental and health consequences of the uranium industry, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations, the importance of traditional uses of land and what happens when they are compromised by irresponsible environmental business practices have all been central to my discussions with members of the Serpent River First Nation.

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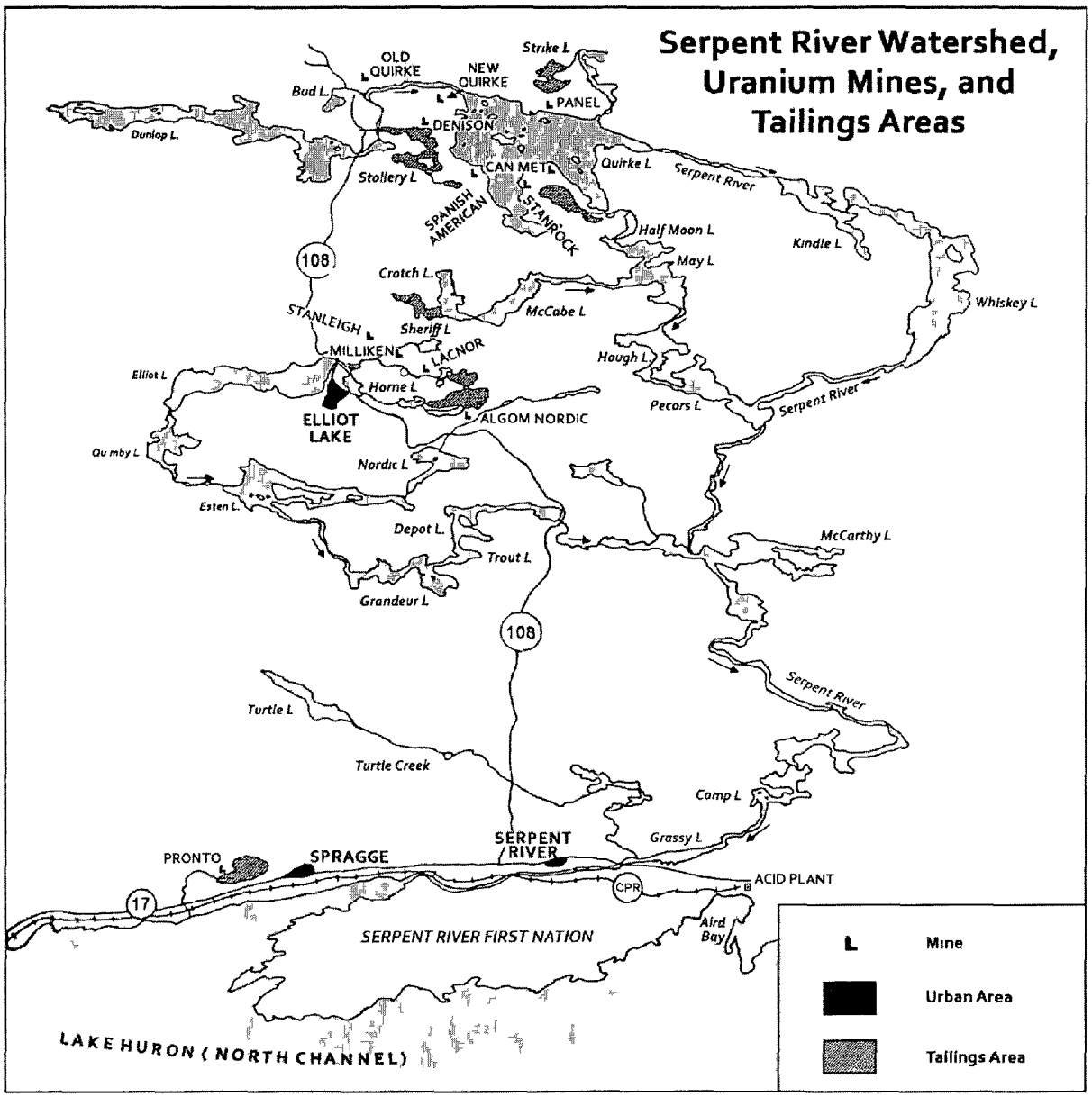

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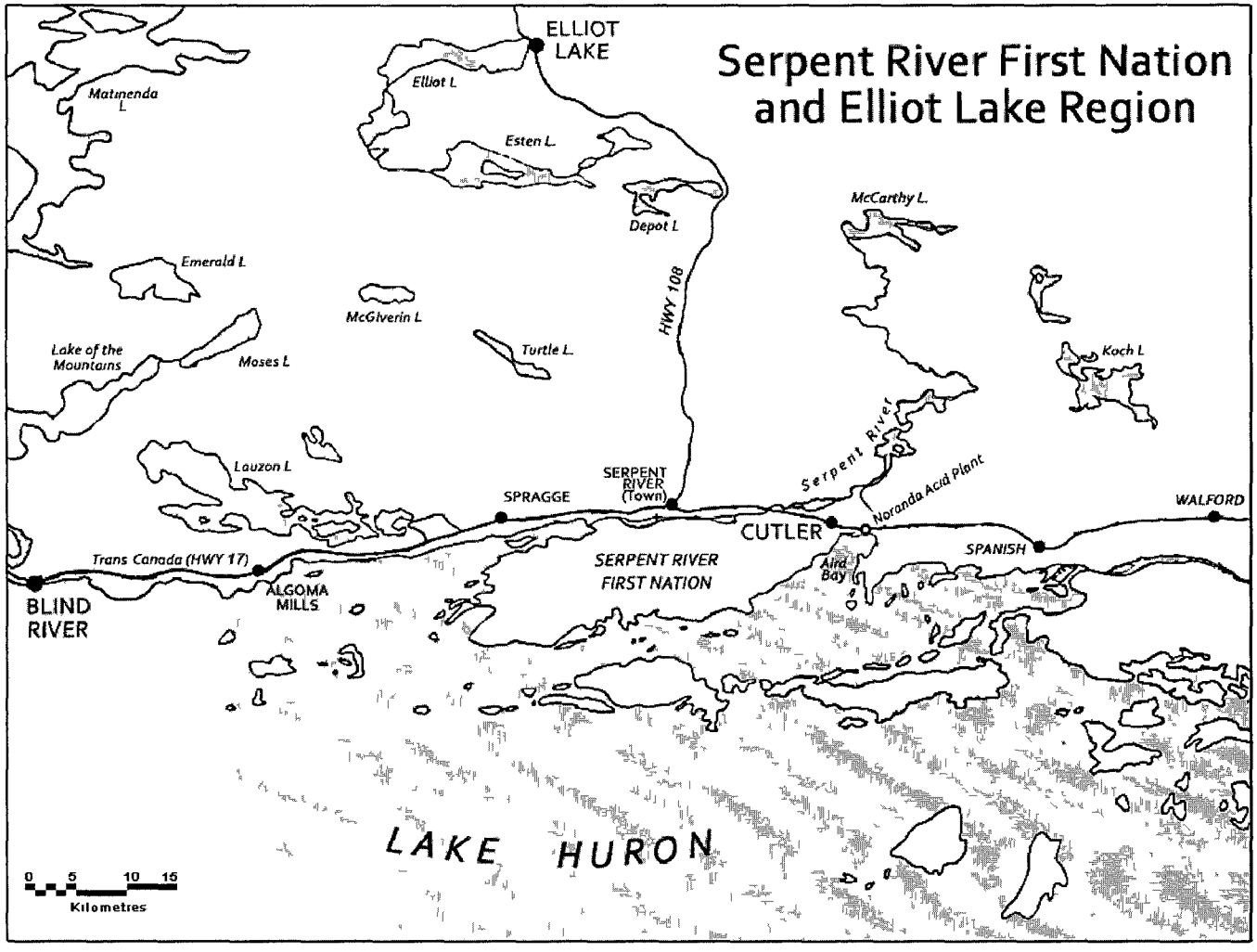

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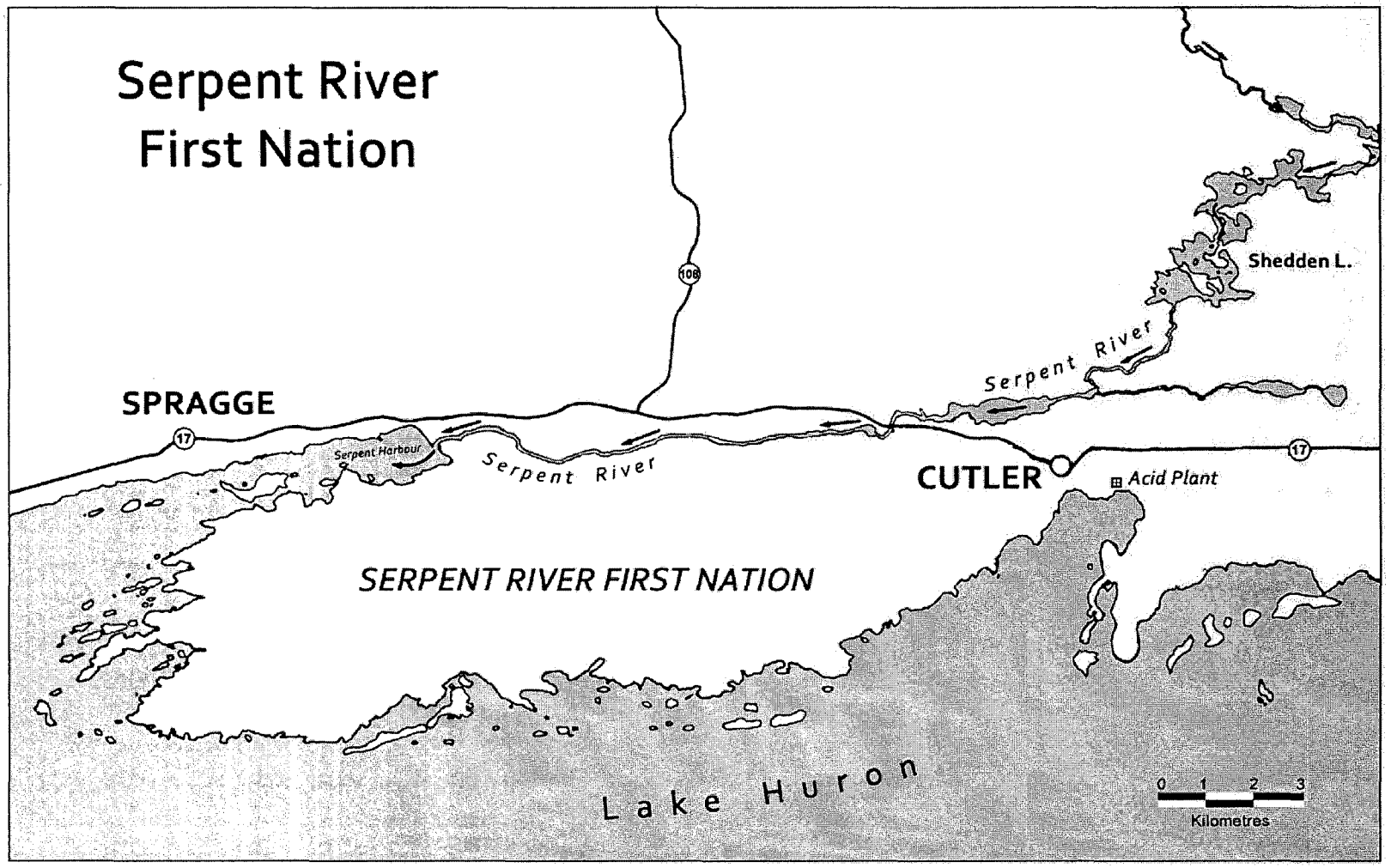
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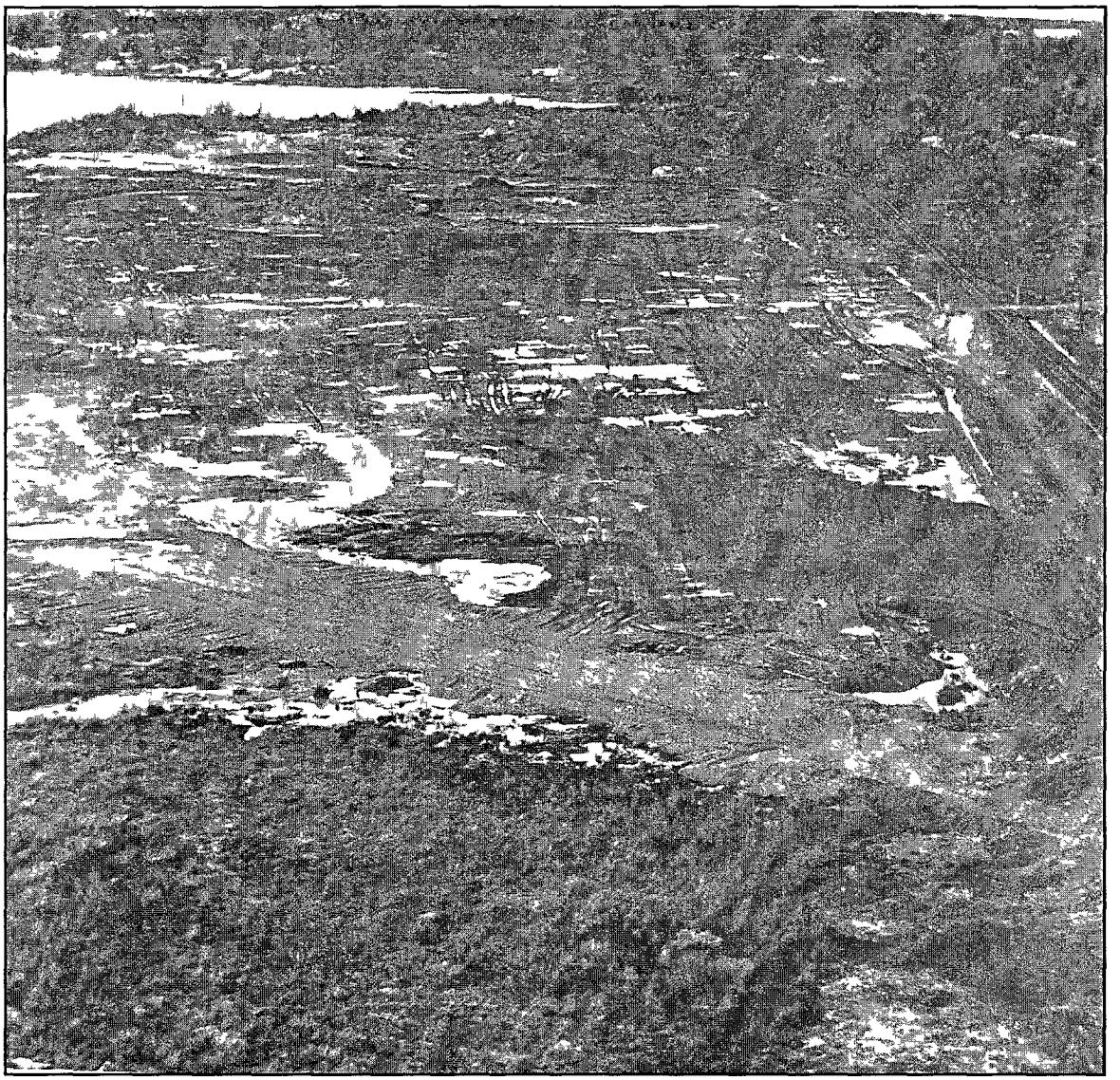


Photo 2: Aerial photograph of the Acid Plant site taken towards the west after DND's Operation "Powdered Serpent" in 1969. Aird Bay is in the background and the CPR tracks are on the right. Source: LAC, RG 10, Vol. 1196, File 2/493-1-837, vol. 1, "Post Exercise Report: Exercise Powder Serpent, 25 Nov 1969."

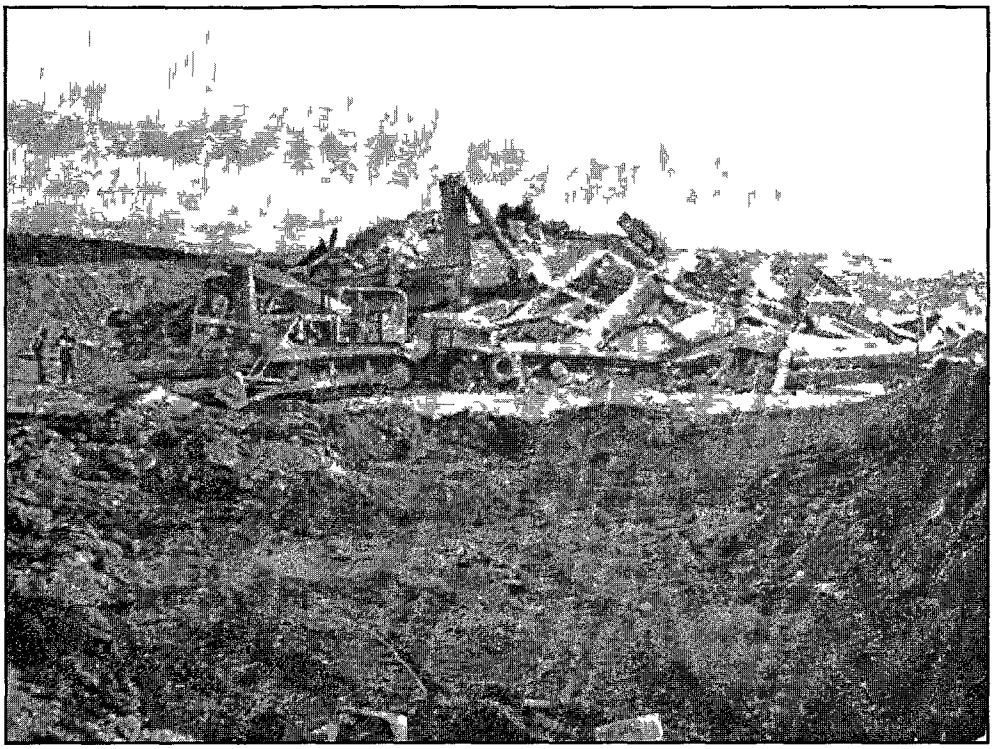
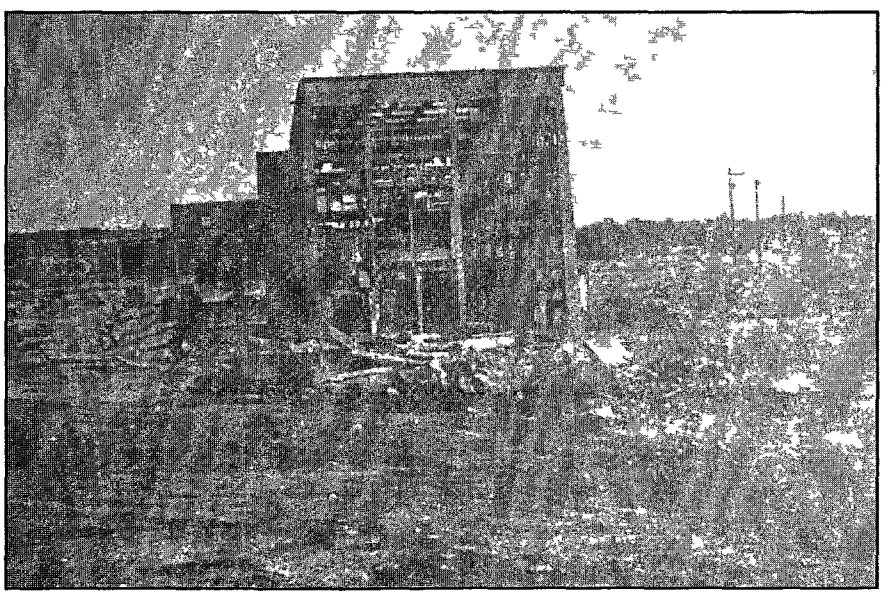


Photo 3: Demotion of the plant during DND's Operation "Powdered Serpent" Source: LAC, RG 10, Vol. 1196, File 2/493-1-837, vol 1, "Post Exercise Report: Exercise Powder Serpent, 25 Nov 1969."



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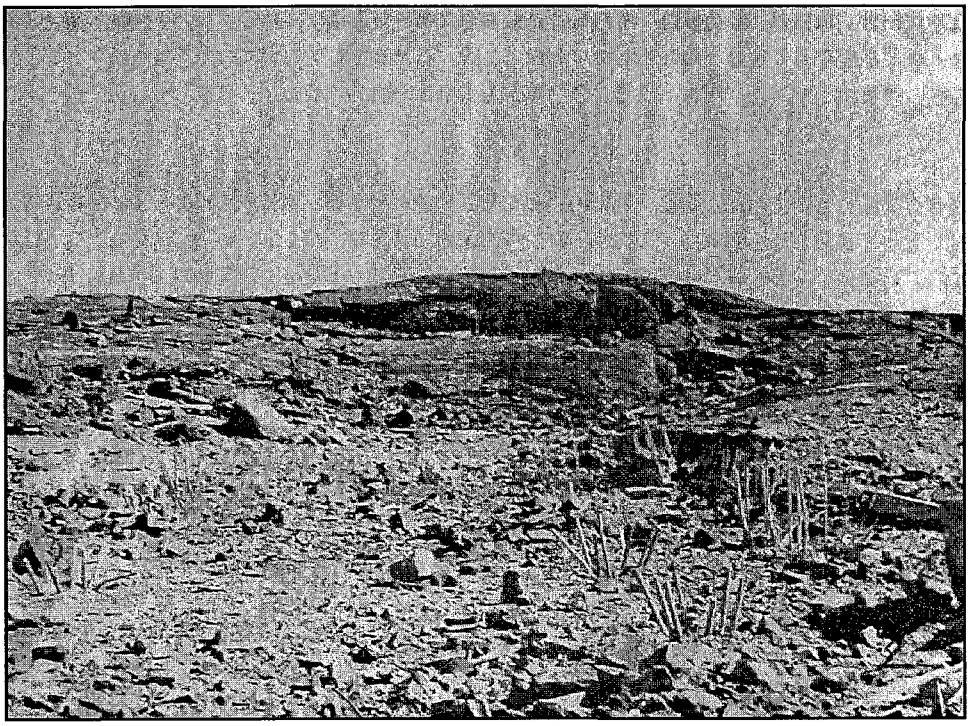

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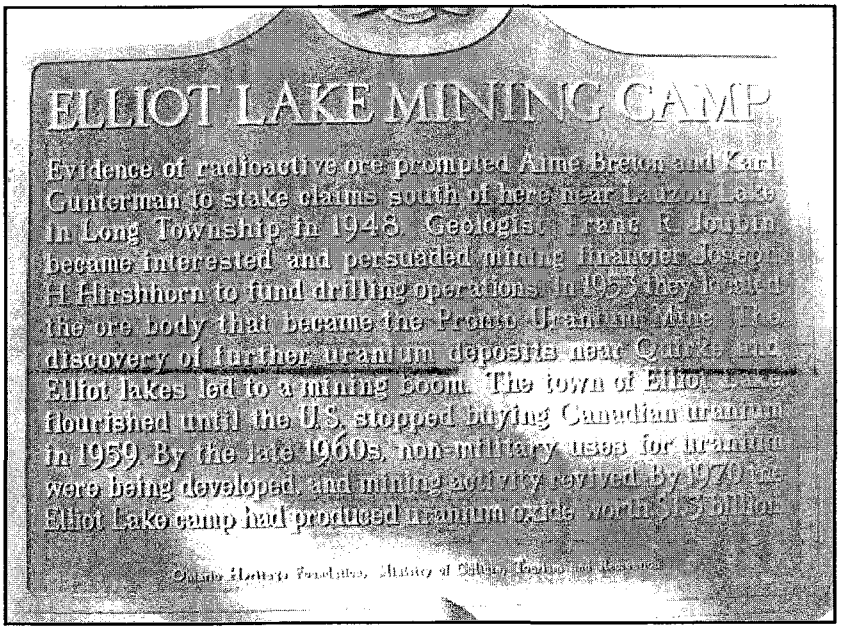
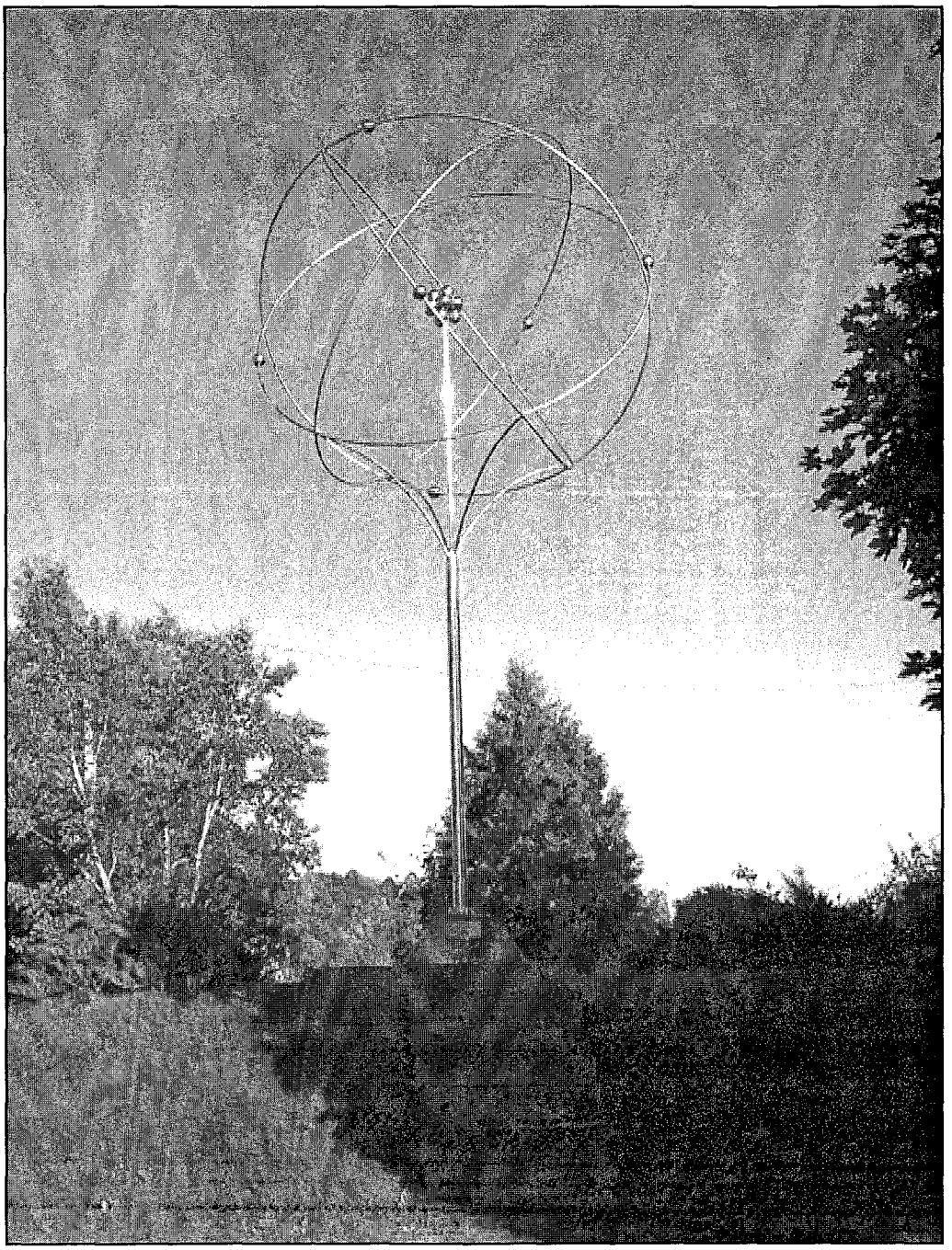


Photo 6: The Ontario Heritage Plaque which sits at the entrance to the City of Elliot Lake. The text is reproduced at the beginning of the preface. Source: author's photo.



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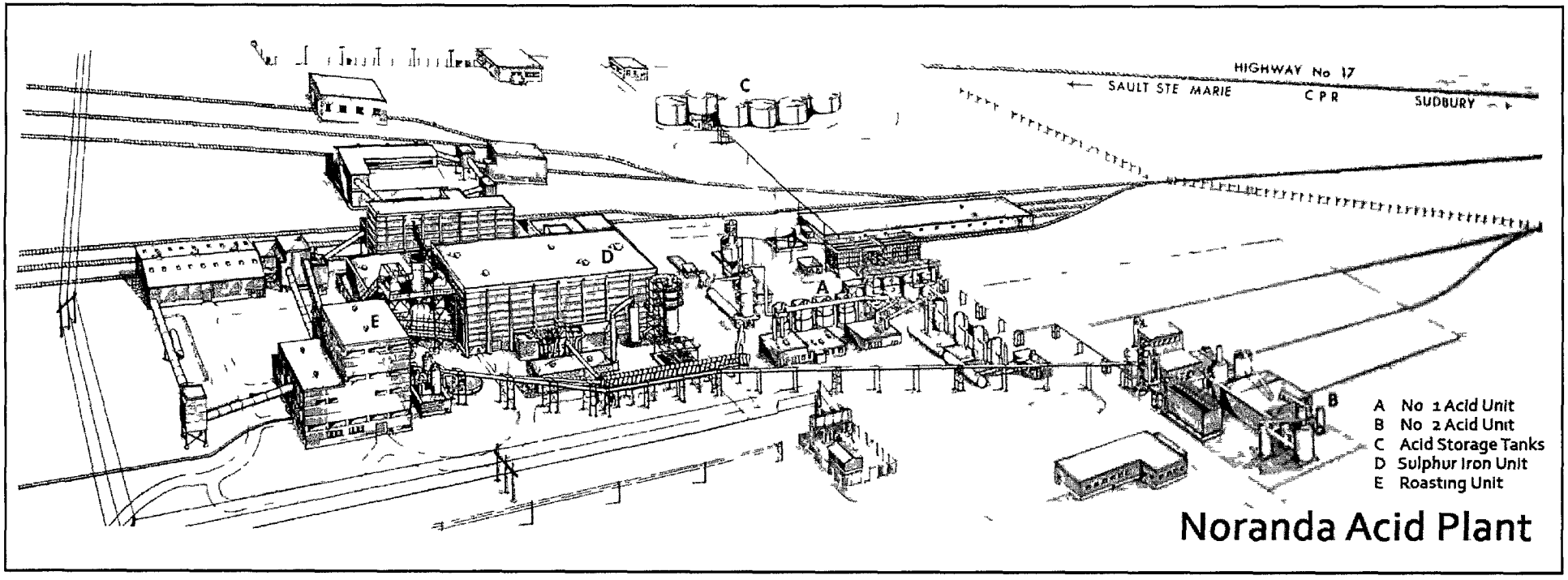

Figure 1: Diagram of the Noranda Acid Plant, Cutler, Ontario. Source: LAC, RG 20, Vol 775, Noranda 37th Annual Report, 1957, pp. 6–7.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the settler narrative of the establishment of the uranium industry at Elliot Lake, "the Great Staking Bee"—the influx of hopeful and determined claimants in 1953 in the area around what is now Elliot Lake—marked a turning point in uranium exploitation in Canada and trade relations with the United States.[1] The amount and concentration of uranium found underground was unprecedented at the time—and was desperately needed to support the nuclear arms build-up south

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[1] "In October 1953 it was estimated that Canada's uranium production would quadruple within two years, and rise by another 450 per cent by 1958. Much of the production would come from Ontario, where large deposits had just been staked." In Robert Bothwell, *Nucleus: The History of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 198.

of the border.[2] The federal government entered into a $1.6 billion contract with the Atomic Energy Commission in the United States in 1957,[3] by which time the townsite was already established to accommodate the influx of miners and later, their families.[4] In the early 1950s, there were twelve mines in the area: Algom Quirke, Algom Nordic, Consolidated Denison, Panel, CanMet, Stanrock, Stanleigh, Spanish-American, Buckles Mine, Milliken, Lacnor, and Pronto.[5] Between 1955 and 1961, uranium extraction was extremely profitable and led to a regional boom which saw a planned model-community of 25,000 people spring up almost over-night 50 kilometres into the mixed forest of northern Ontario. In the conventional

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[2] See chapter II.

[3] Shawn Heard, "The City of Elliot Lake to 1991: Before the Roof Fell In," in *Boom Town Blues: Collapse and Revival in a Single-Industry Community*, eds. Anne-Marie Mawhiney and Jane Pitblado (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999), 22.

[4] Rudolf A. Helling, *Elliot Lake...Beginning* (Windsor: Assumption University of Windsor, 1960), 4.

[5] Helling, 2. See also Downey, Terrence James, *The Political Economy of Uranium: Elliot Lake, 1948-1970* (M.A. Thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 1972), 63 and 174. See also Map 1: Mines and Tailings Areas in the Elliot Lake Region.

narrative, it was a Canadian Cold War success story that linked the struggle against Communism, to industrial development, and suburban dreams.[6]

In popular memory, the Elliot Lake region is known for its uranium deposits, but the area was significant for other reasons:[7] it is the traditional territory of the Ojibwa of the Serpent River First Nation, located southeast of the town, along the north-shore of Lake Huron; indeed the settler-town is said to be located on a previous village site.[8] The Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 established the reserve

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[6] For more context about Canada and the Cold War from a leftist perspective, see Reg Whittaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945 – 1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). For more works, see the introductory section to Chapter II.

[7] Alistair Macleod chose it for the setting of his award-winning 1999 novel *No Great Mischief (Toronto*: McClelland and Stewart, 1999). Now that the mines have closed, the town has rebranded itself as "the Jewel in the Wilderness" and is marketed in southern Ontario as a retirement community. Nevertheless, whenever uranium prices rise so too does speculation that the mines will one-day re-open. See for example 'Pele Mountain Reports Progress at Eco Ridge Mine Site,' 12 November 2010, http://www.marketwatch.com/story/pele-mountain-resources-excellent-leverage-to-uranium-rare-earth-elements-2010-11-12-84500?reflink=MW_news_stmp.

[8] For a case study of traditional land use and differing understandings of treaties and "ownership", see Jean L. Manore, "Indian Reserves v. Indian Lands: Reserves,

for the people that came to live on the Serpent River First Nation on the peninsula formed by the mouth of the Serpent River at Lake Huron to the west and Aird Bay to the east, towards the Spanish, Ontario.[9] The Serpent River is connected through a series of rivers and lakes to Quirke Lake.[10] Several mines were located on Quirke Lake and elsewhere on the Serpent River watershed; in the early days of mining, the resulting waste and uranium tailings were dumped into its waters as a method of disposal. [11]

The prosperity that built the town of Elliot Lake thus came at a heavy price to the people of the Serpent River First Nation. Uranium mining poisoned the waters of the Serpent with radiation and chemicals, destroying an ecosystem which the Ojibway People had protected and relied upon for millennia. This is the hidden legacy of the Elliot Lake uranium boom. Although the environmental effects of

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Crown Lands, and Natural Resource Use in Northeastern Ontario" in Edgar-Andre Montigny and Lori Chambers, eds., *Ontario since Confederation: A Reader (Toronto: University of Toronto Press*, 2000), 195-213.

[9] See Map 2: Serpent River First Nation and the Elliot Lake Region and Map 3: Serpent River First Nation. The current village site is located just to the west of Aird Bay at what is now called Cutler, Ontario but which has also been known as Kenabutch in the past. The reserve itself is also known as Genabaajing.

[10] See Map 1.

[11] See Map 1 and 2.

mining are downplayed by the town today, the Serpent River watershed has long been known as a contaminated basin. In the early days, the pollution was chalked-up to public naivety and lack of technology rather than poor mining practices and cost-cutting measures by the companies.[12] The effects, though, were clear to all. In 1983 the Ministry of Natural Resources had to reintroduce fish, specifically pickerel (walleye) and lake trout, into the Serpent River system because the pollution had killed the breeding stocks.[13] But most of the pollution flowed away from Elliot Lake, downstream towards Lake Huron and the Serpent River First Nation, which served to minimize public concern—except amongst recreational land users and lodge owners. Even after ecological causes gained popularity in the late 1970s and 1980s, few thought about the effects that the mining upstream had had on those who depended on the river and its resources to the south.

While the waters of the Serpent were killed with radiation and chemicals from the mining taking place north of reserve, secondary industry destroyed the air, land, and vegetation on the reserve itself. With the blessing of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), Noranda Mines, Inc. established a sulphuric acid plant on the Serpent River First Nation in 1956.[14] The plant was profitable for a time, but when

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[12]" Serpent River Plan Interesting," *The Sudbury Star*, 23 March 1983.

[13] Ibid.

[14] I use "Department of Indian Affairs" or DIA as a general but consistent term for the department in charge of Aboriginal policies in Canada. Its mandate has fallen to many other departments, such as Citizenship and Immigration, and it has had

the boom went bust in Elliot Lake, the plant was turned over to Canada Industries Limited (CIL) which continued operations until 1963. The plant was hailed as an employment opportunity for impoverished Aboriginal community members and thus welcomed by many. At the same time, it served larger DIA goals, providing the opportunity to make the community self-supporting by using reserve territory in a more "cost-effective" and "progressive" way.

In the end, employment and "progress" proved fleeting. When CIL shuttered the plant, it left behind a toxic waste site at the heart of the community. As a result, the people of Serpent River First Nation found their traditional way of life untenable, their people sick, and their community abandoned by provincial and federal governments.[15] In short, in the name of economic development and community progress, the land and water of the Serpent River First Nation were

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other names, such as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; however, in the interest of consistency, I will use DIA throughout the dissertation.

[15] I have struggled with the use of the word "their" instead of "our." I had always expected to use "their" when explaining the historical actions that occurred in the past that involved particular individuals. In the present-day sense, I had originally wanted to use "our" as a reflection of my positioning as both a community member and historian. In the interests of clarity and consistency, however, I have decided to use "their" throughout the dissertation.

compromised on two fronts: by the poisoned water pouring south from Elliot Lake and toxic fumes and waste left behind by the Noranda acid plant.[16]

This dissertation examines the social, political, environmental, and health effects of the uranium industry at Elliot Lake on the First Nations peoples living on the Serpent River First Nation. It is a case study that seeks to interrogate larger questions about the nature of Indigenous-settler relations, resource development in Canada, and Aboriginal resistance and leadership. Most scholars who have examined these issues have concentrated their research on the earlier periods of Indigenous-settler relations, from contact to the early 20th century.[17] This study

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[16] For another case example of Aboriginal resources controlled by Indian Affairs, see Rhonda Telford's study, "The Wikwemikong First Nation and the Department of Indian Affairs' Mismanagement of Petroleum Development" in Edgar-Andre Montigny and Lori Chambers, eds., *Ontario since Confederation: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 40-54.

[17] See J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). General works about Aboriginal Peoples also include Olive P. Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2002); Arthur J. Ray, *I Have Lived Here Since the World Began* (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1996). The geographical area of what is now Ontario has been studied in several essays compiled in *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations*, edited by Edward S. Rogers and Donald B. Smith. In it, the

turns our attention to the little studied post-war period. In this period, this dissertation is most concerned with analyzing the relationship formed between the Canadian state, settler societies, and Aboriginal peoples, especially within the context of a Cold War resource economy and industrial "progress." My main argument is that the poisoning of the Serpent River First Nation must be understood as the product of an insidious colonial process which threatened community cohesion and socio-cultural relationships with the land. It thus calls into question the very existence of a "post-colonial state."

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contributors seek to provide an understanding of Aboriginal Peoples in Ontario from traditional times of pre-European contact, all the while respecting the differences in experience between the indigenous experience in Southern and Northern Ontario. However, only two short articles, J. Garth Taylor's "Northern Algonquians on the Frontiers of 'New Ontario,' 1890-1945," and Harvey McCue's "The Modern Age, 1945-1980" deal with the post-war period. While the former chapter deals with intense political, religious, economic, and social change in First Nations communities as a result of European contact and colonialism, the latter is a cautiously hopeful, liberal-progressive view of Indian Affairs policy, and Aboriginal reactions to it. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 1 - Looking Forward Looking Back,* "Part One: The Relationship in Historical Perspective," Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, http://www.aincinac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sg17_e.html#57. Most of the other important works in this area are cited in subsequent footnotes.

In examining the development of the colonial relationship in Canada, most historians have focused on the 19th or early 20th centuries when assimilationist policies were most overt. Historians like J.R. Miller and Sarah Carter, to name but a few, argue that DIA officials adopted a "bible and plough" policy which used education and agriculture to eliminate cultural and economic traits that the dominant English speaking society found undesirable in its citizens.[18] On this basis,

[18] For relevant studies on DIA policies, see John L. Tobias, "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada's Indian Policy" in As *Long as the Sun Shines and the Water Flows: A Reader in Canadian Native Studies,* ed. Ian A.L. Getty and Antoine S. Lussier (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995), 39-55; E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986) and *The Indian Commissioners: Agents of the State and Indian Policy in Canada's Prairie West, 1873-1932* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009). See also John Leslie and Ron Maguire, *The Historical Development of the Indian Act* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs, 1978). The Department's support for agriculture and its use of First Nations people as scapegoats for the policy's lack of success can be seen in Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990); Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1992); Bruce Dawson, "The Roots of Agriculture: A Historiographical Review of First Nations Agriculture and Government Indian

other historians have analyzed the methods, ideas, and procedures of the Indian Agents charged with carrying out those policies on the ground, arguing that Aboriginal communities were administered in a "paternalistic" fashion. As Robin Jarvis Brownlie argues, "these officials acted in ways that reinforced the subordination, marginalization, and disempowerment of First Nations people."[19] Paulette Regan extends this argument, presenting a strong critique of the paternalistic colonial relationship that eventually led to the establishment of the residential schools system:

> To those who say that we cannot change the past, I say that we can learn from it. We can better understand how a problematic mentality of benevolent paternalism became a rationale and justification for acquiring Indigenous lands and resources, and drove the creation of prescriptive education policies that ran counter to the treaty

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Policy" *Prairie Forum* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 99-115. Books on residential schools include J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) and John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999).

[19] Robin Jarvis Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918-1939* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2003), xii.

relationship. Equally importantly, we can explore how this mentality continues to influence Indigenous-settler relations today."[20]

Regan locates the residential school system within a larger and interconnected colonial attitude, one that also gave birth to settler narratives of history that devalue or exclude Indigenous presence and paradigms. The "historical myths and colonial mindsets"[21] that still prevail within the settler-First Nations relationship is one that is often present in public discourse, especially in a country where economic development has historically been dependent on resource exploitation. Historians have thus tended to emphasize the power of DIA actors in shaping the function and outcomes of the colonial relationship. In this analysis, resistance was very difficult as it was hard to develop the unity needed to confront the will of the Indian agent.[22]

On the other hand, some historians have chosen to emphasize the agency of First Nations in their relations with settlers.[23] In doing so, they have demonstrated

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[20] Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada,* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 4.

[21] Regan, 4.

[22] Brownlie, 61.

[23]See, for example, J.R. Miller, "Owen Glendower, Hotspur and Canadian Indian Policy," in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 323–52. Janet E. Chute, *The*

how Indigenous peoples successfully resisted the attempts of DIA and other government agencies to unilaterally impose their policies. For example, David T. McNab has examined situations throughout Ontario where "the Crown's promises in the treaties were ignored or forgotten" and Aboriginal Peoples were forced to take political or economic action—such as blockades and protests—to secure redress for their concerns.[24] Indeed much recent scholarship tends to emphasize the agency of Aboriginal peoples, which as Mary-Ellen Kelm and Robin Jarvis Brownlie argue, can serve to minimize and subvert the influence and importance of the colonial relationship.[25] While they were writing in the context of a historiography focused on the late 19th century, at no period is this more relevant than in the 1950s and 1960s.

The historiographical emphasis on pre-war paternalism on the one hand and post-1960s native activism on the other sets up a false dividing line in which the overt practices of colonialism appear to dissipate during the early Cold War years.

Legacy of Shingwaukonse: A Century of Native Leadership (University of Toronto Press, 1998). For an examination of Aboriginal agency in religious encounters see Susan Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (Montreal: McGill–Queen`s University Press, 2003).

[24] David T. McNab, *Circles of Time: Aboriginal Land Rights and Resistance in Ontario* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 16.

[25] R. Jarvis Brownlie and Mary-Ellen Kelm. "Desperately Seeking Absolution: Native Agency as Colonialist Alibi?" *Canadian Historical Review*, 75, no. 4 (1994): 543–56.

But as Franca Iacovetta and Heidi Bohaker have recently argued, the state's attitude towards Aboriginal people did not dramatically change during the early 1950s.[26] Instead, as the Department of Indian Affairs was merged with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in 1950, the assimilation of Aboriginal people remained the government's ultimate goal—only it was to be accomplished by less overt, and I argue, more insidious methods. As Hugh Shewell argues, during this period, the bible and plough were gradually exchanged for policies influenced by the social sciences which favoured economic self-sufficiency and the gradual

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[26] Heidi Bohaker and Franca Iacovetta, "Making Aboriginal People 'Immigrants Too': A Comparison of Citizenship Programs for Newcomers and Indigenous Peoples in Postwar Canada, 1940s-1960s" *The Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (September 2009), 427-461. See also R. Scott Sheffield's examination of the Special Joint Senate and House of Commons Committee to Reconsider the Indian Act (1946-48) ; he argues that it continued DIA's longstanding assimilationist agenda. *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004); See Chapter 7. For an examination of First Nations involvement, see Laurie Meijer Drees, "Citizenship and Treaty Rights: The Indian Association of Alberta and the Canadian Indian Act, 1946-1948" *Great Plains Quarterly* 20 (Spring 20000): 141-58. See also John Leslie's PhD dissertation, "Assimilation, Integration or Termination? The Development of the Canadian Indian Policy, 1943-1963 (Carleton University, 1999).

withdrawal of federal support and direct-intervention in Aboriginal communities as the solution to the decades old "Indian problem."[27]

This study builds on this literature in Aboriginal history to suggest that federal "Indian" policy in the post-war period was inherently colonialist in both its methods and goals. In the case of the Serpent River First Nation, the Noranda Acid Plant was used by DIA officials to make reserve members more economically "self-sufficient" while simultaneously distancing them from traditional pursuits like hunting, fishing, trapping, and timber extraction. It was thus a tool to achieve both cost-cutting and assimilation. As this dissertation makes clear, however, the methods employed by DIA officials to achieve their goals were specific to the circumstances of the Serpent River First Nation and its proximity to one of the largest resource booms in Canadian history. Resource use—and particularly the control of resources—is thus central to this study.[28] While many historians have examined how Aboriginal peoples have participated in or opposed resource development, most of works have again centered on events that took place long

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[27] Hugh Shewell, *'Enough to Keep Them Alive': Indian Welfare in Canada, 1873-1965* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

[28] For an argument in favour of Indigenous control over land in the form of increased property rights, see Tom Flanagan, Christopher Alcantara, André Le Dressay, *Beyond The Indian Act: Restoring Aboriginal Property Rights* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

before the period of this study.[29] Nevertheless, given its current importance to public policy, researchers have more recently begun to look at Aboriginal

[29] See, for instance, Kerry Abel and Jean Friesen, eds., *Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1991). Much has been written on conflict over resources in the mid-19th century, especially as control over territory was threatened in the Great Lakes region. Janet E. Chute, "Pursuing the Great Spirit's Plan: Nineteenth-Century Ojibwa Attitudes Towards the Future of Logging and Mining on Unsurrendered Indian Lands North of Lakes Huron and Superior," in *Social Relations in Resource Hinterlands: Papers from the 27th Annual Meeting of the Western Association of Sociology and Anthropology*, ed. Thomas W. Dunk (Thunder Bay: Lakehead University Centre for Northern and Regional Studies, 1991), 173-203. See also Nancy M. Wightman and W. Robert Wightman, "The Mica Bay Affair: Conflict on the Upper Lakes Mining Frontier, 1840-1850" *Ontario History* 83 (1991): 193-208 and Rhonda Telford, "Aboriginal Resistance in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Anishinabe, Their Allies, and the Closing of the Mining Operations at Mica Bay and Michipicoten Island" in *Blockades and Resistance: Studies in Actions of Peace and the Temagami Blockades of 1988-89*, eds. Bruce W. Hodgins, Ute Lischke, and David T. McNab (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003), 71-84.

experiences with natural resource use—and mining in particular—in Canada's north as well as in the international context.[30]

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[30] See Saleem Ali, *Mining, the Environment, and Indigenous Development Conflicts* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003); Ellen Bielawski, *Rogue Diamonds: The Rush for Northern Riches on Dene Land* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2003); Ginger Gibson and Deanna Kemp, "Corporate Engagement with Indigenous Women in the Minerals Industry: Making Space for Theory," *Earth Matters: Indigenous Peoples, the Extractive Industries and Corporate Social Responsibility*, eds. Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh and Saleem Ali (Aizlewood's Mill, UK: Greenleaf Publishing Ltd., 2008), 104-22; Ginger Gibson and Jason Klinck, "Canada's Resilient North: The Impact of Mining on Aboriginal Communities" *Pimatisiwin,* 3, no. 1 (2005): 114–40; Kerry Abel, Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History (Montreal/Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 2005); Arn Keeling and John Sandlos, "Environmental Justice Goes Underground? Historical Notes from Canada's Northern Mining Frontier" *Environmental Justice* 2, no. 3 (2009): 117-25; Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008); Shirley Tsetta, Ginger Gibson, Linda McDevitt and Sarah Plotner, "Telling a Story of Change the Dene Way: Indicators for Monitoring in Diamond Impacted Communities" *Pimatisiwin* 3, no. 1 (2005): 59-69.

Although this dissertation will add to this literature by examining both Aboriginal participation in the resource-economy as well as its effects on the socio-cultural life of the reserve and its physical environment, the case of the Serpent River First Nation is best situated within the specific literature on the Elliot Lake uranium boom. Indeed, there have been local examinations of the uranium industry at Elliot Lake and its effects on the Serpent River First Nation undertaken by previous researchers. Anna Stanley has examined the effects of exclusion of First Nations from the process of policies surrounding nuclear fuel waste management.[31] Her dissertation, "Marginalization and Challenge: The Production of Knowledge and Landscape in Canadian Nuclear Waste Management Making," is based in part on oral participant interviews with SRFN community members and demonstrates how SRFN knowledge and experience has been systematically excluded in the policies developed by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO)—a group in charge of managing Canada's approach to spent nuclear fuel and tailings. According to Stanley, in order for the aims of NWMO to remain unchallenged, it must actively silence SRFN. Stanley's study demonstrates that the exclusion of Aboriginal voices

[31] Anna Stanley, "Marginalization and Challenge: The Production of Knowledge and Landscape in Canadian Nuclear Waste Management Making," PhD Dissertation, University of Guelph, 2006.

from debate—which this study examines in an historical context—extends to the present-day.[32]

It is a history of exclusion which the people of the Serpent River First Nation have explored themselves. The reserve has published its own collection of recorded oral histories entitled, *This is My Homeland: Stories of the Effects of Nuclear Industries by People of the Serpent River First Nation and the North Shore of Lake Huron.*[33] This collection is edited by community members and contains oral testimony on the effects of the uranium industry on the health and environmental well-being of the reserve's residents. Many of the people interviewed are elders who vividly remember the impacts of the waste on the Serpent River, as well as the environmental degradation that came as a result of the Noranda Acid Plant.

This is My Homeland also emphasizes – and this dissertation affirms - that many of the more active elders in the community are women. In the section written by Lorraine Rekmans, one of the book's editors, there is a strong focus on the efforts made by the reserve's first woman chief, Loreena Lewis, and those of a long-time councillor, Gertrude Lewis. The leadership of women is an important component to

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[32] See also Anna Stanley, Citizenship and the Production of Landscape and Knowledge in Contemporary Canadian Nuclear Fuel Waste Management," *The Canadian Geographer* 52 (2008): 64-82.

[33] Lorraine Rekmans, Keith Lewis and Anabel Dwyer, eds. *This is My Homeland: Stories of the effects of nuclear industries by people of the Serpent River First Nation and the north shore of Lake Huron* (Cutler: Serpent River First Nation, 2003).

this study, as many of the most vocal resisters and activists were women in the community. There is a growing body of historical literature about the unique struggles of Aboriginal women,[34] and not surprisingly, it intersects with central themes of community development and cohesion.[35] All of these works point to the

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[34] Relevant collections include Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale, eds., *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) and Mary-Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend, eds., *In the Days of Our Grandmothers: a Reader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[35]For works about women's leadership in community-building, see Kim Anderson and Bonita Lawrence, eds. *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2003). Janet Silman, *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1987). Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2001). Christine Miller and Partricia Marie Chuchryk, eds., *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom and Strength* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996). Gail Guthrie Valaskakis and Madeleine Dion Stout, eds., *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009); Dawn T. Maracle, "A Story Untold: A Community-Based Oral Narrative of Mohawk Women's Voices from Point Anne, Ontario" in *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations*, edited by Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005).

importance of examining the various roles that Aboriginal women adopted in their communities, as leaders, mothers, activists, and historians.

Elliot Lake has generated its own local histories, although they tend to relate a narrative which emphasizes the "struggle against the wilderness," economic cycles of boom and bust, and tropes of urban development as progress. *Boom Town Blues: Collapse and Revival in a Single Industry Community* is a collection of articles written by community members and sponsored by the Institute of Northern Ontario Research and Development. Published in 1999, a few years after the close of the last uranium mine in Elliot Lake, the compilation focuses on the economic and social changes that occurred as a result, as well as the challenges faced by families with one or more parents out of work. Sharon Gow's chapter, "Respect and Responsibility: Community-Based Options for Perpetual Care in the Serpent River Watershed," calls for more public participation in decisions regarding the future of the Serpent River system.[36] This study furthers her work by examining the river

[36] Sharon Gow, ""Respect and Responsibility: Community-Based Options for Perpetual Care in the Serpent River Watershed," in *Boom Town Blues: Collapse and Revival in a Single-Industry Community*, eds. Anne-Marie Mawhiney and Jane Pitblado (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999), 318-330. For more on the development of Elliot Lake, see Catharine Dixon, *The Power and the Promise: The Elliot Lake Story* (Elliot Lake: Gillidix Publishing Inc., 1996). Dixon also wrote a history of the local high school, *As It Happened: the Founding of Elliot Lake Secondary School* (Elliot Lake: Gillidix Publishing, 2001). Two local historical collaborations are *Jewel in the Wilderness: A History of Elliot Lake 1957-1980* (Elliot Lake: Elliot Lake

system and its local scope through a larger lens that interrogates the Indigenous-settler relationship as it was formed by national and international forces.

But on the whole, local histories of Elliot Lake largely ignore the people and place of the Serpent River First Nation in the narrative. It is a type of exclusionary settler-narrative which emphasizes the positive aspects of western notions of progress while ignoring the dangers. The idea of "the frontier complex," the very concept that provides the foundation of these historical myths, is defined by Elizabeth Furniss as being framed by a:

> "particular historical epistemology that celebrates the 'discovery' of a rich, 'empty land' by non-Aboriginal explorers and settlers. These heroic figures tame the wilderness and subdue Aboriginal populations through a process of benevolent conquest, in so doing rendering colonization a natural and desired process of the domination by a superior civilization over primitive, inferior peoples. Vignettes of encounter, conflict, and conquest of nature and Aboriginal peoples become the epitomizing events in Canadian national

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Secondary School, 1980) and Dawn of a New Setting, 1980-1997 (Elliot Lake: Elliot Lake Secondary School, 1997). These two volumes were written by high school students in partnership with some community members and are largely whiggish commemorative pieces. However, they are useful for a popular and general history of the area.

> histories and are a continual source of symbols for the creation and re-creation of Canadian national identity.[37]

Furniss' case study assesses Williams Lake, British Columbia, where mining and forestry economic interests framed settler-Indigenous relations in the area. The frontier or settler mindset, however, is one that is applicable to uranium interests in northern Ontario, where settlers continue to celebrate the mining history of the area. It is a narrative that relegates First Nations presence to the "old days" of the fur trade and excludes Indigenous worldviews altogether while emphasizing the progressive era of Cold War mining and resource development.

Historians have begun to examine how industrial development and environmental change alter not only landscapes and economies but people and their sense of place. Joy Parr examines the effect of rapid postwar changes and how we "sense" those changes arguing that in order to fully understand the changes brought by science and technology, we need to include the ways in which our bodies have responded to them: "to reclaim a more complete understanding of these common and profound parts of daily human experience, we need to open interpretive and analytical space for the corporeally embodied knowledge that resists representation in language." She argues that this approach will make "our environmental histories and our histories of technologies and daily life [...] more rich, complex, nuanced, and

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[37] Elizabeth Furniss, 187.

useful."[38] She adopts a case study approach to examine the depth and pace of change as a result of military or economic development, and how it has been understood by residents of towns like Gagetown and those who experienced the damming of the Arrow Lakes. It is in examining perceptions of change and the socio-cultural effects of development that allows us to analyze its meaning.

Tina Loo calls the type of resource development at Arrow Lakes "socio-natural production of modernity."[39] She examines the ideologies of resource

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[38] Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953-2003* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 13.

[39] Tina Loo, "People in the Way: Modernity, Environment, and Society on the Arrow Lakes" *BC Studies,* 142-143 (Summer 2004) : 161-196. For a case study that examines the environmental and geographic changes in an area that has been flooded, see Laura Cameron, *Openings: A Meditation on History, Method, and Sumas Lake (*Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). She uses a unique methodology to explore the connections between place, landscape, and history. For an examination of the loss of a sense of place, see J.E. Windsor and J.A. McVey, "Annihilation of Both Place and Sense of Place: the Experience of the Cheslatta T'En Canadian First Nation within the Context of Large-Scale Environmental Projects," *The Geographic Journal* 171, 2 (June 2005): 146–165. For an American example of the effects of damming on Aboriginal Peoples, see Joy A. Bilharz, *The Allegany Senecas and Kinzua Dam: Forced Relocation Through Two Generations* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

development in British Columbia in the postwar period, with its rich potential for hydroelectric dams, forestry, fishing, and minerals, and questions 'progress' and 'modernity'. As with many megaprojects, area residents had to move to new locations, most of which were seen as progressive subdivisions and an important opportunity for people to start afresh. Importantly, residents outlined their environmental concerns about the hydroelectric project on the Columbia River as economic consequences such as the loss of tourism on beaches, and fish and game. There were also concerns that this road to modernity led straight to American domination: the proposed project was a partnership with the United States, which was seen to compromise Canadian political and economic power.[40] Ultimately, Loo claims that the individualistic settler mentality and indeed history were threatened by the project.[41] She sees the resistance to the project itself as an alternative and conservative form of modernity.[42]

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[40] Ibid., 188.

[41] Ibid., 193.

[42] Ibid., 194. An excellent example of a work that incorporates the dynamics of Aboriginal communities, their inter-relations (especially kinship), as well as the importance of the environment and ecology, see Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

A growing body of literature is beginning to explore the effects of economic development on Aboriginal territory and the involvement of the Canadian state in that process.[43] One of the most well-known cases is that of the Grassy Narrows

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[43] Another more famous hydroelectric project had a widely-publicized impact on Aboriginal People. For a good backgrounder on Cree contact with whites in northern Quebec, see Toby Morantz's study, *The White Man's Gonna Getcha: The Colonial Challenge to the Crees in Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002). Unfortunately, it ends just before the hydroelectric controversy, but it adequately outlines the challenges faced by Crees in Quebec before that time. More topical works about the hydroelectric project include Hans M. Carlson, "A Watershed of Words: Litigating and Negotiating Nature in Eastern James Bay, 1971-1975" *Canadian Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (2004): 63-84; Richard F. Salisbury, *A Homeland for the Cree: Regional Development in James Bay, 1971-1981* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986); An extensive political science perspective can be found in Paul Rynard, "Ally or Colonizer? The Federal State, The Cree Nation and the James Bay Agreement" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 8-48; A recent compilation with certain chapters that question the serious effects of the project on the Cree and brings forth interesting perspectives is James Horning, ed. *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999). For an Aboriginal response to the James Bay situation in the context of the Quebec referendum, see *Sovereign*

reserve near Kenora, Ontario, which suffers from a mercury-polluted water system that has led not only to environmental and economic problems, but also to grave social consequences.[44] The community was relocated, adding to a sense of displacement and crisis.[45] The pattern that develops in such cases is one of considerable, and in many cases irreversible, industrial pollution on reserve

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Injustice: Forcible Inclusion of the James Bay Crees and Cree Territory into a Sovereign Quebec (Nemaska, Aeeyou Astchee: Grand Council of the Crees, 1995).

[44] See George Hutchison and Dick Wallace, *Grassy Narrows* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1977) and Connie Deiter, *Human Security and Aboriginal Women in Canada* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, Policy Research, 2005).

[45] Anastasia M. Shkilnyk, *A Poison Stronger Than Love: The Destruction of an Ojibwa Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). For the ways in which women in the community were affected by this environmental disaster and dislocation, see Connie Deiter, *Human Security and Aboriginal Women in Canada* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, Policy Research, 2005). Christopher Vecsey, "Grassy Narrows Reserve: Mercury Pollution, Social Disruption, and Natural Resources: A Question of Autonomy," *American Indian Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (Autumn, 1987): 287-314.

territories. It raises the question: why are these communities seen as dispensable when surrounding non-Aboriginal towns and settlements are spared?[46]

Environmental racism, a term originating in the United States, has been used to describe situations where communities of people of colour have been targeted for questionable land and water use policies. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. defines environmental racism as: "racial discrimination in policy-making. It is racial discrimination in the enforcement of regulations and laws. It is racial discrimination in the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste disposal and the sting of polluting industries. It is racial discrimination in the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in communities of color."[47] Although limited in the Canadian historiography, the literature on environmental racism is considerable in the United States, where studies of non-white and poorer communities are found to have higher incidences of industrial waste and pollution, compounded by apathetic mainstream institutions that refuse to address the issues of environmental degradation. While some scholars have argued that identity formation can help environmental justice groups

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[46] For a case study of Walpole Island First Nation, see Robert M. Van Wynsberghe, *AlterNatives: Community, Identity, and Environmental Justice on Walpole Island* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002).

[47] Benjamin F. Chavis, "Foreward" in *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, edited by Robert D. Bullard, (Boston: South End Press, 1993) 3.

resist mainstream institutions of power,[48] others maintain that the future of environmental justice and dispute resolution for people of colour lies in planning and development.[49] Many of these studies have included the experiences of African

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[48] Teresa L. Heinz, "From Civil Rights to Environmental Rights: Constructions of Race, Community and Identity in Three African American Newspapers' Coverage of the Environmental Justice Movement" *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 29, no. 1 (2005): 49. Heinz argues that the environmental movement, which originated in the 1960s, excluded black communities in the same way that their communities were often exempt from environmental protection by the state and by society. Heinz argues that African American, Latino, Aboriginal, and Mexican immigrant communities are more likely to be affected by environmentally hazardous sites because of the intersections between race, class, and power. Her examination of three African American newspapers leads her to suggest that there exists a strong possibility for social activism and environmental justice movements to resist mainstream institutions of power if cultural or class minorities construct a strong, common identity.

[49] Robert W. Collin, Timothy Beatley, and William Harris, "Environmental Racism: A Challenge to Community Development" *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 3 (January 1995): 356. "planning was not seen as a friend to the Black community" because professional planners in the past have been responsible for the ways in which the development of communities of colour have been ignored or compromised by detrimental environmental policies. However, the authors are optimistic that with

American and Latino populations in the United States, but Brett Williams examines environmental racism through a colonial lens in Washington.[50] He argues that the pollution of the river is indicative of the oppressive colonial relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and settlers in the area. Instead of using politics and racism as the only determinants of environmental degradation, he instead links it to larger issues of empire, nationalism, militarism, racism, and urban renewal, highlighting the importance of integrating such studies into a larger historical context.[51]

Nevertheless, sceptics question the very existence of environmental racism. For instance, J. Tom Boer *et al.* found in their study of Los Angeles County that working-class areas with minority populations tend to be closer to industrial waste sites, but that these are the people environmental justice groups are attempting to organize.[52] They also failed to find a correlation between income and residential proximity to hazardous waste sites—which they had in fact anticipated at the outset

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the professional planners' code of ethics and the achievements of environmental justice organizations, planners are now the key to furthering the movement's goals.

[50] Brett Williams, "A River Runs Through Us" *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 2 (June 2001): 409-431.

[51] Williams, 410.

[52] J. Tom Boer *et al.*, "Demographics of Hazardous Waste in Los Angeles County" *Social Science Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (December 1997): 793-810.

of their study. Of course, they admit that their study is narrow in scope, and that they have not taken history into account in their research, which may account for their narrow argument and explanation. A more nuanced argument is made by James T. Hamilton in his article, "Testing for Environmental Racism: Prejudice, Profits, Political Power?" Hamilton differs from Boer *et al.* by asserting that although ethnicity may have a role in determining whether or not an industrial expansion may take place, the residents' probability (and ability) to protest is a more accurate indicator.[53] In a Canadian case study on environmental racism, Laura Westra argues that First Nations in Canada are a special case when it comes to environmental racism because not only are Aboriginal communities concerned with health, but land holds spiritual importance as well.[54] Indeed, the concepts of wellness, health, safety, and place are inseparable.

These works are particularly relevant to the context of this study of the Serpent River First Nation: race certainly was a factor in the establishment of the acid plant, since the negotiations with Noranda were ultimately handled by the Indian Agent and DIA. Indeed, First Nations peoples in Canada could not even vote in the 1950s, much less unilaterally negotiate a land transfer with a large mining

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[53] James T. Hamilton, "Testing for Environmental Racism: Prejudice, Profits, Political Power?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 107-132.

[54] Laura Westra, "Environmental Racism and the First Nations of Canada: Terrorism at Oka" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 103-124.

company. However, this study reveals that the members of the Serpent River First Nation were not silent when it came to the proposed expansion of the mines at Elliot Lake in the late 1970s, nor were they passive in the 1980s when they threatened a highway blockade unless the government met their demands for the clean-up of the remains of the sulphuric acid plant.

First Nations peoples' traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)[55] has become increasingly important for the responsible development of resources and the inclusion of Aboriginal worldviews in policy development.[56] Although there has

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[55] Julie Cruikshank has examined the differences in the ways in which First Nations and settlers view environmental surroundings. See *Do Glaciers Listen?: Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005). See also Dene Cultural Institute, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Environmental Assessment" and Milton M.R. Freeman, "The Nature and Utility of Traditional Ecological Knowledge," *Northern Perspectives* 20, 1 (1992): 9–12, http://www.carc.org/pubs/v20no1/utility.htm (accessed 23 April 2011). See also John Borrows, "Living Between the Water and the Rocks: First Nations, Environmental Planning and Democracy" *University of Toronto Law Journal* 47 (1997): 417-466; Deborah McGregor, "Linking Traditional Knowledge and Environmental Practice in Ontario" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 69-100.

[56] For a controversial critique of this development with which I do not agree, see Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The*

been debate about the image of the "ecological Indian"[57] there are many examples of

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Deception Behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

[57] Richard White and William Cronon, "Ecological Change and Indian-White Relations" in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 4, ed. William Washburn (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 417-29. This chapter neatly outlines the debate, as well as warns against seeing Aboriginal Peoples simply as monolithic child-like beings in the wilderness, passively adapting to their environment. See also Paul Nadasdy, "Transcending the Debate over the Ecologically Noble Indian: Indigenous Peoples and Environmentalism" *Ethnohistory* 52, no. 2 (2005): 291-331. The author examines how many of these concepts are culturally-bound and the political ramifications of their use.

how TEK has been used in environmental planning in Canada.[58] There are several components to this study of ecological change and place. It requires a discussion of Indigenous-settler relations, and specifically, Indian Affairs policies and Aboriginal leadership. The roles of women are particularly important to the dynamics of community voice and political organization, as well as to questions of social justice.[59] The uranium industry in both its international and local contexts is also crucial to this discussion: the nature of the global uranium market had particular effects on the community of Elliot Lake, as well as on the Serpent River First Nation. Finally, environmental policies and legislation are also important to this discussion, especially in terms of the federal government's role in environmental planning and preservation.

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[58] The benefits and achievements of TEK are beginning to be studied by academics. See Keith Thor Carlson, ed., *You Are Asked to Witness: The Stolo in Canada's Pacific Coast History* (Chilliwack: Stolo Heritage Trust, 1997) in addition to the works done by the Dene Cultural Institute and Freeman, listed in an above footnote. Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh's call for more Aboriginal participation in environmental policies and agreements is an example of the importance of TEK. Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh, *Environmental Agreements in Canada: Aboriginal Participation, EIA Follow-Up and Environmental Management of Major Projects* (Calgary: Canadian Institute of Resources Law, 2006).

[59] See also Deborah McGregor, "Anishinaabe-kwe, Traditional Knowledge, and Water Protection" *Canadian Woman Studies* 26, no.3-4: 26-30.

This case study of settler-SRFN relations, set in the context of the Cold War, contributes to the scholarship on all these front.. The interrogation of the notions of economic development and 'progress' has been present in the Canadian historiography particularly since the 1990s, and it is still a relatively new research paradigm. This study aims to contribute to this view, in hopes that First Nations peoples in this country will become more meaningful partners in their relationships with the state, and with the settler industries and communities that surround them. While the uranium industry and other economic developments on the North Shore were facilitated by a western understanding of "progress" and treaties, the SRFN worldview is more holistic, with an emphasis on the community's interdependence on resources and the connections between the environment, wellness, and social relations.[60]

This dissertation, although historical in scope, examines a later period in the colonial relationship and thus aims to contribute to debates surrounding resource use and Indigenous peoples. The issues raised by this research demand a new way of looking at Indigenous-settler relations, especially when it comes to control over resources. The people of the Serpent River First Nation were no strangers to forestry and agriculture by the time uranium claims were staked in 1953. What is

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[60] An excellent article that describes the importance of Indigenous Knowledge [IK] of which TEK is a part, see Deborah McGregor, "Coming Full Circle: Indigenous Knowledge, Environment, and our Future" *American Indian Quarterly* 28, nos. 3-4 (Summer and Fall 2004): 385-410.

clear, however, is that this was a time of transition for the community and difficult choices were made; these choices were complicated and their effects exacerbated by the colonial relationship. As resource development intensified with river pollution and the effects of the acid plant, it became painfully clear that the traditional role community members had as environmental stewards had been interrupted by colonial practices. In other words, although community members may have decided that jobs were warranted as part of the cultural need to adapt and survive, their inability to *control* the resource development and damage in their traditional territory compromised their role as stewards. It is apparent that as the relationship with DIA changed and Indian agents were no longer in use, the community voiced their demands for increased control and monitoring. In the process, the stewardship role was renewed as SFRN leaders took control over reclamation.

This dissertation relies on oral history[61] from community elders of the Serpent River First Nation, many of whom were politically involved at one point or another. It also draws upon extensive archival research from Library and Archives Canada, Archives of Ontario, Laurentian University Archives, Elliot Lake Public Library, and Serpent River First Nation Library.[62] At the national and provincial archives, many of the documents that I had anticipated using were closed by law. In pursuing Access to Information agreements at both institutions, I have been able to access some of the records that have allowed me to form my argument, but this is

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[61] More discussion of this can be found in the epilogue of this dissertation.

[62] See Bibliography.

why in some cases I have omitted the names of some individuals where required. Nevertheless, some of the records I would have liked to access as an historian remain unavailable.[63] Researching a relatively contemporary topic has been thus been as extremely exciting as it has been challenging—in this respect, newspapers and other published primary sources have helped fill in the gaps.

The dissertation is organized thematically. Chapter II outlines the Cold War context of this case study, one that necessitated uranium for American weapons. The establishment of Elliot Lake took place in the 1950s, and while settlers prided themselves on having carved the town from the rock,[64] this narrative does little to acknowledge the environmental legacy brought by uranium development in the area. While the memory is one of "man's" victory over nature, in reality, Elliot Lake was a planned community that came out of the tripartite relationship between the federal government, the province of Ontario, and mining companies.

The theme of government intervention continues throughout Chapter III, which examines the establishment of the Noranda Acid Plant on SRFN land. Sulphuric acid was used in the leaching process to obtain uranium oxide to sell to the United States, and was thus a secondary industry to operations at Elliot Lake. Through the involvement of DIA, Noranda leased land from the community for the

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[63] I will provide notations throughout the dissertation where this has been the case.

[64] This term is from "Carved from Rock: The Story of Elliot Lake" A National Dream Production, 2005. It is a commemorative film that celebrated the town's 50th anniversary.

purposes of building an acid plant. DIA saw the plant as an opportunity to encourage a more permanent transition to a wage economy for the community, and many people in the community did not object to steady jobs. The federal government's conflict of interest for the well-being of SRFN and its facilitation of the uranium industry is readily apparent: uranium mining was important for the purposes of international relations and economic development, and the acid plant would provide economic opportunity for the community. In this way, the conflict of interest cemented the colonial relationship in the context of the Cold War.

Chapter IV describes the degradation of the river system and its effects on the people who depended upon it. The wage economy brought by the acid plant and mining and general proved to threaten the traditional pursuits that had been central to community identity. Uranium and acid development hampered peoples' ability to interact with the land as they once had, and it altered the community's social relations. Although the Ontario Resources Commission had monitored the area since the start of mining operations, results of water quality studies were not reported in a timely fashion.

As the environmental, health, and social legacies of uranium became more apparent, SRFN leaders became increasingly involved in public discourse surrounding these issues. Chapter V examines the political consciousness of community leadership, which also coincides with the growth of such organizations as the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB). The tactics used by the community changed as they made public presentations, engaged the media in their struggle, and also used more radical tactics to have their message heard. Ultimately, though, it

was the Aboriginal community members of Serpent River First Nation who forced a reluctant government and public to begin to restore the environmental loss which was the legacy of Cold War colonialism.

The study as a whole documents the legacy of uranium for the Serpent River First Nation. It also seeks to examine the settler-SRFN relationship in a way that demonstrates the differences in worldviews, and how one has consistently been challenged and excluded by the other. The pollution of the Serpent River watershed and the damage brought by the acid plant came as a result of Cold War and economic imperatives, but its legacy has lasted much longer.

CHAPTER II

ELLIOT LAKE, CANADA AND THE COLD WAR ECONOMY

Come on you muckin' slushers
You jack-legged drillers and blasters
The price of uranium is up and there's money to make.[1]

On a September evening in 1945 Igor Gouzenko brought the reality of the Cold War to Canada. For the first time, Canadians were confronted with the possibility of espionage in their own middle-power country, accompanied by all the intrigue, fear and sensationalism that came to define the defection of the infamous Soviet embassy cipher clerk. It has been argued by Robert Bothwell that the Cold

[1] Stompin' Tom Conners, "Muckin' Slushers" (Damn Good Song for A Miner).

War was a time of illusions of danger, strength and solidarity.[2] It was a time of perceived danger because of the threat of atomic destruction; this world-ending power also made it a period of high-stakes power-politics on the international stage, but it was also a time of perceived solidarity because there were two definite camps engaged in an ideological struggle that pitted East against West.[3] Bothwell argues that these were the illusions that defined this period of international relations, but that they were nothing more than illusions because this détente ended without the danger, strength, and solidarity being tested.[4] This is especially true in hindsight.

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[2] Robert Bothwell, *The Big Chill: Canada and the Cold War* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing and the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1998). Bothwell expands his analysis in *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World, 1945–1984* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), especially 22–73. A good overview of the political events during the early cold war is provided in Donald Creighton, *Canada, 1939–1957: The Forked Road* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) and J.L. Granatstein, Canada, *1957–1967: The Years of Uncertainty and Innovation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).

[3] For a good recent but brief history of the Cold War written from an international relations viewpoint see John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: a New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

[4] Bothwell, *The Big Chill*, xi.

But even without this simplicity and when analyzed in its proper historical context, Canadians had every reason to be afraid.

The extent of fear in Canada is evident in both popular and official responses to a perceived internal communist threat which ebbed and flowed according to developments on the international stage as well as changing socio-economic conditions at home.[5] Official and popular fears were heightened by the fact that Canada's role on the international stage was undergoing a profound change during this period. In 1949, Canada joined other western countries and the North Atlantic

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[5] The most complete overview is Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). See also Franca Iacovetta, "The Sexual Politics of Moral Citizenship and Containing 'Dangerous' Foreign Men in Cold War Canada, 1950s-1960s," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 33, no. 66 (2000): 361-389; Gary Kinsman, "'Character Weakness' and 'Fruit Machines': Towards an Analysis of the Anti-Homosexual Security Campaign in the Canadian Civil Service," *Labour/Le Travail,* 35 (Spring 1995): 133–161; and Daniel J. Robinson and David Kimmel, "The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (1994): 319-345. The two sides of the debate over the death of diplomat Herbert Norman, who was suspected of being a communist, are investigated in Roger W. Bowen, *E.H. Norman: His Life and Scholarship* (Toronto: UTP, 1984 and James Barros, *No Sense of Evil Espionage: the Case of Herbert Norman* (Toronto: Deneau, 1986).

Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance to pursue common foreign policy goals of defence and deterrence.[6] This represented a new and more prominent peacetime role in international affairs for the Canadian nation, yet it also signalled a critical shift in Canada's traditional relationship with its two closest allies: Great Britain and the United States. Since Confederation, Canadian politicians had struggled to maintain balance within what C.P. Stacey called the North Atlantic Triangular relationship, moving steadily closer to the United States between 1867 and 1945.[7] As J.L. Granatstein argues, following the Second World War British economic and military weakness in the context of the Cold War forced Canada to move even further into the arms of the United States.[8] More recently, Bothwell has summarized

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[6] The most thorough study of Canada's role in the early years of the NATO Alliance is James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: Growing Up Allied* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). See also Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, 41–72; Whitaker and Marcuse, 113–38. A critique of Canada's 'international role' is found in Hector Mackenzie, "The Cold War and the Limits of 'Internationalism' in Canada's Foreign Relations, 1945–1949," in R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (eds), *Readings in Canadian History, Post Confederation, 6th Ed.* (Toronto: NP, 2002), 362–376;

[7] C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict, Volume I* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1979), 7–13.

[8] The debate is described in Creighton, *Canada, 1939-1956*, 116-170 and J.L. Granatstein, *How Britain's Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States* (Toronto: UTP, 1988), especially 41–62. A good recent collection examining

English-Canadian efforts to reconcile the trilateral relationship saying "Canadians were local and imperial, Canadian and British, with a strong American accent."[9] That accent, so the argument goes, got stronger as the postwar period went on.

Canada was drawn to the United States for economic and cultural reasons, but also out of fears for Canada's security. As a middle power with a modest army, Canada relied on its allies and its relationships with other powers to both function as an actor in the international arena and to protect itself. In the post-war period, the greatest threats to peace were a potential Soviet invasion of Berlin and Western Europe and the wider proliferation of a Soviet revolutionary ideology. A key problem for the United States and other NATO countries was that the alliance did not have the conventional forces necessary to protect Western Europe. The NATO defensive strategy was thus predicated on the use of atomic and nuclear weapons to deter Soviet aggression.[10]

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the decline of Canada's relationship to Great Britain is Phillip Buckner (ed), *Canada and the End of Empire* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

[9] Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World, 1945-1984* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 5. See especially John Hilliker and Donald Barry, *Canada's Department of External Affairs, volume 2: Coming of Age, 1946–1968* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1995).

[10] Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, 151–78. See also James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: Peacemaking and Deterrence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press,

Atomic weapons had been developed in the United States during the Second World War and used against Japan in the summer of 1945. Atomic fission weapons use a supercritical mass of uranium to create a nuclear chain reaction that can release energy equivalent to about 20,000 pounds of TNT. Thermo-nuclear weapons (also known as hydrogen or H-Bombs) generate a much greater amount of energy by creating a cascading nuclear chain reaction through nuclear fusion. The first American H-Bomb, tested in 1952, released energy equivalent to 10,000,000 tons of TNT. The sheer power of first atomic weapons and later the hydrogen bomb was theoretically awesome enough to deter the Soviets from starting a conventional war which would be unwinnable for the NATO alliance. When the Soviets tested their first nuclear weapon in August 1949, however, this sparked an arms race in which the United States sought to build and maintain an arsenal of nuclear weapons large enough to deter a Soviet conventional or nuclear attack. Thus, finding large quantities of uranium for use in building nuclear weapons was a key requirement to developing a successful American nuclear weapons programme. While Canada was not interested in cultivating its own home-grown offensive nuclear weapons—although it did obtain American-built and controlled BOMARC defensive missiles—from the early years of the Manhattan Project Canadian governments had a vested interest in supporting the American weapons programme and maintaining co-

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1972), chapters 5 and 6; Sean M. Maloney, *Learning to Love the Bomb: Canada's Nuclear Weapons during the Cold War* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2007), 19–76.

operation between their British and American allies. To this end, Canada could provide the uranium required for the job.

Uranium had been discovered in Canada in 1931 by Gilbert LaBine in the Northwest Territories. Mines were established at Great Bear Lake, run by Eldorado Gold Mining Corporation, which had the main objective of extracting radium from uranium.[11] During the Second World War, the need for uranium to develop and build atomic weapons in the United States led the Canadian government to nationalize Eldorado and take over its mining operations.[12] In the post-war years, demand for the mineral continued to climb which led to renewed private interest in prospecting and extraction, as it was made legal for private companies to mine for uranium in 1948.[13] Deposits that were both less remote and closer to American markets and refining capacity were highly desired. This eventually led to the discovery of uranium near the North Shore of Lake Huron, and the establishment of the town of Elliot Lake.[14]

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[11] Bothwell, *Eldorado*, 28-32.

[12] Ibid., 128; 149

[13] Ibid., 292.

[14] A good, succinct overview of developments in nuclear weapons technology is found in Joseph Levitt, *Pearson and Canada's Role in Nuclear Disarmament and Arms Control Negotiations* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 23-

This chapter examines the development of uranium mining in the North Shore area of northern Ontario in the context of the Cold War and the subsequent establishment of the town of Elliot Lake. Whereas the people of the Serpent River First Nation had been using that territory for centuries, within only a few years an expensive, modern, settler town site was built to house miners and their families. In an effort to avoid the scattered ghost towns of other single-resource areas, mining companies and the federal and provincial governments joined forces to create a single boomtown with all the necessary infrastructure. By the end of the 1950s, however, the American government announced it would not renew its contract for Canadian uranium, and the boomtown threatened to become a ghost town. While the Anishinaabe in the area had interacted with the territory in a holistic way, the uranium industry would change that.

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French explorer Jacques Cartier was first told of the riches of the Kingdom of the Saguenay in the early 1500s.[15] From the mid-19th century onwards, prospectors and miners had been traveling north to explore mineral development in the area. Indeed, the Robinson Treaties of 1850 were commissioned largely in order to extinguish Aboriginal title along Lakes Huron and Superior for the purposes of

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30; see also Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, 160–8; Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada, Peacemaking and Deterrence,* 260–74; and Maloney, 68ff.

[15] Ramsay Cook, (ed.), *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 97–99.

resource extraction.[16] It was due to Aboriginal resistance in such events as the "Michipicoten war" that treaties in the area were seen as necessary to support European expansion and settlement.[17] This pattern of government intervention in the planning of the frontier would continue with future mineral developments, particularly at Elliot Lake.

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[16] Edward S. Rogers and Donald B. Smith, *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations* (Toronto: Dundurn Press/Queen's Printer, 1994), 128–30.

[17] The "Michipicoten war" refers to the 1849 incident at Mica Bay that precipitated the 1850 Robinson Treaties. Chief Shingwaukonse and others had resented mining in Anishinaabe territory, as they were neither consulted nor offered royalties. They made trips to Toronto to request a profit-sharing agreement and a land settlement. When their concerns were ignored, they occupied the Lake Superior Mining Company at Mica Bay in an effort to stop mining there. Janet E. Chute, *The Legacy of Shingwakonse: A Century of Native Leadership* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998). See also Janet E. Chute, "Pursuing the Great Spirit's Plan: Nineteenth-Century Ojibwa Attitudes Towards the Future of Logging and Mining on Unsurrendered Indian Lands North of Lakes Huron and Superior." In *Social Relations in Resource Hinterlands: Papers from the 27th Annual Meeting of the Western Association of Sociology and Anthropology*, edited by Thomas W. Dunk (Thunder Bay: Lakehead University Centre for Northern and Regional Studies, 1991).

The 1850 treaties paved the way for the development of "new" Ontario, supported by a resource extraction economy.[18] As the incident at Mica Bay indicates, mining had been an important pursuit in the region since the mid-19th century. Sudbury, for example, which started out as a CPR stop in 1883, gained economic importance when copper and nickel deposits were found in subsequent decade.[19] The railway town became a boomtown very quickly.[20] Prospectors found gold near Red Lake in the northwestern region in the 1890s.[21] The Porcupine Gold

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[18] On the SRFN's and resource use in the area before the uranium industry see on timber LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11352, file 13/20-7-8 parts 1 and 2, on mining LAC RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 493/20-5-7, and on fishing rights RG 10, 11347, file 13/20-2-8.

[19] The railway was extended to Serpent River First Nation in the 1880s with the right of way surrendered on 22 June 1982 by the band. See "Memorandum from DIA to Privy Council," 22 June 1882, LAC, RG 10, Vol. 2116, File 22036. Negotiations about the right of way continued on and off until the First World War.

[20] For more information about the development of Sudbury, see C.M. Wallace and Ashley Thomson, eds., *Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993).

[21] Michael Barnes, *Great Northern Ontario Mines* (Burnstown: General Store Publishing House, 1998), 1-2. See also Kerry Abel, *Changing Places: History, Community, and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-

Rush to the east started the mineral development of towns such as Timmins and Kirkland Lake after 1909.[22]

The mining industry in Canada was credited with being a major factor in the country's economic growth, and between 1925 and 1950 the industry's output rose from $214,000,000 to $806,000,000.[23] New sources of mineral wealth were discovered with regularity which created an air of speculative possibility in the minds of private prospectors and governments alike. By the late 1940s, the north shore of Lake Huron thus had a long history of fur trading, mining, and forestry boom towns, and the countryside was dotted with hard-won farmsteads and head frames on the Precambrian Shield.[24] It was thus a settler economy that had

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Queen's University Press, 2006) for identity formation in northern Ontario communities.

[22] Michael Barnes, *Great Northern Ontario Mines* (Burnstown: General Store Publishing House, 1998), 51-52. See also the same author's *Kirkland Lake: On the Mile of Gold* (Kirkland Lake: Economic Development and Tourism Department, 1994).

[23] "Increase in Value Canadian Mining Industry Output" *Sault Daily Star*, 12 January 1950, 2.

[24] On the economic history of the north shore see Marion Albert, *Trade History, North Shore of Lake Huron: a Review of Events that Shaped the Economy of the North Shore, 1600–1996* (Blind River: Town of Blind River, 1996) and Andrea

traditionally relied on resource extraction for its prosperity. In the late 1940s, uranium was seen as another mineral that could add to settler wealth. Atomic bombs had won the war in Japan and by the late 1940s they were being developed as the cornerstone of the American deterrence policy – stockpiling offensive weapons which made the possibility of war unthinkable.[25] For obvious reasons, the United States sought secure and readily accessible sources of uranium to support its weapons programme.[26]

The Cold War arms race caused a spike in demand for uranium. Eldorado had begun extraction and processing of uranium in the northwest in the 1930s and by 1948 Canada was one of the world's leading source of uranium behind the Belgian Congo.[27] By 1952, Canada had overtaken its neighbour to the south and within two years continued to threaten the Belgian Congo's lead. "We have advanced a lot in the production of uranium concentrates during the last twelve months" said Dr. John Convey, head of the Mines branch of the Department of Mines

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Gutsche, Barbara Chrisholm, and Russell Floren, *The North Channel and St. Mary's River: A Guide to the History* (Toronto: Lynx Images, 2008).

[25] Gaddis, 48–82.

[26] Levitt, 26–7.

[27] United States Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC), "Fourth Annual Report of the USAEC, Raw Materials Program," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 4, 11 (November 1948): 350.

and Technical Surveys. "In 1955 the advance is expected to be even greater."[28] During the previous years, there had been considerable excitement over uranium prospects throughout the country, on both national and local levels. Canadian prospectors were caught up in an international rush to find new sources of the radioactive element. "Canada is in the race too," reported an article on the global uranium rush in the American periodical *The Rotarian*. "Thirty Government searchers were sent out last year to swell the ranks of free-lance prospectors ranging its wilderness, east-west-north-south."[29]

In Ontario's mining belt, anxious citizens followed the rush as it unfolded across the country. In 1950, they learned that in Quebec, seasoned prospector Captain John R. Beauchemin, backed by more than twenty years of experience and a trusty Geiger counter, made a new uranium discovery near St. Simeon in Charlevoix county.[30] The staking of 15,000 acres of land following the discovery was met with great excitement, but this was not for economic reasons alone. It was also used by the people in the area as a reason to ask the Duplessis regime to extend the Quebec-Chicoutimi highway to St. Simeon.[31] From this readers could infer that uranium

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[28] "Canadian Uranium Production Heading Toward World Lead" *Bruce Mines Spectator*, 13 January 1955, 1.

[29] Georg Mann, "The Uranium Rush is On!," *The Rotarian* LXXIV, 5 (May 1949): 13.

[30] "Uranium Claims Staked in Quebec" *Sault Daily Star*, 3 February 1950, 15.

[31] "Uranium Deposit Found in Quebec" *Sault Daily Star*, 2 February 1950, 1.

would bring important infrastructure and development money wherever it might be found.

For a region of Ontario which depended on the discovery of new resources for sustained economic growth, uranium strikes elsewhere in Canada naturally captured the imaginations of readers of the *Sault Daily Star.* In 1949, sixty groups prospected in Northern Saskatchewan, while the following year it was predicted that their number would double thanks to fifty claims staked in the Lake Athabaska area.[32] Readers learned that another high-grade deposit was discovered in March 1950 by Adolph Studer 85 kilometres northeast of the La Ronge area of Lake Athabaska.[33] In yet another, three of the six claims in the Lac La Ronge area were made "commercially feasible" to mine deposits by the increase in the value of uranium.[34] The *Star* delighted in reporting that the regional prospecting supervisor, Malcolm Norris, explained that "the new price basis will mean a boost of $7 a ton on top-assay ore" and "the other two known deposits would get a 'reasonable' price increase."[35]

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[32] "Step Up Quest for West Uranium" *Sault Daily Star*, 21 March 1950, 11.

[33] "Find High-Grade Uranium Deposit" *Sault Daily Star*, 25 March 1950, 11.

[34] "Increase in Value of Uranium to Aid 3 Sask. Deposits" *Sault Daily Star*, 28 April 1950, 3.

[35] Ibid.

As the *Rotarian* told its interested American readers, the Canadian uranium prospector's "bible is the Government issued *Prospector's Guide for Uranium and Thorium Minerals in Canada.*"[36] The *Prospectors Handbook*, as it was colloquially known, was in its third edition by the spring of 1950 and northern Ontario prospectors picked up copies to learn how to join in on this new mineral rush.[37] It provided a description of radioactive minerals, a geological and geographical overview, warned about potential problems, and gave tips as to how to use and care for the most important tool: the Geiger counter.[38] The Provincial Department of Mines encouraged development of this new industry through free evening prospecting classes which it organized and funded in Toronto.[39] As the Sault Ste. Marie newspapers reported, uranium fever in the area reached frenzied levels when the government guaranteed prices for the ore in April 1950, effectively doubling the

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[36] Mann, 13.

[37] H.S. Spence with F. Senftle, *Prospectors' Guide for Uranium and Thorium Minerals in Canada* (Ottawa: Bureau of Mines, Department of Mines and Resources, 1949). See also "More Prospectors Join Uranium Hunt" *Sault Daily Star*, 13 May 1950, 11.

[38] "More Prospectors Join Uranium Hunt" *Sault Daily Star*, 13 May 1950, 11.

[39] "Prospectors' Class Starts" *Sault Daily Star*, 23 January 1950, 4.

price.[40] Excited editors suggested that prospecting and exploration of the radioactive ore would soon rival the area's already solid tourism industry.[41] In 1955, the *Bruce Mines Spectator*, a local paper for the small North Shore town, even suggested that readers interested in outdoor tourism also do some prospecting on the side.[42] "Bring a Geiger counter to Ontario!" it suggested. "You may not strike it rich but you will have a lot of fun with the ever-growing group of holidayers who use their vacation time to look for radioactive minerals while enjoying the great Ontario outdoors."[43] Thanks to direct government intervention, a nationalized pricing scheme, and a seemingly unlimited market south of the border, prospecting became an everyman's business.[44]

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[40] "Increase in Uranium Price Brightens Algoma's Future" *Sault Daily Star* 20 April 1950, 5.

[41] Ibid.

[42] "Happy Hunting in Ontario...For Uranium" *Bruce Mines Spectator*, 28 July 1955, 3.

[43] Ibid.

[44] SRFN's Band Council also tried to make good use of the excitement. In 1955 they asked DIA for permission to allow limited staking of claims on a portion of the SRFN. DIA informed council that staking could not take place on reserve land and the instead the reserve would have to cede its mineral rights to the crown. Mineral rights on the reserve were ceded in somewhat dubious circumstances on 29 June 1955. A later council tried to rescind the earlier transaction but were not allowed

Despite the enthusiasm, the initial search for large deposits of uranium in the Upper Great Lakes region bore little fruit. Interest was sustained at a fevered pitch by the fact that by 1950 smaller but tantalizing finds had been made on the eastern shore of Lake Superior north of Sault Ste. Marie as well as in northern Michigan.[45] Local newspaper articles reminded readers that even these finds had economic value and that even greater ones were just around the corner.[46] For three years, prospectors and mining company representatives kept busy buying and renewing mining licenses throughout the region, gambling on what they hoped would be a big strike. Meanwhile, the newspapers kept assuring readers that, despite apparent setbacks, a brighter future lay ahead.[47] Three long years later, their luck finally changed.

The largest uranium find in Ontario took place in mysterious circumstances, known colloquially in local lore as the "Back Door Staking Bee." The best-known

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to do so by DIA. The compromise was that DIA would not actively grant extraction rights without band permission. See various correspondence in LAC, RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 493/20-5-7.

[45] Anonymous, "Uranium Exploration in the U.S.," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* VI, 6 (June 1950): 177.

[46] "Algoma Uranium Finds of Commercial Value" *Sault Daily Star* 12 January 1950, 1.

[47] "Spring Development Boom in Algoma Uranium Fields" *Sault Daily Star,* 22 March 1950, 5.

written account is provided by Catharine Dixon, a longtime resident of Elliot Lake and a former journalist. Her book, *The Power and the Promise: The Elliot Lake Story,* details the search for uranium in the area east of Blind River from the late 1940s onward. She attributes the discovery of uranium to independent prospectors, likely encouraged in their endeavours by local news reporting which promised that a successful claim would pave the way to personal economic fortune. Claims by independent prospectors were becoming common by the early 1950s and a Sault Ste. Marie hotel owner by the name of Aimé Breton and his employee, Karl Gunterman, purchased several lapsed claims from the Long Township area in the district of Algoma. In 1952, Gunterman also allowed the claims to lapse, even though Breton had instructed him to maintain them. The twice lapsed claims were subsequently purchased by Franc Joubin and Joseph Hirshhorn. Gunterman had met Joubin in the bush when they were both prospecting in the area. Joubin had subsequently become very interested in the potential of the Breton/Gunterman claims.[48]

Joubin, an independent geologist backed by financier Joseph Hirshhorn, hypothesized that the oxidization process had rendered surface uranium nearly undetectable, but that the elusive element was lurking just below the surface. This supposition spurred the "Backdoor Staking Bee" during the spring and summer of 1953 when a group of independent prospectors as well as some employed by Joubin

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[48] Catharine Dixon, *The Power and the Promise: The Elliot Lake Story* (Elliot Lake: Gillidix Publishing Inc., 1996), 8ff.

and Hirshhorn chartered flights from the Porcupine region (near Timmins, Ontario) and flew into the area in secret. The group was comprised of seventy prospectors, geologists, cooks, and pilots who worked to stake the 8,000 claims in the area over the next six weeks. Their activities did not become public until 12 July 1953, two days after their claims were filed. When their secret was leaked, excitement swept the region as prospectors jumped on the band wagon, hoping to cash in on a potentially large find. Popular and official hopes for a boom in what was regarded as the latest mineral frontier in northern Ontario abounded.[49]

The local popularity of the story of Breton's and Gunterman's lost opportunity and a secret summer staking bee which netted vast amounts of wealth and glory for other individuals underlines the domination of the romanticized view of a wild uranium-packed frontier waiting to be exploited by those gifted with courage and vision. Indeed, in one account of these events, the history of Elliot Lake is recounted as a pioneer narrative. "The first discoveries in the area occurred during 1953," writes a local historian, "and with the faith of financier Joseph Hirshhorn in Franc Joubin and in uranium, plus the rugged pioneer-spirit of thousands of individuals, a part of Canada's great north began its transformation."[50] While the people who came to the area in search of wealth, employment, or a

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[49] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, File: Macleans Article, Star Weekly and Karl Lehlm Article, "Elliot Lake: Uranium Capital of the World".

[50] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, File: Elliot Lake: The 1960s, "Brief History of Elliot Lake", 1.

stepping-stone to a new life certainly took an economic chance, the reality did not reflect local rhetoric about individualistic enterprise in a rugged, untouched wilderness area. Instead, from the very beginning uranium prospecting was but another chapter in a long history of regional resource exploitation, this time shored up by government price guarantees and a cold war market driven by an American build-up of nuclear weapons.

While the actual act of prospecting is, at one level, an individual undertaking, from the very beginning the exploitation of the claims staked out in 1953 became a private-public partnership involving both federal and provincial governments. The town of Elliot Lake, which was created to utilize the claims, was a creation of the partnership formed by the federal and provincial levels of government and the mining companies. This is evident in reading the geography of the town today. One of the community's unique features is the street names which reflect the link between environment, industry, and government. In one area the streets are named after tree species, while in the centre of town they are named after the leading private individuals responsible for the establishment of the industry. In a third neighbourhood, the names of Prime Ministers are used, with Pearson Drive situated as its backbone. It is not surprising that in a town built and sustained by a partnership between industry and government that the urban geography should reflect this reality. Indeed, as we will see, there would be several points in the town's history when the industry at Elliot Lake would only be sustained by government stockpiling initiatives in the absence of international buyers for uranium. The uranium economy at Elliot Lake—which was subject to a boom-bust

economic cycle like any other single-industry town— was thus shaped by larger socio-political changes and private-public partnerships from its very beginning.

It was the "Backdoor Staking Bee" described earlier that began the rush of mining companies to the area. The stakes claimed in the Z formation belonged to the Algom Mining Company, and it investigated the best 630 stakes it had claimed and quickly put a diamond drilling program into place.[51] Consolidated Denison was not far behind during the summer of 1953. A.W. Stollery and F.H. Jowsey staked its claims, while R.I. Benner began the geological mapping of the staked area the following spring.[52]

The drilling done at these mine sites and the others that soon followed demonstrated the staggering amount of uranium which had been discovered. "Before the end of 1953," writes Dixon, "it became evident that ore bodies at both Quirke and Nordic [two mines that were established] might be larger than those at either Gunmar, or Beaverlodge in Saskatchewan. They would yield more uranium oxide than Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories and probably twice as much as Pronto."[53] The quantity and concentration of uranium underground was unprecedented at the time, and twelve mines quickly came into operation in order to extract it: Algom Quirke, Algom Nordic, Consolidated Denison, Panel, CanMet,

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[51] A diamond drill is a type of coring drill used to sample an ore body.

[52] Dixon, 28–30.

[53] Dixon, 20.

Stanrock, Stanleigh, Spanish-American, Buckles Mine, Milliken, Lacnor, and Pronto.[54] The federal government entered into a $1.6 billion contract with the Atomic Energy Commission in the United States in 1957, underlining the extent to which the state was so heavily involved in uranium production and its export.[55]

Between 1955 and 1961, uranium extraction was extremely profitable; by the end of the 1950s, Canada had become completely embedded in the American uranium economy, and that relationship was a lucrative one, with the annual uranium trade bringing in approximately $300,000,000 every year throughout the late 1950s. The United States imported about half its uranium and most of that came from Canada, further cementing the economic and military relationship between the two countries.[56]

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[54] Downey, Terrence James, *The Political Economy of Uranium: Elliot Lake, 1948-1970* (M.A. Thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 1972), 63 and 174. Downey's thesis provides a lengthy overview of government involvement in the development of the Elliot Lake area.

[55] Shawn Heard, "The City of Elliot Lake to 1991: Before the Roof Fell In," 22.

[56] "Uranium Surplus Forecast U.S. Produces Her Own" *The Standard*, 14 July 1951, 1. See also Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World, 1945-1984* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007. The extraction of uranium for the purposes of power generation did not become a factor until the early- to mid-1960s. For an examination of Canada's interest in nuclear power beginning in the 1950s and the move toward implementing that technology, see

On a Monday night in October 1956 at the Blind River Legion hall, Lester B. Pearson, then Minister of External Affairs and Member of Parliament for the Algoma region, explained the direct relationship between uranium extraction in his riding and Canada's international relations: "Ninety-six percent, perhaps more, of the product of this area, is going to the production of weapons of war—weapons almost too much in horror for the human mind to grasp."[57] Pearson was well aware of the importance of making peace and not war; he won the Nobel Peace Prize the following year for his efforts during the Suez Crisis.[58] While nuclear war horrified him, Pearson conceded that deterrence was necessary: "We must look for other

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Wilfrid Eggleston, *Canada's Nuclear Story* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1965), 321-341. Rio Algom signed a contract with Ontario Hydro in 1966 and both Denison and Rio signed contracts with Japan in 1967: Catharine Dixon, *The Power and the Promise: the Elliot Lake Story* (Elliot Lake: Gillidix Publishing, 1996), 262.

[57] Pearson addressed the audience on 15 October 1956 and the local media paid heed. "Weapons too Horrible—96 Per Cent Uranium Going War Production" *Spectator* 18 October 1956, 1.

[58] John English, *The Life of Lester Pearson: The Worldly Years, 1949–1972* (Toronto: A.A. Knopf, 1992), 107ff.

means to peace, but it looks to me as if we will require this deterrent to aggression for some time to come."[59]

The purpose of the Blind River meeting was to brief the public about an international conference in New York. The topic of the conference was the peaceful use of atomic energy, and Pearson had hoped to enlighten his constituents about the importance of their area and new industry to this conference. "If we in New York can make a success of this conference," he said, "we will do two things. We will prevent any countries, other than those who already atomic weapons have—United States, United Kingdom, and the USSR—from using atomic energy for purposes of war. And we will try to increase knowledge of atomic power in other countries, so that we can find new uses for uranium and atomic energy. If we can do this, it will have a direct bearing on this area."[60] In his address, Pearson pointed out the importance of Algoma's uranium to winning the Cold War, both as an essential component of the west's deterrence policy, but also in hopes that it would provide important energy alternatives or other peaceful uses.[61] He was keenly aware that

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[59] "Weapons too Horrible—96 Per Cent Uranium Going War Production" *Spectator* 18 October 1956, 1.

[60] "Weapons too Horrible—96 Per Cent Uranium Going War Production" *Spectator* 18 October 1956, 1.

[61] "High Cost Bars Atomic Powered Cars" *Leader-Spectator* 14 February 1957, 7.

both were good for the Algoma economy, and that the latter alternative would fuel the uranium economy after nuclear weapons were no longer needed.

Pearson's rousing speech was in keeping with the Canadian government's excitement over uranium prospects, which had led to Eldorado's nationalization in stages from 1942-44.[62] It was Eldorado that had the monopoly on buying uranium ore and its milling processes after its interests turned to uranium in the postwar period. As Robert Bothwell explains in his company-sponsored study of the corporation,[63] "the company became, in effect, a compliant Canadian supply arm of the US Atomic Energy Commission, which had reciprocated by buying everything produced at generous prices until its stockpile was full to overflowing at the end of the 1950s."[64] Once the ore had been milled, it was then processed into uranium

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[62] Bothwell, *Eldorado: Canada's National Uranium Company* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 149.

[63] It comes complete with a forward by N.M. Ediger, the Chief Executive Officer of Eldorado in 1984, who congratulates Bothwell for capturing "the excitement of frontier resource development." Bothwell, x.

[64] Robert Bothwell, *Eldorado: Canada's National Uranium Company* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). Political scientists, economists, and public policy analysts had a keen interest in the uranium market, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. See, for example, Hugh C. McIntyre, *Uranium, Nuclear Power, and Canada-U.S. Energy Relations* (Montreal: Canadian-American Committee, 1978); David G. Haglund, "Protectionism and National Security: The Case of Canadian

concentrates at Port Hope, Ontario and then shipped to the United States for refining into pure uranium metal.

While Eldorado had a monopoly on uranium contracts, in 1948, Trade Minister C.D. Howe announced that privately-owned mines would be encouraged to replace government-owned mines in uranium development.[65] Previous to this, two of the three mines that were in operation were located at Port Radium, in the Northwest Territories and the Beaverlodge area in northern Saskatchewan. Both were run by the Crown-owned Eldorado Mining and Refining Corporation. The sole privately-owned company in production in Canada was operated by Rix-Athabasca in the Beaverlodge area. Two other companies, Gunnar Mines and Consolidated Nicholson, were set to begin production in the Beaverlodge area, while Pronto

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Uranium Exports to the United States" *Canadian Public Policy* XII, no. 3 (1986): 459-472); Larry R. Stewart, "Canada's Role in the International Uranium Cartel" *International Organization* 35, no. 4 (1981): 657-689. An earlier examination is W.D.G. Hunter, "The Development of the Canadian Uranium Industry" *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* XXVIII no. 3 (1962): 329-352. The American context can be read in Herbert H. Lang, "Uranium Mining and the AEC: Birth Pangs of a New Industry" *Business History Review* 36, no. 3 (1961): 325-333.

[65] Bothwell, *Eldorado*, 292.

Uranium was in development in the Blind River region of Ontario.[66] Thus, the north shore area of northern Ontario, whose economy had always been defined by resource extraction, added uranium as one of its key economic drivers—a mineral that was to shape both economic and public perception of the region in the years to come. However, unlike previous economic developments, uranium extraction would be defined by co-operation between private businesses and the provincial and federal levels of government.[67]

A co-operative public-private partnership was imperative to create a town-site closer to the ore body so as to facilitate its extraction. Blind River, where Pearson's meeting took place, is located seventy kilometres from the present-day site of Elliot Lake. The main ore body was also thirty kilometres from the Trans-Canada Highway, the North Shore of Lake Huron, and the local branch line of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Given the remoteness of the mine sites to existing towns and transportation infrastructure, it appeared abundantly clear that a town-site would have to be "carved from the rock," to borrow the title of a recent historical documentary on the history of Elliot Lake.[68] In the beginning there were makeshift

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[66] "Canadian Uranium Production Heading Toward World Lead" *Bruce Mines Spectator*, 13 January 1955, 1.

[67] "Pearson Indicts Government" *The Standard*, 9 November 1959, 1 and 3.

[68] *Carved from the Rock: the Story of Elliot Lake* (Toronto: National Dream Production, 2005).

camps to house male employees, but it was thought that there should also be more permanent sites for housing.[69] The campsites bred their fair share of criticism, even in 1957.[70] The United Steelworkers of America union supervisor, Terry Mancini, drew media attention to the inadequate living conditions faced by his members at their work camps. Stating that some of the buildings were nothing more than "broken down barns" and, making reference to the forty reported instances of food

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[69] For a case study approach to male workers in the Thunder Bay area, see Thomas W. Dunk, *It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working Class Culture in Northwestern Ontario* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

[70] Male miners often left their wives and families in other towns until housing was available at Elliot Lake. For a fictional account of the mining industry at Elliot Lake, see Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999), especially chapters 20 through 22. "Sometimes those of us who were off during the days or evenings would sit on benches outside our bunkhouse doors. We would engage in desultory games of horseshoes or talk with the Irish or Newfoundlanders. Many of them were older married men with families who, on paydays, lined up at the small temporary bank to purchase money orders or international bank draughts to send to their distant loved ones. Sometimes they would sit on the benches unconsciously rubbing themselves between their legs. 'In Ireland,' said the red-haired Irishman, 'I have a home but I have no money. Here I have lots of money but I have no home.' We raised our eyebrows in unison to indicate we understood." MacLeod, 147.

poisoning, Mancini publicized his demands for a clean-up of conditions.[71] "We saw men retching and throwing up outside between huts," he reported. "Inside we saw men lying sick in bed while somebody was trying to spoon hot tea into them."[72] Mancini insisted that his members deserved better.[73]

In 1957, 1,000 men walked off the job at Nordic mine in protest of the crowded and poor conditions to which they were subjected. Camp site conditions were controlled by the mining companies themselves which made living conditions an aspect of collective bargaining. Indeed it was a recurring issue for the workers and their union and the journalist's description of camp housing underscores their grievances:

> Some of the men's attempts at adding the homey touch are indeed pathetic. Small shelves erected around double decker bunks hold personal gear, pictures pasted to the walls, and even a jam pail used as a bed lamp. This spells home for these men. Lines strung across the rooms add to the general atmosphere...and drying socks and underwear to the smell. In these latter huts toilet facilities are very

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[71] "'Gone Far Enough,' Mancini Says Steel Will 'Insist on Clean-Up,'" *The Standard*, 6 June 1957.

[72] "'Gone Far Enough,' Mancini Says Steel Will 'Insist on Clean-Up,'" *The Standard*, 6 June 1957.

[73] Ibid.

> poor. Long line-ups are the order of the day for the use of porcelain wash basins [...] a man objects to washing in another man's dirt.[74]

While authorities from Ontario Public Health inspected the site and found no evidence of over-crowding, the workers who lived sixteen people to a 20x16 foot room disagreed.[75] The overcrowding was a by-product of the rushed, temporary work-camp which had been established to quicken workers' access to the sites. As the mines developed and the population increased, it is hardly surprising that employees who planned to stay in the area for the long-term wanted to bring their families. But this was impossible so long as they did not have access to proper single-family housing.

Since the mines and government had been initially reluctant to support a permanent building program as at other single-resource sites elsewhere, permanent housing had developed in close proximity to the individual sources of employment—the actual head frame of the mine, for example. This often created a hodgepodge of loosely connected and sometimes isolated clusters of housing sites which, given the boom–bust nature of the economy, were unsustainable in the long-

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[74] "A Good Beef—But Some Agitating Involved in Lake Nordic Protest" *The Standard,* 13 June 1957, 11.

[75] Ibid.

term.[76] At the uranium camp at Elliot Lake, it was decided early on that there should be a single community established for mine employees regardless of where they worked. Representatives from Algom Uranium Mines Limited had advocated for this plan since 1954, and a brief presented to the Ontario Municipal Board on 20 July 1955 echoed that sentiment:

> A prime objective of Algom Uranium Mines Ltd. and indeed of all mining companies is to ensure their labour force favourable living conditions in pleasant surroundings. As I understand it, this objective can be readily attained through the incorporation of an Improvement District. It can be met by building town-sites at the individual mines or by fostering a central community. This Company and its employees favour a central community and have in the past and will continue in

[76] For a direct comparison see Arn Keeling, "Born in an Atomic Test Tube: Landscapes of cyclonic development at Uranium City, Saskatchewan," *The Canadian Geographer* 54, 2 (2008): 228–252 and also B.G. McIntyre, *Uranium City: the Last Boom Town* (N.P.: Driftwood Publications, 1993); See also the several case studies in Matt Bray and Ashley Thomson, (eds.), *At the End of the Shift: Mines and Single-Industry Towns in Northern Ontario* (Sudbury: Dundurn Press/Laurentian University, 1992).

the future to work with government agencies to encourage this movement.[77]

The brief, an example of the lobbying efforts undertaken by the mining companies, underlines many of their goals for business and community development in the area, and their concern in particular that the latter support the former process. The establishment of the town-site was not to be a haphazard settlement in Ontario's last frontier. Instead, the provincial government and the mining companies joined forces in the planning for this modern town, a relationship that stemmed back to the previous year. As Robert Robson argues in his study of government intervention in resource town-site planning in Northern Ontario during the 1950s, "the provincial government, through its efforts to rationalize northern growth and expansion, committed itself to the notion of comprehensive planning."[78]

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[77] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Brief to Ontario Municipal Board, 20 June 1955"; AO, RG 19, Box 3, D-8, "Brief for Ontario Municipal Board".

[78] Robert Robson, "Building Resource Towns: Government Intervention in Ontario in the 1950s," in Matt Bray and Ashley Thomson, (eds.), *At the End of the Shift: Mines and Single-Industry Towns in Northern Ontario* (Sudbury: Dundurn Press/Laurentian University, 1992), 98. The literature on company towns in fairly large. In addition to those works cited above see Rex. A. Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) and more recent works including Robert Robson, "Manitoba's Resource Towns: the Twentieth Century Frontier," *Manitoba*

A meeting between representatives from the Departments of Lands and Forests, Highways, Health, Municipal Affairs, Mines, and the Ontario Hydro-Electric Power Commission, the Canadian Pacific Railway, Algom Uranium Mines Limited, Technical Mine Consultants, and the Roddis Lumber and Veneer Company on 19-21 September 1954 was surprisingly productive given the number of people present, each with his or her own interests to represent. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss planning options for the town-site.[79] The Administrative committee on town-sites advised the provincial Cabinet Subcommittee struck to deal with the Elliot Lake question of the following points in a statement made 26 January 1955:

1. Exploration of the properties of both Nordic and Quirke Mines indicated sizeable bodies of commercial grade uranium ore and it

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History 16 (September 1988): 2–16; Robert Robson, "Strike in the Single Enterprise Community: Flin Flon, Manitoba–1934," *Labour* 12 (Autumn 1983): 63–86; Robert Robson, "Wilderness Suburbs: Boom and Gloom on the Prairies, 1945–1986," *Prairie Forum* 13, 2 (September 1988): 191–219; Robert Robson, *The Politics of Resource Town Development: Ontario's Resource Communities, 1883–1970* (PhD Dissertation: University of Guelph, 1986); James Mochoruk, "Oral History in a Company Town: Flin Flon, 1926–1946," *Canadian Oral History Association* 7 (1984): 5–12; John Kendrick, *The People of the Snow: The Story of Kitimat* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

[79] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake", 1.

seemed probable that several other adjacent properties had mine potentials.

2. At the Nordic and Quirke properties considerable development work was done, shaft construction well underway, with the expectation that both mines will be in full production by July 1956.
3. Contracts which at this date have been completed, were under negotiation with the Hydro-Electric Power Commission which supplied power by the summer of 1955.
4. Contracts with the Federal Agency which is the sole purchaser authorized to acquire uranium concentrate have been completed.
5. With a working force of 1,200 employees for these two mines and with an anticipated expansion from other potential mines in the area, that a town-site of at least 6,000 persons could be anticipated.
6. With the development of additional properties or an increase in production rate at the Nordic and Quirke properties the town-site population could approximate 15,000 persons.
7. With the area being at a considerable distance from any organized municipality (22 air miles from Blind River) no existing municipality could adequately furnish the urban type of accommodation required by the population which would accompany the anticipated mining operations.

8. The sole ground access to the mining area is by way of a mining development road extending northward from Serpent River to Quirke Lake, a distance of approximately 20 air miles.[80]

These points of interest indicate the need for the establishment of a town-site and the skeletal provisions that were already in place in the area. Perhaps most importantly, these recommendations also note the bright future of the industry in order to emphasize the area as one of growth and prosperity. In other words, although this was no doubt an accurate assessment of the conditions "on the ground," the recommendations highlighted not only the need for a town-site, but that its establishment would also make economic sense in the long-term.[81]

Over the next year, cost-sharing schemes were ironed out through meetings of the Administrative Committee on Town-sites, the provincial Cabinet Subcommittee chaired by the minister of Municipal Affairs, and written assurances from Franc Joubin of Algom's willingness to contribute. Shortly thereafter

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[80] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake", Submitted by J.W.P. Carter, 2 February 1956.; AO, RG 19, Box 3, D-8, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake".

[81] See Robert Robson, "Building Resource Towns: Government Intervention in Ontario in the 1950s," in Matt Bray and Ashley Thomson, (eds.), *At the End of the Shift: Mines and Single-Industry Towns in Northern Ontario* (Sudbury: Dundurn Press/Laurentian University, 1992), 97–9.

townships 137, 138, 143, 144, 149, 150, 155, 156, Proctor, Esten and McGiverin were amalgamated into the Improvement District of Elliot Lake, an area that now spanned 396 square miles.[82] Once the Improvement District was designated, the town-site was divided into three subdivisions to be built consecutively all under the supervision of the committees comprised of mining and government interests.[83]

While the urban planning for Elliot Lake reflected post-war utopian ideals and a government desire to promote order and rationality in development, one peculiar aspect was the structure of the town's governing body.[84] Due in part to the initial transient population (labourers and miners came and went) as well as the rapid transition from wilderness to work camp to town-site, the province appointed a board of trustees, comprised of three men who answered to the Department of Municipal Affairs, to act as the governing structure in the community.[85] In fact, the Minister of Planning and Development at the time, W.K. Warrender, issued an order under the Planning Act to protect government and business interests by

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[82] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake", Submitted by J.W.P. Carter, 2 February 1956; AO, RG 19, Box 3, D-8, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake", 2-3.

[83] Ibid., 3.

[84] Robson, 98–102.

[85] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Elliot Lake: Uranium Capital of the World".

establishing standards of development for the area. Development would be closely controlled by government and legislation until "such time as local municipalities are established to assume responsibility for the permanent administration of the area."[86] The chaotic, frontier style free-for-all common in some places was not to be repeated on the North Shore. Instead, a joint task force between business representatives and government ministries would closely control the area. Joubin, who was now the President of Algom Uranium Mines, Ltd., E.B. Gillanders, Algom's Managing Director and B. Willoughby, the director of Can-Met Explorations Ltd. were chosen to sit on the board effective 1 September 1955,[87] the same day that the area was designated a township municipality.[88]

As Robert Robson argues, the province of Ontario was heavily involved in municipal planning of Northern Ontario "resource-town" development in the postwar period, and Elliot Lake was no exception.[89] The fact that the community

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[86] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Ontario Government Press Release Issued by the Department of Planning and Development dated 22 June 1955"; AO, RG 19, Box 2, D-8, "Press Release."

[87] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake", Submitted by J.W.P. Carter, 2 February 1956.; AO, RG 19, Box 3, D-8, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake".

[88] Ibid.

[89] Robson, 97.

was planned by a partnership between business and government interests did not mean that development would be wholly orderly. A government report titled "Improvement District of Elliot Lake" and written by J.W.P. Carter indicated that the timely transfer of surface land rights from the Crown did not impede development in the town-site, but the clearing process delayed the availability of lots. At the very end of his report, he also mentions that the companies, "with their attitude of urgency, improperly sited the school, a water tower and some of the water services—to rectify these matters all take [sic] time."[90] This embedded and almost hidden statement underscores the rapidity that characterized the development of the town-site and demonstrates that even carefully controlled planning can be unduly influenced by time constraints. While Carter believed that "the preparation of the town-site at Elliot Lake [had] proceeded with acceleration and that community development [had], as much as possible kept pace with the mining development of the area,"[91] it seems as though one of the three board directors disagreed. Joubin, in a letter to W.M. Nickle, the Minister of Planning and Development, outlined his concerns about the town-site's pace of development: "the development of the town-site must also be accelerated to keep step with the development of the mines. The provincially-directed town-site field planning crew

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[90] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake", Submitted by J.W.P. Carter, 2 February 1956.; AO, RG 19, Box 3, D-8, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake", 6.

[91] Ibid., 6.

has varied from three men to twelve and back to a present four in number; a ridiculously small force for the scope and urgency of the project in hand..."[92] Joubin's letter, written on Algom Uranium Mines stationary, presents a scathing criticism of the pace of this organized planning. As both president of Algom and a member of the Board of Directors for the Improvement District, he was in the position to compare the development of both the economic mining and social aspects of the region.

The problem of organized planning was not lost on other board members. E.B. Gillanders, the Vice-President at Rio Tinto Company and a member of the Board of Trustees, called attention to the delays associated with town-site construction and the impact they could have on uranium extraction: "We realize we can't operate these mines without homes for the workers...We want to get away from two or three contractors stumbling over themselves when they get on the job." His reference to the problems with co-ordination and consistency were tied to the operations of the mines. He also made mention of the delays in planning and construction due to government interference: a lack of co-ordination on the part of provincial departments, as well as the federal government's "tight money policy," had a negative impact on much-need financing. "From the company's viewpoint," he wrote, "if we could handle our homes [sic] construction in the same way as we

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[92] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Letter from Joubin to W.M. Nickle dated 23 January 1956"; AO, RG 19, Box 3, D-8, "Letter to Hon. Nickle Jan. 23/1956."

handle construction for our mines then all these bottlenecks that have caused housing delays would have been eliminated long ago."[93] The complicated ties between government and business, although necessary for the establishment of the town-site, were also to blame for delays.

Financier Joseph Hirshhorn downplayed this partnership and instead told the local newspaper that the town was his own idea: "I'm building this entirely on my own."[94] Egotism aside, Hirshhorn's comments reveal that the mining and town development process was understood to be a permanent and lasting process of directed evolution. It was, he said, something that was important not only locally but to the nation as a whole. "This is a big thing...Not a boom, but a planned expansion," he told the paper. "The next 20 years belong to Canada—and during this period this district from Sudbury to the Sault is going to expand."[95] Clearly for Hirshhorn and others in the community, Elliot Lake symbolized the post-war optimistic spirit which framed economic development in the 1950s.[96]

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[93] "Rio Tinto Alone Plans—700 More New Homes" *The Standard*, 13 December, 1956, 1.

[94] "Model of Modern Design—Promises 'Canada's Finest Town' will Have Diversified Industry" *Bruce Mines Spectator*, 17 February 1955, 1.

[95] Ibid.

[96] See Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: a History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), especially 84–111.

Newspaper reports of the time highlight the rapid and sometimes unnerving pace of development but always emphasized that the local settler-population was engaged in an act of civilization building: literally carving a new and "useful" town out from what was formally "under-used" wilderness. One newly-arrived woman, whose husband was having difficulty finding their assigned lot, told the newspaper: "They said it was on high ground. It better be on high ground. I don't want to live down below. The contractors said it was high. It better be. But you can't tell about contractors." The newspaper used romantic language to describe the creation of the town. "The square of concrete foundations yawned vacantly in the afternoon sun," read the story in the *Bruce Mines Spectator*, which doubled as the local Elliot Lake paper at the time; "in the distance were the colourful row of trailer homes; the barracks-like parade square of bunkhouses; men swarming over half-completed homes—some roofless, some windowless—against the sky's blueness." Then the story quoted the woman as saying, "you know, it's going to be wonderful here."[97] Clearly the building of the town was construed as a positive and creative act, making beauty and wonder from what was perceived as an empty and un-used space.

The bunkhouses and shacks that were built to accommodate the transient portions of the population were considered to be a problem, despite the fact that, for many, there were few other options for living arrangements. A front-page story in the new Elliot Lake local, *The Standard,* told of the shacks that were "mushrooming

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[97] "From all Across Canada to Build City: $1 Million Spent House Building Alone, Already" *Bruce Mines Spectator*, 25 October 1956, 1.

overnight" and the health and fire hazards they presented.[98] Twenty to thirty shacks had been constructed outside the town-site as a response to the need for housing. The absence of power and water facilities, as well as the crowded living conditions (two adults and twelve children in one ten-foot square room in one instance), worried the Department of Lands and Forests and the local fire department to the point that they outlawed further construction of such shelters. The small community's proximity to the bush as well as the lack of sanitary measures pressed community officials to act.[99] The following week it was reported that the Board of Trustees, backed by mining representatives, had passed its new by-law against shack-building and unauthorized trailer parking. The concern over this grassroots response to controlled town planning was outlined first by fire and health officials, and then the Board of Trustees chairperson, Joubin, who presented his new plan for the "registration of trailers, the assessing of trailers outside authorized sites, and for the policing of mine properties by mine managers."[100]

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[98] "Townsite Officials Move Against Shacks: 14 People in a Room" *The Standard*, 9 May 1957, 1. Mobile homes had flooded into the area, and along with the shack-builders, there was one woman who called a bus a home for herself and her four children. See Dixon, 76-77.

[99] "Townsite Officials Move Against Shacks: 14 People in a Room" *The Standard*, 9 May 1957, 1.

[100] "Board of Trustees Decide—All Shacks Must Go" *The Standard*, 16 May 1957, 1.

Although the construction of new homes was proving to be a long process, it was clear that the Board of Trustees would not allow housing to go "beyond the limits of control," as Joubin referred to the issue in the meeting.[101] It was the act of building an ordered and rational town which reflected post-war idealistic values and not just growth itself. The former provided evidence of progress while un-controlled growth seemed to recall an older, unenlightened age.

Local officials thus continuously struggled to maintain control over the development process. The town-site construction problems outlined by Joubin himself at the beginning of 1956 in his letter to Minister Nickle were still being addressed the following year.[102] By the summer of 1957, 1,050 housing units were scheduled for construction.[103] It is perhaps no coincidence that the announcement came one month after the conflict over ramshackle housing made news. The units would be divided among the three neighbourhoods built in the 1950s, unimaginatively but rationally referred to as Neighbourhoods One, Two, and Three. While some lots had been cleared for individual purchase, most of them were

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[101] Ibid.

[102] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Letter from Joubin to W.M. Nickle dated 23 January 1956"; AO, RG 19, Box 3, D-8, "Letter to Hon. Nickle Jan. 23/1956."

[103] "1050 Housing Units Scheduled for Neighbourhoods One, Two and Three" *The Standard*, 13 June 1957, 1.

controlled by Stanrock, Stanleigh, Consolidated Denison (through Con-Ell, its housing subsidiary), Rio Tinto (through its housing subsidiary, Elliot Lake Building Corporation) Mines to address the housing needs of their employees.[104] In this way, growth was planned by government but then became the responsibility of the mining companies themselves.

While the clearing of lots had begun in the spring of 1955,[105] the registration of the building plans for Neighbourhood No. 1 was not completed until January of the following year. Although trailer park sites remained available, it was still some time before the new single-family homes could actually be occupied by miners, construction workers, and their families. Housing construction was completed in some areas of town by the spring of 1956, and it was not long before residents commented on the fact that all the houses looked the same. As in many company towns, citizens could only choose from one of three types of home: bungalow, story-and-a-half, and two-story houses with no variation in the floor plans in each category. The uniformity of the houses reduced costs through economies of scale while also reflecting the principles of order and rationality which underlay the town's planning.[106] While company towns tended to offer less variety than independently planned communities, the move towards standardized housing

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[104] Ibid.

[105] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 6, "Brief History of Elliot Lake."

[106] Robson, 110–2.

models was common in Canadian corporate suburban communities.[107] This could sometimes have unintended and humorous consequences. In Elliot Lake, all new homes had identical muddy front yards which made the houses difficult to tell apart. One man was awakened to the sound of a neighbour coming into the house, thinking it was his own. On a separate occasion (after he started locking the door at night) his sleep was disturbed by the boyfriend of a neighbour's daughter: "I've brought her home on time, sir." "Then you'd better take her to the right house" was his unimpressed response.[108]

In a newly-constructed town populated by young mine employees and their families, it also became clear that few immediate provisions had been made for education. Schools were only planned once the construction of permanent housing began. At the end of October 1956, the construction of the first elementary school commenced and it was to provide some relief to the two rooms where 350 students were presently studying. As for the education of adolescents, the town theatre doubled as the high school.[109] A year later, it was reported that work on the elementary school was being rushed because the three-room school was

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[107] Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900–1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 129–54.

[108] Dixon, 109.

[109] "From all Across Canada to Build a City, continued" *Bruce Mines Spectator*, 25 October 1956, 8.

overwhelmed by the more than 375 students who had to cope with the "stagger system," whereby children attended school in shifts in order to meet the demand.[110] Nevertheless, demands for school appeared to be as much a symbol of the community's success as it was understood to be a symptom of the problems of overcrowding and rapid growth.

As with schools, the churches too initially made do with a shortage of meeting space through haphazard, temporary arrangements. Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church was put under construction in early 1957 while its leader, Father Farrell, said mass at the town-site's recreation hall, as well as at the Denison and Can-Met mines.[111] The Unitarians were still in the process of building their church thanks to volunteer labour and several work bees.[112] That said, these temporary arrangements did not hamper the growth of church communities on the town-site. By May 1957, the ladies' auxiliary of Our Lady of Fatima parish was formed and the Anglican Ladies' guild met at the same time.[113] The Catholic auxiliary discussed the need for a tea and the Anglican Guild planned a dance and attended to the matter of arranging a room for the newly-arrived rector. Female parishioners were already

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[110] "Work on School Being Rushed" *The Standard*, 3 January 1957, 4.

[111] "Catholic Church" *The Standard*, 3 January 1957, 5.

[112] "United Church" *The Standard*, 3 January 1957, 5.

[113] "Lady of Fatima Auxiliary Formed Good Turnout" and "Eighteen Present at Meeting of Anglican Guild" *The Standard*, 16 May 1957, 8.

successfully building their respective church communities while the church buildings themselves were either still under construction or masses were being held in temporary locations like the buildings owned by the mines.[114] This linkage between the mine-sites and the social and spiritual lives of Elliot Lake's citizens underscores the complex tripartite relationship which existed between worker, employer, and government.[115]

The role of the local and provincial governments in the planning of Elliot lake included making investments in state-of-the-art infrastructure which would underscore the town's efficiency and functionality. It was an expensive proposition: it was estimated that roads, sewers, and water would cost $1,400,000. As mining waste was routinely discarded into the local environment, including the water systems, finding a clean, safe supply of drinking water was of the utmost

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[114] Ibid.

[115] While the churches and schools struggled through the planning and construction phases of development, the town's first hotel, restaurant, and barroom prepared to open for business. It was set to open 1 April 1957 and in response to jokes about April Fools, the owner, Edward Blahey, was clear. "The hotel will be open," he said. "The contractors have been told that if any tradesmen are found on the premises after April 1 they will be forcibly ejected. And that is not fooling." A beverage room in a mining town is no laughing matter: a fight among men in line to be admitted to the bar resulted in one man being taken to hospital, where he died of his injuries.

importance. Carter's report on the development of the town-site, mentioned earlier, outlined these concerns and the measures that would need to be taken to address them. "An exhaustive survey is under way [sic] to ensure an adequate supply of water for domestic purposes of the town-site and for mining purposes," he wrote. "Simultaneously a careful study is being made to ensure that tailings dumps of the Mining Companies are so arranged that there will be no contamination of water supply for domestic use."[116] The notion that rapid development, no matter how controlled and planned by governments and private business concerns, may have compromised the safety of residents was glossed-over and dismissed as an issue simply related to the growth of the site itself. In some ways, infrastructure—like the schools and churches—was understood to be a victim of the town's success. Nevertheless, rationalized growth was seen as the solution and it was the state's job to ensure that any such shortcomings were rectified. While the health and safety of the water system in the settler-town was of the utmost concern for residents, government, and the companies, we shall see in the next chapter that the same needs of the First Nations community that had been located downstream for more than one hundred years were neglected in the process.

Safe drinking water was not the only concern that needed to be addressed quickly so as to allow for the ordered and controlled growth of the Elliot Lake town-site to continue on schedule. The main road from the Trans-Canada Highway through to the town-site and then on to the mine sites was also a major

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[116] LUL Archives, "Improvement District of Elliot Lake," 6.

consideration for the provincial government. Local oral histories continue to emphasize the broken-down cars that littered the old "highway" due to the inadequacy of the road surface. In the spring of 1955, a letter from the management of Algom Uranium Mines Limited addressed to P.T. Kelly, the Minister of Mines, outlined the urgency of an adequate road, foreseeing disastrous transportation issues if a fix was not soon forthcoming:

> the fact that the four mines have already announced production plans on a large scale and the possibility that at least two more producers may be added to the list in the near future should substantiate our view that nothing short of a two-lane gravel highway will suffice to meet requirements. Furthermore, if development in this area is to continue without serious delay, the construction of this highway should be undertaken immediately.[117]

The letter not only served as a follow-up report to supplement a meeting discussion that had taken place the previous week, but it also appealed to the minister's business sense: a region so valuable in resources required adequate roads not only

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[117] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Letter from Bouck and Derry to Hon. Kelly" dated 11 April 1955. Also AO, RG 19, Box 2, D-8, Kelly, 11 April 1955.

for the construction phases of mining operations, but also for the establishment of the town-site itself.[118]

Adequate transportation infrastructure was understood to be essential to the development of the town itself. The centralized town-site that was so desired by both government and mine representatives for its economical value was threatened by the slow development of roads: "the matter of town-site planning depends entirely on road conditions, as it is planned to accommodate approximately 1,000 men in the new town-site. Present plans are that these men would commute by car and bus from the town-site to their respective places of employment. However, if commuting is not soon practical, the companies will be forced to accommodate their entire working crews at each of the mines."[119] A press release issued by the Ontario

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[118] The letter also outlines the benefits of the mining operations on page 4, linking the development of the improvement district, of which road construction was an essential part, with national interests: "(1) it will be a source of new wealth to the nation; (2) it will provide the much needed employment for large numbers of people and (3) it will provide a substantial increase in business for our industries and utilities." LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Letter from Bouck and Derry to Hon. Kelly", dated 11 April 1955. Also AO,, RG 19, Box 2, D-8, Kelly, 11 April 1955.

[119] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Letter from Bouck and Derry to Hon. Kelly," dated 11 April 1955. Also AO, RG 19, Box 2, D-8, Kelly, 11 April 1955.

government a few months later echoed this sentiment and the desire to create a planned municipality:

> Past experience in Ontario has indicated very clearly that population expansion, such as that which is presently in prospect for the Blind River area [soon to be the Elliot Lake area] into areas which are not organized municipally can, and usually does, lead to the creation of many serious problems of sanitation, education, transportation, protection and administration. All of these problems, if permitted to develop and expand unimpeded, would seriously detract from the potential economic benefits which would otherwise accrue to the local region and to the province as a whole.[120]

In other words, the province understood its duty to be ensuring that the town-site was planned in an orderly manner and that growth was properly managed to so as to avoid the problems of the past.

Private interests in the area saw the government's main role as being the facilitation of expansion, rather than its management. To them the economic importance of Elliot Lake was justification enough for timely government expenditures on important infrastructure projects. These sentiments were echoed

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[120] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Ontario Government Press Release Issued by the Department of Planning and Development dated 15 June, 1955"; AO, RG 19, Box 2, D-8 Press Release "Ontario Government Press Release Issued by the Department of Planning and Development dated 15 June, 1955."

by Algom Uranium Mines Limited President Franc R. Joubin in a letter to P.T. Kelly dated 6 April 1955. He did not mince words about the economic importance of the area to the province. This formed the basis for his request for a highway. "Five mines to-date have developed proven and semi-proven ore with a gross value of approximately $800, 000,000 at current uranium prices. Widely spaced exploratory diamond drilling indicates that this reserve can be tripled."[121] Joubin went on to specify the contracts that were expected and those that were already in place, as well as their potential outputs and employment figures. As for the expected $1,500,000 price tag for the highway, he explained that it was "a sum that will probably be returned to the provincial treasury at least three times over prior to 1961."[122] The main road into town was yet another infrastructural challenge for the mines and government committees in charge of developing the area, and as Joubin, a seemingly practical and fiscally-minded man, pointed out in no uncertain terms that it would ensure the development of this resource-rich area and it would also pay for itself within a few years. Elliot Lake was to be an investment rather than an expenditure.

The slow progress made on the only road into town did not deter some visitors who wanted to see Canada's newest boom town and the emerging city which played such an important role in providing uranium for American nuclear

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[121] LUL Archives, Catharine Dixon Fonds, P103, Box 3, "Letter to P.T. Kelly from Franc R. Joubin dated 6 April 1955"; AO,, RG 19, Box 2, D-8, "Kelly April 6, 1955".

[122] Ibid.

programmes. The 45th Annual Meeting of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, held in Sudbury in May of 1957, included a bus tour to the Elliot Lake area and a visit to one of the mines.[123] Governor General Vincent Massey's visit to area in May 1957 brought national attention to the city. He was set to visit the Consolidated Denison and Algom-Quirke mine sites, and was accompanied by representatives from both companies. After meeting school children and attending a reception, he went on a tour of the Noranda acid plant at Cutler, underlining the linkages between both communities through economic development and capitalistic views of 'progress'.[124] Elliot Lake was held up as a model city in urban planning but also in the way in which its economic activity had practical uses for the Canadian nation and the NATO alliance in the context Cold War security.[125]

It was a municipal concept and a private-public partnership which local and provincial officials were eager to promote. An organized tour in August 1957

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[123] "Delegates Ontario C. of C. Tour Area This Week" *The Standard*, 9 May 1957, 1.

[124] "Governor General Massey Will Tour Mine Area and Attend Reception Saturday" *The Standard*, 16 May 1957, 8. Massey was quoted in the Sudbury Star as having lauded Elliot Lake: "Your community will play a role of great significance in the coming Atomic Age. You are living in exciting times and your area is making a great contribution to the growing prosperity of Canada." Quoted in Dixon, 111.

[125] For more on the planning of Elliot Lake as a model community, see Robson, 109-112.

provided an opportunity for several MLAs to visit northern Ontario and its newest frontier.[126] Organized by the Lands and Forest Minister Clare Mapledoram, the tour and reception at Elliot Lake would be undertaken primarily by the local branch of the Chamber of Commerce, which had other plans for the encounter. After touring the town-site, the mill at Algom-Quirke mine, the site at Consolidated Denison, and a luncheon at Milliken Mines, the Chamber presented the brief that outlined its concerns about development in the area, including roads, schools, housing and trailers, fire service, and jail facilities.[127]

Efforts at achieving publicity for the Elliot Lake project can also be seen in the inclusion of a model of Elliot Lake's commercial area in the Ontario Exhibit at the 1957 Canadian National Exhibition.[128] This was a further opportunity for the

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[126] "MLAs To..." *The Standard*, 25 July 1957, 8.

[127] "S.R. Kurisko Outlines Problems of Elliot Lake to Visiting MLA's" *The Standard*, 29 August 1957, 5. The newspaper compared this meeting to one earlier in the Spring where Lester B. Pearson, the area's MP and guest of honour at the Chamber's inaugural dinner was cornered without warning about the availability of federally-insured housing loans. The later presentation to the provincial MLAs was described by one newspaper columnist as "anaemic" in comparison. Ken Romain, "Hed to Cum..." [this was the name of the column] *The Standard* 29 August 1957, 5.

[128] "To Have Model of Elliot Lake" *The Standard*, 22 August 1957, 1.

Department of Planning and Development to showcase its newest project and it not only underlines the planned nature of the town, but also the stake the province had in it and the desire to showcase the achievement. Although the area was being showcased as the future of natural resource development in the province, local residents took such opportunities to emphasize the interconnectedness of economic as well as social successes, which meant finding a way to address the problems of rapid growth and expansion.

Almost as soon as the town was built in the late 1950s, the problem for the public-private partnership project became one of managing a declining population and economic base rather than addressing the problems of unbridled growth. In 1959 it became public knowledge that the United States government would no longer buy uranium after its contract expired in 1962. In response, the mining companies looked to the government to maintain demand through nationalized stockpiling programs. Uranium, which had fuelled the boom, now became a commodity without a market. As a result, just as quickly as the town began, people had to leave in search of employment elsewhere. Some mines closed around Elliot Lake as the federal government decided which companies would get contracts and which ones would not. Again, the relationship between government and the uranium industry set the pace of the town's decline.

The Diefenbaker government was acutely aware of the situation arising at Elliot Lake. The Prime Minister had been lobbied by interested parties in the area,

and "wondered what could be done about the matter."[129] In a telephone conversation with Ms. O'Brien, chair of the Women's Delegation to Ottawa,[130] it was reported that Diefenbaker assured her that "votre problème me touche très profondément et j'ai travaillé à le résoudre toute la semaine et la fin de semaine."[131] Despite the prime minister's assurance that the plight of Elliot Lake was at the forefront of his agenda for the week, there was little his government could—or would—do to appease the town's concerns. Gordon Churchill, Minister of Trade and Commerce, reminded him that the United States' decision regarding uranium contracts had not been a surprise. "Elliot Lake had over-expanded," he explained.

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[129] LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2746, "Closing down of uranium mines; Elliot Lake area" Cabinet Conclusions, 9 February, 1960, 9 (Prime Minister Diefenbaker).

[130] The Women's Delegation to Ottawa was comprised of women concerned about the fact that they had uprooted their families to Elliot Lake in the late 1950s because they had been told that the "city of the future" held a great deal of promise for them. They signed a petition and travelled to Ottawa where they met with Diefenbaker and Churchill. Helen Marshall, "Report from a Delegate to Ottawa on the Talk with Mr. Diefenbaker" and "Gals Gloomy Following Visit with Churchill" *The Standard*, 3 March 1950, 1.

[131] "M. Diefenbaker envoie un comité d'enquête," *The Standard*, 9 March 1960, 7. "Notre Page" was a section of the paper that communicated news in French for the significant Francophone population in Elliot Lake.

"Its population of 24,000 was expected to shrink to around 10,000 but the lay-offs would be spread out over a period."[132] Churchill also wondered why the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) had authorized 25-year mortgages in a single-industry town in the first-place.[133] The government worried that the failure of state supported resource-towns would cause it a significant degree of embarrassment.[134]

Elliot Lake was one of several resource-towns built nationally in the mid 1950s to exploit uranium deposits, and while the main burden in each case was provincial, Ottawa was the common link. Uranium City in Saskatchewan, for example, would also be severely impacted by the end of the American contracts. "Uranium City has been established as a town of some 3,500 population at a cost of perhaps $50 million to the government," Cabinet concluded on 3 December 1959. "Special efforts were therefore desirable to keep the area in operation, and this could be done only if Eldorado obtained one or more of the contracts that would be

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[132] LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2746, "Closing down of uranium mines; Elliot Lake area" Cabinet Conclusions, 9 February, 1960, 9 (Mr. Churchill).

[133] Ibid.

[134] LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2746, 'Elliot Lake: Present Situation,' Cabinet Conclusions, 10 May 1960, 5.

transferred" back from the United States.[135] Unlike in Elliot Lake where mining was a private venture, in Uranium City, the crown corporation was responsible for mining in the area. This provided the government with an opportunity to subsidize operations so as to keep the town alive. Uranium City, unlike Elliot Lake (Pearson's riding), was also represented by Conservative MP Stanley Korchinski, a member of the Standing Committee on Mines, Forests, and Resources in 1958.[136] When it came to choosing which mines would get a limited number of continuing uranium contracts, Uranium City was the clear winner.

Elliot Lake stood to lose out as the federal Cabinet debated how to deal with the end of American uranium contracts. Whereas Uranium City was supported through new contracts awarded to Eldorado, it was understood that most of the private mines at Elliot Lake would likely close as there were simply not enough

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[135] LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2745, 'Report of the Uranium Committee,' Cabinet Conclusions, 3 December 1959, 7.

[136] Library of Parliament, 'Biography of Stanley Korchinski,' http://www2.parl.gc.ca/parlinfo/Files/Parliamentarian.aspx?Item=d6a3fade-c097-4543-806f-c8d65b6941e3&Language=E&Section=FederalExperience, accessed 22 April 2011.

contracts to go around.[137] Mr. Churchill (who was also the Minister of Trade and Commerce) reported that:

> after several discussions, the Committee had decided to recommend that the contracts held by Stanleigh and Stanrock Mines be transferred to Rio Algom. While some people in the district had voiced disapproval of the proposal, others had endorsed it. The former was saying 'do not sell Rio Tinto,' while the latter approved the transaction because would mean other mines in the immediate vicinity would remain open longer thus assuring the employment for a larger number of miners.[138]

The Minister of Public Works elaborated that "under the Rio Algom offer to Stanrock, the former would assume all Stanrock's obligations except the mortgage amounting to $770,000 owing to Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation in respect of a primary industry loan for the construction of 104 houses at Elliot

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[137] LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2746, 'Closing Down of Uranium Mines; Elliot Lake Area,' Cabinet Conclusions, 9 February 1960, 9-10.

[138]LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2746, "Report of Uranium Committee on proposed transfer of Stanleigh and Stanrock contracts to Rio Algom," Cabinet Conclusions, 7 June 1960, 3 (Mr. Churchill).

Lake."[139] Housing in Elliot Lake, and specifically the fact that the CMHC had guaranteed mortgages for 24,000 residents was a concern but it was not enough to force the government to artificially support a declining market. In concluding months of investigation and deliberation about the situation at Elliot Lake, Diefenbaker's cabinet decided that, in the end, "the government simply could not be responsible for every community which declined because of economic and technological changes."[140] Nevertheless, if anyone from the government were asked for comment they were to remind reporters that the 'position of the province as having a major share of the responsibility for this matter should be emphasized...[and] that the community's case would not be improved by anyone making abusive statements."[141]

The decline of Elliot Lake—and federal support for its mines—remained a political issue after Diefenbaker was defeated by Lester B. Pearson's Liberals in 1963. Pearson's seat was, after all, located in the Algoma East riding which included Elliot Lake. Suddenly artificial support for the private mines became politically

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[139] LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2746, "Report of Uranium Committee on proposed transfer of Stanleigh and Stanrock contracts to Rio Algom," Cabinet Conclusions, 7 June 1960, 3 (Mr. Walker).

[140] LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2746, 'Elliot Lake: Present Situation,' Cabinet Conclusions, 10 May 1960, 5-6.

[141] Ibid.

viable.[142] Stockpiling—that is the accumulation of vast quantities of uranium by the government for re-sale at a later date when prices improved and new markets opened up—became the preferred solution to the Elliot Lake problem. In effect, it amounted to the nearly wholesale subsidization of the industry and town by the federal government, albeit wrapped in rhetoric which equated a healthy uranium supply with national security. "If [stockpiling] was required to maintain existing mines at their current level of operations until the market strengthened" then, concluded Pearson's cabinet, "so be it."[143] A federal stockpiling scheme was one solution to an absence of an export market, and it is what allowed the remaining mines to operate after the American contract came to an end. It did not solve the

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[142] Pearson oversaw a stockpiling initiative within his first few months in office. The Cabinet agreed that "the proposed contract between Eldorado Mining and Refining, Limited, and Rio Algom Mines, Limited for the purchase of uranium mines to keep the mine operating during the eleven month period ending June 30th, 1964, be further negotiated with the company." LAC, RG 2, Vol. 6253, "Maintenance of Employment at Elliott [sic] Lake through purchase of Uranium from Rio Algom Mines Limited," Cabinet Conclusions, 23 July 1963, 5. On 1 August 1963, Rio's proposed changes to the contract were accepted. LAC, RG 2, Vol. 6254, "Purchase of Uranium from Rio Algom Mines to maintain employment at Elliot Lake," 1 August 1963, 3.

[143] LAC, RG 2, Vol. 6271, "Uranium Policy," Cabinet Conclusions, 20 May 1965, 3 (Mr. Martin).

problem, but it was one way to mitigate it and thus keep the model public-private partnership alive.[144]

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The clandestine strike that characterized the Backdoor Staking Bee in 1953 set in motion a unique sequence of events that resulted in the rapid development in the area that complemented large-scale uranium extraction. The local lore maintains that a "city was born" out of the bush, when in fact it originated out of a closely-planned partnership between the mining companies and the provincial and federal levels of government. Unlike the stereotype of a single-industry town born of a frenzied prospecting spree, this was no haphazard frontier town. Although there were certainly individuals who led the mining companies to success, the development of the town and the industry itself was not left to chance and individualist enterprise. The provincial government, particularly its municipal branch, was involved almost from the very beginning, while the federal government was keenly interested in the development of a resource that would help solidify its new relationship with the superpower neighbour to the south. The mining companies were eager to have the support of these levels of government. The industry collapsed in 1959 with an announcement that the US would no longer rely on Canadian uranium, a decision that would devastate the town.

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[144] See Chapter V for discussions about the Environmental Assessment Board and how SRFN inserted itself into the discussion surrounding the possibility of expansion.

Elliot Lake was a community that, in many ways, continued the long tradition of the Saguenay mythology. Just as Cartier had been lured beyond the St. Lawrence by tales of the area's richness centuries before, so too had mining prospectors and companies arrived in search of mineral wealth. The town of Elliot Lake symbolized the settler search for economic development in the wild, and it would shape Indigenous-settler relations in the area. But while earlier use of the area's resources had, at some points, been conducted in partnership with local Aboriginal people, the extraction of Uranium marked a new era in the region's history. The partnership that allowed mines to be established, to flourish, and then to be saved from decline existed between the various levels of the settler's government—but they excluded the First Nations from the decision-making process.

This narrative of "progress" and economic boom and bust silences the voices of the area's Indigenous residents while ushering in a new stage in the colonial relationship. The area thirty kilometres north of Lake Huron had long been the traditional trapping, hunting, fishing, and spiritual centre for the people of the Serpent River First Nation. While the Robinson-Huron Treaty signed in 1850 relegated them to a reserve on the north shore of the lake, there still continued to be a strong tie to traditional land. One hundred years later, prospecting, luck, and a peculiar pact between big uranium business and government had a profound change on the entire ecosystem, having disastrous impacts on the First Nations

community that found itself downstream from the self-proclaimed "uranium capital of the world."[145]

[145] Robson, 109.

CHAPTER III

"LUCKIER THAN OTHERS": THE SERPENT RIVER RESERVE, ACID, AND THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, 1950-1963

Just as in Elliot Lake, the street names on the Serpent River First Nation also point to the history of the area. Wiigwaas road refers to the birch trees that are abundant in the region. Walkhouse Bay Road is the road that leads to a wharf at the end of the peninsula at the edge of the reserve near the traditional burial grounds. Perhaps one of the most telling names in the community is Sulphur Circle, the cul-de-sac that once housed non-Aboriginal employees of the Noranda acid plant and has only recently seen the debilitated houses replaced by adequate dwelling structures. The street was on a parcel of land leased by Noranda Mines and later Canadian Industries Ltd. (CIL) and is a testament to the relationship that continues to bind Aboriginal peoples in the community to the legacy of the uranium industry that boomed 30 kilometres north in Elliot Lake starting in the 1950s.

This chapter discusses that relationship in detail and examines its genesis in the 1950s. Central to this discussion is an understanding of the different roles played by mining companies, band leadership, and community members as well as the intrusion of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA). Through the paternalistic arm of DIA, the federal government sought to control band affairs while at the same time maintaining a vested interested in a private-public partnership in uranium development at Elliot Lake. This chapter argues that this conflict of interest proved disastrous for the people of the Serpent River First Nation. DIA continued the process of leasing reserve land for resource exploitation—a pattern that began at the turn of the twentieth century when logging companies became interested in the area—but this time did so within a Cold War context.

As uranium replaced timber as the top local resource in the 1950s, Noranda Mines, a major player in the resource extraction business, was eager to gain access to the profits from this booming industry.[1] The Serpent River First Nation's proximity to key transportation infrastructure (the Canadian Pacific Railway, Trans-Canada Highway, and the North Shore of Lake Huron) and the Serpent River watershed—not to mention its relationship to the federal government vis-à-vis DIA—offered this chance.[2] Noranda did not seek to operate mines in the Elliot Lake

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[1] See various documents in LAC, RG 10, vol. 11352, File 13/20-7-8 Pts 1 and 2 which documents timber use on the reserve from the 1920s to the early 1960s.

[2] Right of ways for the highway and telephone lines were ceded in 1914. See LAC RG 10, Vol. 2879, File 177/991-2.

area. Instead the company looked for land where it could build a sulphuric acid plant.[3]

Sulphuric acid was essential to the leaching process whereby the local low-grade uranium was extracted from the rock and thus an acid plant capable of sourcing the chemical locally would provide a lucrative secondary industry.[4] Noranda leased the land from the reserve, and DIA employed similar mechanisms that had been used in the context of lumber in the decades before, all in the name of Cold War economic development at the expense of the local Aboriginal people. DIA had a history of attempting to make First Nations communities pay for their own "upkeep," in effect contributing to the colonial relationship that had already been imposed upon them. Although community members initially welcomed the prospect of employment, especially when they saw the prosperity of the other 'boom towns' springing up in the area, they could not have foreseen the extent of the damage it would bring and they were also denied an active voice in controlling the

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[3] Noranda's annual reports for the period in question are available at Library and Archives Canada in LAC, RG 20, Vol. 775, File 23-100-N17.

[4] In 1959, for example, Noranda had $33 million in profits from its production operations alone. The Cutler Acid Plant contributed to those profits. See "Noranda Mines Limited 1959—37th Annual Report: Statement of Operations for the Year Ended December 31, 1959," LAC, RG 20, Vol. 775, File 23-100-N17, 5.

process.[5] While the community had wanted its own legal representation in negotiations with the company, this request was denied by DIA in order to further larger federal commitments to the settler community in Elliot Lake region as well as Canada's allies. The establishment of the acid plant would leave a lasting legacy of toxicity in the community that continues to be felt today.

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The summer of 1955 brought news of a new acid plant that was planned for the Blind River area. Sulphuric acid is a highly corrosive substance, and inhaling its fumes can lead to irritation and damage to the mucous membranes of the lungs, throat, and nose. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists the following symptoms of exposure: "irritation of eyes, skin, nose, throat; pulmonary edema, bronchitis, emphysema; conjunctivitis; stomatis; dental erosion; eye, skin burns; dermatitis."[6] The acid itself was to be produced by burning elemental sulphur in a

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[5] See various transcriptions of interviews with community members who have since died in Anna Stanley, "The Experiences of the Serpent River First Nation of the Nuclear Industry" held in the SRFN Library, Cutler, Ontario.

[6] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "NIOSH [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health] Pocket Guide to Chemical Hazards—Sulfuric Acid," http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npg/npgd0577.html (accessed 26 February 2011).

roaster.[7] Nothing was said about possible environmental damage arising from this process. A north shore location was ideal not only because of its proximity to uranium operations in the area, but also because of the possibilities for transport to and from the plant: water, rail and the trans-Canada highway.

The local production of sulphuric acid to extract uranium was essential to building the industrial basis for the planned town of Elliot Lake. The local newspapers focused solely on the economic and industrial benefits of such a plant. "To produce the large daily tonnages of sulphuric acid required in the chemical leaching process to be used on the Blind River [Elliot Lake] uranium ores, Noranda Mines will construct a multimillion dollar acid plant in the area," reported the *Leader-Spectator* in 1955, "The all-important raw material will be pyrites from its own Rouyn holdings. A unique Noranda-developed process will turn-out daily: some 350 tons of high grade iron sinter; around 70 tons of elemental sulphur; an estimated 500 tons of sulphuric acid."[8] The plant, which was to be built and run by Noranda Mines, provided an important means for that mining company to be involved in the booming uranium industry without actually running a mine.[9] It was

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[7] "New Acid Plant Cost $3,000,000" *The Standard*, 13 December 1956, 1. The title of the article refers to the construction of an acid plant in the Sudbury area.

[8] "Blind River Area Prominent Recent Issue Financial Post: New Acid Leach Mill and Pulp Paper Mill Subject of Article" *Leader-Spectator* 23 June 1955, 1.

[9] See LAC, RG 20, Vol. 775, File 23-100-N17.

also held up by the papers as another example of industrial consolidation and efficiency that would contribute to the area's positive economic and social development: the plant would make use of minerals which were already being manufactured elsewhere in the region while providing an important secondary industry to the North Shore area.

The papers extolled the virtues of secondary industrialization, equating it with the modernization and progression of an 'empty' wilderness area, as the plant would contribute to the viability of other resource extraction industries in the region.[10] The plant could also provide refined iron to American or Canadian steel mills, if constructed in an area suitable for a deep-water wharf, while its main output, sulphur, might also be used in processing at pulp and paper mills.[11] The newspaper article was meant to laud the area's recent coverage in the national paper, the *Financial Post*, and it was hence hopeful and celebratory in tone, particularly in the way the development of the region was tied to achieving national and international economic and strategic security goals. Concerns that the plant would not be open in time to effectively service the new mines was off-set by faith in technological ingenuity and more temporary expediencies: "If not, Noranda is confident it can operate a temporary process producing only acid, and switch to the bigger and more economically desirable process when the special equipment is

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[10] "Blind River Area Prominent Recent Issue Financial Post: New Acid Leach Mill and Pulp Paper Mill Subject of Article" *Leader-Spectator,* 23 June 1955, 1.

[11] Ibid.

available."[12] As it happened, the plant was indeed built in two phases, the first of which was undertaken by the Cleveland-based Arthur G. McKee Company in 1956, after which initial operations began, and the second by the Leonard Construction Company, when full production started in 1957.[13]

The decision to construct the acid plant on the Serpent River reserve was made for several reasons. In his book, *Noranda*, Leslie Roberts describes the company's desire to choose a location that was close to rail, water, and road transportation where housing for employees would also be available nearby.[14] Government economic development policy also stipulated that a new town-site should not be constructed if at all avoidable, and thus an existing local community would have to house the plant.[15] But the North Shore was also a burgeoning tourist

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[12] "Blind River Area Prominent Recent Issue Financial Post: New Acid Leach Mill and Pulp Paper Mill Subject of Article" *Leader-Spectator* 23 June 1955, 1.

[13] "Noranda Acid Plant at Cutler to Supply Entire Area will be Largest in Canada," *The Standard*, 4 July 1957, 7.

[14] Leslie Roberts, *Noranda* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1956), 199.

[15] Robert Robson, "Building Resource Towns: Government Intervention in Ontario in the 1950s," in Matt Bray and Ashley Thomson, (eds.), *At the End of the Shift: Mines and Single-Industry Towns in Northern Ontario* (Sudbury: Dundurn Press/Laurentian University, 1992), 100.

and recreational sport fishing destination and heavy, dirty industry might actually be opposed in some communities that relied on vacation lodges for employment.

There were plenty of non-Aboriginal communities along the North Shore that would have met those criteria, including several which already had operating mine-sites.[16] But the Cutler site provided a perfect opportunity to meet the company's needs. The site that once housed an old abandoned pulp and paper mill would provide the physical space needed for the plant which could be situated between the Canadian Pacific Railway branch line between Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury and the main channel along the North Shore.[17] The bay at Cutler was also deep enough to support a wharf to facilitate Great Lakes shipping if the plant proved viable.[18] At the same time, the Cutler site would situate the plant near the existing settler-community at the town of Spanish, Ontario, some 10 kilometres east of the reserve. As Robert Robson argues, this made the Cutler site ideal as Spanish could still become "the home community for its anticipated workforce of from 100 to 150 men."[19]

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[16] Andrea Gutsche, Barbara Chrisholm, and Russell Floren, *The North Channel and St. Mary's River: A Guide to the History* (Toronto: Lynx Images, 2008).

[17] Robson, 100.

[18] LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2746, "New Wharf at Cutler," Cabinet Conclusions, 6 June 1960, 4.

[19] Robson, 100.

This "ideal site" was located on the Serpent River Indian Reserve (as it was then called) and was thus on land controlled by the Department of Indian Affairs which could be influenced by federal interests in promoting development at Elliot Lake as well as the strategic considerations to find uranium.[20] The Department was also already anxious to promote industrial employment for the local Aboriginal population, which it saw as clinging to a backwards way of life.[21] "Trapping is still a very important factor in the Indian economy and will be for many years yet," lamented a 1959 departmental report on the economic development of Aboriginal People in Northern Ontario. "This type of work, arduous though it may be, is accepted by those Indians who have not been in close touch with industrial development. But where they have been so exposed more and more are realizing

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[20] It is difficult to determine from accessible DIA records why the Cutler site was chosen. The available evidence reflects an assumption that any type of industrial economic development would be a positive force in the community. As will be seen in the following paragraphs, such developments furthered DIA's "civilizing" mandate and thus DIA officials might never have felt the need to write down such an obvious assumption in internal correspondence. Indeed, they were already building the plant in an area that had already been used for the timber industry. We are left to infer their motivations from their actions.

[21] Government of Canada. *Department of Citizenship and Immigration Report of Indian Affairs Branch for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1959* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960), 37.

the benefit of steadier work and a regular income."[22] It is clear that DIA saw trapping as backwards and steady wage work as the way to encourage the community to "progress."

The building of the acid plant at Cutler was thus seen as an important step in the colonization of local Aboriginal Peoples. The Department of Indian Affairs attributed the dismal economic situation of Northern Ontario Aboriginal peoples to their tendency to cling to such "outmoded" economic means as trapping and subsistence hunting and fishing and saw industrialization as a way to move reserves and their occupants into the 20th century economy. "The general economy of the Indian population in the northern Ontario region improved during the past year," read the 1957 departmental report on the situation of Aboriginal Peoples in Northern Ontario. "Though hunting, trapping, fishing and lumbering are still basic to their economic welfare, many Indians were employed in construction work on such projects as the Mid-Canada radar line and electric power and industrial projects. Indians were also employed in mining at Kirkland Lake, Red Lake and other areas."[23] The building of the acid plant was thus seen as a way to make reserve residents less dependent on DIA. "With the excellent opportunities for employment

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Government of Canada. *Canada Department of Citizenship and Immigration Report of Indian Affairs Branch 1956–57* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1957), 31.

now available on the reserve, relief should be at a minimum," reported the local Indian agent to his district supervisor.[24]

Full-scale participation in the waged economy and resource extraction in the area was seen as a positive thing and something to be encouraged as it would "advance the situation of the Indian." This sentiment, which dominated the interactions of DIA with Aboriginal peoples at the time, was also reflected in the local popular press. "In Cutler Noranda Mines provides a regular source of employment here and the Serpent River Reserve is *luckier than others*," read an article in the Elliot Lake *Standard*. "Previously the Indians living there depended upon fishing, trapping, and the lumber industry.[25] In days gone by local Indians functioned largely as family units, hunting and moving from place to place, practicing conservation as they went."[26] The equation of industrialization with economic progression and the success of the colonial relationship is obviously ethnocentric. But official and popular ethnocentrism, and the Whiggish acceptance of Western/capitalist concepts of labour and wages that it entailed, actually justified

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[24] LAC, RG 10, vol 11367, file 493/28-7-17493, "Letter from Indian Agent to District Supervisor."

[25] On the SRFN's and resource use in the area before the uranium industry see on timber LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11352, file 13/20-7-8 parts 1 and 2, on mining LAC RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 493/20-5-7, and on fishing rights RG 10, 11347, file 13/20-2-8.

[26] "Spanish Indians Collected Maple Syrup Here" *The Standard*, 16 April 1959, 6. Emphasis added.

the paternalistic need to control and encourage Aboriginal people's economic lives.[27]

It was a view of progress shared by the local settler population. "The Indian Affairs Dept., and the Dept. of Education, Community Programs Branch have all played an invaluable part together with the spiritual work of the missionaries, in helping adjust the past with the present," read another article in the *Standard.* "Unfortunately however the Indian still does not trust the non-Indian."[28] The notion that the Aboriginal peoples in the area were "lucky" to have the interference of DIA and missionaries, and as an extension of those colonial relationships, the opportunity to work in the acid plant (or indeed, have it located prominently on the reserve) privileges the notion of western capitalistic ideas of 'progress' and 'development'.[29] In fact, the dismal economic situation faced by the community members of the Serpent River First Nation in the late 1950s was actually *the result*

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[27] See various documents in RG 10, vol 11367 File 493/28-7-17493.

[28] "Spanish Indians Collected Maple Syrup Here" *The Standard,* 16 April 1959, 6.

[29] See DIA publications, for example, *The Indian in Transition* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1961). For an examination of how DIA functioned within the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, see Heidi Bohaker and Franca Iacovetta, "Making Aboriginal People 'Immigrants Too': A Comparison of Citizenship Programs for Newcomers and Indigenous Peoples in Postwar Canada, 1940s-1960s" *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (September 2009): 427-461.

of a rapidly changing way of life and colonial processes—not any inherent backwardness or inability to adapt. Economics, geography, and colonial policy goals thus converged on the Serpent River First Nation. The reserve's existence as a racially-segregated space legislated and overseen by the federal government, but built close to an existing white settler-community, was thus a determining factor in the establishment of the plant.[30]

The methods through which the acid plant came to be located on the Serpent River First Nation reveal the continuation of the colonial relationship between the federal government (particularly DIA) and the reserve. It also underlines the complexity of the colonial experience as many in the community welcomed the jobs that the plant seemed to offer as a means to escape the poverty imposed by the reserve system.[31] Even so, there were attempts on the part of the leadership and some members of the community to ask questions so as fulfill their traditional stewardship role. Indeed there is some evidence that political divides and a weak,

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[30] Robson, 100.

[31] Most community members seem to recall the lure of jobs when the plant was discussed in 1955-6. This has been consistent over time. In addition to the interviews conducted for this study cited elsewhere in the dissertation see Anna Stanley, "The Experiences of the Serpent River First Nation of the Nuclear Industry" held in the SRFN Library, Cutler, Ontario.

inexperienced band council were exploited by DIA officials and Noranda Mines Ltd. in negotiating the deal.[32]

In the winter of 1955-6 Noranda Mines Ltd. Approached DIA to begin negotiations to site an acid plant on the Serpent River First Nation.[33] DIA officials were thrilled with the prospect. The SRFN had not been a 'self-sustaining' reserve economically and roads, houses, and facilities had all fallen into disrepair.[34] When Noranda offered to pay $7,162.50 to lease land for the acid plant, J.T. O'Neill, the Superintendent for the Sault Ste. Marie Agency reported to Ottawa that the reserve's problems would be solved. "With the industrial development in that area, I expect a general increase in all matter pertaining to this Band."[35]

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[32] Gertrude Lewis and Peter Johnston recall the desire to hire independent legal representation.

[33]LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11367, File 493/28/7/17493, J.T. O'Neill to Indian Affairs Branch, Dept. of Citizenship and Immigration, 6 April 1956. See also LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11340, File 13/8-8-8.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

DIA had a history of trying to ensure that reserves "pay for themselves" in an effort to minimize departmental expenditures on relief and support.[36] This often meant that their land and or resources should be sold or leased, when possible, for the upkeep of the community. Oral histories of reserve members suggest that DIA—anxious to bring industry to the reserve—spearheaded the negotiations and pushed through the lease of the land.[37] On 21 November 1955, a new band council had been elected—or rather acclaimed when no-one else ran. The previous chief and council had served for their mandated two years and as the previous chief had already served several terms, he had chosen to step down rather than run again.[38] This meant that all three members—the chief and two councillors—were first time members of council.[39] Within a few months of their election, chief and council were faced with making a decision that would prove pivotal to their reserve's history. In the winter of 1956, several public meetings were held which many elders remember attending. Gertrude Lewis recalls the ways in which DIA officials at those meetings

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[36] Robin Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye*, 104-123. Hugh Shewell also documents this concern for Aboriginal "self-support," 95-96.

[37] Interview with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, SRFN.

[38] See LAC, RG 10, Vol. 12962 and Vol. 11376, File 13/3-5-8 Pt. 2.

[39] The files used are closed under ATIP regulations and I have thus been required to remove identifying information from this discussion, even if some of the information is publically available elsewhere.

downplayed the fears of community members. "The community was invited to all these meetings," she says. "[Although] most of the people thought it was a good thing...some of our young people would want to ask questions and the Department of Indian Affairs people would tell them... We'd try to ask for a lawyer to look into it. And they said we didn't need a lawyer because the band didn't need a lawyer 'cause they had all the lawyers they needed in Ottawa—Indian Affairs."[40] Arnelda, in her 2004 interview with Anna Stanley, recalls a similar story. "I guess there were concerns," she says. "...[the band council] said they were meeting with the Department of Indian Affairs and Noranda Mines, and our people wanted to get lawyers. The Indian Affairs people said: 'Well, we have lawyers down in Ottawa,' so they didn't bring the lawyers in to help us out. They wanted to get our own lawyers so we could have whatever they were getting lawyers for, but that was what happened then."[41] Indeed a report entitled "Background Information: Highlights of the History of the Cutler Acid Site," commissioned in the mid-1980s by SRFN's leadership, supports these community members' recollections. "The Band was concerned about the lease with Noranda for the construction of the sulphuric acid making factories and requested the presence of their own lawyer," it reads. "The

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[40] Interview with Mrs. Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[41] Transcript of Interview by Anna Stanley with Arnelda Jacobs, 21 July 2004, 3, held at SRFN Library.

Department of Indian Affairs officials told the Band that the government lawyers would protect the Band's interests."[42]

The available documentary evidence supports oral testimony and the conclusion that DIA drove the process, exploiting the inexperience of the band council. When land—or land use rights—had been leased or ceded from the reserve in the past, it required a vote of the majority of band members, not just those in attendance at meetings. For example, the previous spring (1955), a more experienced band council tried to sell limited mineral rights on reserve land to prospectors engaged in searching for uranium north of SRFN. Several meetings were held, votes taken, and the results submitted along with a band council resolution to the Superintendant of the Sault Ste. Marie Agency. Each time DIA rejected the validity of the vote because too few members of the reserve had cast their ballots. In the penultimate vote, 47 of 116 band members had voted with 46 being in favour of the proposal. Yet it was still rejected by DIA. Only once the majority of reserve members (in this case 60) voted did DIA approve ceding of mineral rights—on the condition that the band be paid an annuity of 3 percent if any claim turned a profit.[43]

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[42] LAC, MG31 K39 R6847, Vol. 36, Serpent River First Nation, "Background Information: Highlights of the History of the Cutler Acid Site," 1986, 1. Author unknown.

[43] See various correspondence in LAC, RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 493/20-5-7. See especially "Surrender 2033", 29 June 1955.

Indeed, SRFN councils had traditionally been reluctant to cede or lease land in the past. The only major sale of reserve lands had been to the Spanish River Lumber Company. In 1906, SRFN was said to have sold 198 acres of land to the company through DIA;[44] however, subsequent councils held that the land had only been leased rather than ceded—a claim upheld to this day by oral testimony. Nevertheless, in 1918 another 179 acre parcel of land was sold to the company, but only after a majority vote by band members.[45] But many band members remained unhappy about how their land had been sold and accusations of wrongdoing by both DIA officials and band leaders during the Great War period are present in the DIA record.[46]

During the 1930s and 1940s, under the leadership of Chiefs John Lewis and William Meawasige, the band fought to regain both the lands that had been legitimately sold and those that many on the reserve believed had been illegally leased. When developers in Spanish, Ontario proposed locating a mill or other industrial development on reserve land in 1932, Chief Lewis told them "The Serpent River Band will not sell or lease any land on reserve. Our reserve is not very big and

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[44] LAC, RG 10, 7539, File 29013-7-3 Pt 1., "T.R.L. McInnes to G. Rothers," dated 1 September 1925.

[45] LAC, RG 10, 7539, File 29013-7-3 Pt 1, "Description of Land Sale," dated 10 August 1920.

[46] LAC, RG 10, 7539, File 29013-7-3 Pt 1, "Letter to DIA" dated 13 September 1916.

we want to hold what little we have got."[47] The band traditionally used its land for hunting, fishing, trapping, and, by the 1930s, timber extraction. Nearby pulp and paper mills provided a welcome market for poplar, balsam, and spruce wood to be used in making newsprint and during the 1930s, the band sold wood to local paper mills for between $9 and $13.50 per cord.[48] Retaining land thus had an holistic incentive that included both economic and social responsibility. In 1940 a chief was even removed for "unauthorized use of Serpent River reserve lands" when he allowed Mohan Construction Company to cut timber on the reserve without band approval.[49] Following his removal, the new Chief, William Meawasige, initiated a five year process that eventually led the reserve to re-purchase the land for $4,770.00 that had been sold (or leased) to the Spanish River Lumber Company out

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[47] LAC, RG 10, vol 11326, File 7-33, "Letter from Chief John Lewis to M.C. Hamilton," dated 18 April 1932.

[48] LAC RG 10, v 11326, File 7-42, See various documents from 1929 to 1955.

[49] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11326, File 7-33, DIA Memoranda dated 8 March 1939 and 17 April 1940.

of band funds.[50] It was the original 1906 plot of 198 acres at the centre of the village that would be leased to Noranda Mines Ltd. only a decade later.[51]

The process by which the acid plant came to be located on reserve land is thus somewhat problematic and difficult to explain. The band had, for the previous two decades, shown a growing interest in not only retaining its lands but re-acquiring lost lands at substantial cost. Land had become politicized on the reserve and the assertion of land rights had even led to the removal of a sitting chief from office. By 1955, DIA officials clearly understood the importance of land in reserve politics which helps to explain why they required a strict adherence to the rules regarding the sale of mineral rights in 1955. Why then did the band turn around and lease a parcel of land which it had just spend $4,000 re-acquiring only a decade before?[52]

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[50] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 7539, File 29013-7-3, Pt. 1, "D.J. Allen to F.H. Peters," dated 27 December 1943.

[51] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 7539, File 29013-7-3, Pt. 1, "W.S. Arnell to DIA, Ottawa, dated 9 June 1944. For the complexity of reserve land leases in the 20th century, (especially for military purposes) see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Battle Grounds: The Canadian Military and Aboriginal Lands* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

[52] The 198 acre 1906 parcel was purchased for $4,000 in 1944 while the 178 acre parcel sold in 1921 was re-aquired for $770.00. See various correspondence dated 1943 and 1944 in LAC, RG 10, Vol. 7539, File 29013-7-3, Pt. 1.

It is somewhat of a difficult question to answer from DIA records alone as the minutes for the Serpent River Band Council for 1955-56 are missing from DIA records although similar records are available for neighbouring communities.[53] What is clear, though, from oral testimony is that some on the reserve were opposed to the plant and that the band council sought legal representation. At the same time, according to DIA records, one of the three council members never attended a single meeting during the critical period of negotiations.[54] In the end, the two remaining council members passed a band council resolution to lease the land to Noranda.[55] It was a method that avoided the need for a majority vote as had been used for past

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[53] The Band Council minutes for SRFN for 1950 to 1969 should be in the Sault Ste. Marie District records along with Spanish River, Batchewana, and Garden River (LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11336, Files 493/3-67, 13/3-6-4, 13/3-6-3, 13/3-6-2). I continue to search for both the SRFN band council minutes as well as the original lease document—which also has yet to be located in DIA records.

[54] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11376, File 13/3-5-8 Pt. 2, "Memorandum for Minister of Citizenship and Immigration," dated 21 November 1956.

[55] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11367, File 493/28/7/17493, "J.T. O'Neill to Indian Affairs Branch, Dept. of Citizenship and Immigration," 6 April 1956. See also LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11340, File 13/8-8-8.

land and mineral rights surrenders.[56] Most telling, perhaps, is the leadership turn-over soon after the resolution was passed. The councillor who had been absent during the negotiations was removed in November 1956[57] while the chief who had overseen the negotiations left the reserve in late December. He officially tendered his resignation on 25 January 1957.[58] The local Indian Agent J. O'Neill gave the following reason to accept the man's resignation: "Because of the location of the Noranda Mines Acid Plant on that reserve, and the numerous items of business that arise from this, I trust that your early approval will be received."[59]

William Meawasige, who had overseen the re-acquisition of band lands a decade before, was quickly re-elected as Chief. One of his main initiatives as Chief was to try and rescind the band's sale of its mineral rights and to begin pressing for compensation to personal property that was damaged by the fumes from the

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[56] See various correspondence in LAC, RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 493/20-5-7. See especially "Surrender 2033", 29 June 1955.

[57] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11376, File 13/3-5-8 Pt. 2, Memorandum, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, 21 November 1956.

[58] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11376, File 13/3-5-8 Pt. 2, "Letter of resignation" dated 9 February 1957.

[59] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11376, File 13/3-5-8 Pt. 2, J. O'Neill to Indian Affairs Branch, Dept. of Citizenship and Immigration, 1 February 1957.

plant.[60] When the plant's lease was re-negotiated in 1964, the band council hired its own lawyer and fought off the sale of the plant to protect its interests.[61] While hard evidence it difficult to find, oral testimony suggests that the experienced band council of 1955-56 may have been told that the land on which the plant was being built could be leased to Noranda Mines Ltd. without band approval because it had been previously leased to the Spanish River Lumber Company. According to former Chief Earl Commanda, "We had a pulp/timber mill here in the community back at the turn of the century. Land was leased to that lumber company. It was called the Cutler Salvage Lumber Company.[62] Indian Affairs took advantage of that surrendered land—the leased land, the surrendered land—to negotiate with Noranda Mines to build a sulphuric acid plant right in the middle of our community

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[60] On the re-acquisition of mineral rights see J.T. O'Neill to H.M. Jones, 18 September 1958, LAC, RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 493/20-5-7; on early claims of damage to property see various correspondence in LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11336 Files 493/3-11-7 and 493/3-8-7.

[61] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11364, File. 493/28-7-17493, "Letter from A.H. Aquin to Superintendent," Sault Ste. Marie Agency, 9 January 1964.

[62] The company changed names several times but the lease he was talking about was clearly to the Spanish River Lumber Company.

in the early 1950s to service the uranium mines."[63] Chief Commanda's description of the way in which reserve land was passed from one company to another illustrates the long history of colonial attempts to force reserve members to participate in the local industry, be it timber or uranium.

Former Chief and band manager Peter Johnston points out that this was part of a larger continuing process of reusing land set aside for one purpose earlier in the reserve's history in order to fulfill another but different role at a later point in time. It also served to minimize the need for discussion or debate, allowing DIA officials to continue an interventionist role in reserve life. "[Because of this] a referendum wasn't necessary, which would have been the case in any other situation," Johnston says.

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[63] This quotation is from a interview with Chief Commanda, transcribed in Lorraine Rekmans, Keith Lewis and Anabel Dwyer, eds., *This is My Homeland: Stories of the effects of nuclear industries by people of the Serpent River First Nation and the north shore of Lake Huron* (Cutler: Serpent River First Nation, 2003), 2. See also page xv, where it is stated by one of the authors, "DIAND used an old lease from the Cutler Salvage and Lumber Company on Anishinabe land to host a sulphuric acid plant to provide acid for leaching uranium at Elliot Lake. DIAND hoped this would provide a 'better' standard of living for people at Serpent River First Nation. Instead this site left a legacy of waste and contamination in the community."

> If, for instance, [a company] came in and wanted to set up their operation, they had to go through the federal government again, in that situation and the federal government had to have a referendum. The majority of the electors of the band had to approve it. In the case of Noranda, though, the land had already been approved. This land had been given up for sale and leased to...Cutler Savage and Sawmill way back in the 1800s. And when the sawmill ceased operations, the land should have returned back to the federal government, but it never did. It had [to be] returned back to the band as band property, but it never did. And so what somebody realized, and the negotiations went on with Noranda was that they didn't require a referendum because the land had already been given up.[64]

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[64] Interview with Mr. Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, Serpent River First Nation. From the perspective of the community, the issue of consent was very important, and Johnston's words are echoed by a report issued by Serpent River First Nation in 1986: "The Indian Act requires that the members of a Band consent to the lease of reserve land. Indian Affairs officials were afraid that the Band members would not approve the lease with Noranda, so the government relied on a technicality to approve the lease without the formal consent of the Band." LAC, MG31 K39 R6847, File: Serpent River, "Background Information: Highlights of the History of the Cutler Acid Site," 1986, 1.

As Johnson suggests, control over the leased land could have been returned back to the reserve after the company left, but it never was. For DIA, timber and uranium were interchangeable resources—two aspects of the same type of local Western economy—meaning that there was an emphasis on economic gain regardless of how damaging one industry might be in comparison to the other.

The acid plant was thus built in the middle of the Serpent River First Nation on land leased by DIA to Noranda Mines in 1956 to support the industrialization of the reserve (furthering departmental goals), supposedly for the benefit of its inhabitants. This particular lease was a continuation of that pattern of using reserve land that was labelled as under-used or 'wasteful' to companies that could better employ it in capitalistic pursuits. Throughout, the process was overseen and controlled by DIA and shaped by the economic legacy of colonialism which served to minimize debate and opportunities for dissent. In every way, the community was unable to choose whether to accept the plant—it was a decision mandated by DIA and necessitated by poverty. Yet this should not be confused with acquiescence or complacency on the part of band members. Consent is a complex idea within the colonial process.

In an increasingly desperate community in the throes of rapid and fundamental change, DIA officials exploited the colonial relationship in which they possessed ultimate authority over the land and economic development so as to present the plant as an easy and quick fix that would solve most of the reserve's problems. The complexity of the colonial relationship—and the ways in which community members were forced to choose between preserving traditional

worldviews or survival—is apparent in their recollections. Many elders recall the reasons why many in the community welcomed the plant and they suggest that the promise of economic development was one of the primary factors that led many to support the lease. For instance, Peter Johnston recalls that community members wanted to ensure that reserve members were given the opportunity to work at the plant and be given priority in hiring.[65] DIA agreed to this as it was one of the reasons its representatives were so enthusiastic about the scheme. Employment began in construction during 1955 and the plant was completed in 1956.[66] However, the plant was only intended to provide employment for 150 people or less.[67]

As some band members had feared, any economic prosperity was fleeting and left a legacy of environmental destruction which hurt rather than improved the long-term prospects of the reserve.[68] "Of course we thought it would be a good thing for our area because there was no work in this area," recalls Gertrude Lewis. "And we thought there'd be employment and our living would be better. We weren't

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[65] Interview with Peter Johnston, 7 July, 2009, Serpent River First Nation.

[66] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11367, File 493/28/7/17493, "Letter from J.T. O'Neill to Indian Affairs Branch, Dept. of Citizenship and Immigration," 6 April 1956.

[67] Robson, 100.

[68] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 493/20-5-7, "Letter to A.B. Irwin, Superintendent Mineral Resources, Indian Affairs Branch," 21 April 1964.

thinking of the destruction of our wildlife and trees and gardens that followed from the plant. We didn't know about that ...they didn't tell us how it would affect anything."[69] For Lewis, employment was clearly only one part of a larger picture which included responsibility for protecting the environment. Terry Jacobs had similar reflections about the process of consultation and why band members agreed to the plant's establishment. "No, we didn't know what the consequences would have been, you know?" he says. "I suppose we would have known if maybe we had one of our members of the community or council to go out and see some of these—like, Noranda, it was in operation then—what damage there had been around that area, maybe we wouldn't have accepted it."[70]

But at the same time, many were already "employed" in traditional activities like hunting, fishing, and trapping.[71] The plant was thus built at a point in time where many people were still living off the land and participating in moditional

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[69] Interview with Mrs. Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[70] Interview with Mr. Terry Jacobs, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[71] See on timber LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11352, file 13/20-7-8 parts 1 and 2, on mining LAC RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 493/20-5-7, and on fishing rights RG 10, 11347, file 13/20-2-8.

economies;[72] the community was in a state of transition. DIA was equally interested in providing jobs to minimize its expenses on the reserve while also keeping community members away from their traditional pursuits.[73] In other words, employment at the plant was a way to further the goal of assimilation. Community members were interested in jobs, but this came as a result of economic necessity.[74] They were not opposed to the prospect of steady employment, and indeed, many of them welcomed it in the face of prosperity arising elsewhere in non-Aboriginal communities. The concept of survival was paramount, and not in and of itself inconsistent with TEK. For members of the community, the ability to provide for their families was seen as a continuation of traditional responsibilities.

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[72] For a good definition of "moditional," see John Lutz, *Makuk* (Vancouver: UBC, 2008), 9, 23-24.

[73]Government of Canada. *Department of Citizenship and Immigration Report of Indian Affairs Branch for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1959* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960), 37.

[74] The interviews conducted by this author as well as those undertaken by Anna Stanley suggest that poverty was the motivating factor for many. See the interviews cited elsewhere here as well as Anna Stanley, "The Experiences of the Serpent River First Nation of the Nuclear Industry" held in the SRFN Library, Cutler, Ontario.

Industrial development threatened the dominance of a traditional worldview in which economics, community, and place were inseparable. Traditionally, members of the Serpent River First Nation had relied on the land in a relationship founded on stewardship and respect. Whereas Western conceptions of land and environment evaluated usefulness in purely economic terms, Aboriginal Peoples traditionally evaluated the environment through a more holistic worldview, on the basis of TEK. As Milton Freeman writes,

> many scientists have begun to understand that such traditional knowledge extends far beyond what in western science would be called descriptive biology, beyond knowing how to identify different species of animals, or describe their feeding, reproduction, or migratory behaviour. The knowledge possessed by such tradition-based, non-industrial societies is essentially of an 'ecological' nature, that is to say, it seeks to understand and explain the workings of ecosystems, or at the very least biological communities, containing many interacting species of animals and often plants, and the determinative role played by certain key biological and physical parameters in influencing the behaviour of the total biological community.[75]

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[75] Milton M.R. Freeman, "The Nature and Utility of Traditional Ecological Knowledge," *Northern Perspectives* 20, 1 (1992): 9–12, accessed online at http://www.carc.org/pubs/v20no1/utility.htm. For more on the uses of TEK in

With a TEK worldview, the acid plant's effects on the broader ecology of the Serpent River system and the life-forms which depended on it—including humans—could not be separated from its economic potential. While the phrase "TEK" is relatively new, it describes the type of worldview and understanding that defined the relationship between community members and their environment at a time when many were still living off the land.

It was precisely this type of worldview which DIA officials hoped to destroy in the process of assimilation. The separation of economics from environment and community were essential precursors to an acceptance of Western capitalism. The uncritical acceptance of the need to build the acid plant by DIA thus underlined the differences between Western and Aboriginal conceptions of 'useful' land and systems of knowledge. From the perspective of DIA officials, resources were a purely economic matter rather than a single aspect of a more holistic worldview.

It would be anachronistic to suggest that environmental concerns would have—or even should have—been on DIA's radar in the 1950s. Settler communities like nearby Sudbury, Ontario welcomed what would today be termed 'dirty industry' because to those living in the area, the economic wealth generated by mining and refining processes was paramount. The environmental devastation which was the by-product of that development was either ignored or downplayed until the benefits of development were outweighed by its negative side-effects. In

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the formation and evaluation of federal economic and environmental policies today see http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca/acp/site.nsf/eng/ao27021.html.

some communities the balance between the two quickly tipped; in others it never has. But it would be equally anachronistic to suggest that Aboriginal people in the area did not see what would today be termed 'environment' as a key consideration. It was a very real concern for the members of the community who attempted to speak out about the acid plant while attempting to address their traditional role as stewards of the land by trying to promote discussion and debate about the plant. Jobs were certainly a factor but unlike in settler communities, they were not the only consideration and this is a key point. Because of the nature of the colonial relationship, however, there was no such opportunity for questions. From the perspective of the First Nation, concern for environmental damage to the land would have been an important consideration, but was not consistent with non-Aboriginal resource development elsewhere in the region.[76]

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[76] Environmental concerns for non-Aboriginal views of development did not exist at this time. Places such as Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie, for example, had industrial economies that had compromised the land, as did Elliot Lake. C.M. Wallace and Ashley Thomson, *Sudbury: Railtown to Regional Capital* (Dundurn Press, 1993); See other company histories that make little mention of environmental consequences of industry: Terrence J. Downey, "The Political Economy of Uranium, 1948-1970" (Master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1972); Jim Lyon, *Dome Petroleum: The Inside Story of Its Rise and Fall* (New York: Beaufort Books, 1983). See pages ix-xi; 142-165; Peter Foster's *Rags to Riches: The Story of Bow Valley Industries Ltd.* (Calgary: Bow Valley Industries, 1985), 9. An even more popular example of a corporate-sponsored company history is *The Richness of*

While the environmental effects of industrialization and resource extraction industries were felt by all communities, settler and Aboriginal, the people who moved to towns like Elliot Lake had neither a traditional relationship to the land nor a sense of responsibility and stewardship for the environment. Economic expansion could thus be analyzed entirely within a Western conception of progress that privileged industry and wealth above long-term regional and local sustainability.

Although the influx of jobs was beneficial to some community members in the short-term, many found that working in a sulphur plant had dire health consequences.[77] In the case of Lawrence Lewis, Gertrude's husband, this meant that

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Discovery: Amoco's First 50 Years in Canada, 1948-1998, written in 1998 by Peter McKenzie-Brown to commemorate the company's fiftieth anniversary.

[77] Other First Nations communities entering the workforce or engaging in the wage economy suffered similar consequences, whereby short-term economic gains had long term health and socio-economic consequences. There is a growing literature of Aboriginal people and labour. See, for example, John Lutz's examination of how an industrialized capitalistic British Columbia would not have been possible without Aboriginal labour "After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Class of British Columbia, 1849-90" in *Canadian Working-Class History: Selected Readings*, 3rd edition, eds. Laurel Sefton Macdowell and Ian Radforth (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2006), 125-148; Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia, 1848-1930* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1996); Frank Tough, *"As their Natural Resources Fail:" Native Peoples and the*

Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996); Toby Morantz, The *White Man's Gonna Getcha: The Colonial Challenge to the Crees in Quebec* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); 'Diane Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); Henry Pennier, *"Call Me Hank": A Sto:lo Man's Reflections on Logging, Living, and Growing Old*, eds. Keith Thor Carlson and Kristina Fagan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); John Lutz and Keith Carlson, "Sto:lo People and the Development of the B.C. Wage Economy" in Keith Carlson, ed. *You Are Asked to Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada's Pacific Coast History* (Chilliwack: Sto:lo Heritage Trust, 1997), 109-124; Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) especially Chapter 4, "Picking, Posing, Performing"; R. Jarvis Brownlie, "'Living the same as the white people': Mohawk and Anishinabe Women's Labour in Southern Ontario in the 1920s and 30s," *Labour/Le Travail* 61 (Spring 2008): 41–68. Paige Raibmon, "Theaters of Contact: The Kwakwaka'wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia and at the Chicago World's Fair," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 2 (June 2000): 157–190. Charles R. Menzies and Caroline F. Butler, "The Indigenous Foundation of the Resource Economy of BC's North Coast.," *Labour/Le Travail* 61 (Spring 2008): 131–149. For a collection that documents Aboriginal ways of using resources and how they changed over time, see Kerry Abel and Jean Friesen, eds., *Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1991); For an

the purchase of new uniforms and equipment was often necessary due to damage incurred by the hazardous work environment:

> And then [his] clothes were always burned. Almost every week he had to buy new clothes for work 'cause they had little holes in them, burned. I guess it depended on where you were working in the plant, too you know, if you were working right where the fumes were and everything...And then he just worked on labour work and that was, that was dirty. Working right in, you know, where all that dirt was and everything. And he got burned on his face with some of the acid. I don't know how that happened. He still has a scar there today on his face. You can see it if you look at him. A little mark there.[78]

The plant provided jobs, but it was dangerous work. Terry Jacobs describes some of the hazards that he encountered. "There were times you couldn't wear the gas masks in there," he said in an earlier interview. "The diaphragms would freeze up

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examination of the effects of game regulations on First Nations in Saskatchewan, see Anthony G. Gulig, "'We Beg The Government:' Native People and Game Regulation in Northern Saskatchewan, 1900-1940," *Prairie Forum* 28, 1 (Spring 2003): 81–98.

[78] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

and you'd choke yourself. You didn't get anything else. About 175 people worked there."[79]

For some, this led to breathing problems which were attributed by the workers to the toxic fumes they often inhaled:

> The guys would be working in there like I say without respirators...I'm sure everybody must have inhaled a lot of that—like you say—sulphur gas. Sulphur gas itself, it was hard to breathe. And I worked in the roaster plant and the number one, number two acid plant and they had two 500 horsepower motors and they sucked all the gas from our plant but when we got a power failure, all that reversed and we got it back into the roaster plant, and we inhaled that...I was working on the floors and I had to go check everything else, how everything was running. Put some covers back on and if you got stuck in that gas, there's nothing to breathe. I remember about two o'clock in the morning one time I had to come down a four-inch pipe, about 80 feet down the side just to get into the [control room]—'cause all the gas was gone up. I went in, I couldn't breathe anything, I couldn't breathe. So I shimmied down the pipe just to get back into the control room, and I took my chances, but if I'd stayed there, I don't

[79] Rekmans, Lewis, and Dwyer, eds., *This is My Homeland*, 45.

know, I could have been suffocated by the gas. When you hear that, it just dries, dries your throat right up.[80]

While community members were benefitting in some ways from their new jobs and were able to purchase things that many could not until that point, it came at a potentially high cost.

Employment at the acid plant cost at least one man his life.[81] Wilfred Commanda, a non-smoker, submitted his workplace compensation claim while in the hospital dying of lung cancer, to which he succumbed in 1992. A decade later, after a fifteen minute recess, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal found that his lung cancer was in fact due to his employment at the cindering plant from 1957 to 1966 and provided a settlement to his widow, Valerie.[82] The lack of

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[80] Interview with Terry Jacobs, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[81] Community members remember other employees who died at a relatively young age due to work in the acid plant, but it is complicated to prove a causal relationship. There was a high correlation between smoking and working in the mining industry, making claims for occupational exposure to lung diseases difficult to prove.

[82] Interview with Valerie Commanda, 7 July 2009, Serpent River First Nation and Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal Decision dated 2002. One detail that is referred to in several places is that Mr. Commanda was a non-smoker, making his claim about lung cancer slightly easier to prove. The author

safety equipment and health and safety precautions, in conjunction with the dangerous work being carried out, quickly undermined any financial benefits that came with employment.[83]

The acid plant threatened not only the lives of its employees, but also those living in the immediate area. Today, many people look to the acid plant and river pollution as the cause of significant sickness on the reserve and as an overall health threat to the community. Air and water pollution resulting from the plant continues to be the main area of concern, and several concerned groups such as Rosalie Bertell and the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, as well as the Institute

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wishes to thank Mrs. Commanda for sharing her experience with the WSIB and the outcome of her claim.

[83] As the employment records of the plant are unavailable, it was impossible to follow-up with non-Aboriginal employees of the plant. While many of them would have undoubtedly suffered similar effects from working in the plant, the fact that white workers' housing was located 10 kilometers away from the plant would have minimized the plant's impact on their families and property. On the health effects of workplace surroundings in this period, see Ontario, *Royal Commission on the Health and Safety of Workers in Mines* (Toronto: Ministry of the Attorney General, 1976).

for Environmental Studies at the University of Toronto to name a few, have studied the effects it had on the community.[84]

From the very beginning, the acid plant had a noticeable and detrimental effect on the environment and landscape. The damage to trees and vegetation in the area, particularly near the plant, was extensive and one of its earliest and most obvious effects. As Arnelda Jacobs recalls, "it took all the trees, the northern wind used to blow south and it used to affect the trees [...] There was no trees up there on the side of the hill."[85] Deforestation represented the physical scarring of the landscape which members of the Serpent River First Nation had traditionally held in trust.

As early as 1959, the SRFN community leadership expressed concern about the effect the plant was having on the land.[86] Noranda recognized such losses only in economic terms and as per an agreement signed in 1959, compensation for lost timber potential was paid annually. Thus, the damage to community land was seen in terms of economic loss rather than holistically. Eventually, in 1963, a reforestation project was undertaken by Noranda Mines, DIA, and the reserve which

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[84] A discussion of the work of Dr. Rosalie Bertell and other studies undertaken by the reserve will follow.

[85] Interview with Arnelda Jacobs, 8 July 2009, Serpent River First Nation.

[86] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11353, File 493/20-11-7 "Agreement between Noranda Mines and Chief and Council, Serpent River Band" dated 19 October 1959.

was intended to end Noranda's responsibility to the band for its loss of wood and timber, rather than restore an environmental wrong.[87] From the beginning this scheme was compromised by the very fumes that had killed trees in the first place: "Those trees that were planted in the bush survived the summer. The trees that were planted in the open, northeast of the acid plant showed extensive damage."[88] It was essential from the company's point of view to finish the project as quickly as possible as, according to J.O. Hinds, the Assistant Secretary at Noranda, they hoped that "adequate reforestation has been done so that we can discontinue the compensation that we have been paying for each year to the band."[89] While many of the buildings had been simply abandoned on the site, trees were the one aspect of the reserve landscape that was to be returned to its original state upon penalty of compensation to the community—it was the only thing deemed to be of economic and thus measurable value. This is not surprising as the reforestation project itself was defined by the relationship between DIA and Noranda rather than the company and the reserve. Letters between Noranda and DIA again describe the reforestation project in purely financial and compensatory terms. In the few occasions in which

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[87] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11353, File 493/20-11-7

[88] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11353, File 493/20-11-7, "Letter from Noranda Mines to G.S. Lapp, Regional Supervisor of Indian Agencies," dated 15 April 1964.

[89] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11353, File 493/20-11-7, "Letter from J.O. Hinds to G.S. Lapp," dated 8 June 1964.

band leadership was included in the correspondence (usually only to administer payments to the community members who worked as labourers for the project), that correspondence was copied through DIA. In this sense, then, compensation was construed in purely financial terms and in the context of the public-private partnership, and excluded members of the damaged community.[90]

In a memo from the Regional Supervisor for Northern Ontario, G.S. Lapp, to the Superintendent of the Sault Ste. Marie Agency, there were to be no more payments due after May 1964 "or when reforestation was carried out." It would also appear that DIA waited until March 1965 to ensure the payments for the preceding years were paid. Furthermore, despite the fact that Lapp stated "it will be August 1965 before the full results of the reforestation can be determined" he went on to definitively state that, in any case, the 1964 payments would be the last.[91]

DIA and Noranda discovered that the replacement of trees was easier said than done. An October 1963 inspection of the reforestation efforts reported that:

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[90] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11353, File 493/20-11-7 "Letter from J.O. Hinds to G.S. Lapp" dated 8 June 1964 and copy of letter from J.O. Hinds to Chief William Meawasige dated 5 June 1964.

[91] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11353, File 493/20-11-7 "Memorandum from G.S. Lapp to the Superintendant, Sault Ste. Marie Agency Re: Noranda Mine Agreement" dated 10 March 1965.

1. Ninety percent of plantation trees showed fume damage, but 50% had 1964 growth.
2. There was no appreciable damage to the residual forest as the most susceptible tree white pine had previously been salvaged. Many small white pine, less than 8" d.b.h. were dead, but these were either too small for the 1961 cut, or were dead and contained too large a cull factor.
3. Some of the hardwood species indicated delayed budding in May 1964 which might be caused by 1963 fume damage.
4. The 150 tree seedlings planted in three places away from the plantation and under an overstory of hardwood or brush were quite healthy.

On May 14, 1964, Mr. Dunfield and Mr. A. Meawasige walked over the fume damaged area and determined where the 40,000 trees were to be planted. The trees arrived at noon on May 14.[92]

As this report suggests, most of the trees that had been re-planted were damaged extensively by the fumes from the acid plant, but some began to recover after the plant's closure in 1964. The repeated visits and inspections of trees speaks to the concern about the reforestation project as a whole, but, more importantly, they

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[92] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11353, File 493/20-11-7 "Sulphur Fumes—Serpent River Reserve" dated 24 May 1964.

demonstrate that the company and DIA were well aware of the damage caused by the plant's operation. Even using their own Western economic standards to measure damage to the community, it was evident that the plant was destroying the long-term ability of the community to support itself (a DIA aim in many instances) and it would prove costly and time-consuming to reclaim. The extent of the damage is evident from the extent of the efforts needed to re-forest the area. The same report concluded that about 10, 000 trees would have to "be planted in the gulleys on the side hill opposite the acid plant, 10,000 in the former plantation and 20,000 scattered throughout the bush."[93] But hopes of success remained marginal. "Unfortunately, Lands and Forests have said they do not wish to assist in this project as they are afraid of the poor publicity if the trees fail to survive," it read.[94] In the understanding that thanks to the extent of the pollution, forestry would never again (or at least for a long while) be an important source of wealth for the community, reforestation became a Band problem. "Reforestation could be a bigger project on this reserve if we had assistance in investigating planting sites," concluded the DIA report. "It could be a Centennial project for the Band, and partly seen from Highway 17."[95]

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11353, File 493/20-11-7 "Sulphur Fumes—Serpent River Reserve" dated 24 May 1964.

It is telling that at Serpent River, DIA officials ultimately returned to the theme of protecting the local tourist industry even in discussions about reforestation. Many in the region, especially those interested in the tourism industry, found the now abandoned acid plant site to be an eyesore and untimely detrimental to the public image of Northern Ontario as being a haven for outdoor enthusiasts.[96] If new trees would hide the damage to the community, it would remove a potential obstacle to wilderness tourism and recreational land use in the area. [97] DIA's suggestion that the Band build a centennial forest was also in keeping with various other projects that were funded in the mid 1960s by all levels of government to celebrate the country's hundredth anniversary.[98]

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[96] This idea will be discussed further in reference to calls for decommissioning of the site later in the decade.

[97] The mention of the community's centennial in the memo is puzzling. The treaty was signed in 1850 and so the reserve Centennial had already passed. Was it a reference to Canada's centennial in 1967 (three years after the date of the memo)? If so, the passing phrase demonstrates DIA's insensitivity to the larger issues at hand: that perhaps celebrating the state's birthday was not a high priority for a reserve that was so damaged by its commercial exploits.

[98] It appears that the Department of Lands and Forests supplied the nursery stock. LAC, RG10, Volume 11353, File 493/20-11-7 Letter from J.O. Hinds, Assistant Secretary at Noranda Mines to G.S. Lapp, Regional Supervisor of Indian Agents.

But it was not only the trees in the area that had been devastated by fume damage from the plant. At least one family, X, launched a claim against Noranda Mines for fume damage to their dwelling.[99] The investigator submitted the following to the company upon visiting the house:

> The rust from the nail heads was showing through the paint as claimed. The roof whuch [sic] is of rolled roofing is leaking because the mastic used to seal the joints has died and allowed the laps to separate. The normal life of this type of roofing is about five years and the rate of deterioration is considered to be normal and not due to fume. The nail heads in this type of roof application are exposed and in this case show some rusting but not to the extent that it is causing the roof to leak.[100]

Despite the findings of the investigator—that there was indeed damage but that it was not due to the acid plant fumes—the plant manager of the Sulphuric Acid Division at Noranda Mines nevertheless agreed that it was "possible that the rusting

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[99] As per the researcher's agreement I signed with LAC to access these files, the name of the family will not be divulged in the interests of protecting its privacy.

[100] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11336, File 493/3-11-7, "Letter to J. O'Neill, Superintendant from T.R. Wearing, Plant Manager, Sulphuric Acid Division, Noranda Mines," dated 26 September 1960.

of exposed nail heads in this building was accelerated when some fume was discharging from the acid plant stacks prior to March 1960 and Noranda Mines is prepared to allow [X] the sum of five hundred (500) dollars to pay for repairing this damage."[101] In other words, although the company did not agree that there were grounds for the community member's complaint, they were still willing to pay a not insubstantial sum to address the claim.[102]

There was some discussion as to the necessary level of DIA involvement in the case. In a letter to the Superintendant of the Sault Ste. Marie Agency, Hinds described the settlement: "we have drawn a general release for the signature of [X] however, before approaching him, Mr. Wearing felt that we should contact your office to make sure that the Department of Indian Affairs is fully advised of the situation and if we require the consent of any other parties, perhaps you would be good enough to advise us."[103] In response, the new Superintendent of the Sault Ste.

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[101] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11336, File 493/3-11-7, "Letter to J. O'Neill, Superintendant from T.R. Wearing, Plant Manager, Sulphuric Acid Division, Noranda Mines" dated 26 September 1960.

[102] According to an online CPI calculator, $500.00 in 1960 had the same purchasing power as $3645.00 today. Consumer Price Inflation Calculator, http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl (accessed 25 February 2011).

[103] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11336, File 493/3-11-7, "Letter to J. O'Neill from J.O. Hinds," dated 25 May 1961.

Marie Agency, A.R. Aquin, described DIA's involvement in the matter as being "arm's-length": the company was to negotiate directly with the complainant, but that once the agreement was signed, they were to send a copy to Aquin "in order to protect this office against any future discussions."[104] DIA, although responsible for bringing the acid plant to the reserve in the first place, was not interested in involving itself in securing compensation for damage done by the plant to the reserve. It also accepted a settlement which came with the proviso that the company would be forever released from responsibility for further damage, despite the fact that the plant was still running in June 1961 when it was offered to family X. "It was fully explained to them at the time of signing that they could have no further claim against the company for smoke, fume, or acid damage as a result of our plant's operation," Hinds told Aquin. "As far as they are concerned, the matter is settled once and for all time."[105]

But damage to the homes and property of reserve residents was common, as the oral histories of Serpent River residents confirm. According to Valerie Commanda, "the roofs never used to last that long and the cars rusted out. They

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[104] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11336, File 493/3-11-7, "Letter from A.R. Aquin to J.O. Hinds," dated 7 June 1961.

[105] LAC, RG 10, Volume 11336, File 493/3-11-7, "Letter to A.R. Aquin, Superintendant of Sault Ste. Marie Agency from J.O. Hinds, Assistant Secretary for Noranda Mines" dated 26 June 1961.

only lasted couple years."[106] Another family was forced to move from its home, which was in an area directly across the highway from the acid plant because of the damage: "our roof was burned [...] from the plant. The roof in our house. And I believe that's why [DIA] asked us to move from there. We had to move up this way."[107] This damage not only resulted in the relocation of a family, but also the community post office, which Gertrude Lewis ran from her home until the 1990s. It appears that the destructive influence of the plant was pervasive on the reserve. More than one resident recalled the clear signs that all was not right with plant's emissions: "that dust was so fine it blew across the community when you got an east wind. And anybody who had nice white clothes or sheets on the line—it would all turn rusty when they brought them in. Of course, this calcine was 65% iron in it."[108] Gertrude Lewis recalls the holes in her clothes: "even when we hung out our clothes out on the clothesline—now this is being laughed about, but it really happened—when I'd hang my clothes out on the line they'd have little weeny, tiny holes in them."[109] Damage to clothing does not appear on any of the records for claims, but it

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[106] Interview with Valerie Commanda, 7 July 2009, Serpent River First Nation. Cars had only recently made their appearance on the reserve, and were considered a luxury item by most families at the time.

[107] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[108] Interview with Terry Jacobs, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[109] Rekmans, Lewis, and Dwyer, eds., *This is My Homeland*, 45.

was widespread enough to have become a dark joke on the reserve among the elders, particularly among the women who were usually the ones doing the laundry.[110] It is thus difficult to determine how frequently individual families launched claims against the company.

Property damage was superseded in the minds of residents by the health effects which the acid plant had on reserve members. People who lived in close proximity to the plant found themselves inhaling the fumes which were killing trees, rusting cars, setting fire to roofs, and putting holes in clothing on a daily basis. "Well, the sulphur fumes were really bad," recalls Lewis, "because when we lived right across from the plant, we couldn't even leave the windows open in the summertime because [of] the fumes."[111] SRFN residents also complained about the impact that the poisoned water had on their children. Terry Jacobs recalled the effects that swimming in Aird Bay had on his child and others in the community: "all

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[110] It should be noted that just because there is laughter on a topic, that does not mean that residents find the topic amusing in a positive way. For more on the topic of First Nations humour, see the works of Drew Hayden Taylor, Thomas King, as well as the author's own article, "Interviewing Nookomis and Other Reflections of an Aboriginal Historian" special issue of *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale, Talking Green*, 30, (2010) http://www.oralhistoryforum.ca/index.php/ohf/article/view/386. See also the epilogue and preface of this dissertation.

[111] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

the leaching from the acid plant went into the river, or went into the bay, and it contaminated all of the shorelines [...] our daughter would go swimming and she'd come out with all—with a rash, and most of the kids did."[112] Valerie Commanda noted that her children suffered from the same condition upon swimming in the same area.[113] In an effort to avoid these rashes for her children, Gertrude Lewis remembers mistakenly thinking the river was a safer place for water leisure activities: "we thought the water was so dirty down here in the bay and they were breaking out, you know, they were getting sores on them. So instead of swimming there, they went up to the Serpent River...And the Serpent River was nice and clear. And we thought, oh, they're safe up there...And here we found that there's radium 226 in that river! We weren't supposed to use that water at all!"[114] Other children, particularly those who lived in "Sulphur Circle" suffered from undiagnosed conditions. In a 1985 report on the health effects of the water pollution on those

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[112] Interview with Terry Jacobs, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[113] Interview with Valerie Commanda, 7 July 2009, Serpent River First Nation.

[114] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, Serpent River First Nation. More on the effects of water pollution from the mining industry in the Serpent River basin will follow in the next chapter.

who swam in the river, one child was described as having discoloration on his/her gumline, which was a possible indication of metal poisoning.[115]

The introduction of the plant had an impact on the reserve, both positive and negative, and change was rapid: "A lot of big changes, eh? It felt like a big change," recalled Betty Jacobs.[116] Interview participants indicated that these changes and their increased purchasing power were beneficial: "It was nice to see people starting to buy cars, you know [...] after a few years they started buying the comforts of life you might say. TVs and all that you know."[117] Arnelda Jacobs remembers the plant changed her life, too: "our men were working there and then my husband worked for a construction company and we got paid every week. So I could go to town to do the shopping, the grocery shopping and it changed our way of life so [...] we were able to buy food." The plant itself brought profound social and economic changes to the community.

All remember that this new material wealth came at a high cost, but it must be acknowledged that many community members desired better paying jobs. This is why some supported the acid plant in the first place. Yet the desire for a better

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[115] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Serpent River Report, 1985" by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, 17. For a lengthy discussion of this report see Chapter VI.

[116] Interview with Betty Jacobs, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[117] Interview with Terry Jacobs, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

life, at least in material and economic terms, was forced to compete with traditional desires and obligations to the community's lands. In fact, the uranium industry and the plant compromised the very ability of the community to balance those two competing demands through the destruction of their resources. It is this sense of destruction—rather than the wage economy itself—which the community now laments. The river pollution on one end of the reserve, which severely compromised the community's fish and game resources, compounded by the pollution in Aird Bay as a result of the acid plant operating on the other side, seriously curtailed the band's ability to continue its age-old practice of subsistence fishing. Elders recall that the effect of the pollution was to make the fish in the bay soft, and therefore not suitable for consumption.[118] When the fish were eaten, in some cases, the pollution could be tasted. "We got a nice bass," recalls Terry Jacobs. "One of those nice ones. In the evening, eh? I thought when we go home we're going to cook that right away. And we tried, I tried it but, it tasted like it was rotten."[119] According to Peter Johnston, the fish population of the bay area also decreased. "Well, I think that what happened is that it used to be common to fish close by," he says, "and then as the effects of the effluent from the plant over the years got worse and it accumulated in the lake, the fish just couldn't take it anymore and the ones that didn't die just didn't come in, they weren't there anymore. They found other places that were more habitable to live in. And so you didn't have the fish in the lake

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[118] Interview with Valerie Commanda, 7 July 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[119] Interview with Terry Jacobs, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

anymore that you used to have."[120] Fishing was a traditional economic and subsistence activity which connected the residents of the Serpent River Reserve to cultural and ecological traditions of stewardship and reliance on the land. The pollution and effects of the acid plant not only sickened the residents of the area, but also threatened to undermine and destroy important cultural traditions.[121]

Any positive effect of the acid plant was fleeting. The jobs soon disappeared. By the time the plant finally closed in 1963, it had only been in operation for less than a decade. The long-term economic consequences of the plant closure were devastating for the community. "Since the closing of the acid plant here on the Serpent River Reserve," wrote the reserve's chief to an official in the Mineral Resources Branch of Indian Affairs,"...we are in a very depressed area, there is no work here at present. We feel that something else could be started, for example a rock quarry."[122] For short a time the plant had provided jobs for the community.[123]

In its 1959 annual report, Noranda had been excited about its operation at Cutler, where it was operating close to capacity, and had even explored acquiring

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[120] Interview with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[121] There are more concerns with the fish and game associated with the river system, but that will be discussed in the next chapter.

[122] LAC, RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 493/20-5-7. "Chief to A.B. Irwin, Superintendent Mineral Resources, Indian Affairs Branch," 21 April 1964,

[123] Ibid.

federal government support for the building of a wharf to enable the plant to increase its output capacity.[124] Just two years later, the company report sang a very different tune. "The Cutler acid plant was lower at 344 tonnes of acid per day, about 35% of capacity, due to reduced demand for acid from the uranium mines," it read. "Some 85,000 tons of pyrite concentrate was burned to yield 125,500 tons of acid and 57,000 tons of iron calcine."[125] The decrease in output in 1960—versus the growth which had been anticipated a year earlier—was directly tied to the "bust" period of Elliot Lake in the uranium industry of the early 1960s.[126]

The following year, Noranda sold the plant to Canadian Industries Limited after the price of uranium plummeted with the public announcement that the United States would not renew its contract with Canada. CIL bought the plant most likely because it competed with another plant it owned near Sudbury,[127] and closed the

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[124] "A Report on Progress: Noranda Mines, Limited, 1959," LAC, RG 20, Volume 775, File 23-100-N17 and LAC, RG 2, Vol. 2746, "New Wharf at Cutler," Cabinet Conclusions, 6 June 1960, 4.

[125] LAC, RG 20, Industry, Trade, and Commerce, Volume 775, File 23-100-N17. "A Report on Progress: Noranda Mines, Limited, 1961."

[126] Ibid.

[127] Interview with Terry Jacobs, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

Cutler operation.[128] Even as operations slowly resumed at some of the mines towards the end of the decade, it was thought to be more financially sound to truck sulphuric acid derived from Inco operations in Sudbury than to continue running the plant at Cutler.[129] When the plant ceased operations in 1963 and the jobs dried up, environmental pollution and social change meant that it was too late to return to the old ways. The fish in the bay were either gone or inedible, and the fish and game in the Serpent River system were contaminated, compromised by mining operations upstream at Elliot Lake. If DIA had intended the plant to decrease Serpent River First Nation's reliance on moditional economic activities and to move its members more permanently into the local resource-based economy, they had succeeded. Members of the Serpent River First Nation were now part of a boom-bust economic cycle and unable to rely on traditional economic pursuits like fishing, hunting, forestry, and trapping as they once had.

The Elliot Lake *Standard*, which had once extolled the virtues of building the plant on the reserve in the hope that it would "advance" the progress of the "Indians," now talked about the abandoned structure as a blight on the landscape and a danger to the tourist industry. Articles in the paper described it as an eyesore visible from the highway, saying it had the "scabrous look of deserted and derelict

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[128] Ibid.

[129] "Two Earth-Shaking Explosions Launch Acid Plant Demolition" *The Standard*, 28 August 1969, p.1.

buildings" and posed a danger to the wellbeing of the larger community.[130] For his part, Chief William Meawasige wanted to be able to use the land for a practical purpose, but CIL refused to co-operate with plans for demolition. DIA was also unresponsive. In an ironic twist, when the lease expired the plant land was deeded back to the reserve, but CIL did nothing to decommission the site and it was therefore unusable and continued to pose a significant health and safety hazard to the community. The band could not finance such a remediation project independently, and in 1967 Chief Meawasige wrote letters to Prime Minister Pearson, who was also the Member of Parliament for the area, asking him for assistance.[131]

The government's answer came two years later in the form of "Serpent Powder," a training exercise which was held for 110 members of Number One Field Squadron, Royal Canadian Engineers. The exercise was intended to both demolish the plant and provide the army with an opportunity for live fire training. In late August 1969, the unit began a multi-week operation which was witnessed by interested parties of both the Canadian and American armed forces.[132] The

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[130] "'Like Stalingrad After the Siege': Ojibway Chief Doesn't Have Solution" *The Standard*, 2 February 1967.

[131] Ibid.

[132] "Embarrassed" is one of the sub-headings of the article, since the first attempt did not result in the building's collapse. "Chief Tells Story Behind Story of Cutler Acid Plant Demolition," *The Standard*, 4 September 1969, p.1. Peter Johnston

squadron camped near the site and had its food and water transported from Elliot Lake. By the end of October, all the buildings had been blown-up at a cost of over $100,000. [133] The demolition by explosives levelled the building but scattered contaminated pieces of rubble over a wider area. Larger pieces of debris were piled in the nearby ravines.[134] A new chief and council were elected soon after and in February 1970 they raised the issue of the refuse, which was still on the 100 acres of reserve land.[135] Although the plant had been demolished, the site remained unusable and a danger to community health and safety.

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The Cutler Acid Plant brought some degree of economic prosperity to the reserve, but it came at a high cost. The Cold War brought with it new imperatives that trumped First Nations interests, and it also led to an entrenchment of the

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recalls watching the demolition, witnessing the initial failure, and hearing someone shout, "bring in the Air force!" Interview with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, Serpent River First Nation.

[133] LAC, RG 22, Volume 1196, File 2/493-1-837 vol 1, "Letter from N. Long to W. Terentiuk," dated 24 February 1970.

[134] "Chief Tells Story Behind Story of Cutler Acid Plant Demolition," *The Standard*, 4 September 1969, p.1.

[135] LAC, RG 22, Volume 1196, File 2/493-1-837 vol 1, "Serpent River Band Council Resolution" dated 19 February 1970.

colonial relationship that had already existed. Although the community initially welcomed the prospect of jobs in the face of economic disparity, their attempts to investigate the offer through their own legal representation were squashed. The internalization of the need for economic prosperity can be seen in many of the elders' recollections of wanting work in the community, especially as mining would lead to the depletion of the very resources upon which they had relied and intimately understood for centuries. As more and more non-Indigenous people came to settle in the area, the inequality was readily apparent to them. The prospect of steady jobs was initially welcomed, but the extent of environmental damage could not have been anticipated. The jobs would be fleeting, but the legacy of toxicity would remain for decades.

Even when it came to working in the plant, employees had to contend with occupational exposure to acids and dangerous chemicals, and reserve residents watched as their trees, homes, cars and even laundry were affected by the constant presence of red dust. Community and family gardens and traditional pursuits of fish and game were replaced by store-bought groceries. By the time the plant closed and the wages disappeared, there was no possibility of safely returning to those practices as they had long been contaminated by the plant and mining operations at Elliot Lake. CIL had no interest in taking with them anything other than what could be moved cheaply and quickly and left the buildings where they were. DIA had not negotiated a clean-up clause in the lease to Noranda despite the suggestions made by reserve residents and the community priest in 1954-1955. More than a decade later, Chief Meawasige had found some success in publicizing the "eyesore" to an

increasingly sympathetic Canadian public, but it was left to future leaders to ensure that the decommissioning process was carried out. In the meantime, children played on the site, fires erupted in the sulphur heaps left behind by the Royal Canadian Engineers, and the water still burned the skin of anyone wanting to swim in the area. All these issues would persist over the next half-century, while reserve leadership became increasingly militant in its calls for proper environmental reclamation of the site.

CHAPTER IV

"WE WOULD ADVISE YOU NOT TO EAT THESE FISH OR TO DRINK THE WATER": URANIUM PRODUCTION AND THE SERPENT RIVER

A boy went on a fast on the North Shore of Lake Huron on his thirteenth birthday. He wanted to return home, but his mother forced him to stay and continue his vision quest. When she returned for him, he had disappeared but was spotted by hunters: "To their amazement, a great serpent rose above the waves. A giant creature with large horns. Clinging to the monster's back was the young boy."[1] After that, others began to disappear and quiet nights were disrupted by terrible noises.[2] The Serpent was angry. The Anishinaabek believe that a serpent lurks beneath the water and has a den where the mouth of the Serpent River meets Lake

[1] Tom Haddow, "Serpent River Home of Giant Reptile: Ojibway," *The Standard* (Elliot Lake), 29 March 1983.

[2] Ibid.

Huron.[3] The creature-spirit is said to be responsible for minerals and water resources, and that to steal from it would result in death and destruction.[4] Its den and waters have been polluted, and minerals ripped from the earth in the interests of financial gain. The Serpent River First Nation suffered the wrath of the Serpent's anger.

To this day, some community elders are aware of the water dweller's power and capacity to both protect and destroy. When asked about the Serpent, Arnelda Jacobs recalls that the water-dwelling being is not always vengeful, but rather is the focus of gift-giving in exchange for help and protection: "It's been sighted every once in a while, eh. And just a few years ago it showed itself and they're just doing a ceremonies to put tobacco and make a basket, put in the water, it's for the serpent. But [another community member] does the things that her grandma used to do– feed the serpent... So they'd help us I guess. I don't know what kind of help it's given us. But he's nothing to fear, eh. He's there to help us."[5] The Serpent's traditional role of helper and protector was compromised as he was poisoned by uranium development. The community's traditional role of taking care of the

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[3] Theresa S. Smith, *The Island of the Anishnaabeg: Thunderers and Water Monsters in the Traditional Ojibwe Life-World* (Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1995), 112.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Interview with Arnelda Jacobs by Author, 8 July 2009, Serpent River First Nation.

Serpent, that all-important role of steward, was changed profoundly by the effects of mining and the influx of settlers.

The aid and protection offered by the Serpent has been compromised by resource development in the traditional territory of the Serpent River First Nation. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, he has had to contend with the establishment of mining operations at Elliot Lake, which brought new dangers despite their high-profile promise of modern economic opportunities. The double-impact of the combination of acid production, as discussed in the previous chapter, and river pollution resulting from uranium extraction on or near the reserve, resulted in a dramatic change in how residents of the Serpent River First Nation were able to interact with their environment. Drinking water was affected (some families drew water directly from the Serpent River), and traditional leisure activities such as swimming became dangerous for children. The biggest change brought about by the river's destruction, however, was the impact it had on the reserve's traditional pursuits of hunting and fishing. It was not only that the ecological effects of uranium signalled a fundamental threat to activities that were of cultural and historical importance, but also that fish and wildlife were still essential to supplement family diets. The fur/pelt trade that had still been ongoing in the area only a decade before was changed fundamentally even in cases where trapping and hunting were used for subsistence. Residents noticed a change in the fish population as well, but it would be a decade before they were told to limit their catch and refrain from drinking the water. This chapter examines the many changes that have occurred in the Serpent River basin since industrial development started,

and the effects these changes had on the people of the Serpent River First Nation and their relationship with its rich resources. Some aspects of early traditional resource use will be introduced, as will the status of the water system from the 1950s to the 1970s. Finally, this chapter will examine how industrial and mining operations brought about a dramatic change to the myriad ways in which residents of the Serpent River First Nation interacted with their environment.

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The people of the Serpent River First Nation have interacted with each other and the resources of the North Shore of Lake Huron since time immemorial. Evidence of early occupation in the area of what is now Elliot Lake has long been documented. Rooster Rock, an important site of spirituality and ceremony, is located in the community's traditional territory and is now part of a uranium tailings management site. Furthermore, pictographs have been found in their territories as well. As community members continue to reclaim and use these sacred sites, it has become apparent that although their ways of interacting with the landscape have been compromised by uranium extraction, dedication to tradition has remained strong.

Community elders have long memories that recall family use of resources dependent upon the river system. Terry Jacobs recalled that his father had made his living hunting and trapping near Black Creek (part of the river system). This livelihood was compromised by the river pollution, as more and more elders of his generation realized that the animal population had diminished and those that remained—the beaver in particular—had been affected to the point where it

threatened livelihoods.[6] Betty recalls that her father-in-law had to stop trapping altogether due to the poor quality of his pelts and the difficulty in obtaining them: "He had to quit, eh? [...] Even the fur—he was trying to do whatever they do to skin the beaver—broke right off...Yeah. Even the fur was no good."[7] Her husband, Terry, described a generational shift in dependence on the land as a result of pollution, and the loss of rich resources: "Everybody [inaudible] most of the elders—I'm an elder now, I'm 72—but the elders just before me, they enjoyed all this trapping, hunting and trapping. And they had to get away from that. The meat might be contaminated. [Pause] And I know Betty, she used to like beaver tails, eh? And the beaver that she used to get were all from the Black Creek. She ended up with colon cancer. I don't know, I can't say for sure that was the result of eating that beaver tail because it was really good, really rich. And she, she enjoyed that, eh? She enjoyed beaver as well, all the meat."[8] This personal history not only contains important information about changes in resources over time, but it also underlines one of the main concerns that Serpent River First Nation members have about uranium: its health effects. It was more than the disturbing fact that the traditional ways of life

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[6] Interview with Terry and Betty Jacobs, by Author, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[7] Interview with Terry and Betty Jacobs by Author, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[8] Interview with Terry and Betty Jacobs by Author, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

were interrupted. They could also make one sick. The connectivity that had always been part of life was now threatening it.

In the minds of the elders in the community, this was directly tied to the river pollution. As Terry recalls, "Oh, Yeah I guess uh, a lot of leaching came from Elliot Lake. All the, all the water emptied into the Serpent River, eh? Came right down. I remember first of all when I was a young fella I could swim in the Serpent River and it didn't matter if the water was really 4 or 6 feet deep. You see right down to the bottom. The stones down below, they looked like jewels. It was very, very clean. But since the mines started, a lot of their leaching emptied into the Serpent River. The bottom of that Serpent River was just like a greyish gunk, eh?[9] And uh, it uh I guess that had to be all from Elliot Lake. And it's still not—after being closed for so many years—it's still not completely, uh, cleaned up. Yeah, we used, that water used to be good for drinking, swimming, washing, washing your clothes. And uh, I guess all the animals in the area, that was their source of drinking water as well. The

[9] Terry's exact wording of the river pollution differs from that of Gertrude Lewis, who recalls that the water was cleaner than that of Aird Bay, which is why she chose to have her children swim there. This probably has to do with Terry comparing the river before and after the establishment of uranium mining, while Gertrude is comparing the river to the obviously polluted Aird Bay, where the acid plant was.

animal population went down, eh?"[10] The ways in which elders understand the effects of the uranium industry on their community is through the environment and health. Threats to both form the foundation of this collective understanding. As mentioned in the chapter IV, economic gain may have been a catalyst for the establishment of such industries, but it was not worth the price paid in the loss of resources and the erosion of community health. As seen in the Jacobs' recollection, health is understood to be directly tied to resources, and as one is diminished, so too is the other. If the Serpent and the river are threatened, there is little he can do to protect us.

Uranium production was one of the biggest threats to the Serpent River watershed, which covers approximately 492 square miles[11] and eventually flows into the north shore of Lake Huron. When the uranium industry was developing at Elliot Lake, there was little consideration for the safe and responsible disposal of the by-products and waste of extraction. Calls to investigate the water disposal methods of mining companies came as early as 1955 after Pronto Uranium Mines (south of present-day Elliot Lake) began operations, and, as one newspaper put it at the time, "initial concern was for impoundment of tailings and neutralization of acid wastes. Although waste treatment and disposal methods were not entirely

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[10] Interview with Terry and Betty Jacobs by Author, 8 December 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[11] AO, RG 1- 282-4-56 File: Serpent River 1964-67, A. E. Armstrong, dated 9 February 1967.

satisfactory in the beginning, improvements which were made in the first year of operation appear to have been adequate."[12] It was the responsibility of the Department of Lands and Forests to study water quality and tailings disposal areas, as well as to "assess the pollutional effects of liquid wastes which must, of necessity, be discharged."[13] The newspaper described the scientific process of tailings and their disposal, as the uranium itself had to be extracted from the ore using sulphuric acid.[14] This process, called leaching, separates "the insolubles (tailings) and passing

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[12] "Study Uranium Mine Area Water Disposal Problems" *Leader Spectator*, 30 May 1957, 7.

[13] Ibid.

[14] The most readable and concise description of the leaching process is as follows: "operations at uranium mines and mills are based on the underground mining of uranium-bearing ore and followed by crushing, grinding and extraction to recover it as uranium oxide. The ore is then crushed, ground, and leached with sulphuric acid to dissolve the uranium. The waste rock after leaching is separated and discharged to waste as tailings. The liquid portion, containing the uranium in solution, is fed to ion exchange resin columns where the uranium is extracted by the solution by the resin and is, in turn, stripped from the resin by nitric acid. It is then precipitated, filtered, and dried in yellow cake form for shipping. The ion exchange feed solution, having been stripped of its uranium, is neutralized with lime and discharged with the tailings to the disposal area." Deputy Minister's Committee, "Report on Radiological Water Pollution in the Elliot Lake and

the clarified solution (with pH adjustment) through ion-exchange resins. The final barren solution, and the water-borne tailings are mixed and fed to mixing tanks where lime slurry is added under automatic pH control to give pH 6.5 to 7.5. After adequate agitated retention in the neutralization plant, the mixture is discharged through wood-stove pipe line to a disposal area."[15] The tailings would then be held in a pond where they could "settle." It had been acknowledged that the sheer magnitude of the 35,000 tonnes of uranium mining capacity of the eleven mines in operation near Elliot and Quirke Lakes "indicated a tremendous waste disposal problem."[16]

There are twelve decommissioned mines in the area—Quirke, Panel, Denison, Spanish-American, Canmet, Stanrock, Stanleigh, Milliken, Lacnor, Nordic, Buckles and Pronto—and all but the last are in the Serpent River watershed. Pronto was located near the north shore of Lake Huron south of Elliot Lake. A 2004-2005 report of the Serpent River Watershed Monitoring Program, prepared for Rio Algom Limited and Denison Mines Inc., described the tailings management areas left by

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Bancroft Areas," (Government of Ontario, 1965), 45. See Appendix IV: Methods of Waste Disposal and Treatment and Recommended Control Measures for Uranium Milling and Milling Procedures.

[15] "Study Uranium Mine Area Water Disposal Problems" *Leader Spectator*, 30 May 1957, 7.

[16] Ibid.

these mines: "Associated with the mine sites are ten decommissioned tailings management areas (TMAs; Denison, Panel, Quirke, Spanish American, Stanleigh, Lacnor, Nordic, Pronto, Milliken, and Stanrock). Tailings were also historically deposited in Buckles Creek, so this area is also considered a source of mine-related contaminants within the licensed area of the Lacnor-Nordic TMA. All the TMAs, except Pronto, discharge to the Serpent River Watershed. The long-term care and maintenance of these sites is the responsibility of Rio Algom Limited and Denison Mines Inc."[17] The maintenance and security of these tailings sites thus continues to be an important issue in the area.

The tailings process was explained by a short 1967 report by A.E. Armstrong, entitled "Pollution in Serpent River Water," written to communicate the extent of the effects of the uranium industry:

> The main sources of waste from the milled process are:
>
> (1) The tailings, or finely divided waste rock that remain after the separation from the uranium-bearing acid solution.
>
> (2) The barren solution that remains following the removal of the uranium oxide concentrate

[17] Minnow Environmental Inc., "Serpent River Watershed Monitoring Program—Cycle 2," June 2005, 1. Held in Elliot Lake Public Library. Note that the report is commissioned by the businesses that are ultimately responsible for the sites.

(3) Mine water that is pumped from underground

> Approximately twelve lakes in the Elliott [sic] Lake area are receiving tailing decants, and without a doubt this has affected the fish or at least has curbed the desire of any angler to fish these lakes, because of uranium contamination.
>
> Also, the Serpent River all the way to Lake Huron will have been affected by uranium wastes with the result that people will be reluctant to use the water or the fish life therein.[18]

This process of containing waste in tailings ponds led to the significant pollution of the Serpent River watershed as some of these ponds and "dead lakes" (as they are also called) inevitably leaked as a result of dam failures from time to time.[19] Drainage or seepage from these sites was recognized as posing a significant environmental danger from as early as the late 1950s. A report by the Decommissioning Review and Advisory Committee, an organization of various stakeholders concerned with the decommissioning process at Elliot Lake in the mid-

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[18] AO, RG 1– 282-4-56 Bin 397141, File: Serpent River 1964-67, A. E. Armstrong, dated 9 February 1967.

[19] AO, RG 1-282, B397141, Container 6, "Meeting at Elliot Lake to Discuss Problems Arising from Radioactive Pollution of the Serpent River Drainage System," 2.

1990s, noted in 2000 that "the companies were not required to take corrective measures until the mid-1960s."[20] Jurisdictional disputes between federal and provincial levels of government created significant problems for regulatory agencies because of the "over-riding authority which is assigned under the Atomic Energy control act," which resulted in delays.[21]

These jurisdictional disputes between federal and provincial agencies did not stop with the regulation, containment, and treatment of tailings.[22] Questions of federal–provincial responsibility also hung over the need to protect the drinking water of town residents, as well as those living in communities downstream.[23] Peter Johnston recalls the effect this debate had on the Serpent River community and the inequities inherent in the jurisdictional issue. "Well we know there was a—I don't

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[20] Respect and Responsibility: The Stewardship of the Serpent River Watershed, Proposal for a New Structure by the Decommissioning Review and Advisory Committee: Final Report, March 2000, 6.

[21] Ibid.

[22] For more information about the cost-sharing arrangements between different levels of government with regards to Elliot Lake in the context of the Cold War, see Chapter II.

[23] Decommissioning Review and Advisory Committee, *Respect and Responsibility: The Stewardship of the Serpent River Watershed, Proposal for a New Structure Final Report,* March 2000, 6. Held at Elliot Lake Public Library.

know how it came about—I think it was through public relations through the media when the town of Serpent River found out that the water contained high amounts of radium," he says.

> And because it was a white community they went to the provincial government because they were getting their drinking water from the river. And they asked, they said to the provincial government, "we know our water's been contaminated by the mines. We need funding from you guys in order to find a process that will eliminate that so that it's not a danger to our health." And so in fact that's what happened: the provincial government provided them with the money to build a treatment plant. At the very same time that was happening, [...] some members of our community were taking water from the river for their own use. And when we went to the federal government and said, you know, there's high radium contents in that water, and it's above the provincial drinking water standard, the federal government's response was well, I don't remember the exact, I think it was three picocuries per litre for the provincial government, but the standard for the federal government was [ten] picocuries per litre. So it wasn't okay for the white community but it was okay for the Indian community to drink the very same water. [...] Just because of the different jurisdictions. Now that eventually led, I mean we fought tooth and nail for years and years and years to get that standard lowered and eventually we embarrassed the government

> enough where they finally did bring it down to the provincial standard. But in the meantime, though, I mean, people drank their water.[24]

Indeed, the province of Ontario had a safety standard of three picocuries per litre (the unit of measurement for radioactivity), and samples taken from the river at the reserve measured as high as 6.2 picocuries per litre.[25] However, the federal government did not consider that level of radioactivity to be significantly dangerous, as its safe level was defined as being 10 picocuries per litre.[26] While non-Aboriginal communities could be protected by provincial standards, despite being vulnerable to river pollution stemming from mining operations at Elliot Lake, the Serpent River First Nation was governed by federal standards, in keeping with the fact that

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[24] Interview with Peter Johnston, by Author, 7 July 2009, Serpent River First Nation.

[25] Poisons pile up in Serpent River; double standards anger Indians" *Globe and Mail*, 16 December 1976, 11. The issues at Serpent River made the national press, and while the *Globe and Mail* may be seen as more conservative, it is national in scope, speaking to the level of interest there was in the 1970s regarding environmental racism.

[26] Ibid. These figures are supported from studies done throughout the 1970s and compiled in chart form in A.C. Roy, W. Keller, "Status Report: Water Pollution in the Serpent River Basin," 1976, in AO, RG 12-45, B141785, "Lakes and Rivers: Serpent River, 1976, 752-2."

Aboriginal people and lands fall under federal jurisdiction. In an article in the *Globe and Mail,* which called attention to this inequality on the basis of ethnicity and jurisdiction, the National Indian Brotherhood's representative, Lloyd Tataryn, was paraphrased as saying "it is wrong to have different standards for whites and Indians. Indians at Serpent River reserve were allowed to ingest up to 10 picocuries per litre while upstream white cottagers were protected by the more stringent three picocurie standard."[27] It was not until the 1970s that attention was called to the fact that federal standards for radioactivity in drinking water differed from those of the provincial government, but it took lobbying on the part of SRFN and the National Indian Brotherhood's Lloyd Tataryn to accomplish this.[28]

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[27] Ibid. See also AO, RG 12-45, B141785, A.C. Roy, W. Keller, "Status Report: Water Pollution in the Serpent River Basin," 1976, in "Lakes and Rivers: Serpent River, 1976, 752-2."

[28] Gertrude Lewis recalls that the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) was helpful in securing a lawyer when asked by the community for help. Peter Johnston recalls that when the community asked for help, the National Indian Brotherhood sent an environmentalist to assist in their presentations to the Environmental Assessment Board in the late 1970s. Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008 and with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, SRFN. For more information about the community's presentation to the EAB, and who was involved, see Chapter V. On the involvement of the NIB see AO,

The jurisdictional issue is also addressed by Gertrude Lewis in her recollection of community concerns over drinking water:

> G.L.: And we complained that they didn't do anything for us. We had three families getting their water from the Serpent River up at the bridge there.
>
> L.L.: Still at that time?
>
> G.L.: Uh huh. [She goes on to name them.] There was the three families that were living there...and they couldn't get any help to put in any protection for our water up there. They didn't do anything for them. And yet in Serpent River [neighbouring non-Aboriginal community] they were paying for water treatment for the people there. And that's another thing we were complaining about—how come they can do that for you know, off-reserve, and on-reserve they don't seem to care...whether we have good water or not.[29]

The First Nation was well aware of the situation and at several points band members had articulated their concerns over potentially dangerous water and the

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RG 12-45, B141785, File: Lakes and Rivers: Serpent River, 1976, 752-2, "George Manuel, President, NIB to Romeo LeBlanc," 26 August 1976,

[29] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, by Author, 22 February 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

inequality in water-protection which resulted from federal jurisdiction over Aboriginal affairs.[30] This was not seen by SRFN as just another political struggle, even though raising these concerns was an inherently political act; it was understood to be more about a struggle for equal access to basic services and safe water. As these oral histories suggest, it was also popularly understood to be more than a jurisdictional debate for the people in the community—an all too familiar story in many other areas of Aboriginal history. These threats to the safety of the reserve's drinking water carried cultural significance as well. For members of the SRFN, the contamination of the water represented the realization of traditional prophecies about the consequences of disturbing the Serpent. Alarmingly, it appeared that the traditional teaching about the onus to care for the Serpent's needs and to leave it undisturbed lest destruction arise was coming true.

The politico-cultural importance of the issue is underscored in the oral history of SRFN members who felt that jurisdictional disputes and official regulatory hurdles often prevented them from realizing traditional roles as guardians of the Serpent. At a later point in her interview, Lewis once again returned to the idea of river pollution and the difficulty of getting answers from different levels of government, underscoring its significance to both her own personal experience as well as that of other reserve residents:

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[30] AO, RG 12-45, B141785, File: Lakes and Rivers: Serpent River, 1976, 752-2, "Minutes of Meeting to Discuss Radiological Concerns at Serpent River Native Community," dated 17 November 1976.

G.L.: [We] couldn't drink the water, of course. We had three families that were getting their water from there. That was, that was kind of bad. And then another thing that was that was difficult was uh if you had a problem, it was just like a football. Between the federal government and the provincial government: "Oh, it's not our jurisdiction." "You're under the feds, we don't have anything to do with that."[31]

L.L.: Or it's water and that's provincial.

G.L.: Yeah, yeah. That's one thing I didn't like. We were just like a football bouncing back and forth there. We didn't know what to do, you know, or where to go.

L.L.: Oh.

G.L.: And look at how long they're taking to clean it up again there now. I suppose there's no money. Nobody wanted to put any money in the last time.

L.L.: Hmm

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[31] For more on the problem of providing clean drinking water on reserve see AO, RG 84-1, B259698, File: Surveys, 1969: Serpent River, "Memorandum by L.V. Pitts titled 'Ground Water Survey, Spragge-Serpent River Area,'" dated 30 October 1969.

G.L.: Probably thinking the same way again. "Oh jeez, it's an Indian Reserve never mind"...[32]

Lewis' football simile nicely encapsulates the jurisdictional issues that plague relations between the federal and provincial levels of government. In this particular case, the feeling that families and leadership had about being "thrown" or "bounced" back and forth is highlighted here in this elder's memory, particularly as it led to a feeling of hopelessness and frustration.[33] From the community's perspective, the province and the federal government seemed to be squabbling, not for control, but rather to avoid this issue. The overall feeling when speaking to elders about this point is that they were seen as "trouble-makers" who had to embarrass all levels of government into action. While there is a tremendous frustration apparent in these interviews, one of the other feelings is pride in not only overcoming that sense of helplessness, but more importantly in actively demanding and creating solutions by re-asserting their traditional role as stewards of the land. Re-asserting Aboriginal rights and demanding better services thus also served to re-affirm the People's traditional relationship with the Serpent.

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[32] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, by Author, 22 February 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

[33] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, by Author, 22 February 2008, Serpent River First Nation.

Drinking water was not the only concern of people living in the area. Since tourism was one of the important secondary industries along the North Shore as many communities are easily accessible via the Trans-Canada highway, the economic implication of the pollution of lakes and rivers became a significant concern for the settler communities as well as one for health and safety. The management of waterways and water safety in non-reserve lands fell to the Province of Ontario. To this end, the government of Ontario had established the Ontario Water Resources Commission (OWRC) in 1956 to make water publically available to municipalities and to manage its quality.[34] By the late 1950s, it had also been charged with monitoring the Serpent River system north of the reserve lands near the Trans-Canada highway.[35]

In the early 1960s, public concern about radioactive contamination at sites in both Elliot Lake and the Bancroft area began to mount. In 1964, political pressure in the provincial legislature from members of the Liberal opposition placed the issue before the government. Liberal leader Andrew Thompson noted the "shocking irresponsibility" of the OWRC and its failure to adequately study radiation in the area of Elliot Lake. In response, Conservative Premier John Robarts established a committee on 13 November 1964, chaired by T.R. Hilliard, the Deputy Minister of

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[34] J.B. Milner, "The Ontario Water Resources Commission Act, 1956," *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 12, no. 1 (1957): 100-102.

[35] Ontario, *Official Report of Debates: Legislative Assembly of Ontario*, (14 June 1965), p. 4136 (Hon Mr. Dymond, MPP).

Energy and Resource Management, which included representatives from several provincial departments such as the Deputy Ministers of the departments of Health, Mines, Lands and Forests, as well as the manager and staff of the OWRC to look into the matter.[36] But this did little to satisfy the members opposite the government. Thompson criticized the composition of Robarts' committee, saying it was an "in group."[37] Stan Farquhar, Liberal MPP for Algoma-Manitoulin, described the hand-picked task force as taking a "hurried, frenzied farcical approach" to the situation.[38] Radioactive pollution was a relatively new threat in Canada and it was an issue that provided the opposition with political hay while also posing a potential economic and health threat to members of communities on the North Shore and near Bancroft.

Robarts' government was anxious to defend its handling of the situation at Elliot Lake. Matthew B. Dymond, Minister of Health for the province, described the work in which his department was involved: "Radioactive pollution of public waters in uranium mine areas near Elliot Lake and Bancroft, upon which we have been

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[36] Deputy Minister's Committee, "Report on Radiological Water Pollution in the Elliot Lake and Bancroft Areas," (Government of Ontario, 1965), foreword. For the data that was collected that form the basis of the report, see AO, RG 84-22, B125018, File: Elliot Lake (Uranium Mines) Analyses 1960 -.

[37] "Thompson's Liberals set up committee on penal reform," *Toronto Daily Star*, 26 November 1964, 53.

[38] Ibid.

keeping a watch since 1958, became a prime object of interest in1964 and it was for this reason that the committee was set up at Deputy Minister level, charged with the task of developing remedies."[39] For Dymond, the committee would address any potential threats and pose solutions to any problem it found. But the opposition wanted facts about any pollution released to the public rather than dealt with behind closed doors. When Dymond was asked by Mr. Renwick if the committee—which involved four Deputy Ministers—had any reports that were "to be published or any information made available to the public in this general field," the Honourable member dodged the question and re-directed it to the Premier.[40] The release of information which might implicate the government in the mishandling of radioactive pollution was clearly not in the interests of the Conservative majority.

The pollution of Northern Ontario lakes and rivers with radioactive waste was a topic, though, which captured the public's attention. It could not be as easily dismissed as the complaints of the Aboriginal People of the SRFN. Radioactive water pollution and the government's unwillingness to make the facts of the case public made national headlines in 1965. In November of that year, a front-page story in the *Globe and Mail* exposed the fact that the release of the OWRC report commissioned by the government of Ontario detailing radioactive contamination in

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[39] Ontario, *Official Report of Debates: Legislative Assembly of Ontario*, (14 June 1965), p. 4136 (Hon. Mr. Dymond, MPP).

[40] Ontario, *Official Report of Debates: Legislative Assembly of Ontario*, (14 June 1965), p. 4136 (Hon. Mr. Dymond, MPP and Mr. Renwick, MPP).

the Elliot Lake and Bancroft areas had been delayed not once but twice that summer.[41] Although the report had been ready for release in June, the *Globe* claimed that it was initially delayed in order to protect the tourism business in those areas.[42] Its release was delayed once more by Premier Robarts until after the federal election, as his office "didn't think it would be the gentlemanly thing to do to make this public before Nov. 8," according to Dr. J.K. Reynolds, chief executive officer of the Premier's Office.[43] The real reason behind the delays in the report's release is that it tended to contradict the government's assertions that the environmental problems related to uranium mining were minimal and that the OWRC had the situation under control. Although the report blamed the federal government for having been "delinquent by not combating radioactive pollution in the uranium mining areas of Elliot Lake and Bancroft," it nevertheless validated the opposition's arguments that the OWRC had refused to release information to the public and had failed to adequately solve the problems as Dymond promised it would do.[44]

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[41] Barrie Zwicker, "Hold-Up Report on A-Pollution Until After Vote," *Globe and Mail*, 2 November 1965, 1.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

Although the report attempted to downplay the significance of the threat—and reads in an intentionally disarming way—it provides clear evidence of the extent of the damage done to the Serpent River watershed. The report outlines several conclusions reached by the subcommittee, the first of which admitted that "low-level radiological contamination [had] occurred in certain public waters in the Elliot Lake and Bancroft mining areas as a result of waste disposal practices which have been considered to be standard in the mining industry."[45] However, in an effort to minimize fear and public outcry, the report then questioned the actual significance of the contamination. "Radiological analyses of samples of surface waters taken in both mining areas indicate that there is no danger to persons drinking the waters in question," it read, "since the concentrations of radioactivity area are within acceptable limits for short-term exposure promulgated by international bodies. However, improved waste control measures are needed to reduce the levels of radioactivity for prolonged exposure."[46] The final clause of this statement speaks volumes. Since there were well-established communities in both the Elliot Lake and Bancroft areas which relied on these contaminated waters for municipal purposes, long-term exposure to radioactivity seemed to be a foregone

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[45] Deputy Minister's Committee, "Report on Radiological Water Pollution in the Elliot Lake and Bancroft Areas," (Government of Ontario, 1965), iv.

[46] Deputy Minister's Committee, "Report on Radiological Water Pollution in the Elliot Lake and Bancroft Areas," (Government of Ontario, 1965), iv.

conclusion.[47] Economic dependence on the industry would almost certainly have coloured their perceptions of the problem of water quality.

At the same time as the report downplayed the consequences and significance of the pollution, it also admitted that a full scientific understanding of both the pollution itself and its effects were lacking. The report further called for a more "detailed investigation" into the extent of the contamination, as well as the

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[47] There was some discussion about the water quality for the town in *The Standard*. See Editorial, "Elliot Lake Water Still Safe for Drinking" *The Standard*, 18 November 1964, 4: "Although it may be news to other parts of Canada that there are waters in the Elliot Lake area that are contaminated by radioactive waste from the uranium mines, it is hardly new to Elliot Lakers." See also "Elliot Lake Water Still Safe to Drink" *The Standard*, 17 July 1963, 1, which described the 300 tonne acid spill at Lacnor mine and "Municipal Beach is Again Closed Down: Water Remains Safe to Drink" *The Standard*, 24 July 1963, 1. "Elliot Lake Weathers Water Scare: Water Supply Safe" *The Standard*, 18 November 1964, 1. A *Macleans* editorial pointed to the disturbing fact that many people did not seem bothered by (or did not believe) the fact that water resources were in danger: "Since when did the truth become more dangerous than danger itself?" *Macleans*, 14 December 1964, 4. See, for example, "Elliot Lakers 'fed up' with media: Foster" *The Standard*, 14 December 1977, 1. In 1983, some non-Aboriginal communities met at the Lions hall in Serpent River to discuss the issue of water contamination. See "Serpent River Citizens fear acid spillage," *The Standard*, 18 March 1983, 1.

nature of the measures taken by mining companies to address radiological pollution. Here the report's authors pointed to "the need [to develop] a schedule of maximum permissible concentrations for application to water affected by wastes from the uranium mining industry in Ontario." Regulation of seemingly inevitable radioactive contamination appeared to be the only solution and thus the report's authors recommended that safety guidelines be established for the mining industry. In its list of recommendations, the report called for the government to establish regulations initially "for the control of radioactivity in public waters arising from uranium mining and milling operations" that would generally correspond with the provincial Department of Health's broader guidelines:

a) In accordance with modern scientific knowledge and opinion, any unnecessary exposure to radioactivity should be kept to a minimum.

b) Concentrations of from 10 to 3 picocuries of radium-226 per litre of water should be adopted as the initial objectives to be attained in public drinking- waters in the Elliot Lake and Bancroft areas.

c) Concentrations of from 30 to 10 picocuries of radium-226 per litre of water should be adopted as the initial or first-

> level objectives to be attained in those lakes and streams where present levels are in excess of this range.[48]

The report makes special note that "these objectives should be reviewed annually with a view to their eventual reduction in accordance with the policy that unnecessary exposure to radioactivity be kept to a minimum"[49] and is supported by further recommendations to expand water monitoring programs through a committee represented by the departments involved in the report, thus making it a sustained, long-term multi-departmental effort. It also promoted the continuation of collaborative efforts between provincial government bodies and mining companies "to seek practical means for the control of radioactivity and to establish sound design criteria for treatment and disposal works."[50] The conclusions and recommendations contained in the report suggest that a collaborative relationship already existed and was possible to sustain among departments and between the

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[48] Deputy Minister's Committee, "Report on Radiological Water Pollution in the Elliot Lake and Bancroft Areas," (Government of Ontario, 1965), v.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

province and the uranium mining industry.[51] Yet at the same time it called for an increased reliance on private industry to actually safeguard the waterways, to conduct its mining operations, and to safely dispose of mine wastes. Even if such co-operation and regulation was agreed to, it would again raise questions about jurisdiction over the acceptable limits of picocurie exposure for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in waterways that flowed through both reserve and non-reserve lands. In conceiving of the pollution problem within a narrowly construed political framework defined by federal and provincial responsibilities and economic considerations, the report did nothing to address the impact of the pollution upon Aboriginal communities downstream of mining sites.

The report also clearly places ultimate responsibility for managing the problem at the feet of the federal government, bringing to mind Lewis's image of radioactive pollution as a political football. In that vein, the report addresses the jurisdictional confusion over water and land resources in the context of federal responsibility outlined in the Atomic Energy Control Act, by calling for the clarification of "statutory authority."[52] Its recommendation that "the Province approach the Government of Canada with a view to clarifying procedure under

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[51] A decade later, the government was still hopeful that this would be possible. See AO, B141785, File Lakes and Rivers: Serpent River, 1976, 752-2, "Status Report, 1976."

[52] Deputy Minister's Committee, "Report on Radiological Water Pollution in the Elliot Lake and Bancroft Areas," (Government of Ontario, 1965), iv.

existing legislative authority so as to assure the control of radioactive pollution of public waters resulting from the disposal of mining and milling wastes from operating and abandoned uranium mines, within limits acceptable to the Province"[53] was a direct criticism of the federal government's record when it came to water pollution. It suggests that the federal-provincial relationship as it existed in the context of the uranium industry and pollution was uneven and in need of reassessment.

It seems as though the co-operative relationship that gave birth to the Town of Elliot Lake was challenged once it became clear that the uranium industry brought with it a series of serious environmental concerns, not the least of them being about water resources. But, again, the report made no mention of the First Nations communities that were affected in these areas. Indeed, the reference to a relatively safe short-term exposure to water in its summarized conclusions seems to be addressing the tourism and cottager industry and the temporary nature of vacationers' exposure. It does not address the fact that there were Aboriginal peoples dependent upon the river for drinking water as well as traditional and leisure pursuits.

While compartmentalized, jurisdictional thinking was perhaps an inevitable political reality of the federal-provincial partnership in the Elliot Lake area and in uranium mining in general, the practical issues which the pollution of the Serpent River watershed raised for Aboriginal Peoples were shared by many local non-

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[53] Ibid., v.

Aboriginal residents of the area as well. The report on river contamination would not have surprised local tourism business owners, for example. One camp owner, Robert Weatherley, reported that some of his guests complained of dead fish on Whiskey Lake, and another, William Webb, noticed changes in the industry for the second time since mining operations began. "There has been a marked drop in tourist registrations, and now it has become worse than it was in the uranium boom days," wrote Webb. "Between here and Espanola [a pulp and paper mill town] on the Spanish River there are hardly any fish to be caught by angling, and now that all this talk has come about the possibility of radioactive contamination it will be hard to draw in visitors."[54] Another tourist operator and commercial fisherman, James B. Vance, and his son Russell worried that American tourists would not leave one polluted area just to visit and fish in another![55] They also noted that the quality of the fishing as a whole was diminishing and that the fish that were caught tasted poorly.[56]

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[54] Eric Colwill, "Pollution of Waterways in District Concern to Residents of Spanish Area," *The Standard*, 15 December 1965, 1.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Eric Colwill, "Pollution of Waterways in District Concern to Residents of Spanish Area," The Standard, 15 December 1965, 1. Concerns about sport fishing and commercial fishing persisted for more than a decade. See various correspondence from 1973 in AO, RG 12-88, B211794, File: River Basins, Lake Huron.

Concerns about the health of fish species in the Serpent River watershed and along the North Shore also came to the attention of the provincial government from its own employees. Questions about fish quality were outlined in a letter to C.F. Schenk, a supervisor at the biology branch of the Ontario Water Resources Commission from district forester J.S. Ball. "For your interest, we have had many reports that lake trout caught in Elliot Lake and Big Quirke Lake are not fit for consumption and have a very distinctive odour associated with them when cooked," Ball wrote in 1966. "One of our commercial fishermen was in Big Quirke Lake in 1961 and caught fair poundages of lake trout. However, trout under five pounds were very rare. One of our Officers observed that even in late October and November female trout apparently had not released their eggs."[57] The local employees of the Fish and Wildlife Branch of the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests were also aware of the problems with fish in the area. George Vozeh of the Department of Lands and Forests reported that were trout in Quirke Lake that had three-year-old eggs, a significant indication of spawning problems.[58] Spawning

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[57] AO, RG 1-282, B397141, Container 6, "Letter from J.S. Ball to C.F. Schenk" dated 27 April 1966.

[58] "Elliot Lake Weathers Water Scare: Water Supply Safe" *The Standard*, 18 November 1964, 1. The title of the article is ironic given the information contained in it. After describing the spawning issues identified by the Department of Lands and Forests, the article then goes on to state that "scientists and medical

rates seemed to be declining, as suggested by both observation of female trout cycles (they should spawn in October) as well as the fact that at five pounds, a trout is only half its average expected weight.[59] This is significant in light of the fact that trout can generally live up to twenty years old and they only reach sexual maturity at approximately seven years old.[60] Along with radioactive contamination, the main threats to lake trout were the acidification of water and oxygen-poor waters.[61] Put simply, if the number of young fish was in decline and females were not spawning as they should, ministry employees feared that the health of the population would be threatened.

The documentary evidence suggests that these concerns of members of the public, provincial employees, and experts were already well-known to the members

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authorities responsible insist that there is no danger whatsoever at this time in Elliot Lake..."

[59] Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Ontario-Great Lakes Area Fact Sheets: Lake Trout, http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/regions/central/pub/factsheets-feuilletsinfos-ogla-rglo/laketrout-touladi-eng.htm, (accessed 12 July 2010). Lake trout have an average weight of about ten pounds, or 4.5 kilograms.

[60] David R. Browne, *Freshwater Fish in Ontario's Boreal: Status, Conservation and Potential Impacts of Development* (NP: Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2007), 33.

[61] Ibid., 29-33.

of the OWRC by the early 1960s. In a 1964 OWRC interoffice memorandum from D.S. Caverly, the general manager, to G.M. Galimbert, the assistant general manager, the concerns of a lodge owner on Whiskey Lake were discussed at length. Mr. L.J. Prior, proprietor of Redwood Lodge had written several letters detailing his concerns about water and fish quality. One of these letters, dated 17 December 1963, told of his suspicion that pollution and radioactivity were harming Whiskey, Kindle, and Hook Lakes, and his concern about the safety of the drinking water and fish: "He pointed out that some of the fish were very thin and in some, the spawn was not normal."[62] The reply given to Mr. Prior described the monitoring programme then in place and said that once information was available, the OWRC "would be in a better position to comment on the...condition of the fish."[63] Of course, by 26 August, the Reconnaissance Survey of the OWRC had been completed but not released to the public, a fact not lost on the author of this particular memorandum: "you are aware that the report we prepared on the Serpent River watershed has not been made available to the public. There are, of course, certain people who are vitally interested in the findings of the report."[64] The OWRC, which had carried out

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[62] AO, RG 84-22, B125001, Container 9, G.M. Galimbert to D.S. Caverly, "Industrial Pollution in the Serpent River Watershed—Whiskey, Kindle, and Hook Lakes," dated 26 August 1964.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

its own preliminary investigation into pollution in the watershed, was aware that many people were concerned about their livelihoods, as well as their health, before the committee's report was written. Yet this same report at once downplayed the severity and danger of the situation while emphasizing the possibility that regulation would solve most of the 'minor' problems it identified.

Nevertheless, Galimbert's memorandum acknowledged that all was not well with the Serpent River watershed, and that there had been a marked change since the start of uranium mining in the area. In a second letter dated 27 January 1964, Prior had indicated that "the pollution in Whiskey Lake was evident to the smell, there was considerable foam and it was black in colour, and the fish in the lakes were sterile due to radium pollution."[65] Prior was also concerned about the fact that tourists were asking pointed questions about whether the fish were suitable for consumption, as well as having noticed that the spawn were not normal.[66] The lodge owner was then told that there was no further information that could be provided to him at the time, despite the fact that he said that he might have to close his lodge if he received no answer. Galimbert's memorandum was intended to ascertain whether it would be possible to take action in response to Prior's letters. But he acknowledged that a truthful reply might be devastating to the lodge owner. "You must realize that it is quite possible that his business may be affected by the information that we can now provide," he wrote. "What action he would take upon

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

receipt of this information I do not know...I feel that the answer cannot be delayed indefinitely because of the vital interest of Mr. Prior in the matter."[67] Galimbert seemed keenly aware that the information available to the OWRC might endanger Prior's business, but he was also constrained by the fact that the survey had not yet been released to the public. Clearly officials had to weigh the competing interests of public safety and economic development in their assessment and publicization of the pollution of the Serpent River system.

By the mid 1960s, it was becoming increasing difficult for the government to refrain from taking action as more information was learned through official, scientific studies of the pollution of the river system.[68] A letter from Galimbert to Dr. D. J. Dewar, the senior scientific advisor of the Atomic Energy Control Board dated 13 August 1964, clearly outlined the findings of the government's initial survey. Even though the results were only preliminary, they were damning. "I would like to point out that this survey was of a preliminary nature only but it did

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[67] Ibid.

[68] See, for example, AO, RG 84-1, B259698, File: Surveys, 1969: Serpent River, "Memorandum by L.V. Pitts titled "Ground Water Survey, Spragge-Serpent River Area," 30 October 1969.

point out that in the two lakes [Quirke and Pecors][69] in which the work was carried out that there is radiological contamination beyond the tolerances that are recognized by health authorities," he wrote. "Both the Department of Health and our own group feel that a survey of more detail should be carried out but that this is secondary to an attempt to achieve some correction of conditions that have materialized."[70] Despite a desire to maintain calm and minimize the importance of the pollution, it was now impossible to ignore as public safety might be in jeopardy. Galimbert pointed out that the safety of the drinking water was clearly suspect and he wondered about its consequences for human health, particularly for infants who took formula mixed with water from Quirke Lake.[71] This letter—which was written at about the same time as the interoffice OWRC memo discussed above—indicates that the provincial government had knowledge that at least some lakes were contaminated in the watershed and that this posed a threat not only to economic endeavours and tourism, but also to the health of the people who ate fish and drank the water.

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[69] The letter does not name the lakes explicitly, but the 1965 report focused on these two lakes. Deputy Minister's Committee, "Report on Radiological Water Pollution in the Elliot Lake and Bancroft Areas," (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 1965).

[70] AO, RG 84-22, B125001, Container 9, "Letter from G.M. Galimbert to Dr. D.J. Dewar," dated 13 August 1964.

[71] Ibid.

But some officials in the government continued to downplay these apparent threats to human health, despite the findings of their own internal studies. One October 1964 memo from G. D. Clarke of the Fish and Wildlife Branch to Frank A. MacDougall, Deputy Minister of Lands and Forests, entitled "Radioactive Pollution," contains contradictory statements made about radioactivity in the area and the health of fish and their suitability for consumption:

> I have checked with the Ontario Water Resources Commission and find that in their opinion the level of radioactivity in lakes such as Quirk and Wiskey [sic] and as far down as Lauson [sic] is ten times what is considered tolerable for a life-time exposure. They do not consider that there is any risk in casual contact by persons coming from low-hazard areas...Levels found in fish are lower than those in other organisms, vegetation and in the lake generally. Fish are scarce in some of the lakes with high hazard, but no objection can be seen for tourist fishing in these lakes now extensively used for that purpose. Consequently, they do not advise that we should close any lakes to angling.[72]

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[72] AO, RG 1-282-4-56 File: Serpent River 1964-67, "Memo to F.A. MacDougall," dated 22 October 1964.

This summary of OWRC findings contradicts the observations of people who worked and fished in the area as well as the findings of the initial studies referred to by Galimbert. Instead, this memo rationalizes avoiding a ban on fishing so as to protect the bourgeoning tourism industry. In doing so it ignored the effects of long-term exposure to radiation and other toxins. While the memo seems to indicate that there was a low risk to tourists, it does not directly address the fact that many local people regularly fished in the area for both subsistence and commercial purposes. His suggestion that because fish were scarce in "high hazard" lakes—due in part to the inhospitable, polluted waters—a ban would be a moot point because they were no longer used by tourists for sport fishing, failed to take into account the fact that the waters and life forms living in the Serpent River watershed were all interconnected. Problems in a few lakes upstream could not be contained as ultimately the waters (and fish) moved down towards Lake Huron. This reasoning also failed to account for the possibility of continued pollution through dam failures at tailings sites, not to mention traditional First Nations uses of fish, wildlife, and water.[73] The failure to acknowledge that other people depended on the resources

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[73] One recalls George Manuel's critique of the way the government and industry handled water pollution in the Grassy Narrows area: "When the mercury content of fish in the English and Wabigoon Rivers went up too high, southern tourists were told to 'Fish for Fun.' Native people who depend on the fish as their principal food were told nothing. Governments that were prepared to give grants to industry to locate on clean waters had no answer when native people asked, 'What

connected to these lakes and rivers—or indeed the existence of a traditional worldview that emphasizes the intimate relationships between all aspects of Creation—was yet another way that government officials compromised SRFN community wellness in the name of promoting economic success.

Only when the pollution became bad enough to visibly threaten the health and confidence of tourists and recreational land users did the government begin to contemplate action. That same October, there was a multi-departmental meeting held at Elliot Lake for representatives of the U.S. Public Health Service, the OWRC, the Ontario Department of Health, the Department of Lands and Forests, as well as the Department of Mines. The purpose of the three-day seminar was to "observe and review the extent of pollution resulting from uranium mining and milling in the area."[74] R.W. McCauley wrote a report of the meeting he attended, which he described in detail, and his alarm is apparent: "Numerous places where flimsy impounding structures had been washed out allowing tailings to enter lakes were evident from the air. Several lakes in which the colour of the water was a pronounced green from this pollution was noted. The flight over the area impressed

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are we to eat?'" George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills: Collier Macmillan Canada, 1974), 189.

[74] AO, RG 1-282-4-56 File: Serpent River 1964-67, R.W. McCauley, "Meeting at Elliot Lake to Discuss Problems Arising From Radioactive Pollution of the Serpent River Drainage System," 1964.

the writer of the seriousness of the pollution in the water system."[75] McCauley paid particular attention to the dam structures and their capacity to leak, if not fail altogether. His mention of the green colour of tailings lakes was made possible by the aerial tour of the affected region, which had been arranged by the OWRC. McCauley also mentioned visits to tailings sites on the ground, especially those areas where there had been leaks. His conclusion was that "the view from the ground was more impressive than that from the air in that the depth of the tailings covering over a hundred acres also became evident."[76] On the second and third days of the seminar, the issue of tourism and the possible effect of the pollution on cottaging in the area took centre stage. Economic issues, rather than public health of local residents, clearly continued to dominate official discourse about the consequences of uranium mining. One participant, D. Gillespie of the Department of Lands and Forests, Sudbury region, asked pointed questions: "what do we tell cottagers and anglers on a lake containing water above the maximum possible limit? What do we tell eaters of fish (and possibly clams) from the polluted waters?" It was also suggested at this time that the OWRC draft a press release and that a more comprehensive scientific study be undertaken of the area. As more knowledge was

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

gained about the extent of the pollution in the mid 1960s, inaction became increasingly difficult to justify from a legal and public health standpoint.[77]

The evidence presented above makes it clear that the high levels of radioactivity in the Serpent River watershed had been known to the OWRC since 1957. Rather than raise public alarm, the government and commission allowed economic concerns about the viability of the uranium industry and later tourism to trump concerns about public health. But, as officials discovered, the public was not happy at being deceived. In 1964 a newspaper story in the *Globe and Mail* broke the news that the pollution of the river system had been kept a secret for more than two years by the Ontario government, thus endangering the health of all those who lived and vacationed in the area. "Although some contamination has been known to exist for at least two years, no serious effort has been made by the authorities to inform the population," wrote investigative reporter Barry Zwicker. "...The accepted long-term safe concentration of radioactivity in a litre of drinking water for much of the population in the Elliot Lake area is 10 picocuries. An OWRC report, which the commission refuses to release, shows that Elliot Lake water has reached twelve to fourteen picocuries per litre during the past year. Nearby Quirke Lake water has been measured at forty to one-hundred picocuries and plankton in the lake at thousands of picocuries."[78] Indeed, the information contained in the newspaper

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Barry Zwicker, "Facts Secret Two Years—Elliot Lake Contaminated by Radioactive Waste," *Globe and Mail* 13 November 1964, 1.

report was only released after extensive pressure by the *Globe and Mail.* Not surprisingly, the provincial cabinet disavowed all responsibility for suppressing the report and dealing with its contents, blaming the OWRC.[79] The latter maintained that it was a cabinet decision and fell under ministerial responsibility.[80] A *Maclean's* editorial written a month later entitled, "Since When Did the Truth Become More Dangerous than the Danger Itself?" noted the hazards of hushing up concerns about public health and drinking water safety. It also expressed dismay at the government's reaction to the publication of the story: "when the long-suppressed story was finally broken by a Toronto newspaper, the official reaction seemed at first to be more resentment than embarrassment."[81] The editorial went on to chide Elliot Lake residents for being more concerned about tourism than their own health: "neither are we consoled to learn that local residents 'knew about the situation all along' (though in fact some said they didn't) and were mainly concerned that the fishing had been spoiled in the lakes round about. Even this fact is by no means trivial, since Elliot Lake had been trying to repair its shattered fortunes by developing into a tourist outfitting centre. Were any tourists told that they might be

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] "Since when did the truth become more dangerous than danger itself?" *Macleans,* 14 December 1964, 4.

fishing in radioactive wastes?"[82] It is interesting to note that "fishing" is defined here as a non-Indigenous, middle-class leisure pursuit that had economic importance only in so far as it was able to attract visitors to the area.[83] The traditional role of fishing to both European and First Nations communities in the area in supplementing family diets was completely ignored.[84] The classist and racist implications of this statement stem from the all too common exclusion of impoverished groups and First Nations from the economic narrative of the north shore. Even when the story broke in the national press, it continued to be dominated by a discourse which prized wilderness areas for their economic value—either for resources or tourism. Pollution was seen as a threat to the economic

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[82] "Since when did the truth become more dangerous than danger itself?" *Macleans*, 14 December 1964, 4.

[83] See also AO, B211794, "Lake Huron Serpent River - River Basins, Lake Huron, RB-22: Streams, Serpent, Volume IV."

[84] The members of SFRN continued to fish commercially in Lake Huron during the 1960s but their traditional fishing grounds, the mouth and "half of the Serpent River" were no longer safe or productive. For a description of traditional territories see LAC, RG 10, Vol. 11347, File B/20-2-8,"Serpent River Reserve Fishing Rights," 5 December 1949,. For an overview of how fishing changed in see LAC, RG 10, Vol. 13102, File 411B/20-2-201.

viability of the region, not as a destructive force that could tear apart the fabric of communities and traditional relationships to the land.

Solutions that were suggested included further regulation and control by government, and the editorial problematized a lack of adequate initial planning rather than the mining operations and the rapid industrialization of the region itself. "We know enough to treat it not with casual neglect but with the utmost caution," continued the *Macleans* editorial. "The Elliot Lake incident reveals that our governments are not in fact exercising this caution. They are not policing the situation as they should, are not using what knowledge they do have to provide a machinery of protection, and even feel no obligation to warn us of the dangers we have unwittingly incurred...it's high time we, the Canadian public, shifted the burden of proof from the poisoned to the poisoners."[85] The editors held government accountable for monitoring and prevention, and attempted to demonstrate how elected officials failed the Canadian public, not just through inaction in passing adequate regulation, but also by suppressing important health and safety information. Implicit in this critique of government inaction and suppression of vital public health information is the belief that elected officials had a responsibility to the Canadians who voted for them. It was a public discourse of citizenship and rights which naturally excluded Aboriginal peoples from the list of the wronged.

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[85] "Since when did the truth become more dangerous than danger itself?" *Macleans*, 14 December 1964, 4.

In 1964, Status Indians had only been enfranchised for four years.[86] In fact, the one group that indisputably depended on the government's fiduciary duty to "protect" were the very people who were hurt the most and were ignored in the public discourse. As some of the elders noted, the two levels of government fought about who *did not* have responsibility for protecting First Nations people from the dangers of uranium and, given their lack of legal power and standing, no one else stood up to champion their cause.[87] Like their settler neighbours who also relied on fishing, Aboriginal people were concerned with the fact that the river pollution was impeding their livelihoods. Community members consistently voiced grievances about threats to traditional economic pursuits. In a moving account of loss in a published oral history, a member of Serpent River First Nation described only as "Junior" outlines his family's struggles with the effects of the pollution on their livelihood. "My grandfather had a camp at Quirke Lake," he said.

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[86] Olive P. Dickason with David T. McNab, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times 4th Edition* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2009), 388. For an examination of enfranchisement and loss of Indian Status before 1960, see R. Jarvis Brownlie, "'A better citizen than lots of white men': First Nations Enfranchisement: an Ontario Case Study, 1918-1940," *Canadian Historical Review* 87, 1 (March, 2006): 29–52.

[87] Interviews with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008 and with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, SRFN.

> They just walked in. There goes his camp, there goes everything. This was his trapping ground. Nobody compensated him for taking his camping ground. I mean, we're talking '52, '53 when they got started. All our fish are gone. Our rivers are never ever going to come back to what they was. Never. I mean, I used to be able to go fishing down the Serpent River down by the highway over there and catch all kinds of fish. Every time you'd put the line in the water. It's nothing now.[88]

But fishing was not the only thing to suffer from the effects of pollution. As Aboriginal people in the area understood from a traditional standpoint, the river and its inhabitants were only one part of a larger food and environmental chain. Junior went on to describe his concerns with the quality of moose meat and its effects on the health of those who ate it. "We should mention something about our moose—remember, something about the kidneys and the livers they wanted for a while there because they were contaminated? They were telling us their kidneys

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[88] Lorraine Rekmans, Keith Lewis, and Anabel Dwyer, eds., *This is my Homeland: Stories of the effects of nuclear industries by people of the Serpent River First Nation and the north shore of Lake Huron* (Serpent River First Nation, 2003), 33. This is a community-based collection of oral testimony and information pertaining to pollution arising from the uranium industry. The editors noted that the group session where these stories were told was held at the Kenabutch Health Centre on 19 March 1999.

were contaminated and whatever else. What about the rest of it, the whole body?"[89] Junior summarized the Anishinaabe worldview of connectivity, saying: "they all drink the same water [and we eat them]."[90]

The consequences of pollution were felt long after the boom went bust. DIA officials also began to recognize the importance of advising Aboriginal Peoples about the potential risks to their food supply—but only ten years after similar concerns were first raised for the European settler residents of the area and tourists. A letter from Indian and Northern Affairs to Chief and Council of SRFN dated 30 July 1974 outlines what their department was doing during this time:

> There are tests being made on pollution of the Serpent River and the water where the acid plant used to be. One of our officials had advised that they suspect that the fish taken from the Serpent River may be contaminated. It would be appreciated if you would advise us immediately as to whether it would be possible for you to catch and ship a couple of different species of fish caught in the Serpent River and we will give you the required instructions on where and how to ship these fish. In the mean time, as a safety precaution, *we would*

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[89] *This is my Homeland*, 41-3.

[90] *This is my Homeland*, 42

advise you not to eat these fish or to drink the water from the Serpent River until the results of the tests are obtained.[91]

While it had been the partnership between mining companies and various levels of government that led to the contamination issue in the first place, DIA made the reserve leadership responsible for its own health and safety. It was not the DIA official who was to gather samples, but rather, the community members were meant to catch these samples themselves for scientific study rather than for consumption.

By the mid-1970s, the issue of Aboriginal drinking water was also receiving more attention than it had in previous public debates. At the request of the community, the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) had also started to involve itself in some of these discussions.[92] In a letter to Romeo Leblanc, who was then the acting federal minister of the Environment, NIB president George Manuel described a list of concerns about the findings made public at a meeting by George Kerr, the Ontario minister of the Environment:

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[91] AO, RG 12-45, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Letter from E.L. LeVert to Chief and Council," dated 30 July 1974. Emphasis added. This letter was found in provincial documents but has not been located in the DIA records available at LAC. It is possible that a copy was not retained at DIA or was misplaced.

[92] AO, RG 12-45, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Letter from George Manuel to Romeo Leblanc," dated 25 August 1976.

> Mr. Kerr informed the meeting that radiation levels in the Serpent River were unsafe. He also suggested that wells on the Serpent River Reserve may be contaminated with radiation...You can appreciate our concern when we discovered that people living on the Serpent Indian Reserve are not only drinking radiation contaminated water but are also eating fish from the river system. These fish are undoubtedly contaminated with radiation. Naturally we are concerned about the health of the people living and fishing on the Serpent River System. You will note that the situation is not unlike that of White Dog and Grassy Narrows in Northwestern Ontario. There the environment which supported the Indian lifestyle was destroyed by thoughtless dumping of mercury into the English-Wabigoon-Winnipeg River system. It would appear that the thoughtless handling of mining materials in Elliot Lake has done the same thing in the Serpent River area.[93]

The letter from the NIB drew a clear comparison between the situation on the north shore and that taking place at Grassy Narrows, which at this time had already garnered more public attention.[94] The NIB was also becoming increasingly involved

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[93] Ibid.

[94] For works on Grassy Narrows, see Anastasia M. Shkilnyk, *A Poison Stronger Than Love: The Destruction of an Ojibwa Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

in the public discourse surrounding First Nations issues, particularly when it involved political debates and environmental concerns. In the case of SRFN, it was asked to assist with legal representation and lobbying of government departments.[95] The letter thus went on to request that more information about contamination be sent to reserve residents through a formal education campaign and that clean water be provided for the reserve. Finally, it asked that all sources of contamination be ended. The all-too convenient excuse of jurisdictional problems

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1985); George Hutchison and Dick Wallace, *Grassy Narrows* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1977); Christopher Vecsey, "Grassy Narrows Reserve: Mercury Pollution, Social Disruption, and Natural Resources: A Question of Autonomy," *American Indian Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (Autumn, 1987): 287-314.

[95] The Red Power movement of the 1970s had contributed to the development of Aboriginal political organizations as they became increasingly concerned with rights and environmental issues. See Donald Purich, *Our Land: Native Rights in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1986), especially the chapter entitled, "The Future of Native Rights"; J. Rick Ponting and Roger Gibbons, *Out of Irrelevance: A Socio-political introduction to Indian affairs in Canada* (Toronto: Butterworth, 1980), especially Part III: The Politicization of Indian Affairs—The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB); Peter McFarlane, *Brotherhood to Nationhood: George Manuel and the Making of the Modern Indian Movement* (Between the Lines, 1993); George Manuel and Michael Posluns (with a foreword by Vine Deloria, Jr.), *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills, Collier Macmillan Canada, 1974).

was also addressed clearly and concisely: "Mr. Kerr informed delegates that acting to alleviate the pollution problem is complicated by the fact that Indians are a Federal responsibility, and some of the people clearly in danger from the radiation contamination of the Serpent River are Indians. I trust you will not use this jurisdictional problem as an excuse for inaction."[96] Although the industries involved in the pollution of SRFN were very different from those at Grassy Narrows, they were nonetheless understood to be connected in this letter, portrayed as being ultimately responsible for inflicting the same type of anguish on the two communities. In other words, the disharmony between human beings and their environment was not one of First Nations' making, but instead was due to foreseeable industrial pollution that resulted in the alienation of the people from their resources.[97]

Leblanc was unable to offer many concrete solutions. His response to Manuel's letter outlined the control measures that would be implemented to curb further environmental damage, although the rest of the letter only contained vague

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[96] AO, RG 12-45, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Letter from George Manuel to Romeo Leblanc," dated 25 August 1976.

[97] Other Aboriginal groups in Ontario actively supported SRFN. See the petitions and letters written to the Minister of the Environment, Keith Norton in 1981 in AO, RG 12-88, B214163 File Lakes and Rivers Serpent River 1981.

timelines and few details as to the actual courses of action that would be taken. [98] A waste treatment facility was to be opened the following year at the Stanrock–Can Met property then owned by Denison.[99] At Milliken—Stanleigh, Leblanc wrote that "contaminated seepage from the Crotch Lake tailings area and a tailings spill west of the tailings area is entering Sherriff Creek. It is my understanding that a control order to correct the situation will be issued in the near future by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment."[100] The letter went on to acknowledge and describe a disturbing fact about the health of the Serpent River and how it was directly affected by leakage: "In 1970, the Stollery dam failed, releasing precipitates into the Serpent River. These precipitates continue to dissolve in the low sulphate fresh water producing increased levels of Ra 226. Stabilization or removal of these precipitates may be required. The alternatives for their stabilization or removal will be determined so that corrective action may be taken."[101] Vague "corrective action" was also promised for other spills at Stanrock and Panel. Leblanc wrote this letter six years after the Stollery Dam failure that was responsible for radium 226 contamination in the Serpent River basin, as well as the unnamed spills at Stanrock

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[98] AO, RG 12-45, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Letter from Roméo Leblanc to George Manuel," dated 18 November 1976.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

and Panel. But the reality was that in the 1970s almost no direct action was forthcoming.

Nevertheless, radioactive contamination continued to pose a hazard to daily living on the reserve. In 1976 a letter was sent from Health and Welfare Canada to Chief Lorena Lewis finally and explicitly advising that residents not drink water from the river: "According to the latest studies by the Provincial government radioactive contamination of the Serpent River is above acceptable levels for drinking water standards. If any of the Serpent River Band members are obtaining drinking water from this source, *they should stop immediately.*"[102] However, this warning letter was written a full twelve years after the 1964 report on water contamination was first released and at least fourteen years after the OWRC first learned of the problem.

By the end of 1976 there had been some discussion amongst provincial and federal government officials as to the safety of fish consumption for reserve residents. By then, a decade had passed since initial fears of threats to tourism kept potential health risks from the public eye. There were several meetings to address health and environmental concerns. A letter from Bruce Rawson, Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare Canada to Everett Biggs, Deputy Minister of the Environment for Ontario, discussed the outcome of a meeting of representatives of both levels of government, as well as community leadership. It was agreed that further

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[102] AO, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Letter from Dr. Peter J. Connop to Chief Loreen Lewis," dated 30 July 1974. Emphasis added.

monitoring and analysis of the river system and wells would be undertaken, as well as a study of reserve residents' eating habits, especially in regards to fish. Interestingly enough, this meeting also included a demand for a solution to the acid plant contamination,[103] as it was most likely seen as a related concern to community health. But while governments continued to meet with various stakeholders, dams failed, and spillage occurred in the Serpent River system, the studies continued. The 1976 status report was optimistic in its observation that "levels of radioactivity as reflected by radium (Ra-226) showed a significant decrease between 1970 and 1975," but continued more cautiously, "overall Ra-226 activity in the system as measured near the river the river mouth remained slightly above the permissible level for public surface waters."[104] The low pH as a result of leakage from contaminated lakes was still a significant concern:

> accessory data collected on lakes in the basin during 1975 indicate that the pH depression problem is much more severe in some lakes in the watershed including Pecors, Quirke, McCarthy, and Whiskey, than indicated by WQM data (stream stations). The low, continuously declining pH of these lakes is evidence of a serious ongoing problem—

[103] AO, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Letter from Bruce Rawson to Everett Biggs," dated 17 December 1976.

[104] A.C. Roy and W. Keller, *Status Report: Water Pollution in the Serpent River Basin*, (Toronto: Ministry of the Environment, 1976), 1.

likely a consequence of the oxidation of sulphides present in the tailings wastes and/or the relatively long residence time of waters in the basin."[105]

As the report made clear, the low pH in several lakes within the Serpent River watershed was directly connected to mining operations and older abandoned mine sites. The study's summary concludes:

> it appears that in general, significant reductions in Ra-226 levels have occurred throughout the system and lesser decreased in concentrations of ammonia, TDS [dissolved solids] and sulphate were recorded at sites not affected by active operations. Downstream of mining and milling activity, high loadings of ammonia, TDS and sulphate continued...Drainage from the abandoned tailings area of Stanrock and Can Met uranium mines appears to be the major contributor to radioactive contamination and pH depression in the basin while the greatest elevation of ammonia, TDS and sulphate occurs below the presently active mining and milling operations.[106]

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[105] Ibid., 2.

[106] Ibid., 3-4.

Although Ra-226 decreased in some lakes over a five-year period, the system as a whole was still under threat from further leakage. In a letter that accompanied the 1976 *Status Report: Water Pollution in the Serpent River Basin*, R. E. Moore, Northeastern Regional Director of the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, identified the primary source of pollution for the Serpent River basin: "the major contributor to radioactive contamination and pH depression in the basin appears to be drainage from the abandoned tailings area of Stanrock and Can Met uranium mines. The greatest elevations of ammonia, total dissolved solids and sulphate were found below presently active mining and milling operations."[107] Since those mines were still in operation, there was little hope that the situation could be improved upon. Local residents, tourists and First Nations people still depended upon the water for consumption as well as for fish and game.

A meeting was held in Toronto on 17 November 1976 to discuss Serpent River First Nation's concerns about mining and radioactive pollution. In attendance were representatives from the Ministries of Health, Natural Resources, and the Environment, as well as the federal Departments of Indian Affairs and the Environment. One of the main concerns outlined was the effect this pollution had, not just for people drawing water directly from the river, but also those who had wells nearby: "it is thought that the source of water for these wells could be the

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[107] Introductory letter signed by R.E. Moore, Regional Director, dated 1976. Ontario Ministry of the Environment, *Status Report: Water Pollution in the Serpent River Basin*, 1976.

river and that there was a possibility of radiological contamination. The levels in the river for radium-226 range from 3 to 7 pc/l."[108] The concern was due not only to the wells' proximity to the river, but also to the fact that many of them were old, "poorly constructed, and [...] susceptible to contamination by surface drainage." As for fish, there were plans to undertake a sample study of fish in the river. While ten fish had already been sent for radiological testing,[109] it was hoped that there could be more caught and handed over to officials in the Fall: "an attempt was to be made to obtain more fish this fall from the natives, if they were still fishing. However, it was determined that there is no collection going on this fall and that the collection will have to be done next spring."[110] There are three possible explanations for this: there really was no Fall harvest, as was stated; people were not fishing as much

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[108] AO, RG 12-45, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Minutes of meeting to discuss radiological concerns at Serpent River Native Community," 1. Recall that the provincial standards for radioactivity were three pc/l and the federal standards were 10 pc/l. Poisons pile up in Serpent River; double standards anger Indians" *Globe and Mail*, 16 December 1976, 11; Interview with Peter Johnston, by Author, 7 July 2009, Serpent River First Nation.

[109] It is unknown what the results of those tests were.

[110] AO, RG 12-45, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Minutes of meeting to discuss radiological concerns at Serpent River Native Community," 2.

because of the warning sent out two years prior to this meeting;[111] or perhaps First Nations fishers were unwilling to hand over the fruits of their labour to the government.

While the first explanation offered above is straightforward enough and people simply may not have been fishing at the time, the second reason is more convincing, as it is reflected in some of the interviews conducted with elders. They certainly remember the tests, and subsequent warnings against fishing and eating.[112] The third reason is also a possibility. Perhaps autumn game was supplemented with fish, and it would be easy to understand why some community members may have been very reluctant to surrender their catch to the government for testing. The absence of any harvesting could also have been a sign of resistance on the part of the community after the insult of being asked to collect its own data and on its own time. Members of the community would probably not have been keen to use their own resources to ascertain the level of destruction imposed upon

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[111] Recall memo sent to Chief and Council asking them not to fish or drink from the river. AO, RG 12-45, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Letter from E.L. LeVert to Chief and Council," dated 30 July 1974.

[112] Interview with Terry and Betty Jacobs, 8 December 2008, and interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008. See also Lorraine Rekmans, Keith Lewis, and Anabel Dwyer, eds., *This is my Homeland: Stories of the effects of nuclear industries by people of the Serpent River First Nation and the north shore of Lake Huron* (Serpent River First Nation, 2003).

them by the very governments asking them to do the investigating. After all, it had taken those same governments decades to admit that the reserve had a problem with radiological pollution as a result of mining operations upstream. If the purpose of the study was not communicated properly, or, as had happened in the past, there was little or no follow-up afterwards, it may not have been seen as beneficial to co-operate.

An additional point discussed briefly by the interdepartmental representatives was an update on the state of the acid plant remains that continued to be a source of concern for SRFN: "Environment Canada is still looking into the Cutler C.I.L. acid plant and will take appropriate action on problems which have been created through leachate from a liquid storage lagoon. It will advise Regional MOE of developments in the investigation."[113] This meeting took place in 1976, but it would be twelve years before the situation would be addressed, the result of Aboriginal agency and political force.

Note that no one from the community had been invited or contacted for this meeting, even though its concerns were deeply felt locally, and it had voiced them at a previous meeting: "The meeting was called to deal with the concerns expressed at a recent meeting with Mr. Kerr and Mr. Biggs, which was attended by several interest groups, including the Serpent River native community and its advisors. Concern had been particularly expressed about the potential for radiological

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[113] AO, RG 12-45, B141785, Lakes and Rivers 1976, "Minutes of meeting to discuss radiological concerns at Serpent River Native Community," 2.

contamination in private wells and fish." [114] Frustratingly, the minutes do not identify those advisors specifically or where and when exactly that particular meeting occurred. It should also be noted that even in a case where the community was represented at a meeting, it is listed in these minutes as an "interest group," rather than a political community directly and most-affected by this problem.

The representative from the Federal Health and Welfare Department had also declined the invitation to the meeting, even though representatives were invited: "The Federal Health and Welfare Department was invited because of its direct involvement in the native community affairs but was unable to attend."[115] With only one representative from DINA (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs), cursory contact with the federal Department of Health and Welfare, and no one from the community itself, it is difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of such a meeting, particularly with the absence of any kind of representation from SRFN itself. While the community had been left to deal first-hand with the decline in resources, and, thus, its traditional pursuits, it continued to be excluded from many of the discussions that involved not only river pollution, but, also by extension, community health and welfare. This would change drastically by the end of the decade as community leaders demanded to be active participants in the discussions that concerned them most.

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[114] Ibid., 1.

[115] Ibid.,1. Dr. P. Connop was contacted in advance for general commentary, so the Department of Health and Welfare did not send a representative to the meeting.

The damage to the Serpent's home had been an ongoing community issue, and along with the Cutler Acid site, characterized the Indigenous-settler relationship along the North Shore. While it was not only SRFN community members that were affected by uranium production, community members, along with the Serpent, were stewards of the watershed for centuries before the establishment of the Elliot Lake town site. Once uranium production began, that relationship with the land and water changed profoundly, and SRFN was excluded from the dialogue surrounding the vitality of the river. The values inherent in the teachings about the Serpent and its role as a protector were changed irrevocably as the river itself underwent rapid change in the mid-20th century. As resources diminished and were compromised, so too were the traditional ways in which the community interacted with the land. While tourists were simply warned not to visit, there was little concern for the traditional lifestyle of the original inhabitants of the area who had a more holistic and complete reliance on the land and water. Compromising the health of the Serpent also compromised the community's social and environmental relations, and led to the sickness and destruction that is warned about in the teachings. For several decades, people were given only partial information about the health of the river system, and attention was only paid to SRFN's concerns ten years after the initial story surfaced in 1964. While report after report described the need for departments at different levels to co-operate and the fact that there was a problem with the water system upon which the community had been dependent since time immemorial, it would only be a few years before rumours of the expansion of uranium mines at Elliot Lake would present yet another level of urgency and

contention. The next chapter discusses the SRFN's continuous struggles to insert itself into these discussions.

CHAPTER V

"YOU COULD SEE THEM LOOKING AT US WHEN WE WALKED IN, 'OH HERE THEY COME AGAIN'": THE POLITICIZATION OF SRFN LEADERSHIP, 1977-1988

In the summer of 1985, the *Toronto Star*'s investigative reporter Olivia Ward 'broke' the story about pollution on the Serpent River First Nation to an unaware non-Aboriginal Canadian public. The effects of the acid plant on reserve land were said to have created a "hell on earth" in which environmental degradation had left a legacy of serious health effects for reserve residents.[1] A few days later, the paper's editorial board demanded to know how such a thing could happen only a few hundred kilometres north of Toronto. "How did this happen?" they asked. "Thirty years ago the people of Serpent River thought Ottawa was doing them a favour by allowing Noranda Mines Led. to build a plant on their reserve that would produce

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[1] Olivia Ward, "Serpent River Pollution Site a Sulphurous Hell,' *Toronto Star*, 21 July 1985, H1.

sulphuric acid for use in uranium mines—and generate jobs for the Indians. But when the planet was closed some years later, Noranda and the company that followed it, Cutler Acid Limited, a subsidiary of Canadian Industries Limited (CIL), didn't clean up after themselves...Since then, there has been nothing but stalling and government-corporate buck passing...One wonders whether it would have been cleaned up long ago had it been anywhere but an Indian reservation."[2] By the 1980s, the Canadian public was increasingly being confronted by environmental issues as well as the physical legacy of colonialism in First Nations communities. Despite front page media coverage—which came and went with the news cycle—it fell to Aboriginal people themselves to seek redress for past wrongs.

This chapter examines how members of the Serpent River First Nation protested proposed increases in mining production, sought to protect river resources, and to force an adequate reclamation process for the land lost to the Cutler Acid Plant. It argues that these efforts throughout the 1970s and 1980s reflect a significant shift not just in the Aboriginal leadership on the Serpent River First Nation, but also in Indigenous communities across the country. This shift towards Aboriginal leadership in lobbying and activism on the part of community members took place at a time when local Indigenous communities were beginning to work together with national and provincial Aboriginal organizations such as the

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[2] Editorial Board, "Footdragging at Serpent River," *Toronto Star*, 23 July 1985, A12.

National Indian Brotherhood [NIB] and the Ontario Union of Indians.[3] It also occurred within a larger national context in which environmental concerns in Canada were growing amongst the non-Aboriginal population. At the same time, DIA was increasingly withdrawing from direct intervention in reserve life and governance, and transitioning throughout this period to Aboriginal community leadership. It was the confluence of these external and internal factors that allowed Aboriginal voices to be heard. Thus, the clean-up and awarding of eventual compensation for the damage to the reserve was the result of the work of Aboriginal people from the community itself. It represented as much a reclamation of traditional stewardship roles as it did a political and environmental victory.

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By the late-1970s, uranium was again projected to be a major energy source, according to the World Energy Conference of that year.[4] Alistair Gillespie, Minister

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[3] The National Indian Brotherhood was formed in 1968 and the Union of Ontario Indians was formed in 1949. Anishinabek Nation: Union of Ontario Indians, http://www.anishinabek.ca/union-of-ontario-indians.asp (accessed 23 April 2011). For an earlier instance of Indigenous rights assertion, see R. Jarvis Brownlie, "'Nothing left for me or any other Indian': the Georgian Bay Anishinabek and Inter-War Articulations of Aboriginal Rights," *Ontario History*, XCVI, 2 (Autumn 2004): 116–42.

[4] Ron Sitt, "Energy Source Uranium Number one—Gillespie" *Sault Star* 31 October 1978.

of Energy, Mines and Resources, stated "we must set aside our own reserves and maintain a 'Canada first policy.'"[5] A secret international uranium cartel was formed amongst Canada, Australia, South Africa, France and Britain to "control the world price and supply of uranium through a complex scheme of price fixing, bid-rigging, and the allocation of markets."[6] Nuclear power was seen as the cure for a global energy crisis that was fuelling inflation and cost of living.[7] In the case of Elliot Lake, this good news came hot on the heels of a renewed contract with Ontario Hydro, signed in 1976.[8] Ontario Hydro's decision to buy uranium for nuclear power rather

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[5] Ron Sitt, "Energy Source Uranium Number one—Gillespie" *Sault Star* 31 October 1978.

[6] Larry R. Stewart, "Canada's Role in the International Uranium Cartel" *International Organization* 35, no. 4 (Autumn 1981), 658. Stewart's article is also fascinating in how it demonstrates the fact that although Canadians (especially opposition politicians) did not seem to object so much to the cartel as it informed international relations and protection of the uranium industry at home, as they disliked the fact that it was a secret.

[7] See Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, *Canada Since 1945, Revised Edition* (Toronto: UTP, 1993), 338–59.

[8] *The Standard*, 29 December 1976, 1.

than enter the mining business itself caused discussion and controversy, as the contract was worth $7.3 billion.[9]

The late 1970s were a hopeful time for the settlers living in the Elliot Lake region as economic expansion seemed poised to begin anew. The contracts with Hydro appeared imminent, and it was reported locally that Rio Algom and Denison were each planning to increase production and hire more workers. Rio Algom's net earnings alone increased by more 100% in the first quarter of 1977 because of an increase in the export price for uranium.[10] According to George R. Albino, President and CEO of Rio Algom, Ltd., "the expansion at Elliot Lake is going well and a number of programs are under way."[11] Not only could it increase production of its previously-developed mines, but it could also expand their reserves. This had the related effect of stimulating discussion about how and when the town was going to

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[9] As has been discussed, Ontario Hydro had been purchasing Elliot Lake uranium for power purposes since the mid-1960s. There had also been a contract with Japan, signed in 1967. See Dixon, 262. The Pearson government had ended its large scale stockpiling program designed specifically to save jobs in Elliot Lake in 1964 (see Chapter II), but its federal stockpiling program had ceased in 1970. The contract renewal with Ontario Hydro in 1976 was thus an important development.

[10] "Renegotiation of contracts ups Rio profit" and "Outlook for uranium strong" *The Standard* 11 May 1977, 3.

[11] "Outlook for uranium strong" *The Standard* 11 May 1977, 3.

expand to reflect the projected population increase. The mining companies started housing construction projects in 1976, and even embarked on a joint recruitment process.[12] In its year-in-review edition, *The Standard* ran a headline which reflected the community's confident anticipation of both renewed industrial expansion and social revitalization: "1976—a very good year."[13] It was like 1955 all over again—almost.

By the mid 1970s, government officials were acutely aware of the potential hazards of unbridled economic expansion in relatively isolated areas of the province that remained dependent on a boom-bust resource economy. Any expansion of uranium mining, it was feared, might worsen the environmental problems that had plagued the tourism and recreation industries when the boom went bust in 1962.[14] It was important that any growth have a minimal environmental impact which would require careful planning and the Ontario Environmental Assessment Board (EAB) would hold several hearings and issue a report before any expansion began.[15]

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[12] "Efforts Stepped Up" *The Standard*, 29 January 1976, 8.

[13] *The Standard*, 29 December 1976, 1.

[14] "Environmental Assessment Board Told 10 Lakes are Beyond Reclaiming" *The Standard*, 27 April 1977.

[15] "Environment Minister Sets Date of Preliminary Public Hearing" *The Standard*, 28 October 1976, 1. Ontario Environment Minister George Kerr set the 30 November 1976 date.

The EAB began its hearings in November 1976 and invited submissions from local stakeholders and interested third parties at several meetings held over the next few months. Most of the presentations and questions surrounding the potential for Elliot Lake's expansion centred on how expansion would impact on the social, economic, and political structure of the municipality and local economy. Various stakeholders were included: the town council, mining companies, the Steelworkers Association of America (the union representing employees at all mines in the area), the Province of Ontario, the Town of Blind River, St. Joseph's General Hospital, the local school boards, and, at their own insistence, members of the SRFN. As revealed in the board's interim report, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake area: Interim Report Community Assessment*, issued in March 1979, the concerns of most stakeholders and board members centred on the long-term sustainability of economic growth and the need for economic expansion:

> The Board recognizes that the expansion of a community to the size that Elliot Lake is expected to be (a two to three- fold expansion) may be one of the most significant aspects of the expansion of the uranium mines. If one looks beyond the life of the mines as presently envisioned, serious questions are raised as to what will ultimately happen to this community. While the closing down of the physical facilities of the mines may be achieved with minimal effort the past indicates that the closing of a community of the size which Elliot Lake expects to become can present substantial problems.

> Because of its dependence on ore reserves and market conditions the uranium mining industry has tended to be cyclical. The Town of Elliot Lake, in its short history, has already experienced one drastic decline resulting from the closing down of most of the uranium mines in the area during the 1950's and 1960's. The evidence before the Board indicated that under the present contractual commitments the life of the mines and consequently the life of the Town, unless other primary or secondary industries can be attracted to Elliot Lake, is expected to be between thirty and forty years. The Board hopes that the various parties including the Province of Ontario, the Town of Elliot Lake and the mining companies as well as the United Steelworkers of America will co-operate to ensure that all avenues are explored in the attempt to define alternative strategies for Elliot Lake to minimize its long term dependence on the uranium industry.[16]

In the end, the board hoped that temporary expansion of the mines would fund long-term investment in a more economically sustainable and stable industry and that the various stakeholders from the settler community might work together to achieve that goal.[17] While there was brief mention of water quality and tailings

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[16] Environmental Assessment Board, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake area: Interim Report Community Assessment*, March 1979, 5-6

[17] Ibid.

disposal, it was only in the context of municipal infrastructure.[18] The vast majority of the fifty-page interim report dealt with social services such as education, social workers, and healthcare, while housing,[19] water, and sewage were discussed in ways that were consistent with any municipal planning program.[20] Tourism

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[18] Environmental Assessment Board, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake area: Interim Report Community Assessment*, March 1979, 19-21; 27.

[19] Housing was a main concern for the community when expansion was hotly anticipated. There are numerous *Standard* articles that deal with the concern for available housing, both at the time, and in the future should the mines expand. Throughout this time there was general anticipation for the expansion reflected in the local paper, and it spun the EAB's findings as supporting the general goals of the mining community in terms of available jobs, housing, and being good for business overall. Although there were some complaints about the town in terms of sidewalks, nightlife, traffic, etc. "the report concluded on a positive note. 'The town has a friendly, quiet, small-town atmosphere,' it states, adding that most people feel shortages will be overcome with time... 'In general' the report concluded, 'Elliot Lake has been perceived as a good place to raise a family." This can be found in "Report details town's needs, offers solutions to problems" *The Standard*, 12 April 1978, 1.

[20] Environmental Assessment Board, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake area: Interim Report Community Assessment*, March 1979, 37-38.

operators were the only settler-group at the meeting to express concerns about how expansion might hurt their business by damaging the environment.

The main voices of concern at the meetings were those of SRFN community leaders and members who were determined to prevent a repeat of the environmental devastation which had resulted from the last uranium boom. To the community's elders, many of whom were also community leaders at the time, it is clear that to them, that it was much more than an investigation into the feasibility of municipal expansion. Rather, it was their opportunity to voice objections to mining, as well as showcase their grievances before an increasingly sympathetic public audience in the context of the growth of environmentalism in public discourse. This was also a time when the expansion of resource projects was affecting other First Nations communities throughout the country.[21] But First Nations were also becoming increasingly vocal in their opposition to such projects.

The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry and Thomas Berger's subsequent 1977 report is one example of Aboriginal peoples and concerned Canadians being at odds with the settler resource industry.[22] It marked one of the first times that

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[21] Ibid.

[22] See Thomas Berger, *Northern Frontier/Northern Homeland: The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry*, 2 vols. (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1977) and Martin O'Malley, *The Past and Future Land: An Account of the Berger Inquiry into the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates,

Aboriginal peoples were invited to give their testimony in the preparation of a comprehensive study of the social and environmental impacts of resource development in the North.[23] Significantly, it was also one of the first times that the social and environmental costs of an oil and gas project were considered "before and not after the fact."[24] And it was also one of the first times that First Nations were successful in speaking over the voices of corporations and government. As one geographer has described Berger's willingness to include and acknowledge Aboriginal stakeholders concerned with stewardship over the land: "Having redressed the characteristic imbalance between northern communities and southern entrepreneurs and governments, the Inquiry established a foundation for participation in which northerners' traditional ecological knowledge was recognized

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1976). P.H. Pearse, ed., *The Mackenzie Pipeline: Arctic Gas and Canadian Energy Policy* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974).

[23] For a comprehensive study of Northern resource development, see Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); Liza Piper and John Sandlos, "A Broken Frontier: Ecological Imperialism in the Canadian North," *Environmental History* 12, no. 4 (October 2007): 759-95; Liza Piper, "Subterranean Bodies: Mining the Large Lakes of North-west Canada, 1921-1960," *Environment and History* 13, no. 2 (May 2007): 155-86.

[24] Berger, *Northern Frontier/Northern Homeland: The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry*, 2 vols. (Ministry of Supply and Services, 1977), 224.

and became influential."[25] The Berger Inquiry's ultimate finding—that although the pipeline was feasible, there should be a decade-long moratorium on development until Aboriginal claims could be addressed—was one of the first of its kind in acknowledging Indigenous land rights, and it came less than a decade after the *Calder* decision which acknowledged the existence of Aboriginal title to land.[26]

The 1970s were a time of struggle for many Aboriginal groups. The fight of the James Bay Cree in the 1970s, and the first modern treaty that ensued in 1975 in the form of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, is another example of First Nations protecting their rights in the face of resource development and related environmental threats.[27] The notion that a lawsuit brought forth by the Northern

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[25] Richard Howitt, *Rethinking Resource Management: Justice, Sustainability and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 42.

[26] For more on the 1973 *Calder* decision which acknowledged the existence of Aboriginal title to land, see Daniel Raunet, *Without Surrender, Without Consent: A History of the Nishga Land Claims* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1996); Hamar Foster, Heather Raven and Jeremy Webber, *Let Right be Done: Aboriginal Title, the Calder Case, and the Future of Indigenous Rights* (University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

[27] J.R. Miller, "Aboriginal Rights, Land Claims, and the Struggle to Survive," *in Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 405-420. This article nicely encapsulates some of the more modern struggles over land rights and provides a concise

Cree could result in an injunction against development was confounding to both the companies involved and the government itself. Nevertheless, 150 witnesses and an injunction later, the need for an agreement that could satisfy all parties involved—not the least of which was the James Bay Cree—was readily apparent. It ensured that development did not move forward without consultation or compensation, as Quebec premier Robert Bourassa and his government had originally anticipated.[28]

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overview of the issues involved. A more recent work is that of Hans M. Carlson, *Home is the Hunter: the James Bay Cree and their Land*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008) see especially chapter eight, entitled, "Flooding the Garden"; Alan Penn, "Uneasy Coexistence: La Grande and the James Bay Cree" in Bruce W. Hodgins and Kerry A. Cannon, eds, *On the Land: Confronting the Challenges to Aboriginal Self-Determination in Northern Quebec and Labrador* (Toronto: Betelgeuse, 1995): 129-144.

[28] See James F. Hornig, ed., *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999); Richard F. Salisbury, *A Homeland for the Cree: Regional Development in James Bay, 1971-1981* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986); Paul Rynard, "'Welcome In, but Check Your Rights at the Door': The James Bay and Nisga'a Agreements in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 33, no. 2 (June 2000): 211-243. Caroline Desbiens, "'Water all around, you cannot even drink': the scaling of water in James Bay/Eeyou Istchee" 39, no. 3 (September 2007): 259-267; Martin Papillon, *Aboriginal Quality of Life Under a Modern Treaty:*

In the postwar period, the role of DIA was changing. As Hugh Shewell has argued, "the postwar era introduced a new, intensified form of state subjugation...Indians now required social adjustment, modern education, and opportunity."[29] DIA abandoned the term "assimilation" and replaced it with "integration." Not only does this new era in "Indian Administration" provide a reason for the acid plant's establishment in the first place, but it also helps to explain DIA's gradual retreat from the day-to-day administration of communities and focus on policy-related issues. The Indian agent model was phased out in the 1960s, but regional offices remained.[30] While policy proposals such as the Hawthorne Report[31]

Lessons from the Experience of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee and the Inuit of Nunavik (Canadian Public Policy Collection, 2008).

[29] Hugh Shewell, *"Enough to Keep them Alive": Indian Welfare in Canada, 1873-1963* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 170

[30] Burton Jacobs, "Kicking out the Indian Agent" in *Nation to Nation: Aboriginal Sovereignty and the Future of Canada*, eds. John Bird, Lorraine Land, and Murray MacAdam (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 2002), 141-147.

[31] *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political and Educational Needs, Volumes 1 and 2* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1967-8). This report is also known as the Hawthorn Report, after its editor, Harry B. Hawthorn. It advocated the term "Citizens Plus."

and the White Paper[32] advocated change in the 1960s, (very different types of change, respectively) they did mark a slow transition from the reactionary policies and administrative structure for which DIA had previously been known.

Consequently, during this critical period of change, First Nations began to assert their Indigenous rights. But these other case studies contrast starkly with circumstances at Elliot Lake. Both the Mackenzie River Valley and the James Bay region of Northern Quebec lacked land surrender treaties. In contrast, from the perspective of both government and mining officials at Elliot Lake (as well as the public), the area of the North Shore of Lake Huron had been ceded by the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 and therefore Aboriginal rights in the area were given minimal importance.[33] In the case of development at Elliot Lake, there were few non-Indigenous people who understood the First Nations view of the treaty and their desire and cultural obligation to continue to pursue a stewardship role not just on their reserve territory, but for the Serpent River watershed as a whole.

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[32] The White Paper, proposed by Pierre Trudeau's government, was an attempt to bring Aboriginal administration in line with his "just society" idea. According to Trudeau, the "special" Indian Status afforded to First Nations people was what held them back. See Sally Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda, 1968-70* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

[33] See my discussion in both the note on methodology and epilogue sections for more information on issues surrounding this western/Euro-Canadian interpretation of the Treaty.

Furthermore, in both the James Bay and Mackenzie River areas, inquiries or court cases were undertaken at a crucial stage *before* large-scale resource development projects began. However, in Elliot Lake, the Environmental Assessment Board was meeting to determine how an expansion to pre-existing mining operations would affect the surrounding communities and the mining town itself. The EAB's purpose was decidedly not to debate the merits of the uranium industry and its environmental effects, but instead to discuss how an inevitable expansion of those industries could be managed most effectively from an economic point of view. Concerns about the environment and impacts on First Nations land use were minimized behind those of local tourism operators and a growing municipality.

The significance of the EAB hearings for Elliot Lake's expansion lies in the public forum which they provided to SRFN leaders and community members to express their grievances and concerns. It was the first time that the community was able to participate in discussions with the wider settler community about its role in the region, independent of the interference of DIA. While the James Bay Cree and people of the Mackenzie Valley fought to stop developments that would damage their lands as the SRFN had been damaged decades before, SRFN members now fought to insert their voice into the debate for the first time.

Peter Johnston, who was Chief at the time, remembers the animosity and controversy surrounding the discussions about re-opening the mines. "I often think about those days," he said.

> So when the uranium mines when they finally got contracts and it looked like the future of uranium was going up [in the late 1970s] and they were talking about expansion and doubling the capacity, the productivity of the mines, I mean right away we decided as a band that we had to do whatever we could to prevent that from happening. And so we engaged what was at the time, or what is now, AFN and we asked them for their expertise and they sent an environmentalist that was working with them at the time. And ...we put together a paper that we presented at the Environmental Assessment Board.[34]

The paper argued against the expansion of the mines, citing the various health and environmental impacts of previous expansion. But the community did not limit itself to submitting reports. Community members were determined to

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[34] Interview with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, SRFN. Johnston's view of preventing expansion at Elliot Lake may stem from the fact that he worked for Rio and "had first-hand knowledge of what was happening and what the potential there was for things to go wrong in the future which might still happen." His first-hand view as an employee, which was not an easy position for him to occupy, was one of his personal motivations for ensuring that expansion did not continue, and may serve to explain why some of the other elders were concerned that it move on responsibly -- after proper compensation for past environmental damage -- rather than not at all.

make their presence felt at every meeting which the board held, a fact which the EAB eventually noted in its report.[35]

The main advocates speaking on behalf of the Serpent River First Nation at these meetings were Loreena Lewis, the SRFN chief, and Gertrude Lewis, a councillor. When asked how their presentations were received by the Board and the people there representing different stakeholders, Gertrude Lewis responded, "Well, I don't think they were received too well by some of the people." She went on to clarify that some of the responses characterized SRFN representatives as troublemakers: "you could see them looking at us when we walked in, 'oh here they come again.'"[36] This characterization of SRFN spokespersons as troublemakers is something that was echoed in an older interview in 1999 with Loreena Lewis. She simply stated that while "some people in Elliot Lake were supportive...some were not." Gertrude was in agreement, "For Elliot Lake the mine expansion was a boost for them. They built new homes. For us it was being cautious and asking them not to expand until they could find a safe way to get rid of the waste. They were

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[35] Environmental Assessment Board, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake Area—Interim Report—Community Assessment,* March 1979, 3. There were people concerned with their tourism businesses present as well. Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, SRFN.

[36] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, SRFN.

thinking more of the benefits of expansion."[37] Both Loreena and Gertrude were acutely aware of the controversy their work had in the area dominated by mining interests, both in terms of the companies and the people dependent on the incomes mining operations secured. Neither woman was unsympathetic to the desire for expansion, and, in fact, they understood how it echoed SRFN's initial desire for the jobs offered by the acid plant decades before: "It was probably the same way we felt about the plan when it came here, that there would be jobs and benefits."[38] However, the toxic legacy of the acid plant, as well as the threats to the river system, ensured that both women, however understanding of the impetus behind expansion and the economic benefits it would bring to the area, wanted the mining companies to proceed with caution. First and foremost, they wanted reassurances that rapid expansion would not threaten environmental surroundings before any steps were taken in that direction.

It is also important to note that it was women responding to how they were seen by people outside their community. As women, they happened to be political leaders in their communities, but their sense of responsibility and leadership stemmed from their roles as mothers and stewards of both the community and the land. This was most likely lost on the members of the male-dominated panel, not to

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[37] Lorraine Rekmans, Keith Lewis and Anabel Dwyer, eds., *This is My Homeland: Stories of the effects of nuclear industries by people of the Serpent River First Nation and the north shore of Lake Huron* (Cutler: Serpent River First Nation, 2003), 95.

[38] *This is my Homeland*, 95.

mention the mining and government representatives who were predominately male as well. The sight of several First Nations women—Betty Jacobs was present at many of the meetings as well—in equal (if not dominant) speaking roles to the Board, was probably an unusual sight to a panel comprised of settlers. They were there leading their community, at the table along with their men, ensuring that both sexes were represented at the table and in front of the Board.

Both women were aware of how their presence confused settlers at the hearings, and their identical last names did not help matters. In the earlier interview, Gertrude recalled at an incident involving mistaken identity:

After Loreena's term was over I went to another hearing. There was a lawyer there from Rio Algom. He was confused and kept saying 'isn't that right, Chief Lewis?' He would address me as Chief Lewis and I would not answer him. He kept saying Chief. I kept saying nothing. Peter Johnston was the chief at the time. Peter said, 'It's Chief Johnston. We only have one chief.' That's how much they paid attention to us.[39]

Although both women share the last name Lewis, they are not physically similar, nor had Gertrude ever served as Chief of the community. The incident of mistaken identity may seem humorous at first, but it underlines the racism which lurked beneath the accommodating surface level of the hearings: not all First Nations women are identical, nor are they interchangeable. Despite the fact that the chief of a community in the area would be a stakeholder in the discussion, the

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[39] *This is my Homeland*, 94.

lawyer of one of the two mining companies seeking permission to expand did not seem to know which woman he was dealing with.

Gertrude's act of resistance in refusing to respond would have most likely been unsettling and embarrassing for the lawyer, mining company representatives, and members of the Board: to be ignored by a woman whom they thought they were addressing directly in such a formal environment would have made the exchange uncomfortable. Her continued refusal to respond, even when she was repeatedly addressed by this lawyer, made it clear that she was not to be mistaken for someone entirely different. Her silence, although seemingly passive at first blush, was an aggressive assertion of her identity and refusal to be mistaken as another woman from the community. Although Gertrude was a community representative, she was not the sitting Chief, and this was an important political, cultural, and respectful distinction she required the lawyer and other stakeholders to make.

The community members' attendance and presentations at the hearings were important forces in forging a collective politically-active identity. There was a sense of loneliness in being one of the only groups questioning expansion in a settler society, but it was a message that the community as a whole needed to appreciate given the past struggles of its elders. "But we were...one voice, the *only* voice that was against this expansion of the mines," said Johnston. "Everybody else, the City of Elliot Lake, the Chamber of Commerce, anybody that was anybody was all in favour, and we were the lone little voices in the wilderness trying to make a statement. It was a lonely—there were lonely, lonely fights, I'll tell you. People don't realize,

especially our community, how much we fought and how much energy we expended trying to right what we considered wrongs."[40]

When one side was not considered to be an equal player—despite the historical understanding of the treaty that allowed resource extraction to occur in the first place—any discussion about how to move forward also became uneven. Not only did community leaders assert themselves in a situation that automatically positioned them as inferior, they were also fighting an immensely unpopular battle from a regional point of view.

In the mid 1950s, when the mines were first opening and DIA proposed building an acid plant on SRFN land, community members were forced to choose between jobs and their traditional role as stewards of the land. At the same time, that choice was largely made for them by DIA officials who saw the plant as a tool through which Aboriginal people would be made less dependent on the government and traditional life-styles. In that situation, it was not so much a choice as an eventuality as forums for discussion and dissent where minimized. When allowed to speak and to choose how to balance personal economic interests with traditional obligations, SRFN members seemed—without any significant dissenting voices—to call for caution. It is important to note that many, if not most, of the men on the reserve worked at one time or another in a job somehow connected to the uranium

[40] Interview with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, SRFN.

industry.[41] By the late 1970s the wage economy had become the norm on the reserve as the local environment could no longer sustain traditional economic activities.[42] SRFN opposition to the expansion of the mines was, in some ways, contradictory—but only if viewed solely through an economic lens. For SRFN members, when allowed to speak for themselves and in the absence of an economic gun to their head, stewardship of the environment at the very least had to be balanced with economic activity. While the teaching of the Seven Generations—that any decision made has to take into account the seven generations in the future—was commonly understood in the community, it was a point of view that appeared to clash loudly with uranium development.[43]

At the same time, SRFN found an unlikely ally in the local Steelworkers leadership. Some settlers also understood the devastating impact of unbridled expansion by the late 1970s. Homer Seguin, the union's local steward voiced his concern: "We have to be completely reassured even if we have to be oversafe [sic]...while we're in favour of expansion, it has to be based on giving the most

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[41] Both Terry Jacobs and Peter Johnston noted that many of the community's men worked at the plant.

[42] See Chapters III and IV for the effects the industry's pollution had on traditional pursuits.

[43] See the prologue for a more indepth explanation of Anishinaabe teachings.

attention to the environmental care of the water and air."[44] He also worried that expansion at the rate that was expected could be detrimental to the work that had already been completed: "a big boom could erode all the advances we've made."[45] Seguin and the Steelworkers had previously called upon the government to improve its practices to prevent water pollution, particularly in lakes surrounding the town. Their concerns stemmed from a 1976 Ontario Ministry of the Environment status report titled *Water Pollution in the Serpent River Basin* which demonstrated that the quality of local waters had only slightly improved during the period of limited mining operations between 1970 and 1975—something which flew in the face of previous expectations.[46] "What will happen when the mines expand?" asked Seguin, "...The Steelworkers do not want townspeople to pay for prosperity with their health."[47]

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[44] Tony Frangomeni, "Fall public hearings set by provincial ministry" *The Standard*, 30 September 1976, 1.

[45] Tony Frangomeni, "Fall public hearings set by provincial ministry" *The Standard*, 30 September 1976, 1.

[46] This report is discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

[47] Richard Sandberg, "'Clean up polluted water' union men demand of government", *The Standard* 15 July 1976, 1. See also "Slow up in expansion program needed here says union leader" *The Standard*, 14 September 1977, 1. Seguin spoke to *The Standard* about the Board, which was, at the time, in temporary adjournment. The

The new environmental concerns expressed by the Steelworkers under Seguin's leadership were symbolic of a growing Canadian awareness of environmental issues. From the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962[48] to the formation of Greenpeace in 1970,[49] the environmental movement in North America was becoming increasingly important. The founding of Earth Day in 1970 in the United States marked a growing environmental awareness, one that had already been introduced in Canada by the 1969 mock funeral for the Don River, staged by Pollution Probe, a group of University of Toronto students. The environmental movement has grown since the late 1960s from a leftist fringe concern to a widespread movement in Canada, especially since the first Earth Day Canada was celebrated in 1990.[50]

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union supported expansion, but it insisted that it be at a rate that took workers, the town, and the environment into consideration.

[48] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring – 40th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002).

[49] Rex Weyler, *Greenpeace: How a Group of Ecologists, Journalists and Visionaries Changed the World* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004).

[50] "A Catalyst for Change: Earth Day Canada" *Macleans*, 122, no. 14 (20 April 2009), 49. See also Chad and Pam Gaffield, eds., *Consuming Canada: Readings in Environmental History*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1995). For Canadian environmental policy, see Bruce Doern and Thomas Conway, *The Greening of*

In fact, when newspaper letters to the editor are consulted, one can see the public interest in clean waterways. Readers responded to the Globe and Mail's investigative journalism by Barry Zwicker about the pollution at Elliot Lake and Bancroft (see Chapter IV). As J.W. Black of Sudbury wrote: "kindly accept our thanks for your articles regarding radium-tailings seepage into the waters of the Serpent River and the Elliott [sic] Lake area [...] Fish life has been affected in several of the lakes on this river system, owing to the pollution. One wonders at the Government's lack of interest in this matter. Thank the Great Manitou that we have newspapers such as the Globe and Mail."[51] It is unclear whether this reader is himself Anishinaabe or if he has appropriated the Aboriginal term for the Creator, but one is apparent from his letter: his concern for the ecological integrity of the river system, on which his cottage is located.

Other letters of concern were written directly to the Ontario Water Resources Commission. One concerned taxpayer felt compelled to write a letter after the 1964 Zwicker article was published. "Public concern has been aroused

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Canada: Federal Institutions and Decisions (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). A more recent book is Melody Hessing, Michael Howlett and Tracy Summerville, *Canadian Natural Resource and Environmental Policy: Political Economy and Public Policy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005). Kathryn Harrison, *Passing the Buck: Federalism and Canadian Environmental Policy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996).

[51] J.W. Black, "Elliot Lake" *Globe and Mail*, 21 November 1964, 6.

recently by the disclosure that much of the water in the Elliot Lake and Bancroft districts have been contaminated," the individual noted. "As an interested tax-payer I would like to know to what extent these two areas have been contaminated and what is being done to decontaminate them. I would also like to know at what level radio-activity in water is considered dangerous and how it is detected." He went on to ask, "how are mine operators able to get away with this for so long without detection?"[52] The public outcry, evident in both government correspondence records and newspaper editorial sections, indicates a growing public concern for environmental issues, particularly water safety.

At the time of the Board hearings in the late 1970s, it was already well-known that uranium had taken its toll on lakes surrounding the town. Nevertheless, visiting the sites of pollution could still elicit a shock. "When they were talking about the expansion, because we toured one of the sites and oh, it was terrible there," Gertrude Lewis recalled.

> And the smell, you know. And there was a little lake there and it was a dead lake. At that that time there were ten dead lakes around Elliot

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[52]Archives of Ontario RG 84-22, File: Elliot Lake Uranium Mines Pollution Correspondence Information, "Letter from Ronald Hancock to D. S. Caverly, General Manager, OWRC" dated 16 November 1964. See the entire file for more examples and the responses (usually one-and-a-half pages in length) provided by Caverly or other OWRC officials.

Lake. That was in the paper...And so that was one of the dead lakes that we were at. And the animals would be piled so high around that lake, all dead from this lake. Probably drinking a little bit of water that was in it. And, and the ministry, Ministry of Environment noticed that there was no sprinklers system working, like the mine should have had a sprinkler system working. And they didn't. And when we got there with the Ministry of Environment, boy did they ever run around to turn on the sprinkler system. And, and then we had noticed all those dead animals around there, rabbits, all kinds of dead animals. But we couldn't see them all because they were all around the band of the lake. And we told them, the Ministry of Environment that. We were traveling with [Ministry of the Environment], by the way...We were in their car. Which didn't look good, I guess to the mines. And they got their men to pick up some of those dead animals. They wanted to take them back for analysis. We never got the results of that. And the head fellow from the [Ministry of] Environment that was traveling with them that day. He never came back here again. That was his last meeting...And he was never allowed to come back again. Next time they had another meeting up there, it was a young fellow. And oh was he ever miserable with us. He sure didn't want to talk to us at all. And they didn't even want to take us on that tour. We toured the mines that time, and they didn't want to take us. They said we couldn't go. And uh, and it was the union... he was the head of the

union, in Elliot Lake and he said, "no, let the women go." So they allowed us to go.[53]

The ecological and health consequences of mining and waste disposal in the area were obvious.[54] Negative publicity was something that all pro-expansion parties were attempting to avoid, and literally chauffeuring political leaders from the nearby First Nations community to tour the dead lakes was starkly at odds with the overall aim to facilitate expansion. Nevertheless, the women were able to participate, ask questions, and report back to their community about the extent of

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[53] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, SRFN. When Gertrude mentioned the head of the union, she was most likely referring to Homer Seguin.

[54] See for example "Environmental Assessment Board Told 10 local lakes are beyond reclaiming," *The Standard*, 27 April 1977, 1. Dr. Donald Gobor, the project manager of Denison and Rio Algom's consulting firm, McLaren, presented the information himself to the Board. It should be noted that the local response to negative media attention to the area was unwelcome. See "Elliot Lakers 'fed up' with media: Foster" *The Standard*, 14 December 1977, 1. M.P. Maurice Foster is quoted throughout the article as saying , "People are fed up with sensationalist journalists coming here to tell Canada that there are all these problems...they don't realize that people live here, raise their families here, and they don't go around scared to death...If the town was like the way the CBC would have you think, then why do people spend their whole life here?"

the damage they witnessed. That said, the officials running the tour seemed ill-at-ease with their presence: "It seemed that they were kind of afraid of us because we were noticing everything," Gertrude Lewis recalled.[55]

During the hearings, the SRFN leadership also invited representatives from the EAB to visit the community to see the destruction that had been left by uranium mining and the acid plant even after the first "reclamation" attempt had been carried out a decade before for themselves. The community wanted people to see the extent of the damage and the basis of some of their concerns. It was not only the possibility of river contamination that was an issue: children were still left to play in the contaminated bay and around the rubble of the acid plant. Once the panel members toured the area, they were invited to the community centre for a meal, but refused all attempts to offer them beverages: "We brought those guys down here from the panel, to see the destruction around here, and we had a lunch for them at the band hall. They wouldn't drink tea or coffee!" Lewis recalled.[56] When further attempts to offer hospitality were met with hesitation, SRFN members reassured their guests that it was "not water from Elliot Lake, you know!"[57] The effort to extend a hospitable meal was consistent with social expectations in the Anishinaabe community, and the humour is undercut by the fact that the Board members were

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[55] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, SRFN.

[56] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, SRFN.

[57] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, SRFN.

aware of the issues surrounding water and ground pollution as a result of mining. In this situation, SRFN hosts, while still conforming to Anishinaabe social protocols, forced EAB representatives to acknowledge the extent of contamination when confronted with their own health choices: they could return and drink water elsewhere while SRFN community members had no such luxury.

In their interim report, the EAB expressed the belief that the river system would actually recover itself over time, but this too was contradicted by events at the time.[58] In fact, there had actually been another dam spill or overflow at Rio Algom during the course of the Board's hearings! When asked for comment on a tailings spill on 28 March 1978, a Rio Algom official provided the following: "Quite honestly, this concerns us as much as it does anyone. The spills cost us money and we don't need the publicity that goes with it."[59] It was not, apparently, the danger posed to the river system that was seen as a main problem, but rather the cost of

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[58] Environmental Assessment Board, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake Area: Final Report*, May 1979, 251.

[59] "Rio Spill not the first as both companies seek prevention measures," *The Standard*, 19 April 1978, 1. The article also outlines previous issues Rio and Denison had had in the 1970s, as well as the modern equipment that the companies were using to try to increase their responsible waste management systems. The concerns did not end in the 1970s, nor were they only held by SRFN as the non-Aboriginal community of Serpent River held a meeting in March 1983. "Serpent River Citizens fear acid spillage," *The Standard*, 18 March 1983, 1.

cleaning it up and the ensuing bad press. Another mill spill at Johnston Creek caused concern because the land between the creek and the Serpent River was swampy, but the potentially dangerous effect of 100,000 gallons of tailings waste was dispelled by Jerry LaHave, an official from the Ministry of the Environment:

> The extent of the spill and any possible contamination to the Serpent River is so small that even if some radioactivity found its way into it (the river) you couldn't even measure it that far down...we're looking at two things right now. In the short term, we're looking for ways to control the Radium 226 that has dissolved in the water. Our second concern, the long term problem, is that we get all the solid waste because if we don't, there's a chance it could gradually dissolve in the water.[60]

Spills such as this concerned the community. Not only had they described the effects of the acid plant on reserve land, community members had ongoing reasons to be concerned about mining activities at Elliot Lake. The notion that the expansion of such mining operations would have a positive effect on the watershed simply did not make sense, and speaks to the fact that the EAB had little interest in actually interrogating the companies' practices and responsibility, or in evaluating the real concerns that expansion would bring. From the Board's perspective, river

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[60] "Big clean up job ahead after recent Rio tailings spill" *The Standard*, 19 April 1978, 1.

contamination and the reclamation of the Cutler Acid site were not the responsibility of mining companies.

This was the point of view expressed in the Environmental Assessment Board's final report, dated May 1979, which records the grievances brought forth by the SRFN community. While the Board acknowledged the community's concerns, they found that there was little they could do for the community:

> The Board heard a plea from the Band that the expansion be delayed until compensation for past environmental insults is received. The Board does not have the power to grant such a request. However the Board has reviewed the existing situation in the watershed, has noted the many upstream lakes which have been seriously damaged through contamination from the mines and has considered the corrective measures that are proposed. Based on this review it is the Board's opinion that the recovery of the watershed is probable with the expansion.[61]

The EAB believed that DIA should bear the brunt of responsibility for the reclamation of the acid plant land and for water concerns:

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[61] Environmental Assessment Board, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake Area: Final Report* (May 1979), 251.

> It is the Board's understanding that the Department of Indian Affairs has neither indicated a willingness to agree to the arrangement nor proposed a suitable alternative. In the Board's opinion too much time has elapsed since the plant close-out without action. On behalf of the Indian Band, the Board suggests it is incumbent on the Department of Indian Affairs to seek an expeditious solution to the Band's concerns. Early in the hearing, the Board invited the Department to participate. Unfortunately this invitation was not acted upon.[62]

It was likely that DIA officials chose not to participate in the hearings as part of a larger policy to allow First Nations more of a leadership role in the community.[63] This increasingly non-interventionist stance allowed SRFN

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[62] Environmental Assessment Board, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake Area: Final Report*, (May 1979), 251. Emphasis added.

[63] I have not been able to locate DIA records, if they exist, about why the department chose not to participate in the meetings. There are Department of the Environment records that may shed light onto these events and those that take place in the 1980s, but they are currently restricted by law (they are not covered by my ATIP agreement, which pertained to RG 10 files). LAC RG108-A, File 135298 Departmental Correspondence "Correspondent: Commanda, Earl; Serpent River First Nation Environmental Impact Assessment General," 1995. Furthermore, there are currently "orphaned" Department of the Environment records that are in the process of being catalogued properly. Their LAC catalogue

community members to voice their own concerns, but at the same time it minimized federal responsibility for the environmental devastation which had been allowed to happen while it was still operating under the aegis of its fiduciary responsibility to Aboriginal people. In this respect, the EAB listened to SRFN community members' voices, arguing that DIA had a responsibility to clean up its own messes.

"In the Board's opinion, [...] those who are responsible for the administration of the rights of the Band and the protection of the reserve should review the Band's concerns with all possible haste. Indeed the problems have been left without resolution for too long."[64] In this sense, SRFN community members were successful in bringing DIA's lack of action into the public record and making members of the public and regulatory bodies aware of their grievances. It was a significant step for a community long silenced by the veil of colonialism.

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record states "This record was created as a temporary holder for containers that have no clear provenance. After the migration to AMICAN, work will continue to place these records in their proper place in the hierarchy." http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3726684&rec_nbr_list=3726684,48441,183805,141355,358,178487,42518,41899,178496,141426 (accessed 23 April 2011). They, too, are restricted by law.

[64] Environmental Assessment Board, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake Area: Final Report*, May 1979, 252.

But when it came to the issue of expansion in general, the EAB's final report supported a measured degree of expansion. "Based on the evidence heard and received in written form," it read,

> the Board is of the general opinion that the technology exists to carry out the expansion in an environmentally acceptable manner in the short term...Based on the evidence of these experts, the Board is of the opinion that this expansion can be carried out in such a way as to ensure that the people of the area will not receive unacceptable exposures or be exposed to unacceptable risks. With respect to the long term, present day knowledge is, to a large extent, limited. It is evident to the Board that considerable effort and time is required before solutions to the long term aspects of waste management can be found.[65]

Ironically, the debate proved to be moot. While some modest expansion of housing and mining activity took place, Elliot Lake's population in this period never rose to the anticipated 27,000 people.[66] This was partly due to the fluctuation of

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[65] Environmental Assessment Board, *The Expansion of the Uranium Mines in the Elliot Lake Area: Final Report*, May 1979, x.

[66] In 1990, Rio and Denison announced their first round of lay-offs. Denison closed in 1992 and Rio Stanleigh's last day of operation was in 1996. By 1996, 4200 miners had lost their jobs out of a population of approximately 13,500 people. See

uranium prices on the world-market but also the fact that during the 1980s, Saskatchewan-mined uranium—which was higher-grade and cheaper to extract—overtook the domestic market, eventually comprising 48.3% of the Canadian uranium market by the end of the decade.[67] As a direct result, in 1991, Ontario Hydro sought to renegotiate its contract with the Elliot Lake companies, arguing that uranium from Saskatchewan was higher-grade and therefore more cost-effective.[68] But for SRFN, the decade truly did mark a new beginning. With the same spirit that underpinned their presentations to the EAB, SRFN leaders began to publically demand that the pollution and its effects be cleaned up on their land. This led to a radicalization of community politics as it sought new and more forceful methods to assert its claims to compensation and restitution.

Anne-Marie Mawhiney and Jane Pitblado, "Introduction" in *Boom Town Blues, Elliot Lake: Collapse and Revival in a Single-Industry Community* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999), 12-14.

[67] Anne-Marie Mawhiney and Jane Pitblado, "Introduction" in *Boom Town Blues, Elliot Lake: Collapse and Revival in a Single-Industry Community* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999), 13-14.

[68] Anne-Marie Mawhiney and Jane Pitblado, "Introduction" in *Boom Town Blues, Elliot Lake: Collapse and Revival in a Single-Industry Community* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999), 13-14.

In the fall of 1979, approximately six months after the EAB issued its final report, the community began seeking external advice from academics and activists. If DIA was going to do little help the community, than the community would help itself. A study was commissioned from the Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Toronto. The study was meant to ascertain what, if anything, could be done with the land upon which the acid plant once stood. It was meant to survey the extent of the environmental damage and outline some of the uses that would be safe for the community to develop on the site.[69] The report examined such land use possibilities for industry, recreation, housing, and nature parks, and ranked each possibility in terms of feasibility, and the high cost involved.[70] It reviewed reclamation possibilities and surveyed community members about their goals for the site. The University of Toronto researchers also highlighted the unusual skin rashes which reserve residents often exhibited after swimming in the bay.[71] They concluded that it was "unlikely that from a description of the sores that the origin was in the swimmer's itch parasite...the main outbreak may have [in fact] coincided

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[69] Institute for Environmental Studies, "Rehabilitation of the Cutler Acid Site, on the Serpent River Indian Reserve—A Feasibility Study," Final Report, 1981.

[70] Ibid., charts on 175-76.

[71] Discussed at length in Chapter III.

with the breaking of the dam across the shoreline between the waste piles and the lake."[72]

While the cost and process of the clean-up was examined by one group, the SRFN leadership also followed up the University of Toronto researchers concerns, commissioning a professional study to quantify the human cost of the pollution so as to give weight to their claims.[73] In 1982, Dr. Rosalie Bertell, a distinguished public health activist who has worked with United Nations projects around the world, began to study the health effects that the harsh sulphur had on residents of the area.[74] In two reports published in 1984 and 1985, her findings conclusively linked

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[72] As quoted in Olivia Ward, "Serpent River Pollution Site a Sulphurous Hell,' Toronto Star, 21 July 1985. See also Institute for Environmental Studies, "Rehabilitation of the Cutler Acid Site, on the Serpent River Indian Reserve—A Feasibility Study," Final Report, 1981, 97.

[73] Ibid.

[74] The International Institute of Concern for Public Health describes itself as "a Canadian-based non-profit organization dedicated to helping communities assess and improve their environmental health status." On the IICPH see http://www.iicph.org/, (accessed 22 April 2011). I use this data here only to suggest a pattern in the relationship between the acid plant and community health. It was not an exhaustive study, but it is the only one of its kind to provide statistics about the health of residents due in no small part to privacy concerns

pollution on the reserve from uranium and the acid plant to severe long-term health problems amongst reserve members. Most significant was the unusual incidence of chronic and serious diseases on the reserve. In her first report titled the "Joint Health Report: Serpent River, Mississaugi and Spanish River Reserves" published in January, 1984, the total percentage of residents reporting some type of disease was 50% on the Serpent River First Nation, as compared to the 45% at Mississaugi and 39% at Spanish River.[75] The report explains the reasons behind the discrepancy: "conditions favouring health are not the same on the three reserves, with the Spanish River being most conducive to health. Since both males and females at Serpent River are reporting chronic diseases at a higher rate than at the other reserves, the problem(s) may be environmental. Generally males are reporting more chronic diseases than females, which may indicate differences related to

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and the fact that this is a fairly recent situation. See also Elaine Carey, 'Honours Piling Up for the Rebel Nun,' *Toronto Star*, 25 January 1987, D5.

[75] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Joint Health Report: Serpent River, Mississaugi and Spanish River Reserves January, 1984" by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, 2.

occupation."[76] According to Bertell's study, the overall health of the community was compromised by the toxic effects of the acid plant.

The best empirical evidence of the health effects of the pollution was Bertell's examination of maternal and infant health. Bertell assessed reproductive patterns and drew links between the reserve's high-risk environment and her findings. The average number of pregnancies per couple was similar for each community: Serpent River had 5.7, Mississaugi 4.1, and Spanish River 4.9.[77] However, Bertell found differences among the communities when examining the success rate of those pregnancies. Pregnancies on the Serpent River First Nation were approximately 6.2 times more likely to end in fetal death than on the Spanish River reserve, and approximately four times more likely to end in fetal death on the Mississaugi reserve.[78] Bertell concluded that "just as chronic diseases were more frequent at

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[76] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Joint Health Report: Serpent River, Mississaugi and Spanish River Reserves January, 1984" by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, 2.

[77] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Joint Health Report: Serpent River, Mississaugi and Spanish River Reserves January, 1984" by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, 4.

[78] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Joint Health Report: Serpent River, Mississaugi and Spanish River Reserves January, 1984" by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, 4. Bertell breaks down the numbers for each reserve into subcategories: occupational exposure, age, and fish and game consumption.

Serpent River, so are pregnancies ending in fetal death [...] The loss of these pregnancies appears to be related to maternal ill health, some occupational exposures and perhaps environmental pollution."[79] The higher rate of fetal deaths among the residents of the Serpent River First Nation, in conjunction with the pattern of chronic illness in higher numbers than on neighbouring reserves, gives a strong indication that there was a pattern of health concerns that was attributable the location of the Serpent River First Nation. The biggest difference between the Serpent River reserve and the other similar reserves in the area was the existence of the acid plant, which was also a known source of environmental pollution.[80]

Bertell's second comparative study, which took place the following year, lists several health problems that were common among the male workers in the community and categorized them by men who worked in the acid plant, males who worked at the uranium mines at Elliot Lake, and men who were from the other

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Because she did not use the same subcategories for each community, I have averaged the numbers given for each community to give an approximate comparison in order to suggest a pattern.

[79] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Joint Health Report: Serpent River, Mississaugi and Spanish River Reserves January, 1984" by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, 4.

[80] This may also have to do with the fact that Sagamok and Mississaugi are not located in the same place within the watershed.

communities and therefore had a lower degree of exposure. The study was based on a questionnaire sent to every household in the three communities, with 68% of responses coming from the Serpent River reserve.[81] While the statistics are not conclusive, they nevertheless provide an indication about the plant's potential effects on the community.

The data unequivocally points to a higher incidence of sickness and disease on the Serpent River First Nation than in the neighbouring two communities. Bertell found that 14.3% of acid plant workers suffered from chronic bronchitis, while 9.1% of males in other occupations also reported the condition. Dr. Bertell reports that "sulphur, sulphuric acid, sulphur dioxide and hydrogen sulfide are all known respiratory irritants. Radon gas is associated with both non-cancerous and cancerous changes in respiratory tissues. Workers at the Print Shop located for the past 10 years on the former Cutler Acid Plant site complained of constant 'sniffles'."[82] The respiratory problems indicated that exposure to the irritants described by Bertell were substantial and far-reaching within the community, regardless of the occupation of the male of the households.

Bertell's study also concluded that 16.2% of males on the reserve who did not work at the acid plant (and were therefore classified as having medium

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[81] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Serpent River Report, 1985" by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, 17.

[82] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36 "Report on the Serpent River Project" dated 30 November 1985, 5.

exposure to emissions) reported eye problems, defined as blindness or poor eyesight.[83] This is in comparison to the 2.8% of males from another reserve who did not work at the site (classified as having had low exposure).[84] Indeed, eye problems reported by reserve residents were so numerous that in 1974 the Algoma Health Unit requested special assistance in dealing with them.[85]

In addition to respiratory and eye problems, skin disorders were common among reserve residents, particularly among children who swam in Aird Bay on the

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[83] LAC, MG, 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Report on the Serpent River Project" dated 30 November 1985, 4.

[84] I include the comparison because the two communities would have had similar socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds with the only significant difference being that Serpent River FN had an acid plant and Mississaugi FN did not.

[85] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Report on the Serpent River Project" dated 30 November 1985, 4–6. Bertell also found that 57.1% of acid plant workers and 13.6% of other males reported deafness (the latter had 0.6% partial deafness). She suspected that the hearing loss in adult workers was related to excessive noise at the plant, but she also had some concern that the hearing loss in children may have been related to swimming in the bay near the acid site (where refuse from the plant was dumped throughout its operation): "Children swimming in Aird Bay, in the acidic effluence from the contaminated site have reported pains in their ears. Some of the acid plant worker deafness was probably due to noise."

north shore of Lake Huron on the reserve near the acid site. According to the report, "As early as 1974 these rashes had been reported. Government officials at times discounted them as probably due to a parasite common on the north shore which caused 'swimmer's itch'."[86] The rashes, however, did not appear when children went swimming in other areas, and while one rash was characterized as "red blotches on arms and legs after swimming, which disappeared in an hour or an hour and a half", the other type included more serious "red spots with blisters".[87] Bertell reports that one child's condition was so difficult to diagnose that he/she was sent to Toronto for testing.

Bertell's report, which was done with the co-operation of SRFN reserve members, highlighted the disastrous consequences that uranium mining and the sulphuric acid plant had had on the community—in the type of quantifiable western terms which would be understood by government officials. In co-operating with external experts independent of DIA oversight, SRFN community members succeeded in not only drawing attention to their plight but also in obtaining the type of third-party outside advice which reserve leadership had desired—but was denied—when the original acid plant lease was negotiated. This co-operation the publication of these reports had its desired effect. Just over a year after the first

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[86] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Serpent River Report, 1985" by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, 16.

[87] LAC, MG 31 K39 Vol. 36, "Serpent River Report, 1985" by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, 17.

report was published, in July 1985 Olivia War of the *Toronto Star*, broke an important story on the effects of the pollution on the Serpent River First Nation. It was the first time that a major news agency had been interested in the community's plight. The report recounted the community's troubled past with the acid plant, describing its acceptance so as to further employment in the late 1950s, its closure only a few years later, the destruction of the site in a DND training exercise, and the unwillingness of any federal agency to assume responsibility for cleaning up the site—a clean-up that was conservatively estimated at $1.5 million.[88] While DIA officials told the Star that they would "not back down on [their] responsibility for funding the proposed clean-up," he also acknowledged that the initiative and funding for an empirical study of the contamination and to provide an estimate for the cost of the reclamation process came from Chief Earl Commanda.[89] When DIA officials arrived during Ward's visit to the community to talk to the Chief, he told the reporter "Maybe we'll get something done, or maybe we'll just be one more group that gets together to talk."[90] He did not seem confident.

During the 1980s, DIA officials repeatedly expressed their desire to help the community while also falling back on their new policy of non-intervention in

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[88] Olivia Ward, "Serpent River Pollution Site a Sulphurous Hell,' Toronto Star, 21 July 1985, H1, H5.

[89] Ibid, H5.

[90] Ibid, H5.

Aboriginal community affairs to minimize their obligation. To those involved in these discussions, a tremendous amount of frustration is evident, but so too is a real sense of determination and self-sufficiency. "We started putting pressure on the federal government for funding to do a proper clean-up," recalls Peter Johnston.

> And it must have taken us at least ten years of real hard... I remember being at Indian Affairs office in Toronto at the regional office[91] and pounding my fist on the table with the people from Indian Affairs trying to get them to understand how determined we were that there was a problem and that it was their problem, not ours. But it was really, really hard. I mean, they were civil servants living far away from the problem. As long as it didn't affect their daily lives to the

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[91] Given his clarification of "at the regional office," Johnston is most likely referring to the federal Department. At the provincial level, the Ontario Native Affairs Directorate was established in 1987 under the Ontario Liberals, and the NDP made it a secretariat in 1990. See Jonathan Malloy, *Between Colliding Worlds: The Ambiguous Existence of Government Agencies for Aboriginal and Women's Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 38 and 119. The province replaced the Secretariat with a Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs in 2007. Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, "About the Ministry" http://www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca/english/about/about.asp (accessed 23 April 2011).

> extent that it was affecting ours, it wasn't the problem as we saw it. And so it was a lot of real hard bargaining. We ended up going to using every means that we had available to us... But it was, I'm telling you, I mean it drained us. I mean the amount of energy and time and money we spent just fighting to get the money to do the clean-up was just awful.[92]

Experience had taught community leaders that the government was not protecting their interests, and so they entered into their own negotiations. DIA was not their protector in this case: it was the defendant and the organization that continued to block the community's goals.

Fatigue with endless meetings and promises of studies led to a radicalization of the political process. SRFN leadership increasingly looked to manipulate public opinion to both draw attention to the problems on the reserve as well as to put pressure on the government to meet its demands for reclamation and compensation. In February 1986 Chief Commanda first threatened to block the Trans-Canada Highway at Cutler. "The band council passed a resolution in January stating if we don't get a meeting with the minister that the possibility of this type of action will exist," he told the Elliot Lake *Standard*, "...We've talked about this type of action as a protest against the lack of response from Indian Affairs."[93] While Chief

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[92] Interview with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, SRFN.

[93] "Chemical Waste: Band could block highway," *The Standard*, 9 February 1986, 1.

Commanda described the companies as well as the provincial Ministry of the Environment, federal bodies Environment Canada, and Health Canada as being willing to co-operate and support the clean-up, he blamed DIA for the delay: "our own Indian Affairs ministry is where the thing gets bogged down." DIA had wanted to stall discussions and action in order to find out who was really responsible for the clean-up via the Department of Justice. He harkened back to the original involvement of DIA in laying the blame with it: "They are in breach of trust. They broke our trust by allowing the plant to be built there."[94] Commanda was more explicit the following week: "I'm told a 24-hour blockage (of highway 17) would bring the uranium industry to its knees. In a lot of ways we could gain negative attention. You reach a point where you just don't care. We also have the CPR line running through the reserve and an Ontario Hydro line."[95] The community set a deadline for the end of May—the beginning of the tourist season.

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[94] "Chemical Waste: Band could block highway," *The Standard*, 9 February 1986, 1.

[95] Peter Haggart, "Reserve's Acid: Band chief more hopeful, but no clean-up promised," *The Standard*, 16 February 1986, 1. The *Toronto Star* reported that a 31 May meeting had been scheduled to include federal Indian and Northern Affairs Minister David Crombie, federal Environment Minister Tom McMillan, and federal Health Minister Jake Epp. David Israelson, "Indian Band Ready to Block Highway over Cleanup Dispute" *Toronto Star*, 14 February 1986, A14.

Highway blockades organized by First Nations in response to colonial practices, now more familiar since the Oka Crisis,[96] were increasing in frequency in the 1980s. As one scholar suggests, "the blockade in both its effects and meanings, is directed outwards; it is aimed at the dominant culture [...] To the extent that the blockade speaks graphically of generations of friction, grievances, and lost opportunities, it deserves attention and analysis from whatever quarter."[97] A blockade is not simply a symbolic stance against government inaction, nor it is it only a physical representation of anger and impatience; a blockade is a direct stance

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[96] For more on Oka and its ties to the growth of Aboriginal nationalism, see Gerald (Taiaiake) R. Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (Don Mills, Oxford University Press, 1995).

[97] Nicholas Bromley, "Shut the Province Down': First Nations Blockades in British Columbia, 1984-1995" *BC Studies*, 111 (Autumn 1996), 5-35. Quote from page 6. See also C. Radha Jhappan, "Indian Symbolic Politics: The Double-Edged Sword of Publicity," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 22 (1990): 19-39.

against dominant culture and an assertion of Indigenous control.[98] In many cases, pamphlets with information about the reasons for the protest are distributed, press conferences are given, all in an effort to gain support from some members of the public while calling attention to official government oppression. The important function of blockades or protests generally is to showcase the voice and agency of First Nations.

As SRFN renewed its efforts to get the government to address the acid plant clean-up, it had actually found a somewhat unlikely ally in the *Standard*. Coverage of the acid plant and pollution at SRFN ebbed and flowed in tandem with the economic tides of the region. When economic expansion loomed on the horizon, environmental concerns were minimized. When the mining economy contracted, tourism and recreational land use became more important and so too did concerns about the eye-sore on Highway 17 and the quality of the fishing in the area. As the uranium mining industry began to take a downward turn in the late 1980s, coverage in the local Elliot Lake newspaper began to favour Aboriginal initiatives aimed at securing federal assistance in cleaning up the site. This included SRFN's threats to block the highway. The change in the *Standard*'s coverage between the 1960s and

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[98] See Anna Willow's work on the use of blockades at Grassy Narrows in response to clear-cutting: "Clear-Cutting and Colonialism: The Ethnopolitical Dynamics of Indigenous Environmental Activism in Northwestern Ontario," *Ethnohistory* 56, 1 (2009):35–67.

the 1980s is obvious. Both articles on the highway closures cited above described the community's concerns in sympathetic terms and noted that the report by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health was about to be released.[99] For a paper that had once described the plant as a means to move the reserve into the 20th century economy, the plant had now become a concern to both communities. While this certainly reflects the changing economic situation in the region, it is also indicative of a larger shift in public support for both environmental concerns and Aboriginal issues during the 1980s. In any case, in the local media the main actors and the driving force behind the clean-up efforts were clearly the local members of the SRFN, not DIA.

In the spring of 1986, SRFN chose not to block the highway when federal officials offered to meet with the community. But by the end of the summer, little had been accomplished—it was more of the idle talk which Commanda had lamented to Ward the previous year.[100] At the top of the community's immediate list of demands was the removal of 110,000 cubic metres of toxic was from the site.[101]

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[99] "Chemical Waste: Band could block highway," *The Standard*, 9 February 1986, 1; Peter Haggart "Reserve's Acid: Band chief more hopeful, but no clean-up promised," *The Standard*, 16 February 1986, 1.

[100] David Israelson, "Band sets Deadlines for Clean-up on Reserve," *Toronto Star*, 28 September 1986, A18.

[101] Ibid.

In a letter to Ontario Minister of the Environment James Bradley that was a follow-up to a 11 July meeting, Commanda reminded the province that its assistance was needed to "initiate high-level discussion" with Rio Algom so the waste could be managed at a site at one of its defunct mines, Pronto. Commanda was also looking for technical support with the processes required to reclaim toxic waste, and to think of alternate sites for waste disposal should Pronto not work out.[102] The letter has the following scrawled at the top with a telling description of what the response would be: "~~Send~~ Prepare letter for Minister low-key response and thanks."[103]

By the end of September, little progress had been made. Keith Lewis, the SRFN planner, told the press, "Quiet negotiation has brought us along to where are now [but] it's getting us nowhere and we're forced to consider other options."[104] These other options included blocking the highway and main East–West CPR line, cutting the Ontario Hydro North Shore transmission line, and moving the toxic

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[102] AO, RG 12-45, B320348, File: Waste Sites 1986, Cutler Acid Site – Serpent River, "Letter from Chief Earl Commanda to Hon. James Bradley," dated 22 July 1986. Not everyone was pleased with the Pronto idea, as one Lake Lauzon resident was concerned about potential pollution as a result of this type of action. See correspondence in same file.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Douglas Armour, "Leaders' Threat: Reserve will take its own steps unless government moves on acid," *The Standard*, 1 October 1986, 1.

waste to the edge of the highway itself.[105] In October, Commanda held a press conference, announcing that the community would move the actual waste to areas outside the reserve if there was no immediate response from the government.[106]

That fall, before the snow fell, the community moved "approximately 26 truckloads of waste [from the acid plant] to the edge of the Trans-Canada highway"[107] and erected a sign outlining DIA's role in the establishment of the plant and its hesitation to provide funding for waste removal. It read in part: "...The people of the Serpent River Indian Reserve dedicate this site to [DIA], in recognition of their relentless pursuit on our behalf. God save the queen."[108] The tongue-in-cheek dedication to the federal government revealed a community memory of betrayal and the long-standing sense of bitterness about the three decades it was

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[105] Ibid.

[106] Douglas Armour, "Leaders' Threat: Reserve will take its own steps unless government moves on acid," *The Standard*, 1 October 1986, 1; Rudy Platiel, "Serpent River Indians seek action on contaminated soil," *Globe and Mail*, 29 September 1986, A14; "Reserve cleanup awaits decision," *Globe and Mail*, 24 October 1986, A9.

[107] Anon., "Native Set Protest Fire to Push Ottawa on Waste," *Toronto Star*, 29 June 1988, A7.

[108] Jim Patrick, "Serpent River band tells a history of complaint," *The Standard*, 29 June 1988, 1.

taking for DIA to correct the situation. The words "relentless pursuit on our behalf" was an especially cutting commentary. Of course, "God save the queen" not only referred to a colonial past, but also the continuing colonial relationships that defined the community's relationship to the government at the time. The community entered into the 1850 Robinson-Huron Treaty as a partner in negotiation, but the resulting pollution and slow action underlined the erosion of such promises and the nation-to-nation relationship.

In addition to public protest, the SRFN continued to express its concerns through official channels. Gertrude Lewis' 1987 presentation notes to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, which the community was asking to communicate a resolution of support to the Minister of Indian Affairs and the House of Commons,[109] demonstrate the sophistication and adeptness that some community members had in pressing their case. "As a band member of the Serpent River Band I attended meetings in '55 with representatives of Noranda Mines and D.I.A.," she told the committee.

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[109] Serpent River Band, "The Cutler Acid Site: Presentation to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs," 28 January 1987. The author is unknown, but it was prepared for the leadership's presentation. The report is held in the private papers of Gertrude Lewis. Miigwetch to her for her permission to use them for this project.

> I can still hear Indian Affairs people telling us we had nothing to worry about. The Band tried to request their own lawyer, but were told Indian Affairs would look after our interests very well. We've had sulphur fires flare up at any time during the summer months. On a hot, windy day the red calcine dust can be seen blowing across Highway 17 and can be smelled as you drive through our community. The health of our people is a concern to us. We are counting on you the committee to approve our endeavours.[110]

It was clear to community members that the mining industry had caused harm to themselves and their families both in terms of health and traditional lands. It can be seen in the way Lewis wrote her speech that she saw those two concepts as being intimately linked, if not completely inseparable. In her mind, the health of the community was tied together with the dust, smells, and the larger history of the community and its colonial relationship with DIA.

The community's 1987 submission to the House Standing Committee summed up SRFN's claims and more than a decade of activism on the part of the community's leaders. It included a history of the area, Rosalie Bertell's study that indicated health problems was quoted, and a length description of the ways in which the government did not represent the best interests of the community. For

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[110] Speaking notes written by Gertrude Lewis, held privately in her papers. Miigwetch to Gertrude for lending them to me and providing consent to quote from them.

instance, as noted above, the history of the lease agreement, which was entered into by Noranda and DIA, was shown to be possible only through a technicality.[111] The brief outlined the issues in the area, making reference to the sulphur, pyrite, calcine, concrete, rebar, and fill waste on 95 acres of reserve land.[112] It also discussed the importance of Crown responsibility for the clean-up. To make its case, the report also used selected quotations from the media to equate government inaction with racism. One quotation from Elmer Sopha, MPP for Sudbury in 1969 provides part of the introduction to the brief: "if such a situation existed in or near a white community, there would be such a howl of protest that the appropriate and responsible officials would be required to take steps with expedition to eliminate it. The fact that this one has been permitted to exist for so many years demonstrates once again that Canada's first citizens can be expected to suffer any indignity."[113] Further on in the brief, the community quoted from a 1985 editorial in the *Toronto Star* which followed Ward's *exposé* which echoed Sopha's comments almost two decades later: "According to the environmental geologist Derek Smith, 'the site is

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[111] Serpent River Band, "The Cutler Acid Site: Presentation to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs," 28 January 1987, 3-4.

[112] Ibid., 3.

[113] Elmer Sopha, MPP, Sudbury to Minister of Indian Affairs, 1969, quoted in Serpent River Band, "The Cutler Acid Site: Presentation to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs," 28 January 1987, 2.

110 cubic metres of some of the worst pollution I have seen in this Province. It should be cleaned up now.' One wonders whether it would have been cleaned up long ago had it been anywhere but an Indian reservation."[114] The quotations were chosen carefully, and they demonstrate the community's frustration with environmental racism but also its willingness to hold the government accountable for its actions.

Ample quantitative and qualitative evidence clearly existed to support the community's claims. Another section of the presentation provided a case study of Ville de Lasalle, PQ, which also suffered from industrial waste problems. The main difference between the two cases was that soon after a government task force was established to look at Lasalle, action was taken: "This example of rapid government action strengthens the Band's past and present frustrations, but it also offers hope."[115] Although the swift action taken when a non-Aboriginal community was affected by industrial waste was frustrating, it did prove that it was possible to move

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[114] Editorial, *Toronto Star*, 23 July 1985, quoted in Serpent River Band, "The Cutler Acid Site: Presentation to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs," 28 January 1987, 4. For the original article see Editorial Board, "Footdragging at Serpent River," *Toronto Star*, 23 July 1985, A12

[115] Serpent River Band, "The Cutler Acid Site: Presentation to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs," 28 January 1987, 6.

forward quickly if government support was forthcoming. What is clear from the community's perspective, as outlined in its brief, is that environmental racism was evident in the history of the acid plant site. Community members also made reference to the length of time it took government officials to act. One section of the presentation was entitled, "Serpent River—Justice Delayed is Justice Denied." The community was suffering from 'study fatigue,' as no less than four environmental studies had been undertaken in the area to try to ascertain the level of damage and come up with reclamation processes that could work with the kind of industrial waste that was present.

The waste sat at the edge of the Trans-Canada highway for more than a year as SRFN continued to pursue other means of negotiation and protest.[116] Just before the Dominion Day long week-end, on 29 June 1988 the community set fire to the pile of toxic waste. "The pile [of waste dedicated to the federal government] is now alight and Commanda said it could burn for days or months," reported the Toronto Star. "Although there are no flames or sparks, the smoke can be seen for miles and a rotten egg smell permeates the area, irritating the noses and throats of residents and Trans-Canada travellers. The burning material contains sulphur, pyrite, calcite, and cement."[117]

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[116] "Natives Set Protest Fire to Push Ottawa on Waste," *Toronto Star,* 29 June 1988, A7.

[117] Ibid.

When asked to describe protests and other actions that were taken to call attention to the issues of land reclamation, Peter Johnston did not differentiate between political meetings in downtown Toronto and the type of visible public protest that occurred in 1988; in fact, he remembered them as being intimately linked as a co-ordinated effort in one instance. "We had those things [discussions] ongoing," he says.

> We had one big meeting that was scheduled with—I think it was a meeting we had in Toronto. And it was with federal government departments. And it wasn't—when I say the federal government, I'm not saying Indian Affairs because it involved Treasury Department, it involved Environment Canada, environment, Justice Department, because Justice Department were the lawyers that were handling the legal work for the Department of Indian Affairs. So it involved all these departments. We had a big, big meeting scheduled in Toronto. And we decided to have a big day of protest. And we lit the fires purposely. We lit the sulphur piles. And they blew as they usually did with the westerly blow of the wind. All the material blew across Highway 17. It closed Highway 17 down. I mean motorists couldn't go by. And it became a real PR problem for the government. And we used that to its full advantage. And when we went to that meeting in Toronto, we told them, we said, "if you turn your TV on tonight, or you turn it on right now, you'll find out how, just what our people at the

> community level feel about this; you're not just talking to us here as the leaders of our community. We're representing people at the community level and things are getting out of hand. I remember saying to them "you see on the news tonight where Highway 17, the TransCanada highway, has been closed because of the burning of the material that is still on that site." And pretty soon, the federal government started to realize that they did have a problem. But it took us, I mean we had to fight and fight and tooth and nail before they finally came up with the funding in order for us to do that.[118]

The SRFN had found the government's weak-spot. Less than a month after setting the pile of toxic waste on fire, the federal government caved.[119] On 20 July 1988, it was reported that the Treasury Board authorized a $5,777,000 funding package and it was anticipated that the transfer of waste would begin in February. To compensate the Township of Shedden for taking over responsibility for the waste, the federal government paid for the construction of a football field-sized disposal site as well as an insurance liability policy, and it also offered to "finance

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[118] Interview with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, SRFN.

[119] Anon., "$5.7 million Given to Compensate Band in Toxic Waste Case," *Toronto Star* 20 July 1988, A7.

other municipal improvements."[120] Once brought to the nine metre-deep site, the waste would be neutralized by lime.[121]

As for the companies that ran the acid plant on the site, it was announced in November that Noranda, which had originally promised a small settlement, would not contribute to the clean-up process since the government had already agreed to fund the process.[122] By the end of the year, however, CIL agreed to pay $106,500 to the community, although this was far less than what Commanda had hoped for. "We're not happy with the settlement; we're disappointed," he told a reporter. "But in contrast to Noranda Mines, which took a $50,000 offer off the table, we're pleased to get something." Chief Commanda went on to describe the community leadership's reaction to Noranda's change of heart: "we were just flabbergasted. They are still saying we have no claim against them."[123] CIL was the company that operated the plant for only eleven months as compared to Noranda's negotiating and building of

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[120] Judy Robinson, "Government gives reserve $6 million for toxic cleanup" *The Globe and Mail*, 18 July 1988, A9.

[121] Judy Robinson, "Government gives reserve $6 million for toxic cleanup" *The Globe and Mail*, 18 July 1988, A9.

[122] Jim Patrick, 'Noranda won't help with Cutler clean-up" *The Standard*, 23 November 1988, 1.

[123] Jeff Wilkinson, "Chemical company compensating band," *The Standard*, 18 December 1988, 1.

the plant in addition to operating it for seven years. Nevertheless, CIL's spokesperson, Bruce Millar, when asked if the company was happy with the settlement responded: "Happy? Are we ever...We're pleased it's finally settled. Hopefully, it's at an end for us now."[124] While many other issues remained outstanding between the reserve and the government of Canada, the clean-up of the acid plant site came about as a result of community activism.

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After more than three decades of struggle with both the river pollution and the threat of disaster from spills, as well as the legacy of the acid plant, the Serpent River First Nation had a long-awaited solution to the problems caused by the uranium industry. Its leaders had tirelessly advocated for a responsible and slow expansion to the mining operations at Elliot Lake in the 1970s, and become increasingly vocal in negotiations with various departments, as well as the press. The acid site clean-up in 1988-89 was due in no small part to the efforts of SRFN leadership and the rest of the community. The savvy use of the media continued the tradition of Chief Bill Meawasige, who started the trend in the 1960s, but twenty years later leaders were also making threats to block the highway with sulphur in an effort to hurt the uranium industry where it would feel it the most— the wallets of respective mining companies. The plant had been established to facilitate the industry, but it left behind damaging effects that the community had to live with for

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[124] Jeff Wilkinson, "Chemical company compensating band," *The Standard*, 18 December 1988, 1.

decades. The political consciousness of the community, although not a new development itself, was made more apparent to settlers along the North Shore. Community leaders were able to appeal to widespread public environmental consciousness and concerns over health to successfully lobby for the 1988 clean-up. When this was not enough, they resorted to forcing the federal government into action. By referring to DIA's direct involvement in the origins of the plant, SRFN established the federal government's responsibility to clean it up. These "troublemakers" eventually succeeded in drawing attention to the environmental and health devastation that plagued both reserve and traditional territory by becoming increasingly involved in the discussions surrounding the issues that were most important to the community.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: URANIUM'S LONG LEGACY

When asked what the legacy of uranium has been for the Serpent River First Nation, Peter Johnston offered this emphatic response about the pollution that still plagues the area where the acid plant stood and the tailings dams that offer thin protection against further pollution in the river:

> There's no question – there's no question right now that the biggest legacy is what is still there. And that includes what is still here. I mean we tried to clean it up but obviously we didn't do the kind of job that should have been done and so we still have that problem. It's not as big a problem, though, as what the mines have left us. The potential for disaster is just tremendous in my estimation. I mean I predict, and I've said this all along, that sooner or later an act of nature is going to happen and one of those dams or other or dams are going to break and when they do, everybody keeps talking I mean anybody that is an environmentalist talks about the re-growth of Serpent

> River and how it's coming back to its original – what it was originally. It'll never – I mean what's lying on the bed of the Serpent River will never [...]come back to its original state. But what the potential that exists up there for disaster is just mind-boggling. And it's bound to happen. I can't see how it won't happen, I mean, these are man-made structures. There's no guarantee that those things are going to maintain their integrity forever.[1]

The fact that our community has had to rely on man-made structures as a solution to a problem created by humanity is disturbing to many community members. Of course, technology has improved since the spills of the mid-twentieth century, but it does not have the ability to return the Serpent's home to its original state and still holds the key to further destruction.

Gertrude commented that the legacy of uranium continues to be "the pollution that they left behind. That's the biggest thing." Her primary goal for the community is to "get the acid plant cleaned up really well! And not to have to worry about it in another twenty or thirty years. I won't be around. At least the young people should have someplace to call home."[2] The concept of homeland, one that is viable for generations to come, is at the forefront of her mind when asked what the community's priorities should be. The teaching of the Seven Generations has become one of the most vital since the pollution brought by the uranium industry nearly cost us our homeland. It also underscores her concept of community

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[1] Interview with Peter Johnston, 7 July 2009, SRFN.

[2] Interview with Gertrude Lewis, 22 February 2008, SRFN.

responsibility: Gertrude was politically and socially involved in these struggles and wants to ensure that the homeland will be around for future generations once she is gone. Terry echoed this sentiment of concern for the land: "as far as reclamation was concerned, that's the part we're concerned about."[3] It is clear that community elders do not want to have to be concerned that there will be yet another political negotiation to stall a proper reclamation process. They want the land returned to the community in a good way and to be able to move forward as a nation.

Betty Jacobs recalled rapid and extensive change brought by the plant and the mines: "a lot of big changes, eh? It felt like a big change."[4] Arnelda Jacobs described the rapid changes brought by the wage economy, however short-lived, in the ways the community interacted with the land and with each other. These changes were more than economic – they also changed the social relations surrounding community gardening, fishing, hunting, and living with the land in general.[5] There were, of course, people who lost family members as a result of the acid plant and mining operations. Valerie Commanda not only lost her spouse, but she also had to go through a decade of struggle before it was acknowledged that his occupation contributed to his death.[6]

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[3] Interview with Terry and Betty Jacobs, 8 December 2008, SRFN.

[4] Interview with Terry and Betty Jacobs, 8 December 2008, SRFN.

[5] Interview with Arnelda Jacobs, 8 July 2009, SRFN.

[6] Interview with Valerie Commanda, 7 July 2009, SRFN.

This sense of profound loss underscores the fact that the uranium industry brought fundamental changes to the community and to the environment: steady wage jobs, the depletion of resources that had been used and protected for years, and the subsequent reliance on store-bought goods. It also brought with it death and disease, which, if one believes in the teaching of the Serpent, can be seen as a consequence of disturbing it with pollution.

SRFN's struggle with reclamation of the acid plant site did not end in 1988. It has since become clear that the water and bottom of Aird Bay continue to pollute the site. Although $6 million was spent removing the debris from the reserve and containing it with lime, it was not just the debris that was posing an obstacle to reclamation. In the fall of 2009, Chief Isadore Day and SRFN filed a specific land claim to address the need for compensation for continued contamination of the Cutler Acid Site. Chief and Council took four years to prepare the claim, along with the support of the Union of Ontario Indians. Clearly the process is far from over.

The Cold War brought a new atomic imperative to the country, and while this dissertation is a local study of the effects this new economy had on the Indigenous people of the area, it is also important to locate it within its larger international and national context. The lucrative and short-lived uranium contract with the United States would have the power to both create and destroy the livelihoods of settler families who travelled to the area to live and work. In an effort to avoid the ghost towns that populated some areas of northern Ontario, it was decided that a modern town site would be "carved from the rock," a phrase indicative of a local settler memory celebrating man's manipulation and victory over natural resources. This

image serves to commemorate a particular way of seeing the world and its resources: for settlers, the rock was key to an important resource. It brought prosperity at some points and worry at others, but here the rock is seen as both the foundation of and impediment to development in the area. The rock was what housed uranium and thus needed to be disturbed and manipulated.

This narrative excludes the First Nations in the area, both in terms of the relationships between the two peoples, and in terms of Anishinaabe worldview that differs when it comes to interacting with the land. The historical and contemporary interactions between the two communities are largely ignored, with the exception of a quick nod to the original inhabitants prior to contact and the fur trade before moving on to the central narrative and thus "more important" history of the area. For SRFN, Rooster Rock in particular continues to be a sacred site, regardless of what has been carved from it and the legacy brought by mining.

What is clear from Chapter II is that the establishment of the community would be anything but the work of independent self-made men. In actual fact, the town came to fruition through careful planning and the tripartite relationship between mining companies, the federal government, and the Province of Ontario. The town's boom-bust history would prove that although uranium mining was at the will of the international market, it would be the government's responsibility to ensure that there would be stockpiling and mortgage schemes to assist where economic forces could not.

Chapter III examines one aspect of SRFN's involvement in the uranium industry that is not often acknowledged as being an intimate part of the area's

mining history. The acid plant was presented to the community in 1955 by DIA as a way to diminish the economic disparity that was apparent as more non-Indigenous people moved into the area in search of jobs in the uranium industry. The environmental effects of such a project were not disclosed, and the community was denied their request for independent legal consultation, as DIA paternalistically told them that its lawyers would be all that the community needed. The jobs were fleeting, but the legacy of the acid plant was not.

The plant closed in 1963, but it would stand abandoned near the village and in full view of the highway. As the tourism industry became more of a concern, the government decided that it was now time to take care of the buildings. DIA, in partnership with the Department of National Defence, launched "Operation Serpent Powder," which served to demolish the structures, but in doing so spread pollution throughout the site, rendering it more harmful than it had been before. Rosalie Bertell's study indicated the health concerns posed by the plant when it was in operation, as well as the unreclaimed site: occupational disease and hazards for former employees, ear and skin infections in children, as well as other conditions for community residents. After two decades of struggle, the plant underwent yet another reclamation process, and community members now consider any development in the community very carefully, as it has learned a very costly lesson in economic development under colonial rule.

As for the river and the Serpent for which it is named, the legacy of uranium changed its ability to care for the community and for the community's ability to interact with the land as its members once had. No longer could drinking water be

safely taken from the river. The traditional pursuits of hunting and fishing changed as people were asked to do so with caution. As for the government of Ontario, it undertook several studies through the Ontario Water Resources Commission, held countless meetings, but always failed to consult the original stewards in a comprehensive or meaningful way. Perhaps if they had, some of their conclusions could have been avoided, along with some degree of destruction. Although the Ontario Water Resources Commission had been monitoring the water since the late 1950s, it failed to adequately warn SRFN community members of the dangers in the system until two decades later.

As colonial relationships changed throughout the twentieth century, and the legacies of uranium became more apparent and long-lasting, SRFN leaders grew ever more assertive in demanding that their concerns be heard. Lobbying the Environmental Assessment Board hearings in the late 1970s was a political and conscious act of dissent against rapid and thoughtless mining development. Asking for assistance from the National Indian Brotherhood marked another act of political consciousness: the NIB was decidedly *not* DIA and was willing and able to assist in demanding a voice at the negotiating table. And negotiating was what these community leaders did for the better part of the 1970s and 1980s. Whether it was to question two-fold expansion of uranium production at Elliot Lake, or to attend meetings in Toronto or Ottawa, or to threaten to block the highway if DIA continued to impede a clean-up process of the acid site, SRFN community members resorted to creative means of getting their message across.

This has been a study in colonialism in the context of the Cold War. It challenges the idea that Canada is in a post-colonial period, as well as the assumptions that surround that view. Environmental degradation as a result of industrial economic development is not a new story in Canada, nor is SRFN the only First Nations community to have suffered as a result of it. The choices made by the Serpent River First Nation were shaped by paternalistic colonial circumstances that continue to have a presence in the community. They were shaped by a dominant power that privileged economic gain and a narrow view of resource development that clashed with one that views the social relationship with the environment in a holistic manner. Mining practices and containment technology have improved since the mid-1950s, and Denison Environmental is now overseeing a monitoring program to ensure the viability of the river system.[7] The company has changed its focus from uranium extraction to responsible and transparent stewardship, and SFRN leadership has worked collaboratively with the company to oversee joint stewardship of the watershed. It marks a departure from when this stage of the Indigenous-settler relationship began, and it demonstrates the power of asserting and renewing the role of TEK in the community's interactions with resources and the larger environment. Responsible and accountable resource development

[7] For more information about the decommissioning and monitoring aspects of the work being done by Denison Environmental, see Denison Environmental Services, http://www.denisonenvironmental.com/ (accessed 27 February 2011).

depends upon the assertion of the Anishinaabe worldview that privileges stewardship and TEK.

CHAPTER VII

EPILOGUE AND REFLECTION

> *We are a people to whom understanding and knowledge comes by way of relationships - with the Creator, the past, the present, the future, life around us, each other, and within ourselves. And, like my ancestors, I am here on this earth to learn.*[1]

Winona Wheeler's words have particular resonance for academic research conducted in Aboriginal communities. As an *Anishinabe kwe*, I have embraced community-based approaches in my own work, as they hold a great deal of promise

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[1] Winona Wheeler, "Reflections on the Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories," *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations*, eds. Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 190.

for new avenues of historical research into environmental topics and themes. By practicing community-based history, I have been able to reflect on historical methodologies, as well as on my own growth as a scholar and as a community member. Furthermore, the sharing of oral traditions that convey Traditional Ecological Knowledge [TEK] and environmental history not only provide promising avenues for research, but they often help revitalize community relations and traditions.

In recent years, non-Indigenous scholars such as Julie Cruikshank, Jean-Guy Goulet, and Nancy Wachowich have written about aspects of the research process and their conversations with Aboriginal peoples.[2] It is perhaps no surprise that

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[2] See Julie Cruikshank, Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith and Annie Ned, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Elders* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) and *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). Jean-Guy Goulet's method of radical participation is outlined in *Ways of Knowing: Experience, Knowledge, and Power Among the Dene Tha* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998). See also Nancy Wachowich in collaboration with Apphia Agalakti Awa, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak and Sandra Pikujak Katsak, *Saqiyuq: Stories From the Lives of Three Inuit Women* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999). Kira Van Deusen examines Inuit storytelling in *Kiviuq: An Inuit Hero and His Siberian Cousins* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009). See also John Lutz and Barbara Neis, eds., *Making and Moving Knowledge: Interdisciplinary and Community Based Research in a World on the Edge* (Montreal:

methods and processes of community collaboration have come from the discipline of anthropology, but they have become more relevant to the practice of respectful and informative Aboriginal history. Aboriginal scholars from within the community and non-Aboriginals from beyond the community face fundamentally different issues in negotiating the research process.[3]

McGill-Queens University Press, 2008); R. Jarvis Brownlie, "First Nations Perspectives and Historical Thinking in Canada," in Annis May Timpson, ed., *First Nations, First Thoughts - New Challenges* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 21–50. See also Cruikshank, Julie. "Oral History, Narrative Strategies, and Native American Historiography: Perspectives from the Yukon Territory, Canada" in *Clearing A Path: Theorizing the Past in Native American Studies*, edited by Nancy Shoemaker. New York: Routledge, 2002.

[3] See Winona Wheeler, "Reflections on the Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories" in *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations,* eds. Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 189-214 and "The Journals and Voices of a Church of England Native Catechist: Askenootow (Charles Pratt), 1851-1884" in *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History,* eds. Jennifer S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), 237-62. See also Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1999), 140: "The research community has a number of terms which are used to good effect as exclusionary devices to dismiss the challenges made

In examining the history of the North Shore uranium industry and the links between First Nations people and settlers, I have had the opportunity to reflect upon my own work and my own connections to those communities. This dissertation is a way for me to acknowledge my community's sense of loss, and I have done so through the use of archival and newspaper sources. The most

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from the outside fold. Research can be judged as 'not rigorous', 'not robust', 'not real', 'not theorized', 'not valid', 'not reliable'. Sound conceptual understandings can falter when the research design is considered flawed. While researchers are trained to conform to the models provided for them, indigenous researchers have to meet these criteria as well as indigenous criteria which can judge research 'not useful', 'not indigenous', 'not friendly', 'not just'. Reconciling such views can be difficult. The indigenous agenda challenges indigenous researchers to work across these boundaries. It is a challenge which provides a focus and direction which helps in thinking through the complexities of indigenous research. At the same time the process is evolving as researchers working in this field dialogue and collaborate on shared concerns." See also Robert A. Innes, "Wait a Second. Who are you Anyways?: The Insider/Outsider Debate and American Indian Studies" *American Indian Quarterly* 33 no. 4 (Fall 2009): 440-61. Innes examines his own relationship to his community as an insider/outsider and argues that the debate surrounding this dynamic can be helpful for First Nations scholars examining historical issues at home and that First Nations studies is a discipline that can contribute to the larger discussion on the topic.

rewarding aspect of my methodology, however, has been the oral interviews I was able to participate in with my elders. As will be discussed in this methodological reflection, the process of returning home and balancing the role of academic historian and community member can be challenging, but it is most definitely enriching.

This methodological chapter reflects on my own experiences in conducting historical research on the Serpent River First Nation, of which I am also a member. This project has allowed me to better reconcile the relationship between my academic pursuits and the *Anishinabek* system of understanding that is inherently formed by our relationships with family and community, as well as by our collective sense of place and history. However, there is also tension between my position as a scholar and my role as a community member. Indigenous research "at home" raises some important questions about the insider/outsider dynamic: what happens when an Aboriginal academic completes the sometimes gruelling, complicated, and (as will be discussed in this essay) culturally inappropriate university ethics process and finally gets to begin her research? How do community perceptions and relationships influence the process of collecting oral histories according to non-Aboriginal academic standards?[4]

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[4] An example of the complexities of being both a community insider an academic is Charles R. Menzies, "Stories from Home: First Nations, Land Claims and Euro-Canadians" *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 4 (November 1994): 776-91. He describes his background in a fishing family and his ties to home: "Unlike the 'outsider' anthropologist, whose leave-taking has a note of finality to it, my leave-

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The legacy of the acid plant is still present, and SRFN's struggle with reclamation of the site did not end in 1988. It has since become clear that the water and bed of Aird Bay continue to pollute the site. Comprehending the present-day political situation means understanding the personal experiences shaped by the health and environmental impacts of industrialization. Nearly all of those interviewed correlate the health of the community with the health of land and animals, and speak about the endangerment of traditional practices. But it is important to note that the community has revitalized past practices as much as possible, due in no small part to continuing dialogue and oral traditions. A renewed sense of history and heritage has contributed to fostering community relations, particularly between elders and youth, through ceremonies and celebrations. Many residents are still concerned about the uranium tailings dammed upstream near Elliot Lake, and there continue to be ongoing political processes to reclaim the land, but people continue to fish and hunt where possible and share their resources with elders. In working with community members, it is readily apparent that

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taking has always been temporary. I am tied by my family into the life of the west-coast fishery. Each summer I end my sojourn in the metropolis and return home to fish." (787). See also Charles R. Menzies, "Reflections on Research With, for, and Among Indigenous Peoples" *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25, no. 1 (2001): 19-36.

remembering and retelling history continues to be a significant form of social and political interaction, while fostering the relationships through which we learn. Moreover, I recognize how these interviews have influenced me in more ways than merely a researcher wanting to learn more: I have become part of that process whereby the past renews the present.

Oral history is used in different ways by different types of historians reflecting larger methodological variations and assumptions from one field to another. Military historians, for example, have used oral history to simply provide background context for what they see as their larger goal: to reconstruct in small detail, the movements of military personnel and the battles in which they were involved. As Terry Copp has reflected, "the memories of veterans are frequently unreliable on specifics. What comes across best in interviews are impressions, attitudes, stories of friendship, of admiration, of regret. These recollections provide information and insight, which, if carefully used in conjunction with the written record, can prove invaluable."[5] It is thus not his intention to have oral history stand

[5] Terry Copp, *The Brigade: The Fifth Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1939-1945* (Stoney Creek: Fortress Publications, 1992), ii. For a more thorough methodological reflection on how military historians use oral history see Edward M. Coffman, "Talking about War: Reflections on Doing Oral History and Military History," *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (2000): 582-92. G. Kurt Piehler offers a critique of how oral history with veterans distorted interpretations of the Second World War in "Veterans Tell Their Stories and Why Historians and Others Listened," in *The United States and the Second World War: New Perspectives on*

on its own, nor does he see it as being as "reliable" or "truthful" as the written record. Oral history in this sense is used to add colour and indeed, it is seen as having the potential to complicate the narrative unnecessarily should the interviews conflict with documentary evidence.[6]

Social historians, on the other hand, have used oral history to examine the personal experiences of disempowered people and have subsequently helped develop class, ethnicity, and gender as categories of scholarly analysis. The inclusion of oral history is thus a political choice, and as Joan Sangster has written, "We need to avoid the tendency, still evident in historical works, of treating oral history only as a panacea designed to fill in the blanks in women's or traditional history, providing 'more' history, compensating where we have no other sources, or 'better' history, a 'purer' version of the past coming, unadulterated, from the very

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Diplomacy, War, and the Home Front, G. Kurt Piehler and Sidney Pash, eds. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 216-235.

[6] Alessandro Portelli argued that the very things that are criticized about oral history – its subjective nature and questionable credibility – are its strengths. "What Makes Oral History Different" in *The Oral History Reader*, Second Edition, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 32-42.

people who experienced it."[7] There have been several works that concern themselves with the gendered ways Canadians experienced the Great Depression, for example, and oral history has been a way for historians to examine the experiences of women during this difficult period. Feminist historians such as Katrina Srgiley, Lara Campbell and Denyse Baillargeon have embarked on the process of conducting or using participant interviews in order to analyze the impact on the Depression on women in Canada.[8] While the use of oral sources and methodologies for historians of class and gender has provided their respective subfields with more nuanced and inclusive narratives, oral traditions in Indigenous communities have added layers of complexity.

In the Indigenous context, the role of storytelling in the retention of community history and culture cannot be overstated. Not only is storytelling our traditional method of sharing information, but it is also an important way for

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[7] Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History" in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 88. 87-100.

[8] Katrina Srigley, *Breadwinning Daughters: Young Working Women in a Depression-Era City*, 1929-39 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Lara Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario's Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Denyse Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family and Home in Montreal During the Great Depression* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999).

Indigenous peoples to be active participants and recognized experts in academic research. The interviews described above have been invaluable to my dissertation research, and give a strong sense of rapid change in the community, as well as significant loss of resources. The history conveyed through these conversations is that of lived experience formed by the community's relationship with the environment, mining companies, and the government. These themes are central to the community's history and define what it means to be a member of the Serpent River First Nation. As a child, I remember wondering why my *Nookomis*—that is, my grandmother—Gertrude Lewis, had a photograph of the acid plant on her bedroom wall. For her and many other elders, the acid plant is a complex but inescapably central element of their personal narratives. For *Nookomis*, it was where her husband worked and a source of income; it was the cause of community devastation; and it symbolized more than half a century of community struggle and political activism. She continues to speak with pride about her role as a community leader and a mother in this history.

It is therefore not surprising that many of the community leaders and protesters who spearheaded efforts to decommission the acid site properly were women. At the time, Loreena Lewis was chief and Gertrude Lewis a councillor. They and other community women were active in making formal complaints, meeting with mining and government officials, and organizing protests. They made presentations to the Environmental Assessment Board when there were plans to

expand mining operations at Elliot Lake in the 1970s.[9] Chief Lewis corresponded with government officials regarding water quality on the reserve.[10] Both Chief Lewis and Gertrude Lewis toured the tailings ponds, despite warnings against doing so. They witnessed firsthand the problems with fish and wildlife in the region, as they came across animal carcasses throughout the tailings area they toured.[11] While the female elders I interviewed retold their stories as community members and mothers, the documents and reports written at the time indicate that some of them also operated as respected leaders in the public sphere. Their motivations for running for political office were linked very strongly to their roles as community members and as women.

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[9] Gertrude Lewis made a presentation to the Environmental Assessment Board, which evaluated the possibility of expanding mining operations in the area. "Chief Accuses Mines of 'Wrecking River System,'" *Sault Star*, 4 August 1977, 12. Although the article refers to her as the chief, she was there as a councillor and a representative of the community.

[10] Archives of Ontario, RG 12-45, B141785, "Serpent River." See also Rekmans, Lewis and Dwyer, eds., particularly the section entitled, "I wanted to be Chief because I wanted to be there for the people. But those council women really made me work," 91-96.

[11] Ibid, 92. This story was also told during my interview with Gertrude Lewis.

My first interview, therefore, was with Mrs. Gertrude Lewis - *Nookomis.*[12] I did not expect this to be an easy task; I defer to her not only because of her status as a participant, elder, and community member, but also because she is our family's matriarch. This familiarity simultaneously helped in approaching her for the interview and made questioning her more awkward. The informal conversations we had always enjoyed were now to be modified by a microphone and a consent form. I had always sought to learn from her as an *Anishinabe kwe*; now I would be learning as a scholar. As Dakota oral historian Angela Cavender Wilson has stated, "the intimate hours I spent with my grandmother listening to her stories are reflections of more than a simple education process. The stories handed down from grandmother to granddaughter are rooted in a deep sense of kinship responsibility, a responsibility that relays a culture, an identity, and a sense of belonging essential to my life."[13] That sense of personal responsibility was heightened by my awareness that I now also had a professional responsibility.

It is not uncommon for participant interviews with Aboriginal people to take the form of more informal conversations than highly-structured question and

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[12] For another example of the collaborative process and the grandmother-granddaughter relationship, see Stacey Zembrzycki, "Sharing Authority with Baba," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 219-38.

[13] "Grandmother to Granddaughter: Generations of Dakota Family," *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing About American Indians*, ed. Devon A. Mihesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 27.

answer sessions. Besides being culturally-appropriate, this helps in a practical sense to put the participant more at ease with the process. My grandmother's kitchen table—with Happy the dog trying to jump on my lap, and visitors coming in and out—was the setting for my first interview.

My grandmother began with expressions of reservation about using the tape recorder and the idea of transcription. This is perhaps not that surprising, given the unfortunate history of academic research in Aboriginal communities before collaboration was even a consideration for most scholars. Her hesitation stemmed from how my need to record the conversation differed from the way that traditional knowledge is usually passed on within the community. It did not help that my tape recorder is a large, imposing black audio-cassette recorder. Also, I quickly learned that *Nookomis* does not like the sound of her voice on tape and did not want it to be heard by others.

Indeed, her concern with the tape recorder was a troubling aspect of my interview experience. The fact that I needed to respect my grandmother's wishes both as her granddaughter and as a researcher meant that I had to adapt my preferred method of gathering historical evidence to accepted kin and community expectations. At one point, *Nookomis* asked that I turn off the tape recorder, and I, of course, complied. She was speaking about a difference in leadership between men and women in the 1970s and 1980s and chose not to be quoted on the record about her thoughts on the matter. However, she had little concern about being recorded while criticizing the present community leadership. This reflects her status as an

elder, as she has not shied away from making these criticisms known in the community.

My grandmother also expressed concerns about her interview transcription. She worried about the inclusion of hesitations, inelegancies of speech, or even emotional reactions—including laughter. Native humour is known for seeming to make light of serious situations, and her telling of environmental and health threats faced by the Serpent River First Nation was no exception.[14] Speaking about an interview experience she had with a previous researcher, Grandma outlined her annoyance that the transcription insertions "[laughter]" or "[giggle]" suggested she did not take the situation seriously: "I don't know if [the researcher] ever did put it in the library, 'cause I just asked that the giggles be taken out of it. It didn't sound too serious you know, because I mean we were serious about this contamination of our area, eh? We were really serious: it was no laughing matter to us. But talking

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[14] For more on Aboriginal humour, see Roger Spielmann, *'You're So Fat!': Exploring Ojibwe Discourse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) especially "'What's So Funny?': Humour, Laughter, and Teasing in Ojibwe Storytelling," 107-28. Drew Hayden Taylor examines non-Aboriginal responses to Aboriginal humour in "Seeing Red: The Stoic Whiteman and Non-Native Humour," *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal Peoples and their Representations*, eds. Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 21-8. See also Drew Hayden Taylor ed., *Me Funny* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005) and the works of Thomas King.

about it, there were too many giggles."[15] I had to promise to exclude such notations in the transcription, because our interview—bonded by family—contained a great deal of laughter and humour. The points at which she laughed have been noted below only to demonstrate this point about Aboriginal humour and the interview process, but they have been removed from the transcript in accordance with her wishes.

At the beginning of the interview, *Nookomis* told of sending her children to swim in the Serpent River because the water ran clear, while the water in the bay on Lake Huron where they used to swim was visibly contaminated:

> We thought the water was so dirty down here and they were breaking out, you know they had sores on them so instead of swimming there they went up to the Serpent River and the Serpent River was nice and clear [laughter] and we thought, oh, they're safe up there [laughter]. I used to drive them up the back of that road down the hill here and drop them off - there was a bridge back there. And they'd all go swimming there and here we found that there was radium 226 in that river! We weren't supposed to use that water at all! [laughter][16]

The memory of one's children swimming in a contaminated river was not comical, yet the absurdity of the situation made the interview subject—and the

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[15] Gertrude Lewis, interview with the author, Serpent River First Nation, 22 February 2008.

[16] Ibid.

interviewer—laugh. Although it was clear throughout the interview that *Nookomis* was deeply upset about the contamination and the government's unwillingness to address the problem, she sometimes communicated her feelings through humour.

Overall, my close kin relationship with the community's historical political structure assisted my research; to my surprise, in turn it also deepened my experience as a band member. Most striking throughout the interview process was the willingness for community members to share their personal experiences with me. They spoke as elders, family members, and fellow stakeholders in our community's future. They spoke not as subjects to be studied, but as respected community leaders with valuable historical knowledge. The level of trust they demonstrated by sharing their words, experiences and expertise was profoundly humbling as both a scholar and a community member. They entrusted me to represent their experiences faithfully, to give them credit for their expertise, and to share their stories with a wider audience. This is a great deal of responsibility for an historian and a community member, as I am accountable for how I relay their knowledge and our community's history to the academic community and, hopefully, to a wider audience. This was a much more powerful relationship than the one given structure in the two-page consent form. In fact, despite my entreaties, few interview subjects read the form carefully. As one elder stated as he signed the form: "I trust you."

Another powerful and unexpected aspect of the oral history experience was the possibility of protecting our community's cultural resources. The oral traditions that were passed on through my dissertation research—and certainly the TEK

shared throughout the learning process—were instrumental in my development as a community member. These interviews demonstrate an important aspect of our community and culture in general, and I hope that other youth and young adults will continue to ask questions of our elders and protect the valuable knowledge and relationships that we have. In terms of my own role in this process, I will be depositing both the transcriptions and digital copies of the interviews of consenting participants in our library for the future use and enjoyment of the community.

This process has also made me more aware of the need to change some university processes to increase collaboration between Aboriginal academics and First Nations communities. One of the most glaring examples is the need for ethical research processes to take the insider/outsider dynamic as well as cultural differences into account. The university ethical research process is an important and necessary way to ensure that scholars comply with accepted research practices and to protect vulnerable groups from mistreatment. Yet the process does not take culturally-specific Aboriginal protocols into account and therefore makes historical research in Aboriginal communities more difficult when the researcher is herself Indigenous. The very act of identifying subjects as part of a "vulnerable group," which subsequently steers the ethics process, assumes an otherness on the part of the researcher. It is thus a process which hinges on the assumption that the researcher is an outsider to that group. But this is not always the case. When the researcher is an Aboriginal person, the ethics process serves to complicate the negotiation of insider/outsider status, and renders the relationship between his or

her role as an academic and community member even more complex than it is already.

At the same time, the actual methodologies of conducting ethical oral history are further problematized by the insider/outsider dynamic. At the beginning of the interview process, it is necessary for the scholar to present a consent form to the interviewee in order to protect that individual's rights and to clearly define the ways in which their personal histories can be used by the interviewer in their own research. Yet the consent form's legalistic language proved to be very daunting for First Nations participants to read, all of whom had varying levels of non-Aboriginal education. This is, of course, a problem which confronts researchers working with many vulnerable groups from various socio-economic, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Yet the process is most complex for the Aboriginal historian working on her or his own community. In my case, in order to foster understanding and to ensure that my interviewees understood their rights and my obligations to them, I endeavoured to verbally explain terms like "risk and your rights," "loss of privacy," "publication," and "confidentiality." Yet these terms and headings are complex concepts which are often inconsistent with Aboriginal ways of knowing. As these terms were often foreign to their experiences and knowledge, the interviewees looked to me as a *community member*—rather than an outside scholar—to interpret their meaning. The trust, for example, that the aforementioned elder demonstrated when he signed the form was based on his familiarity with me in my role as a community member and was not predicated on my academic credentials or his knowledge of my adherence to university ethical research processes. While I am

honoured as a community member to be trusted by my elders, I am nevertheless concerned by the ethical implications raised by these interactions.

The concept of free and informed consent is an important part of the ethical research process; consent must always be obtained to protect the interests of both parties to the interview. But the lengthy written document—verbose and legalistic—was useless to this purpose in an interaction between two Aboriginal community members who each have culturally-specific ways of safeguarding trust, especially as one depended upon the other for comprehension. The fact that I was interviewing mostly elders added another level of complexity: while they are the people who hold the most community knowledge and history, I had to identify my university credentials and role as a researcher, which had no bearing on my role as a community member. I was there to learn from the elders' expertise rather than the other way around. Our ways of knowing are dependent upon our experiences and traditional relationships, but I also had to ask about things I had read in books, articles, and archival documents written mostly by non-*Anishinabe* people. Thus, in some cases where interviewees signed the form out of trust and a verbal interaction rather than through an understanding of the written text, the actual form itself did not fulfill its role—the existing community relationship and the ethical duties that define it took the place of any written consent in the mind of some of the interviewees. Some scholars have already recognized the need to incorporate oral consent, where appropriate, into accepted university research ethics practices, as

this is more consistent with how First Nations people learn and communicate.[17] It will thus safeguard this particular "vulnerable population" more effectively and respectfully.

The university Research Ethics Board [REB] process did not align well with Aboriginal practice in other ways. For example, I attempted to follow the commonly accepted Indigenous protocol of giving tobacco and a small cash payment to elders in recognition of their expertise and gift of time. However, the REB, although well-intentioned, was concerned about the amount of money involved and the prospect that payment might skew participation. In practice, rather than encouraging people to come forward and thus skewing participation, the honorarium was a pleasant surprise to those who had taken the time to share their knowledge with me. In order to demonstrate to the REB that this practice was not done to manipulate or unduly encourage participation, but was in fact a specific social protocol that I was expected to fulfill as a community member seeking knowledge, I clarified the cultural importance of the practice through additional communications. In other words, I had to position myself more clearly as a community member with the additional role as researcher.

The university ethics process would benefit from cross-cultural policy building.[18] The process of conducting ethical research is extremely important, and

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[17] Carolyn Ells and Shawna Gutfreund, "Myths about Qualitative Research and the *Tri-Council Policy Statement" Canadian Journal of Sociology/ Cahiers Canadiens de sociologie* 31, no. 3 (2006): 361-73.

[18] There are other scholars who are making the same call for enhancements to existing research relationships. Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, "the research approach has to address seriously, the cultural ground rules of respect, of working with communities, of sharing processes and knowledge," 191. In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples made recommendations for embracing and acknowledging Aboriginal historical models when addressing the cross-cultural relationship. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples *Volume 1 - Looking Forward Looking Back*, "Chapter 3 - Conceptions of History"; "Appendix A: Summary of Recommendations Volumes 1-5," and in particular, recommendations 1.7.1 and 1.7.2. See also "Appendix E: Ethical Guidelines for Research." RCAP, *Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples*, http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/rrc-eng.asp <accessed 20 October 2009>. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada has made Aboriginal research a strategic priority and a discussion paper acknowledges the importance of Indigenous perspectives: "Aboriginal research is more a method of study than an area of study. In its emerging conception, 'Aboriginal research' is research that derives its dynamic from traditions of thought and experience developed among and in partnership with Aboriginal nations in Canada and other parts of the world." SSHRC and Craig McNaughton and Daryl Rock, "Opportunities in Aboriginal Research: Results of SSHRC's Dialogue on Research and Aboriginal Peoples," unpublished paper, SSHRC, October 2003, http://www.sshrc.ca/SITE/apply-demande/background-renseignements/aboriginal_backgrounder_e.pdf <accessed 20 October 2009>.

is essential to building bridges between Aboriginal communities and the academy. It is also essential, however, to ensure that the process is not so formal as to be intimidating to Aboriginal participants.[19] It should also be more aware of the fact

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Although the Tri-Council Policy Statement for ethical research with Aboriginal groups states that it had not had the opportunity to consult Aboriginal stakeholders and therefore had not crafted a formal policy, it instead offers best practices based on the literature in the area. A clear policy for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars alike is necessary to accommodate cross-cultural research and collaboration. This should be based on consultation with scholars and Aboriginal communities in order to best address this issue. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans,* 1998 (with 2000, 2002, 2005 amendments) http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/tcps-eptc/ <accessed 20 October 2009>. See page 6.1.

[19] More and more Indigenous communities are taking control over the research that is conducted within their populations. It is now customary to contact Chief and Council to secure their support before proceeding with participant interviews and other research. Some also have an application process for researchers to complete prior to granting a band council resolution. See, for example, *Guidelines for Ethical Aboriginal Research*, or GEAR, a model developed by stakeholders in Aboriginal communities on Manitoulin Island: Research Review Committee, "Guidelines for

that as more and more Indigenous scholars conduct work in their own communities, the needs being served by such policies are rapidly changing and so too should these practices. We have our own methodologies and ethical practices that are intimately tied to our social roles and expectations. Just as there have been calls to broaden accepted scholarly methodologies to incorporate Indigenous paradigms, the research ethics process should be more willing to do the same.[20]

The relationship between researcher and community member was not only complicated by the REB process, but also by potential clashes between my two roles. As a community and family member, I had grown up with the legacy of uranium exploitation and the acid plant and as a result was very aware of this history. I had expected to find that the Department of Indian Affairs had forced the establishment of the acid plant on the community. Through the interview process, I found that this does not seem to be the whole story. There is no doubt that there was a lack of transparency that resulted in the community being left with a legacy of poison; however, the story is not as black and white as I had anticipated. Instead, there

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Ethical Aboriginal Research" Noojmowin Teg Health Centre website, http://www.noojmowin-teg.ca/default5.aspx?l=,1,613 <accessed 10 October 2009>. Although this is a health research model for Aboriginal communities, it has relevance for researchers in other fields.

[20] Kathleen Absolon's dissertation discusses Indigenous methodologies and ethical practices at length. "*Kaandosswin*, This is How We Come to Know! Indigenous Graduate Research in the Academy: Worldviews and Methodologies," 2008.

were several meetings held in the community where people were consulted about the possibility of establishing the plant there. All but a few people were in favour, as it meant economic development for the area and tangible incomes for a population that needed them badly.[21]

However, this does not change the end result—that the community had requested independent legal representation, which was denied them by Indian Affairs, who instead assured them that the Department's own lawyers would suffice. As a result of this uneven relationship, the community then had to wait for decades for the site to be decommissioned. Certainly, community members could not have foreseen the extent of the damage that would occur, and at the very beginning actually welcomed the mine as an economic development opportunity. It is not surprising that growing Aboriginal families, surrounded by economic boom in non-Aboriginal communities, sought jobs. It does not indicate consent for long-term environmental destruction and health consequences, nor does it change the fact that the federal government failed in its fiduciary duty to the community for decades in forcing us to wait so long to reclaim the land. In fact, the land remains unclaimed. The interview process and research relationships have been a benefit to me personally as a community member, but at the same time, they have also forced me to confront my own assumptions as a researcher. This was an important lesson, and

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[21] Gertrude Lewis, interview with the author, Serpent River First Nation, 22 February 2008; Terry and Betty Jacobs, interview with the author, Serpent River First Nation, 8 December 2008.

it has prepared me for other surprises I may encounter as I conduct more participant interviews and archival research. Scholars of Aboriginal history have debated the victim/actor dichotomy in recent years,[22] and as more work is done it will become more apparent that this is a gray area. In fact, a dichotomous view of Aboriginal history is becoming an inadequate framework to examine such questions. Oral history provides the meaningful opportunity to see beyond the contentious issue itself and shed light on the personal lived experiences and relationships that are the foundation of our understanding of the world.

As more Indigenous people conduct academic research in their communities—and thus choose topics that have tremendous personal meaning—we will continue to negotiate our roles as scholars and community members. Kin and community ties will continue to play a role in research conducted by Indigenous scholars, and more of us are incorporating Indigenous methodologies such as oral traditions into our work and demanding academic recognition of them. Our ways of knowing are defined by our relationships and personal experiences, which is why the practice of oral history can be integrated with our systems of learning. That

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[22] A well-known example of this debate is J.R. Miller, "Owen Glendower, Hotspur and Canadian Indian Policy," *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 323-52; and R. Jarvis Brownlie and Mary Ellen Kelm, "Desperately Seeking Absolution: Native Agency as Colonialist Alibi?" *Canadian Historical Review*, 75, no. 4 (1994): 543-56.

said, blending academic practices and Indigenous knowledge is not always easy. It can be challenging to juggle scholarly expectations with community roles and responsibilities, but that negotiation possesses a great deal of promise as well. The role of community member can enhance the academic experience, as one's community may provide support, enthusiasm, and encouragement for community-based research. Indigenous methodologies can enrich historical and cultural understanding for both the individual researcher and the academy. Non-Aboriginal researchers conducting oral history in First Nations communities will no doubt experience the research relationship differently than their Indigenous counterparts, and it would serve them well to try to understand First Nations protocols and expectations. Finally, as more First Nations scholars undertake this path of learning and research within our own communities, there is the chance to rebuild a long-lost trust between Indigenous communities and the academy. For the Indigenous researcher and community member, the responsibility of seeking greater understanding and incorporating oral traditions is a necessary part of decolonizing the academy. On a personal level, I will continue to record these conversations at kitchen tables when given the opportunity, and I expect to share much more laughter with *Nookomis* in the process. Perhaps most importantly, I will continue to negotiate my roles as daughter, granddaughter, auntie, niece, cousin, community member, and academic historian.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

Chi miigwetch to the following Serpent River First Nation elders for sharing their experiences with me, both at the dissertation stage and when I was growing up. Their willingness to share their knowledge has enabled new generations of community members to share in our rich history, a pursuit I have cherished long before my university days. It is through their stories and wisdom that we can have a better understanding of ourselves as a community and as a people.

Mrs. Valerie Commanda

Valerie Commanda is an elder in the community who has suffered the loss of her spouse as a result of mining and acid operations. Her husband, Wilfred, died of workplace-related lung cancer as a result of his employment at the acid plant and in

Elliot Lake mines. She fought a decade-long battle to have the link between his occupation and his death recognized.

Mrs. Arnelda Jacobs

Arnelda Jacobs lives across the highway from my Grandmother in SRFN. I remember her sharing stories and community history with us at Stockwater Bay when I was a little girl. Her knowledge of the Serpent, our traditions, our culture, and our history continues to enrich each generation. In the 1980s, she was a youth intervention worker to raise awareness and prevent substance abuse. She has worked to teach traditional arts and crafts, and also served on council.

Mr. Terry and Mrs. Betty Jacobs

Betty and Terry married in the 1950s and before moving to Toronto, he worked in the acid plant and in the mines. They came back to the community and Betty worked as the co-ordinator of Geka Wiigwam (the elders' home) until her recent retirement. Terry was a SRFN councillor for many years, and both were involved in the Environmental Assessment Board hearings.

Mr. Peter Johnston

Peter worked at both the acid plant and at Rio Algom throughout his career. He was Chief from 1969-1973 and again from 1977-1983. In addition to that, he has served band manager, and is an active member of the Our Lady of the Highway

Catholic community. He is a Roman Catholic deacon. He was a representative on the North Shore Roman Catholic District School Board.

Mrs. Gertrude Lewis

Gertrude is an active member of the community, having served on council for much of the 1970s through to the 1990s. She ran the post office in the community, which was run out of her home, from 1953 to 1958 and then again from 1960 to 1991. She was the first Aboriginal school board representative for the North Shore Board of Education, and has also served on many committees in the community and along the North Shore.

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