

A SURVEY OF THE OPHTHALMIC STATUS OF THE CREE INDIANS
AT NORWAY HOUSE, MANITOBA*

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In March, 1944, a survey was carried out by the author among the Cree Indians at Norway House, Manitoba, to determine the frequency with which ocular defects and disease occur. The Crees are traditionally a peace-loving people who have been forced northwards gradually through the last few centuries by more war-like tribes. Many bands of Crees are found today scattered over the unfertile bush country of northern Manitoba, northeastern Saskatchewan and northwestern Ontario. The particular band visited for the purpose of this survey, is situated about historic Norway House at the northern tip of Lake Winnipeg. The land here is relatively unfertile, being composed of scattered muskeg and bush country. The Indians obtain a meagre existence by hunting and trapping. This fact has a double significance. They are exposed for long periods to the rigours of the climate and their diet contains relatively little fresh vegetables, dairy products and meat. The staple element of their diet is bannock, which is a sort of biscuit made from a mixture of white flour, lard and baking soda; sugar and tea and such fish and game as they can secure. The second point of significance is that any ocular defects seriously affect the already low standard of living by reducing the efficiency of the Indian when hunting or on his trap line.

In order to determine the means of improving the standard of living and the health of the Indian, a study was sponsored by the Department of Indian Affairs and by the Hudson's Bay Company. It consisted primarily in an investigation of the dietary habits and the nutritional status of the Indian. The study started in March, 1942, at which time Indians were examined, and groups were given various vitamin and food supplements. The present visit was one of a series and the first in which the author participated. It is recognized that the physical health and prosperity of these people are intimately interwoven. This survey was also of interest to the Royal Canadian Air Force, as it provided an opportunity to observe the effects of prolonged and repeated exposure to severe climatic conditions.

Between March 15 and March 22, 1944, 300 Cree Indians within reach of Norway House were examined. It is felt that this group represents as nearly as possible a random series. One hundred and three of the adults examined had been using vitamin supplements of one type or another for a period of one to two years as part of a nutrition study. All the school children examined were being supplied with a tablespoon of cod liver oil a day (800 I.U. of vitamin D and 8,000 I.U. of vitamin A). As far as could be found out, co-operation in the actual taking of the cod liver oil was good. It is to be pointed out that it is not justifiable to draw final conclusions regarding possible casual relationships between nutrition and ocular disease on the basis of data collected at this stage of the study.

In table I are recorded the age and sex distribution of the subjects examined. It is to be noted that in this table the subjects are divided into two groups, one being composed of those 5 to 18 years of age, and the other group composed of those 18 years of age and older. They are divided therefore into those of school

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