

Message from His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor with sundry Despatches relating to the Indians of this Province.

F. B. HEAD.

The Lieutenant Governor, with reference to the surrender by the crown of the controul of the territorial revenue to the Provincial Legislature, deems it right to communicate to the House of Assembly the accompanying copies and extracts of a correspondence between the Local and Imperial Governments on the subject of the Indians in this Province, and the liberal protection and care which they are entitled to claim, from the Legislature, as the original possessors of the soil, and which he doubts not the House of Assembly will cheerfully recognize.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
29th January, 1838. }

No. 70.
(Copy.)

TORONTO, 20th August, 1836.

MY LORD;

Your Lordship is aware that my predecessor, Sir John Colborne, with a view to civilize and christianize the Indians who inhabit the country north of Lake Huron, made arrangements for erecting certain buildings on the great Manatoulin Island, and for delivering, on this spot to the visiting Indians, their presents for the present year.

The instructions which I received from your Lordship to counteract or defer these arrangements, reached me too late to be acted upon, and it being impracticable to promulgate to the Indians that they were not to assemble there, I determined to proceed to the Island and attend the meeting.

I was five days going there in a canoe, and during that period, as well as during my return, had an opportunity of meandering through, and living upon the Islands which are on the North shore of Lake Huron, and which exceed in number twenty-three thousand.

Although formed of granite, they are covered with various trees growing in the interstices of the rocks, and with several descriptions of berries upon which the Indians feed; the surrounding waters abound in fish.

On arriving at the great Manatoulin Island, where I was received by fifteen hundred Indians, who had assembled for their presents, I found that this Island as well as those I had mentioned, belong (under the crown) to the Chippewa and Ottawa Indians, and that it would, therefore, be necessary to obtain their permission before we could avail ourselves of them for the benefit of the other tribes.

Although I did not approve of the responsibility, as well as the expense of attracting, as had been proposed, the wild Indians from the country north of Lake Huron to Manatoulin, yet it was evident to me that we should reap a very great benefit if we could persuade these Indians, who are now impeding the progress of civilization in U. Canada, to resort to a place possessing the double advantage of being admirably adapted to them, (inasmuch as it affords fishing, hunting, bird-shooting and fruit,) and yet in no way adapted to the white population. Many Indians have long been in the habit of living in their canoes among these islands, and from them, from every enquiry I could make, and from my own observation, I felt convinced that a vast benefit would be conferred both upon the Indians and the Province by prevailing upon them to migrate to this place.

I accordingly explained my views in private interviews which I had with the Chiefs, and I then appointed a Grand Council, on which they should all assemble to discuss the subject, and deliberately to declare their opinions.

When the day arrived, I addressed them at some length, and explained to them, as clearly as I was able, their real interests, to which I found them very sensibly alive.

The Indians had previously assembled to deliberate upon the subject, and had appointed one of their greatest orators to reply to me.

The individual selected was Sigonah (the Blackbird), celebrated among them for having, it is said, on many public occasions, spoken without once stopping, from sunrise to sunset.

Nothing could be more satisfactory than the calm deliberate manner in which the Chief gave, in the name of the great Ottawa tribe, his entire approval of my projects; and as the Chippewas and Ottawas thus consented to give up the twenty-three thousand islands, and as the Saugins also consented to give up a million and a half acres adjoining the lands of the Canada Company, I thought it advisable that a short plain memorandum should be drawn up, explanatory of the foregoing arrangements, to be signed by the Chiefs while in Council, and witnessed by the Church of England, Catholic and Methodist Clergymen who were present, as well as by the several officers of His Majesty's government.

I enclose to your Lordship a copy of this most important document, which, with a wampum attached to it, was executed in duplicate; one copy remaining with me, the other being deposited with a Chief selected by the various tribes for that purpose.

Your Lordship will at once perceive that the document is not in legal form; but our dealings with the Indians have been only in equity, and I was therefore anxious to shew that the transaction had been equitably explained to them.