

THE FIRST PEOPLE



There are many stories about how human beings came to live on the territory we now call Canada. First Nations and Inuit have passed those stories to their young people for thousands of years. Those stories do not belong to us here at *Kayak*. The best way for you to learn them is to ask an Indigenous elder about them. But even though we don't know exactly when and from exactly where the First Peoples came to this place, one thing is for sure: They were here long, long before the settlers arrived.



When the French, Spanish and English came here, they believed they had discovered a new world where the land was empty. Their religion told them that as Christians, they were better than any people they might run into. Therefore, they believed, the land was theirs to use and settle on. Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, knew their territory had many people living in it, and wasn't "discovered" by others.

First Nations are all different, but they were much more like each other than they were like the settlers who first trickled, then flooded in. Settlers wanted to own land as they did back in their home countries. Indigenous people believed the land could be shared by all.



“I BELIEVE IT IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED THAT THEIR NUMBERS ARE DIMINISHING, AND SOME TRIBES HAVE BECOME NEARLY IF NOT TOTALLY EXTINGUISHED IN THE CANADAS.”

– CATHARINE PARR TRAIL, AN EARLY SETTLER IN UPPER CANADA (ONTARIO)

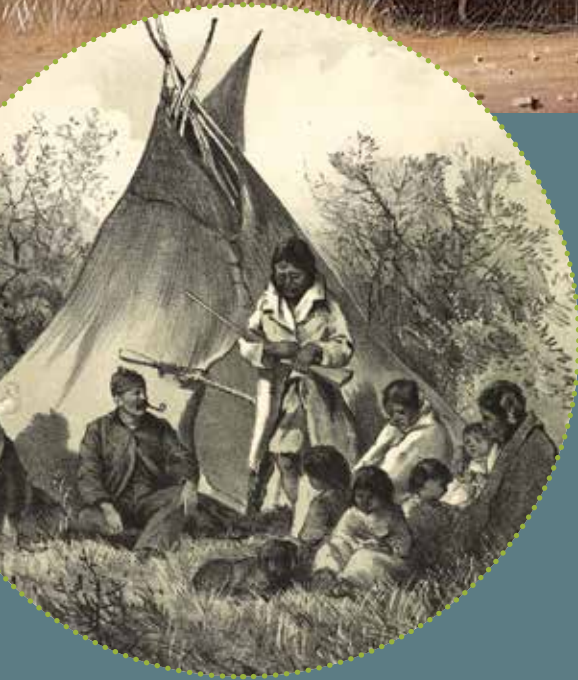
When European ships first started coming to the east coast in the 1500s in search of fish, their crews usually just tossed out an anchor and dropped their nets. Sometimes the sailors captured First Nations people and took them as prisoners to be displayed back in Europe.

Settlers learned much from the people who already lived here. First Nations people taught the newcomers about hunting, fishing and trapping, about maple syrup and which plants had tasty berries or were good for medicine. They showed them how to plant the Three Sisters: corn, beans and squash. Without their Indigenous neighbours, settlers would not have known how to make and use snowshoes or birch-bark canoes. Many settlers would have died if it weren't for the kindness of First Nations people. And in many cases, they got along well for a long time.

Things weren't perfect. The two groups sometimes distrusted, feared and even hated each other. Settlers took over more and more land for farming and towns, which often led Indigenous people to fight back. Settlers didn't always want to share what they had. Some Indigenous people stole settlers' supplies or animals. Both were guilty of attacking and killing the others at times.

New settlements also made it harder for everyone to find food. With all those people now fishing and hunting, there wasn't always enough to go around. In the Prairies, the bison, which First Nations and Métis depended on for food and skins, disappeared because of overhunting, mostly for their shaggy pelts.





Governments wanted settlers to spread out and create farms and towns. They made treaties with First Nations, who often felt they were agreeing to share the land, not give it up. Some treaties moved First Nations onto new territory, usually much poorer land and a tiny part of their original territories.

Although only the King or Queen of Great Britain was supposed to have the right to buy land from First Nations, it was often governments that made the deals. Sometimes they said they wanted to give Indigenous people a safe homeland away from the newcomers, but many broke their promises and pushed First Nations people aside to make room for more and more settlers.

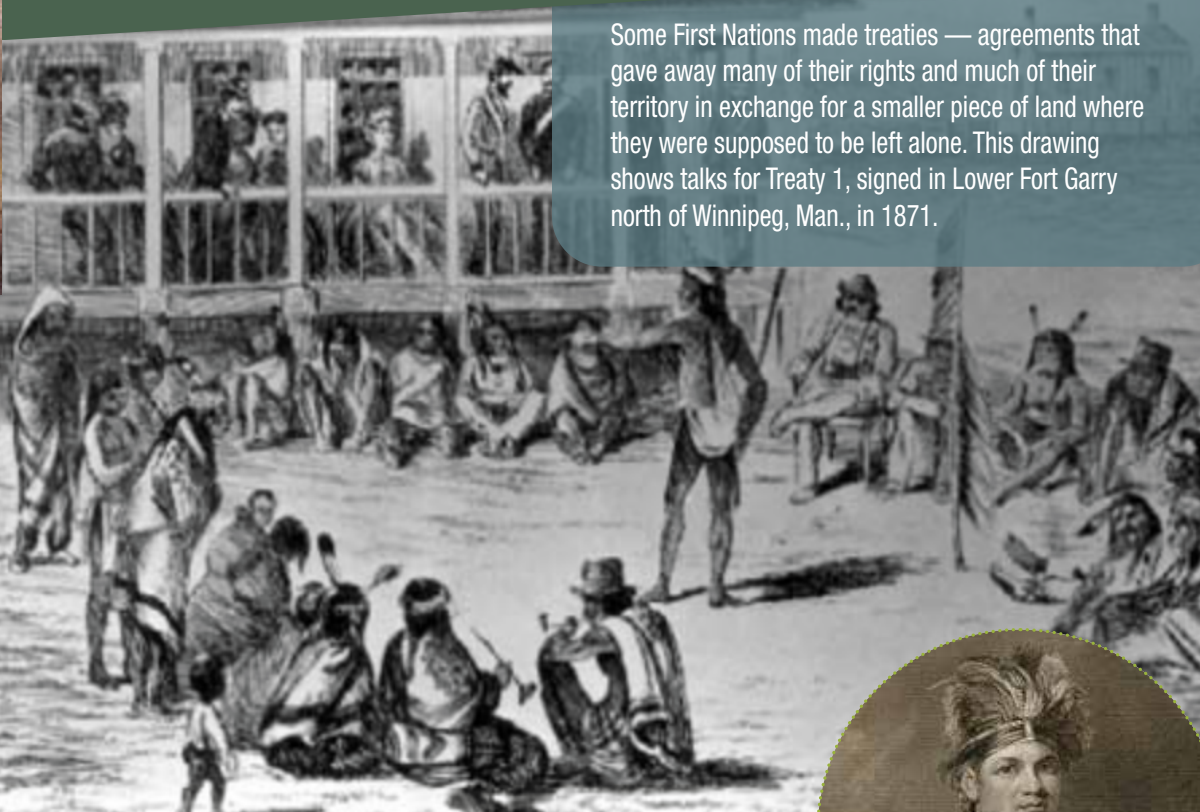
The Indian Act of 1876 gave the Canadian government power over First Nations, Métis and Inuit. The federal Department of Indian Affairs took over Indigenous lands and nearly everything about their lives. The government wanted Indigenous people to give up their old ways and become more like Europeans.





Demasduit was said to be one of the last of the Beothuk people who had once lived on the island of Newfoundland. By 1830, they were all dead. Many died of diseases brought by Europeans. Others were killed in fights over metal they wanted for tools, or over hunting and fishing areas.

Some First Nations made treaties — agreements that gave away many of their rights and much of their territory in exchange for a smaller piece of land where they were supposed to be left alone. This drawing shows talks for Treaty 1, signed in Lower Fort Garry north of Winnipeg, Man., in 1871.



“THE MOHAWKS HAVE ON ALL OCCASIONS SHOWN THEIR ZEAL AND LOYALTY TO THE GREAT KING; YET THEY HAVE BEEN VERY BADLY TREATED BY HIS PEOPLE.” –MOHAWK CHIEF JOSEPH BRANT

