Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: November 22, 1970
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Where would you go to find 19th Century accounts of Red Lake and Pembina Chippewa Half-Breed scrip? And does this scrip have any worth today?

Why dredge up an 1854 Indian treaty relating to the Weas, Piankashaws, Peorias, and Kaskaskias -- Indian groups that are a tiny minority of Indians today?

How much did Florida cost in 1823? And who cares?

Such questions have been raised in 1970. Their answers may be worth millions of dollars, and depend on archaic records of U.S. Government

Agreement with Indian tribes. In most, if not all cases, the agreements imply recognition of the tribes as having a degree of sovereignty.

The Interior Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs is the original source of most Indian records. The BIA is required by law to maintain indefinitely those official papers it determines to be “of enduring value.”

Major BIA records up to 1940 -- including many records from the War Department which once directed Indian affairs -- are maintained by the National Archives and Records Service in the National Archives building in the Nation's Capital. Today they comprise thousands of cubic feet of books, papers, decisions, treaties, and other documentary materials which can never be considered extraneous.

Since these are records directly affecting the lives of Indian people, they are a matter of intense interest to Indian Americans, Government officials, students, anthropologists, lawyers and historians. In fiscal year 1970, more than 135 researchers visited the National Archives specifically requesting Indian records. In addition, archivists answered more than 1,000 written inquiries for historical information on Indian affairs.

Among the most constant users of Indian records is the Bureau of Indian Affairs itself. Other researchers include Government and private attorneys representing either individual Indian claimants or the Justice Department in preparation for court appearances. In such instances, a matter of Chippewa Half-Breed scrip could be a key legal issue.

For example, under the provisions of treaties signed in 1863, mixed blood Red Lake and Pembina Chippewa Indians were entitled to scrip, which could then be exchanged for 160-acre allotments of land in North Dakota and Minnesota which had been ceded to the tribes. Scrip was issued between 1867 and 1882.

Descendants of those mixed-blood Red Lake and Pembina Chippewas are dependent upon the archives for proof of their right to inherited ownership of such Indian homestead lands.

Treaty records have equal significance for tribal -- as opposed to

individual -- Indian land rights lost by the tribes.

A contemporary example relates an 1854 treaty to a $2 million judgment against the U.S. in favor of the claimant Peoria Tribe of Indians, On July 31, 1970 an Act of Congress ruled that a new roll must be prepared of those Indians who are lineal descendants of the various tribes who were parties to the Treaty of May 30, 1854 which combined the interest of the Weas, Piankashaws, Peorias and Kaskaskias. Certain living descendants of these tribes will share more than $2 million.

To find those eligible, researchers must examine not only the treaty itself, but many other documents such as census data, annuity rolls, tribal rolls, and military muster rolls of relocated Indians. Most of these documents can be found in the National Archives building in Washington, D. C.

Other regular customers for archaic Indian records are the attorneys handling tribal claims before the Indian Claims Commission, a judicial body established in 1946 to adjudicate hundreds of tribal claims against the U.S. to obtain financial redress for lands taken from them in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

As of November 1, 1970 the Indian Claims Commission had completed work on 327 of 609 dockets, or sub-petitions of Indian claims, since it was created August 13, 1946. To date, Congress has appropriated more than $330 million to Indians as a result of Commission awards. In fact last month, the Indian Claims Commission ruled that the U. S, owes the Seminole Indians more than $12 million for a goodly part of Florida, which was their homelands in 1823. The case is not yet completed, because the time during which an appeal may be filed with the Court of Claims is still open.

Indian records are among the most active Government agency files in Archives' custody, Past is Prologue," is nowhere more applicable Americans.