Yeenoo Dàì' Gwatsat Teetł'it Zheh Googwandak

The History and Archaeology of Fort McPherson

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Cover photos:
Upper: Ingrid Kritsch, Rita Carpenter, and Corey Alexie examining artefacts from a test pit excavated in Fort McPherson in 2000. *Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI*
Lower: HBC Post at Fort McPherson, 1904. *Photo: C.W. Mathers, Hudson's Bay Company [HBC] Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/363-F-43/6 (N59-119)*

Back Cover photo:
Bertha Francis, Ingrid Kritsch, Robert Alexie Sr. and Alestine Andre at the old fort location in Teetł'ıt zheh. *Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI*

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Fort McPherson from the air, 1961. View northeast.
Photo: NWT Archives. N-1991-072-0093

Acknowledgments

This booklet is the result of the efforts of many people who contributed to our project documenting the history and development of Fort McPherson, known as *Teetł'ıt zheh* in Gwich'in.

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Photo: I. Krıtsch, GSCI

Mr. Woody Elias looking for artefacts at the Fort McPherson site in 1999.
Photo: I. Krıtsch, GSCI

Introduction

The history of *Teetł'ıt zheh* (Fort McPherson) goes back more than 150 years. *Teetł'ıt zheh* began as a trading post in 1840 four miles upriver from the present day community, and was the first post erected in the lower Mackenzie Valley. The expansion of the fur trade into the area had many consequences for the region and its inhabitants. This is particularly true for the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın, trading into the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) trading post.

Over the years, *Teetł'ıt zheh* developed into a major social, religious and economic centre, and today is the home community for the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın.

The importance of Fort McPherson within Canadian history was acknowledged in 1969, when the establishment of the fur trade post was designated as an event of national historic significance. Over the years, many stories have been collected from the elders about *Teetł'ıt zheh*. Recently, youth from the community also had the opportunity to excavate the area where their ancestors camped while visiting the trading post. This booklet provides a window into what we have learned about *Teetł'ıt zheh* from the oral history of the elders, the archaeology and published historical documents. It is dedicated to the people of Fort McPherson.

Opposite page: The old Hudson's Bay Company area in Fort McPherson. *Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI.*

The Teetł'it Gwich'in: People at the Head of the Waters[1]

Before the coming of Europeans to their lands, the Teetł'it Gwich'in lived in the upper Peel River area. They did not remain in the same place but moved throughout their territory hunting and gathering different resources depending on the seasons. In the winter, the Teetł'it Gwich'in hunted in the Richardson, Ogilvie and Selwyn Mountains.

Caribou, moose and sheep were the main animals they lived on during this season. When there was plenty of food, people would live together in large groups. A leader was chosen to organize the work and every morning he told people what they had to do. Hunting was done using caribou corrals, snares, spears, and bows and arrows. Sharing was important and everyone received their share of the hunt. When there were few animals, the Teetł'it Gwich'in divided into smaller groups. Families had to move often in order to find enough food to live on.

In the spring, the Teetł'it Gwich'in moved towards the Peel River. They travelled to the river through a network of trails between the mountains and the river on foot. They carried packs on their backs and used dog packs to carry their household goods. Summers were spent fishing along the Peel River and its tributaries. People travelled on rivers and streams with birchbark canoes. They gathered at a few places along the river and fished with nets and fishtraps. Summer was a very social time for the Teetł'it Gwich'in. Visiting, trading, feasting, storytelling and berry picking were important activities during this season.

Above: Traditional Gwich'in birch bark canoe. *Photo: Father Émile Petitot* [m]

Below: Model of Teetł'it Gwich'in fishtrap. *Photo: M. Fafard*

[1] Teetł'it is also sometimes translated as 'In the middle (people)'.

When Mary Neanda (Neyando) was a little girl the Loucheux (name introduced by the fur traders) Indians [2] were nomadic, moving from place to place in accordance with the movement of the animals and the run of the fish, which provided their source of food.

The men, of course, were responsible for the hunting, and the women used to follow them with the loaded sleds. They knew which way to take because the men blazed a trail by putting handfuls of moss in the forks of the trees, so the women would follow the fresh moss. They knew their own man's trail from the pattern of the snowshoe track. Camp was made when the woman came to a pile of newly cut wood, with the axe blocked in it.

The wife carried their home on the sled; it consisted of a tent made of caribou skins over a framework of bent willows. The hides were sewn together with the hair on the inside and the white, tanned skin on the outside. Mrs. Neanda (Neyando) remembers watching her mother make such a skin tent. When they

[2] Loucheux, meaning 'bright eyes' was the name the fur traders used to refer to the Gwich'in.

travelled, the willow boughs were taken as well as the skins; these sticks gave the wife something to hold onto as she ran alongside the sled. When all the gear was loaded, the woman would push her baby in to the wide neck of her skin garment, swing it round to the back and tie it in safely with a wide belt. Her dress was of caribou hide with the hair on the inside. The skirt was beaded in panels and fringed with widths of brown, smoke-tanned hide.

When she came to the woodpile, where she must make camp, the woman would put up the tent, make an open fire inside the tent, and eat; then, at last, she would put the baby down, and go out and cut a supply of wood for the night. She would dig out a patch of snow inside the tent and strew branches (later, the people used white Hudson's Bay Company blankets) to make a bed. A branch hooked from the thin ridgepole of the tent made a support for the kettle.

Originally, food was cooked in baskets woven from bark. The basket could not be placed directly on the fire, but when it was filled with snow and pieces of meat, red-hot stones were pulled out of the fire and thrown into it, and the basket was kept near the heat until the food was cooked. Meat cooked in this way was delicious. In time, the people were able to buy copper kettles in which to cook their food; every family at Fort McPherson was proud of its copper kettle.

— Mary Neanda (Neyando), as interpreted by Ada Stewart[i].

Gwich'in winter camp in 1848 (after Murray).[ii] The person on the left uses trail snowshoes; a pair of hunting snowshoes can be seen to the right of the skin tent.

The caribou skin was the most important for winter clothes and real important for tents. They made all kinds of important things out of it like rope to snare caribou. There were a lot of different ways to make arrowheads and things out of caribou horns or bone.

— Extract from *Life in the Old Days*, by Sarah Peters, COPE

Father Émile Petitot's drawings of different arrowheads found among the Gwich'in when he lived in the Northwest Territories in the 1860s and 1870s.[iv] It is worth noting that all these types – barbed, blunt and unbarbed – have been excavated at Fort McPherson. The blunt (middle) type was used to shoot birds.

A Close Relationship with Vadzaih (Caribou)

Caribou have always been important to the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın. In Gwichin mythology, caribou and people were very close and, long, long ago, could even speak to one another. When it came time for them to separate, it was agreed that people could hunt caribou and that as a sign of their close relationship, each would retain a part of the other's heart. Caribou would have a piece of human heart and humans a piece of caribou heart. In this way, each would know what the other thought and felt.

The Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın continue to have great respect for the caribou and it continues to be an important source of food and hides. In the past, they made use of every part of the animal. Caribou not only provided them with meat and bone grease, but also with much of the raw material needed to make different items used in everyday life. Several of these items were found in the excavation at *Teetł'ıt zheh*.

Above left: Bone and antler tools encountered in Fort McPherson in 2002: hunting points (a-e); pointed tools (awls) for making holes (f, h, j); bone needle (g); worked bone fragment (h). *Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI*

Above right: Gerald Tetlichi holding a point he found at the site in Fort McPherson in 2002. *Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI*

Above: Bone awl excavated at Fort McPherson in 2000. *Photo: Susan Irving, PWNHC*

First Contacts with Europeans

After they discovered the existence of Fort Good Hope (established ca. 1804), the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın made occasional trips there to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1839, the Company sent chief trader John Bell to explore the area of the Peel River with the idea of establishing a trading post in the Mackenzie Delta. According to Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın oral history, their people were staying at *Ok chì'* (eddy rock), one of their traditional fish camps in the Trail River area, when they first met John Bell and his crew.

The hill on the right side of the photo is Ok chì' (Eddy rock), the location of an old traditional Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın fish camp in the Trail River area. *Photo: I. Krıtsch, GSCI*

Once the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın all got together and traveled down to the place where the Peel River runs into the Mackenzie River. There they found some woodchips that were cut in a funny way. They didn't know how these were made. They all looked at them and first asked "Is it beaver?" But it didn't look like marks from beaver teeth. Over the winter, leaders from all over the place got together and tried to figure where the woodchips came from. In the summer, a strong man of the Yukon people and the headman of the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın paddled down the Peel and then followed the Mackenzie River up to Fort Good Hope.

There, they saw white men for the first time. They showed them the woodchips they had found at the mouth of the Peel. The white men showed them an axe and told them this is what they used to cut wood. They also showed them guns and other things. At first, our people didn't know how to call these men. They finally decided to call them Chii zhit Gwich'in, 'people who live in the rock'.

— Sarah Simon, 2000, GSCI

One summer, all the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın went up to the place that is now called Trail Creek. This is where they had a big fish camp. While they were staying there, people from the Hudson's Bay Company came to visit them. They came in a boat. Our people had never seen a boat before and they were scared. The women and children ran way into the bush. The men stood along the bank with their bows and arrows. These people in the boat had interpreters with them. They told our people not to run away, that they were friends, but the women and children didn't come out of the bush. The boat landed on shore and once more, the men from the Hudson's Bay Company showed our people what they brought: gun powder, shots and things like that. My grandmother said they had this gun, they called it a muzzle loader. They put powder into it and then shot with it. They wanted to show our people how it worked but when they shot the gun, everyone ran into the bush and didn't want to come out.

— Sarah Simon, 2000, GSCI

Sarah Simon (1901- 2001) was born in Fort McPherson and is well-remembered for her great knowledge of Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın history and tradition. She dedicated much of her life to the well-being of her community. Sarah worked as a midwife and as an interpreter of the Gwich'in language. She was also closely involved in the activities of the Anglican Church. Her husband, James Simon, was ordained an Anglican Minister in 1959. *Photo: Ingrıd Krıtsch, GSCI*

In those days people couldn't afford any guns. A person bought a gun (it was not a rifle)—today we call it a muzzle loader. Before the gun ever came into this country all the people used was the bow and arrow. A person that bought this gun went out hunting. He made his first shot—he shot a caribou. When he made his first shot he made too much noise and the caribou started running away—so the people told him to, "Put that gun away", it made too much noise - that he was scaring the caribou away. Then the people went back to their bows and arrows and got more caribou than the gun.

— Extract from *Traditional Life*, by
Lucy Vaneltsi, COPE

It always beats me, Graham, to think of the courage of those Indians' forefathers—going after grizzlies with spears and bows and arrows before the days of firearms. Of course, when I was with them the younger men were getting good .44 rifles from the Hudson's Bay Company though the old ones still used to go round with old smoothbore muzzle-loaders, carrying three or four bullets in their mouths. (The guns sometimes burst, 'but not often' as they said!).

— George Mitchell relating story to
Angus Graham[v]

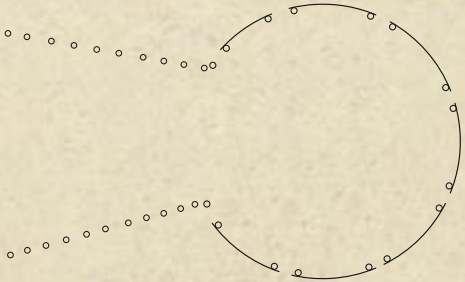
Firearms: A New Hunting Technology

Firearms were among of the most desirable items introduced by the Europeans. At *Teetł'ıt zheh*, a gunflint was found in 2000 alongside a bone point (arrowhead) in the deepest and oldest part of the site, that dates between 1850 and 1870. Gunflints were part of an early firearm technology. They were used to produce a spark in the gunpowder charge and propel the bullet out of the barrel of the musket. It was an unreliable and sometimes dangerous method that was soon replaced by percussion caps and, later, cartridges.

Even though the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın made use of firearms in the early years of the fur trade, they also continued to use their own technology for hunting. Caribou fences, for example, remained the main method of acquiring large amounts of caribou meat until the early 1900s.

Image drawn by Alexander Hunter Murray in the late 1840s.[vi] It shows two Gwich'in hunters dressed in summer caribou skin clothing. One of the hunters stands with his bow and quiver of arrows, while the second has a trade rifle and powder horn.

Left: Brian Martin and Janet Firth are using a transit and a rod to measure the elevations of the site in Fort McPherson. The artefacts found in the deeper layers are typically older than those closer to the surface. *Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI*



Left: Caribou fences and corrals were used by the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın to hunt caribou and resulted in large quantities of meat. These massive constructions required the co-operation of many people to build, maintain and to use for hunting.

They could be several miles long and consisted of two long lines of fence with a corral at the end. The fence and corral were made of tree poles. The fences served as wings to funnel caribou into the corral in which snares were set. The hunters chased the caribou towards the opening and shot them with their bow and arrows. Other caribou were killed in the snares that were set in between the poles. *Photo: Cornelius Osgood* [vii]

Above: Firearm-related artefacts found in Fort McPherson in 2002; cartridge cases (a-h, k); .22 bullet (i); lead shot (j); gun flint (l). *Photo: M. Fafard*

When my grandmother was alive (she was very old when she died) nobody knew her age and quite often the white people would ask her if she had ever lived in The Old Fort. She would tell them no and tell them it was a long time ago since that Old Fort was moved down here. They would ask her how long was The Old Fort built before it was moved down here. She would tell them that she was told The Old Fort was ten years old before it was moved.

— Extract from *Life When a Young Girl in 1902*, by Lucy Vaneltsi, COPE

Zheh gwajat, the location of the first trading post on the Peel River. The Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın still use this place as a camp location. *Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI*

The Establishment of a Trading Post on the Peel River

When John Bell met the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın at *Ok chì',* in the Trail River area, he told them about his intention to establish a trading post on the Peel River. They welcomed the idea, and their Chief, *Vihshriiniintsaiti'* (Painted Face's Father) suggested that the post be erected there at *Ok chì',* where his people often gathered for the summer to fish. This did not happen, however, because the Hudson's Bay Company also wanted to trade with other groups in the Yukon and in the lower Mackenzie River, including the Siglit[3] to the north and the Gwichya Gwich'in to the east. Consequently, the trading post was established closer to the Mackenzie Delta, near the present location of Fort McPherson. This was in 1840. The Euro-Canadians referred to this place as the 'Peel's River Post'. In Gwich'in it is called *'Zheh gwajat'* (rotten house) although people now mostly call it 'The Old Fort'.

Only a few years after it was established, *Zheh gwajat* had to be moved to another location because it flooded several times. Initially, the Hudson's Bay Company wanted to build the new trading post on the left bank of the Peel River but the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın insisted that the post be built on the present site of Fort McPherson. From the hill where the new post was erected they could see a long distance downriver and would know when the Siglit–who they were often battling with at the time–were approaching. The Peel River Post was renamed in 1848, in honour of Murdoch McPherson who was the chief trader for the Hudson's Bay Company. The Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın originally referred to the place where the new trading post was established as '*Chii tsal dik*' ('On top of the small rock') but it became known as *'Teetł'ıt zheh'* ('Headwaters of the Peel house') with the establishment of the post at this location.

[3] The Siglit were an Inuit group who lived between the Mackenzie Delta and the Arctic Coast at the time of contact with Euro-Canadians. In the early 1900s, the Siglit were joined by Alaskan Inuit and today these people are known collectively as the Inuvialuit.

Trading at Teetł'ıt zheh

During the early years of its establishment, the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın did not visit Fort McPherson very often. Only a few of the men made a quick trip to the post in the summer to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company.

In those years, the Gwich'ın brought mainly dry meat and bone grease to trade. This food was used to sustain Hudson's Bay Company staff at Fort McPherson and at other northern trading posts where fur was the main item traded. In the second part of the 19th century, metal knives, files, chisels, awls, and pots, beads, ammunition, and guns were the main Euro-Canadian items involved in the trade. Beads were particularly important for the Gwich'in, becoming a symbol of wealth. Rich people were those who could accumulate large quantities of beads, particularly blue ones. Beads were also used along with porcupine quills and silverberry seeds to decorate different articles of clothing.

Morgan Keevik and Gerald Tetlichi screening the dirt removed from the site in Fort McPherson in 2000 to ensure that small items such as beads and bone fragments have not been overlooked.
Photo: I. Krıtsch, GSCI

Guns and beads, beads and guns is all the cry in our country. Please do excuse me for repeating this so often, but I cannot be too importunate, the rise or fall of our establishment on the Yukon depends principally on the supply of these articles.
— Alexander Hunter Murray 1847-48[viii]

Beads are the riches of the Kutchin, and also the medium of exchange throughout the country lying between the Mackenzie and the west coast, other articles being valued by the number of strings of beads they can procure.
— Sir John Richardson 1848-49[ix]

Different types of beads encountered in Fort McPherson. The red ones at the bottom are called Cornaline d'Aleppo, one of the earliest types of bead traded at *Teetł'ıt zheh*. They are Venetian in origin and were long used by the Hudson's Bay Company, and because of this became known as "Hudson Bay beads." Seed beads, which are still used by Gwich'in women to make floral designs, were introduced in the latter part of the 19th century.
Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI

The Moose Skin Boats

Prior to the 1880s Peel's River Post was primarily a meat-provisioning post for HBC forts in the Mackenzie District. After the 1880s fine fur became an important part of the trade at Peel's River Post and the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın moved to take advantage of this change in economy. Some families left the mountains before break-up to trap marten in the upper Peel River area. However, at about the same time the HBC asked them to increase their trade of meat and in order to meet the greater demands for selling their meat and furs at the fort, they began to construct large moose skin boats. These boats were made of untanned moose hides stretched over a frame of spruce and held together with babiche. They ranged in size from 25 to 40 feet in length and required 10 to 15 hides depending on the size of the boat. Each boat could carry six to ten families down the Peel River to *Teetł'ıt zheh*. The making of the boat and the trip to Fort McPherson was a very important and exciting event in the life of the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın. The passage through the Peel Canyon located below the Bonnetplume River was so dangerous that the women, children and dogs walked along the portage trail above the canyon while the men took the boats through the turbulent waters. When their journey was successful, they celebrated with rifle shots and a big feast on a cobble beach at the downstream end of the canyon. The last moose skin boat trip to *Teetł'ıt zheh* took place in 1927. The next year–1928–brought the last major influenza epidemic and with it, a close to the period of moose skin boats.

The Peel River Canyon. *Photo: I. Kritsch, GSCI*

All winter long, caribou and moose were killed. The moose skins were cleaned and kept for the boat. The skins were not tanned, the hair was all cut off and the insides scraped clean and that was all. Meat was dried and fixed up and by spring time there was plenty of food.

When the weather became much warmer and snow was going, everybody moved towards the rivers. Here the women worked on the caribou hides and moose hides they could tan. There always had to be enough hides available for the boat. These were not to be tanned until later when the boat landed at Fort McPherson. The men had to cut wood for the huge skin boat they were to build. The skins to be used on the boat, were taken out and put into water to soften. The men cut the wood then put it together. The women sewed the moose hides together when it was ready. They sewed them together by putting the rear of the hide together and then laid them side by side until there was about ten moose hides altogether. Then one more hide was added on to the head and the back of the boat and that's about twelve moose hides for one boat. Paddles or oars were also made. Since the boat was very big the paddles had to be big too—and heavy.

When all was completed, the people began to load the boat. They had to put their belongings in separate piles and beside each pile their dogs were tied. The family sat beside their own stuff and dogs. As soon as everything was in place, they pushed out and the paddlers got into their places. Each paddler knew where he would sit. All this was gone over before by the leader (chief) or captain of the boat and the men. The paddlers sat facing the rear of the boat where upon a platform stood the captain. He stood there to see for the paddlers.

After passing through the canyon safely and getting into better waters they landed the boat. The women packed lunches. Good food, set aside for the trip, was taken out and a big feast was held. Also, two men paddled on ahead to town. At McPherson they picked up tobacco, tea, and shells. With this they went back up and when they made it to the island above McPherson, the people in the skin boat began shooting away. At the same time, those who were already living in town started to shoot. This was their way of saying hello and to let everyone know that all was well.

— Extract from *How we lived long ago*, by Bella Alexie, COPE

In McPherson, the people enjoy each other's company. Sometimes friends have been apart for a year or a couple of years and seeing each other again was just great. The people who lived around McPherson and the delta bought meat and hides from their friends or just exchanged them for fish and fur. Feasts and dances were held. Everything that had to be done was done at this time—weddings were held—children were baptized.

— Extract from Travels in the Yukon, by Paul Bonnetplume, COPE

Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın moose skin boat at Fort McPherson.
Photo: General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada – P7507-3032-36c.

In those days, there were a few log cabins along with a few skin tents. The Gwich'in all set tents along the riverbank. All the people gathered, giving each other meat and having a good time visiting.

— Extract from *1909 How People Lived Between Peel River and Dawson*, by Sarah Peters, COPE

The archaeological crew working at the excavation in Fort McPherson in 2002. *Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI*

Camping at Teetł'ıt zheh

The area where the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın used to camp during their visits to Fort McPherson was identified as an archaeological site by archaeologist Dr. Richard MacNeish in 1951. He excavated several artefacts and was given other objects previously collected by community members. In 1999, a playground was built in the area which disturbed part of the site.

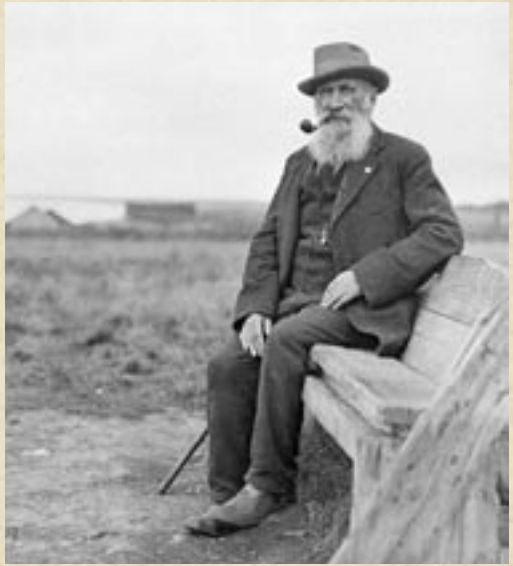
Mr. Woody Elias of Fort McPherson alerted the GSCI and with the permission of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, GSCI staff recovered artefacts left on the surface beside the playground and in the ball-park across the street where the soil from the construction site had been spread. The GSCI carried out further work at the site in 2000 and 2002, with archaeologist Mélanie Fafard and several youth from the community.

Archaeologist Mélanie Fafard taking notes on the excavation at *Teetł'ıt zheh*, with two children visiting. *Photo: C. Aporta*

Watercolour of Fort McPherson drawn by Elizabeth Taylor, an American who traveled to Fort McPherson in 1892. *Photo: James Taylor Dunn and Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society. 142. F.4.2F.*

The Hudson's Bay Company in Fort McPherson

Throughout the history of *Teetł'ıt zheh*, the appearance of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post changed. In the early years, the fort had a palisade that protected the Hudson's Bay Company compound. This palisade was later removed and the trading post did not look like a fort anymore. Nevertheless, sometime in the 1890s its name changed from Peel's River Post to Fort McPherson. Many employees of the Hudson's Bay Company came to Fort McPherson to manage the trading post over the years. One of the most notable factors was John Firth who was from the Orkney Islands in Scotland. He managed the Hudson's Bay Company post for 27 years, from 1893 and 1920 and was known for his physical strength and strict code of ethics. John Firth's wife, Margaret Stewart, was the daughter of the HBC trader Alexander Stewart and his Gwich'in wife Catherine. Many of John and Margaret's descendants live in Fort McPherson and nearby communities today.



John Firth sitting on a bench in Fort McPherson, 1929.
Photo: NWT Archives. N-1983-006-0023

My grandmother said they had a big fence around the Hudson's Bay. A big fence with gun holes around it. If anything happened they would go and shoot from there. That's why they call it a fort.
— Sarah Simon, 2001, GSCI

It was the report of Sir John Franklin, who discovered the Peel in 1826, that first drew the attention of the Hudson's Bay Company to the wealth of the Peel River country in fur-bearing animals, and in 1898 this was still the Company's richest territory… The clerk in charge, John Firth, was an Orkney-man who had come out to the Company's service as a boy and had risen from dog-runner to factor through sheer excellence, honesty, and force of character. He looked like a man of granite—square, broad, and powerful—and there was a formidable quietness about him which had a compelling effect on the Eskimo and Indians.
— George Mitchell as recorded by Angus Graham[x]

Far left:
The Siglit dancing at Fort McPherson. This image is from a water-colour drawn by Father Émile Petitot when he visited Fort McPherson in 1870.[xii] A palisade surrounded the fort at that time.

Left:
The Hudson's Bay Company store in Fort McPherson in the 1920s. *Photo: NWT Archives. N-1983-006-0010*

Right:
Store, dwelling and warehouse at Fort McPherson, ca. 1930. *Photo: HBC Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/363-F-43/10 (N78/63)*

Far right:
Fur trading post at Fort McPherson, ca. 1940. *Photo: HBC Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/363-F-43/24 (N15826)*

The Gwich'in Settlement Region.
Map made by Scott Higgins, GSCI.

The Siglit in Fort McPherson

The Siglit traded regularly at Fort McPherson until Aklavik was built in 1912. They usually came to the trading post by boat in the summer and camped on a large sandbar below the riverbank. The items they brought for trade included arctic fox, musk-ox and polar bear furs, along with walrus ivory, eider-down feathers and carved models and toys.

At night, the Siglit often played drums and danced on the sandbar. In the early years of the trading post, relations between the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın and the Siglit were tense because of the history of conflict between them. Over the years, however, these conflicts faded and they became friends. They often played football together when they met in Fort McPherson.

Siglit encampment on the shores of Peel River - Fort McPherson, 14/7/1892. *Photo: James McDougall, HBC Archıves, Archıves of Manıtoba. 1987/13/212 (N6271)*

The Chief of the Siglit and wife, Fort McPherson, ca. 1890. *Photo: James McDougall, HBC Archıves, Archıves of Manıtoba. 1987/13/208 (N6272)*

The Eskimo (Siglit) encampment on the sands was really a wonderful sight. The whole tribe from Herschel Island and the north coast had come up to do their trade, and there must have been three or four hundred of them altogether. They came up in three different kinds of boats – the women's boats, what they call *umiak*, which are big clumsy things for heavy loads; another kind of skin boats that is long and narrow and has a high pointed bow and stern; and the *kayaks*. There were flotillas of *kayaks*, and the men and boys seemed to be out in them all the time… As you know, the Eskimo live in igloos in winter, made of snow blocks carved to fit, but in summer they put up any old shelters of canvas or skin. The sands were just covered with them.

— George M. Mitchell relating story to Angus Graham[xii]

The Inuvialuit (Siglit) used to come to Fort McPherson and camp here. I remember my grandmother talking about when they came to the community. She said that they were still cautious when the Inuvialuit were around because they used to fight. She remembered they had tents way out there on the sand below the hill. She said she remembered this girl who kept coming up from down there and she kept coming up a little closer and a little closer. I guess she was kind of scared too, they didn't trust each other. And slowly this girl made her way up. She came a little further up every night. Finally she made it up on top the hill. My grandmother remembered that they were playing around with her and all of a sudden, the girl just got up and took off. She went right back down the hill, right back out on the sand bar. My grandmother said she remembered that they were really cautious of each other, they still didn't trust each other.

— Mary Teya, 2001, GSCI

Siglit at Peel River, ca. 1890.
Photo: James McDougall, HBC Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/13/207 (N58-81)

The Missionaries

The first missionaries arrived in Fort McPherson to evangelize the Gwich'in in the early 1860s. The Roman Catholic Church, represented by Oblate priests, and the Protestant Church, represented by Anglican ministers, competed to convert the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın to their religion. After following both religions for a time, most Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın finally adopted the Anglican faith. Sunday became a day of rest and Christian holidays and rituals were integrated within their cycle of activities. Fort McPherson, which was already an important gathering and trading place, also became a religious centre. Whenever possible, the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın visited *Teetł'ıt zheh* for Christmas and Easter.

One of the most notable early ministers was Reverend Robert McDonald. He lived among the Gwich'in in Fort Yukon and Fort McPherson for over 40 years (1862–1905), living in Fort McPherson from 1871–1905. During this time he became fluent in speaking and writing Gwich'in, and with the help of his Gwich'in wife, Julia Kutug, he translated scriptures, hymns, prayers and other religious texts into Gwich'in. To help convert the Gwich'in, he trained a number of Gwich'in lay readers who, when out on the land, held prayer meetings on Sundays. Rev. Edward Sittichinli was the first Gwich'in minister. He was ordained in 1903.

Reverend (later Archdeacon) Robert McDonald (1829-1913) was an Anglican missionary who resided in Fort McPherson between 1862 and 1905. Married to a Gwich'in woman, Julia Kutug, he learned her language and translated the Bible and many other religious texts into Gwich'in. *Photo: Old Log Church Museum, Whitehorse, Yukon. Collection Ref.#: 2003-7-14.*

Church of England residence and church in Fort McPherson, 1937.
Photo: NWT Archives. G-1989-006-0091

I was born in 1902. My mother died after I was three months old. My grandmother raised me. Our home was on the upper Peel River. We never went down in the delta. We stayed around mostly Trail Creek and that country but our permanent home in the winter time was near a little river called Yellow Sand River (Sheih tsoo njik).

Them days people were very religious. Nobody worked on Sunday—everyone prepared for this special day. My grandparents and myself had never been to school. My grandparents just went by what the missionaries had taught them. On Sundays, we didn't do nothing but stayed home and sang the hymns we knew. I, being a small girl, still picked these hymns up and I still remember them today. Some people right today think I can read and write my language but this is not so as I just go by memory…

I remember the time when the whole McPherson was Roman Catholic. They baptized the people. Everybody had a string of beads. At a later date, the Hudson Bay Company manager married a Loucheux woman. She did not know a word of English. Her husband had a year holidays coming so he took her out to Winnipeg and put her in school for a year. He had strict instructions to the teachers there to try and teach his wife how to talk English. She would even go to school on Sundays. It wasn't very long, say about eight months—his wife talked perfect English and also could read and write. Before he came back he would take her out to churches (he himself was not a Catholic).

After he came back to McPherson—that summer the Anglican minister arrived in McPherson. This woman told the people, and especially the chief, that she wanted the people to be all Anglicans. Although this chief, in his ways, was a wise man, he did not know anything about religion. So after a few weeks he would go to the two churches and listen to the ministers praying. One would pray in French and the other would pray in English. He gathered the people near the riverbank, there was a lot of people them days, and he told the people about this woman; that she was one of them and had seen a lot while she was outside for one year. The chief said, "I am not going to force none of you but, for my part, I am going to turn to this English Mission" (he was very respected among the people). "Those who want to follow me look at me." He then removed the beads of the Catholics from around his neck and threw them into the river. Only a few families did not do that (although practically all the people of McPherson had done what the chief did)... After the big change, all the people of McPherson were re-baptized into the Anglican Church… Since the big turn-over, the Anglican Mission translated the Bible, the Prayer Book, and the Hymn Book. Most people today can read those books. In my mind we don't criticize no religion because people know a little different now. They have found out that they all serve one God.

— Extract from *Life When a Young Girl in 1902*, by Lucy Vaneltsi, COPE

Group of women and children standing in front of the church at Fort McPherson, 1936.
Photo: R.N. Hourde, HBC Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/363-F-43/22B (N15840)

The Steamboats

After a trading post was established on the Peel River in 1840, supplies were brought to the post in York boats, which had their origins in the Orkney Islands. These large wooden ships drifted with the current, were rowed when necessary, and sometimes sailed if the wind was right downstream, from as far away as Fort Smith but had to be tracked upstream by men who walked along the shores. On large lakes, or long stretches of flat, slow moving water, they were rowed. The steamboat replaced the York boats in 1887.

They were used to carry supplies, mail, the Anglican Bishop and children travelling between Fort McPherson and the mission school in Hay River. The *S.S. Wrigley* was the first steamboat to travel to Fort McPherson. It was replaced by the *S.S. McKenzie* in 1908. The last steamboat to travel the Mackenzie and Peel Rivers was the *S.S. Distributor*. It was owned and operated by the Hudson's Bay Company from 1924–1943 and taken out of service when diesel tugs were introduced to the area.

Fort McPherson. From the landing place below the hill, all supplies were hauled up the path seen at the left in the photo. *Photo: HBC Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/363-F-43/3 (N15837)*

Steamboat (probably the *S.S. McKenzie*) landed at Fort McPherson in 1922. *Photo: NWT Archives. N-1979-004-0246*

People always came in before the boat came from the south with freight. Soon the boat showed up and everyone was yelling that the boat was coming. When the boat landed, everyone was happy to see the Bishop come off the boat – first on the gang-plank. He was met by everyone shaking hands. Then he would go straight to the mission and church and mail was sorted out, too. Some of the children were at Hay River School, some who went last year. This was the only time we saw letters from the children. Sometimes some families got sad news from their child passing away or some families would get good news that their children were well.

When this boat came, everyone was happy knowing that there was fish nets to fish with, ammunition to hunt with, and the main thing was, our Bishop came here and, once again, we would receive our holy communion. This was all we were happy for and nothing else. At that time I remember I saw only a pile of flour and a pile of small barrels. There was sugar and tea also; this was plenty for us.

After the boat left, people went to the store and bought all the nets they needed, ammunition, tea and some other things we needed. Then people would go off to their fishing places, even how bad the mosquitoes were they went.

— Extract from *The Way Indians Make Their Living Long Ago*, by Christie Thompson, COPE

When I was young, we used to land below the hill. Even the Distributor landed down there under the hill. That's the steamboat. It brought oranges and things like that, that we only saw in July. We used to only have oranges for two or three days but now it's year round that we have all this fresh food. I really remember you know, when the boat came, we could just smell oranges. We were standing along the shore, watching the boat coming in.

— Caroline Kaye, 2001, GSCI

"Receiving supplies at Fort McPherson, Peel River", from the *S.S. Wrigley*, 1892. *Photo: James McDougall, HBC Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/363-F-43/4 (N6270)*

The Klondike Gold Rush

Gold was discovered on Rabbit (Bonanza) Creek in the Yukon near the present day community of Dawson on August 17, 1896. The discovery led to a major rush of people stampeding to the area in 1898—the official date of the Klondike Gold Rush—resulting in an influx of 50,000 people from around the world. During the Klondike Gold Rush, about one hundred stampeders passed through Fort McPherson, seeking an easy route to the gold fields. Their arrival on Gwich'in lands had an important impact on the lives of the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın. The Gold Rush brought many new experiences for the Gwich'in. In demand as guides, packers, and hunters, wage labour brought the new experience of handling money. Previous to this they had experienced only the barter system of the fur trade. As well, it was during this time that they made their first visits to the ever-growing Dawson—a 'city' much larger and more energetic than the quiet fur trading posts of their home area.

During the years that followed, the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın reoriented their land use towards the Dawson and Moosehide[4] area for trading, employment and social reasons. They lived at village sites such as Black City and Calico Town and camps in the upper Blackstone area and used these as bases to hunt caribou in the fall and spring when caribou migrated through the area. In the winter they stayed in the Blackstone, Eagle, Hart and Ogilvie River areas and at Hungry Lake. Quick trips were made to sell meat and furs to the miners at lucrative prices. Some also stayed over parts of the summer to take advantage of new forms of seasonal wage labour in Dawson. Only a few Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın families visited Fort McPherson between 1905 and 1910 because Dawson offered better prices for their fur and meat, and there was a greater variety of commercial items available. The Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın orientation to this part of the Yukon outlasted the Gold Rush and when Dawson declined in importance and the price of muskrat furs rose dramatically in the later years of World War I, the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın began to revisit Fort McPherson in the summer.

Fort McPherson in 1904. From left to right, the old Hudson's Bay Company trading store, the manager's house, the fur warehouse with fur press in front, and a caribou skin tent. This was the last year such tents were used at *Teetł'ıt zheh*. After this, the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın purchased canvas tents in Dawson City.
Photo: C.W. Mathers, HBC Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/363-F-43/6 (N59-119)

[4] Tr'ondek Hwech'in (Han) community outside of Dawson

There was hardly any (canvas) tents them days… they came in about a hundred years ago with the miners. After they discovered Dawson in '98. I remember my mother always told a story about when she was five or six year old, it must have been before 1910. That year one of her brothers went to Dawson and brought back a tent and a stove. They set the tent up. Her mother had been living in a tepee for all those years. She didn't want to move into the tent. She thought it was cold. My mother remembered that. She remembered kids coming into the tent and touching their stovepipe. It was hot (Robert Alexie Sr., 2001, GSCI).

In 1898 (1896), gold was found in Dawson. That was the first time we saw so many white people. They would hire the boys to take them through the Rat River Pass and also up the Peel River. People used to call them miners. They would buy meat from the people. There was not much white man grub so white people and Indians had to make the best of everything. We travelled with the white people and we helped them out the best we could. Of course, they paid us in money but nobody knew about paper money, but we still took it. They told us to give it to the Hudson Bay Company and they would give us whatever we wanted for it. In those days, the Hudson Bay Company bought furs.

— Extract from *A Long Time Ago*, by Christopher Colin, COPE

I remember living at the Mouth of the Peel as a very young child, along with my mom, dad and younger brother, Peter. My father was fishing all summer and then again after freeze-up. After we had a huge pile of fish, the men from the Hudson Bay Company in Fort McPherson came and took most of it. My father had sold it to them.

We moved to McPherson and set up our tent down close to the river. We stayed in town for a few days when some people came to town from up the Peel River. They got supplies from the Bay and then left. Our father and mother packed up our stuff and went ahead of the dogs. My brother and I ran behind the sled, hanging onto the head line. Our mother walked behind us. We caught up with the people we were going to and then moved on. I remember how I was happy to see the children. As soon as we caught up, I started playing with them. I did not think of helping my folks. We moved on and on, day after day and soon passed Little Wind River. Here we came to a big camp. Lots of people were living here. Then everybody moved on together. After reaching the Hart River, some moved through Big Hart. There were people all over so it was not a surprise when a letter was found addressed to anyone moving through the Big Hart River. Skinny Francis read the letter. The letter said a new town was discovered. It was not too far from where we were and it was called Dawson. Skinny Francis, who was our chief at that time, took off after the people that left the note for us. He returned shortly with his packsack full of goodies. He had been to Dawson. Some people from around the Yukon River came back with him. There were natives called Han Gwich'in (River people).

Winter 1901 – Gwich'in arriving at Dawson City for Trade. *Photo: Yukon Archives, E.H. Jones fonds, 77/65#2, PHO 077*

There was a lot of caribou. Everyone had plenty of meat. Since there were many people in Dawson, there was a shortage of meat, so the town bought meat (caribou, moose, sheep, etc.) from whoever could supply it. Our people went to Dawson with big loads of meat and sold it all. They brought back a lot of food when they returned.

— Extract from When I was a Boy, by Abraham Alexie Sr., COPE

The Royal Northwest Mounted Police

American whaling activities along the Canadian Arctic coast in the early 1900s encouraged the Canadian Government to reinforce its authority in the area. In 1903, Supt. Constantine, Sgt. F.J. Fitzgerald and four constables were sent to the lower Mackenzie Valley to investigate the need for Western Arctic posts and to establish the first Royal North-West Mounted Police (RNWMP) detachment in Fort McPherson. As part of their duties, the officers made regular patrols by dog team between Dawson City and Fort McPherson, covering a distance of 760 km.

The patrol route followed an old traditional Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın trail. In the winter of 1910-1911 one of the patrols became lost and met a tragic end, entering Canadian history as the 'Lost Patrol'. Four RNWMP officers, including Inspector Francis J. Fitzgerald, Csts. C.F. Kinney and R.D.H. Taylor and Special Constable Carter died during their expedition to Dawson. The officers were buried in Fort McPherson, where a monument was erected to honour their memory. Two other monuments along the Peel River commemorate where the four men died.

"Constable Gifford Moore, RCMP reading the inscriptions on the stones above the graves of four Royal Northwest Mounted Policemen who were frozen on the Dawson trail in 1909 (1911)." Fort McPherson, ca. 1930. *Photo: HBC Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/363-F-43/13 (N15838)*

On December 21, Inspector Fitzgerald, Consts. Kinney, Taylor and Sam Carter left here for Dawson, expecting to be gone three months. We were daily expecting them to return when on the 22nd inst. three sleds showed up. Imagine our horror and grief to learn that the patrol had not reached Dawson, and further that the search party had found the emaciated bodies of the whole party, all within 35 miles of this post (Fort McPherson), where they had lain perhaps many weeks, and we ignorant of them. As yet the bodies have not been brought in, and no record has been seen, but a party is now off for them, and doubtless some diary will be discovered to tell the tale.

They went off short provisioned, for the sake of travelling light, but their dogs were not of the best, and they had no Indian for guide. Carter had been over the trail, coming this way, four years ago, but was not sure of the crossings, and it is surmised that they got astray, trying to find the crossing from Little Wind to Hart rivers, and being short of food, decided to return, and for some unknown reason, were unable to make it. The packet was found in Colin's house, and the Inspector's dispatch bag, left there on their return. Twenty miles lower down they found the bodies of Kinney and Taylor with the four fur robes of the party. Ten miles lower… they found the bodies of the Inspector and Carter. They went from here with 15 dogs, and so far 10 harness have been found. Will give you more particulars when I learn them.

— Extract from letter from Rev. C. E. Whittaker, Fort McPherson, to Bishop Stringer in Dawson, 1911

The R.C.M.P. compound in Fort McPherson, 1922.
Photo: NWT Archives. N-1979-004-0110

The Muskrat Period

Beginning with World War I until 1920, the value of muskrat fur rose dramatically from $0.40 to $1.50. As the lower Peel River and the Mackenzie Delta were the most productive places for muskrats "rats", the Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın began to leave the mountains earlier than usual in spring to travel to the Delta over ice, abandoning their usual practice of travelling with the river spring flood in moose skin boats. Trapping usually occurred from early March to mid-June.

The Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın often spent Easter in Fort McPherson before leaving for their ratting camps. They came back with their furs in June and stayed at the post for a few weeks, usually until after Dominion Day on July 1st, now called Canada Day. Starting in the 1920s, many Teetł'ıt Gwich'ın families began building cabins in *Teetł'ıt zheh*.

Two Gwich'in women and three children at *Teetł'ıt zheh* in 1922, with buildings in the background.
Photo: NWT Archives. N-1979-004-0247

Easter was celebrated. Everyone attended church and those confirmed all took communion. Feasts and dances were held. Sometimes weddings. After spending one or two weeks in town, the people prepared for spring. In those days, everything was hard to get. The men looked after their traps as well as they could and still at times they lost them. Sometimes the spring floods took them away.

The store, Hudson's Bay store, usually ran short of some items that the trappers needed. The trappers sometimes had a hard time getting together what they needed, then left for the ratting camps. Traps were set. The men and women all set traps. They caught muskrats, brought them home, and stretched the skins for sale. The meat was eaten or fed to the dogs. When it was close to break-up, the traps were taken out of the lakes and some were set around the lake shore. After the ice was all gone, hunting was done by small canoes. At times a man went out in the late afternoon and he didn't come home till early in the morning, around six. Shortly afterwards, his wife woke up and skinned the muskrats. This was not easy work. Everything was hard work but no one knew of an easier life, so nobody complained. After the spring hunting season ended, everyone came to town again – paddling. When they got into town they took their furs to the Bay. There were set prices on fur those days.

The fur prices did not go up and down like it does today. The manager did not give money like it does today. He only told the trappers about how much money they had and he kept it in the store. Any time they needed anything, the people would simply go and charge it (on their account). After the steamboat came, once again the store was packed with food and hardware and some clothing. The people bought what they needed and made their long trips to the fish camps.

— Extract from *Winter, Summer, Spring and Fall*, by Charles Koe, COPE

Gwich'in boy showing his spring catch of muskrat in *Teetł'it zheh*, 1922. He wears skin clothing.
Photo: NWT Archives. N-1979-004-0025

Those Indians, Graham, when they once got going in the store would ask for, and get, the God-damnedest assortment of stuff you could possibly imagine—all of the very highest quality. They took Sheffield knives, file-blades for making their crooked knives, Hudson's Bay blankets (half-point to four-point), genuine copper kettles of various sizes and for various purposes, needles—some bent ones—and awls for perforating skins, ammunition for .44 rifles, gunpowder well packed in canisters, and caps and balls for the old-fashioned muzzle-loading guns, sheet-lead (probably off tea-chests), brass wire for snares, fish-hooks, flour, fat pork or bacon sides (they keep better than pork), the best beads I ever saw anywhere—both glass and cut steel, sewing-silk, broadcloth for leggings, large quantities of rice in packets and large quantities of sugar and tea.

— George M. Mitchell relating story to Angus Graham[xiii]

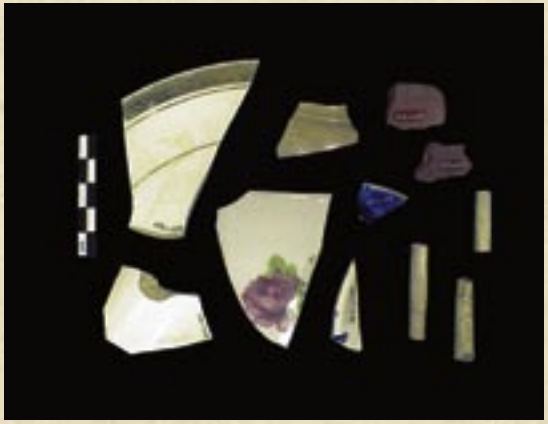
Euro-Canadian Goods

As the years went by, the Hudson's Bay Company introduced a greater variety of goods to trade at *Teetł'ıt zheh*. At the time when George Mitchell traveled through Fort McPherson during the Klondike Gold Rush, there was already a good selection of items.

The interior of the Fort McPherson store, ca. 1930. *Photo:* HBC Archives, Archives of Manitoba. 1987/363-F-43/9 (N8927).

Bottle glass fragments collected at the site in Fort McPherson.
Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI

Metal artefacts from Fort McPherson.
Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI



Ceramic and clay artefacts found at the site in Fort McPherson. The three fragments on the bottom right of the picture are clay pipe fragments.
Photo: M. Fafard, GSCI

Treaty 11

After oil was discovered at Norman Wells in 1920 the Canadian Government decided that it was time to clear title to land in the Mackenzie Valley to make way for future development. They attempted this by signing Treaty 11 with all the Mackenzie Valley Dene groups north of Great Slave Lake, including the Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın. Fort McPherson was the northernmost location where Treaty 11 was signed on July 28th1921.

Two hundred and nineteen Gwich'in received Treaty money in Fort McPherson on that day. Chief Julius Saloo and Johnny Kyikavichik (Kay) signed the Treaty on behalf of their people. The Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın saw the Treaty as a friendly agreement that would protect their homeland and allow them to pursue their traditional way of life. For the Federal Government the signing of Treaty 11 meant that the Dene in the Mackenzie Valley had given up their lands in exchange for different privileges such as hunting reserves, funding for education, assistance to pursue agricultural activities, grants for trapping and fishing equipment, and some annuities. The Government did not live up to all of these promises, however, and in the 1980s comprehensive land claim negotiations were initiated with the Dene who had taken Treaty 11. The Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim signed on April 22, 1992 in Fort McPherson, was the result of more than 20 years of negotiation between the Gwich'in, Federal and Territorial Governments.

Picture of Treaty Party, 1921. Left to right: Simon Diindzik, John Martin, Ben Kunnizzi, R.C.M.P., Old Robert, Johnny Kay, Fred Firth, Chief Julius, Mr. Conroy, Old William Vittrekwa.
Photo: NWT Archives. G-1979-017-0001

I will tell you about in the year 1921—about a treaty given to the Indians and what was said before the Treaty money was given out.

Mr. Conroy was the first white man who gave out money in Fort McPherson. When he arrived, he came in a gas boat...A large tent was set up on the sandbar at the beach at Fort McPherson and a flag was set in front of the tent. Tables and chairs were also put around this tent and on this table there was lots of money. All the Indians gathered by this tent with the chief, Chief Julius.

Signing of Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement in Fort McPherson in 1992. With Willard Hagen, Tom Siddon and Nellie Cournoyea signing on behalf of the Gwich'in Tribal Council, Federal Government and Government of the Northwest Territories. *Photo: Northern News Services*

Mr. Conroy said to the chief, "I came here for you and your people to take Treaty money". Chief Julius asked him, "What is the money for?" Mr. Conroy said, "You see that… (medal) you're wearing? On this... (medal) you see the King and Government shaking hands. The same way the King is shaking hands with you and your people with this money." So Chief Julius asked more questions again. "After taking this money, are we still free to live off the land, our country, and continue the way we always lived?" Mr. Conroy said, "Yes, you are free to live the way you always lived"… And he went on to say, "Some day there will be lots of people, lots of white people, coming in and maybe oil will be found (or anything like gold, etc.) in your land. You will find out then it is your land. If this happens, you will be kept real well and looked after, this side of Peel River and up the Snake River and to Arctic Red River right down to the mouth of the Peel River. If you hold on to this land, no white man is allowed in this Territory, not even allowed to cut down one tree or anything, because this land will be kept for you and your people…

At the meeting about the Treaty money and land, they never talked about other parts of the land. Later, it was said that the Indians returned the land back to the Government, which is not true. What was said about the land and promises at that meeting of first Treaty money, were never mentioned again. Nothing has been said about the land since it was promised to us - that it was ours to live off of as long as we live.

— Extract from *1921 Treaty,* by Johnny Kay, COPE

Treaty 11 signed at Arctic Red River, Fort McPherson, 1921. *Photo: Rene Fumoleau, NWT Archives. N-1995-002-9692*

Teetł'ıt Zheh : A Modern Community

After World War II there was a significant decline in the fur economy and many Aboriginal peoples in the North could no longer make their living from trapping. The federal government encouraged them to move into town and offered different social programs including family allowance and old age pensions. Schools and nursing stations were established in the settlements and housing was also made available. Such measures were an important factor in the development of Fort McPherson. Many Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın families moved into town, although they continued to spend several months out on the land hunting, fishing and trapping.

The population of *Teetł'ıt zheh* now stands close to 900 inhabitants of which the majority are Teetł'ıt Gwıch'ın. The population also includes individuals who are from other Gwich'in groups, and a small percentage of Inuvialuit, Métis and Euro-Canadians. This dynamic community includes approximately 250 homes, a school, two churches, a nursing station, a RCMP compound, a Band office, a Hamlet office, a Community Centre, a senior citizens home, an indoor curling rink, two retail stores, a hotel with a gas station and several other businesses.

Fort McPherson, ca. 1960.*Photo: HBC Archıves, Archıves of Manıtoba. 1987/363-F-43/28 (N64-114)*

Endnotes

i The Beaver, June 1953:24.

ii Journal of the Youkon 1847-48. Edited by L.J. Burpee. Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1910, p.85.

iii The Amerindians of the Canadian Northwest in the 19th century, as seen by Émile Petitot, vol. 2. Edited by Donat Savoie. Ottawa: Northern Science Research Group, Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1970, c1971, p. 61, No.39.

iv ibid, p. 56, No.20.

v Angus Graham. The Golden Grindstone: The adventures of George M. Mitchell. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1935, p.249-250.

vi "Kutchin [Gwich'in] Hunters": coloured lithograph based on a sketch by fur trader Alexander Hunter Murray, at Fort Yukon in 1847-48. Published in Arctic Searching Expedition: A Journal of a Boat-Voyage through Rupert's Land and the Arctic Sea, In Search of the Discovery Ships under Command of Sir John Franklin. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada.

vii Contributions to the Ethnography of the Kutchin. Yale University Publications in Anthropology No. 14. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1970 [1936], p.25.

viii Journal of the Youkon 1747-48. Edited by L.J. Burpee. Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1910, p.100.

ix Sir John Franklin. Narrative of a second expedition to the shores of the polar sea, in the years 1825, 1826, and 1827. Including an account of the progress of a detachment to the eastward, by John Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969, vol. 1, p.391.

x Angus Graham. The Golden Grindstone: The adventures of George M. Mitchell. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1935, p.89.

xi Emile Petitot. Les grands Esquimaux. Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit, 1887, pp.246-247.

xii Angus Graham. The Golden Grindstone: The adventures of George M. Mitchell. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1935, p.95.

xiii ibid, p.291.

Help Us Protect Gwich'in Heritage!

Archaeological sites are a fragile and important part of Gwich'in Heritage, and are protected by law. Please do not disturb them. If you find an artefact please leave it where you found it, take a picture of it if you can, and report the find and location to the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute. Mahsi' choo!

"Archaeology, you know we get our history out of it and I think it's really important".
— Mary Teya, 2001, GSCI

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