



Construction of the 50,000 sq. ft. Chief Sam Cook Mahmuwee Education Centre in Split Lake.

Chapter 8

Community Renewal

Split Lake in the First Half of the 1990s

EVEN THOUGH it would be premature to draw definitive conclusions about the experience of the 1990s, community renewal seems to have been the main feature of life in Split Lake since 1990. The First Nation has made major strides in reasserting control over its development, its lands and its waters. Split Lake Cree have been actively involved in managing their resources and further developing their government administration. They have also overseen the extensive redevelopment of their reserve community. Rightful pride is taken in the fact that all of this has also contributed to a revival of traditional cultural pursuits, particularly among younger members, as well as an increase in the consumption of domestic food.³³

Community Development

Several important physical and other community development initiatives have been completed in the last five years, building on the foundation laid in the 1980s. A new band office was constructed in 1990. A modern kindergarten to grade 12 school was opened in September 1991, allowing students to complete their high school education in the community. By 1992 water and sewer services had been provided to about 65% of the expanded community. To meet community power needs a direct transmission line from Kelsey was completed in 1992, for the first time ensuring the availability of reliable, unrestricted amounts of electrical energy. The arena was finished in 1994. Mail service increased to three times per

week. Figure 11 on page 75 shows the extent of development in the community by 1995.

Split Lake Cree are still carrying on traditional pursuits despite the ongoing effects of hydroelectric development. Recent activities have helped foster a revival of cultural practices throughout the community; the sharing of country foods is but one example. The spiritual aspect of Cree culture has assumed more significance. Although problems of contemporary society continue – the increase in diabetes is particularly disturbing – Split Lake Cree are better able to handle them, equipped as they are with both Aboriginal values and modern science and technology.

Indeed, the community appears to be moving towards a way of life which is blending both traditional and modern practices and values. Several examples illustrate this trend. Resource harvesters still winter in cabins in the bush, but at the same time they watch the NHL playoffs on portable televisions while they are there. Split Lake Cree youth are educated in a modern school, learning computer and other contemporary skills. At the same time they also express increasing interest in Split Lake Cree traditions and Aboriginal culture. Cree language is taught in the Chief Sam Cook Mahmuwee Education Centre, and field trips to traditional land use sites are common. Despite their taste for chips and cola, many young people are also eating more country foods.

Northern Flood Agreement Implementation

The global negotiations to implement the NFA that began in early 1989, resulted in divisions among the member First Nations of the Northern Flood Committee, just at the time that a comprehensive implementation framework had been negotiated. The details of this period are recounted in the Introduction to this study. Faced with the decision of either abandoning years of work and departing from the clear direction provided by the people, or proceeding alone if necessary, Split Lake Cree First Nation chose to proceed, and committed itself to continued negotiations.

These negotiations, carried out in the face of what many assessed to be overwhelming odds, resulted in the signing of the historic NFA Implementation Agreement, on June 24, 1992 amongst Split Lake Cree, Canada, Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro. Chief Norman Flett, ably supported throughout by the Council, First Nation staff and the

people, guided Split Lake through the negotiations between 1989 and 1992.

The 1992 agreement provided additional financial compensation of \$47 million, making for a total implementation package worth more than \$63 million, along with tens of thousands of acres of new reserve land at Waskaiowaka Lake and Assean Lake, and titled lands throughout the resource area. Just as important, new institutional arrangements were created among the parties, in terms of the management and use of Split Lake Cree traditional lands, resources, and waterways, as well as the enhanced environmental monitoring capability of the First Nation. Additional details on the specific provisions of the Implementation Agreement are provided in Appendix 2. The Split Lake Cree are convinced that this agreement has been, and will continue to be, of central importance in the First Nation reclaiming its rightful share of control over its lands and waters, as well as enabling it to reaffirm its Aboriginal identity.



Elder Joseph Morris assists in opening the new arena at Split Lake. The 1992 Implementation Agreement helped fund construction of the arena.

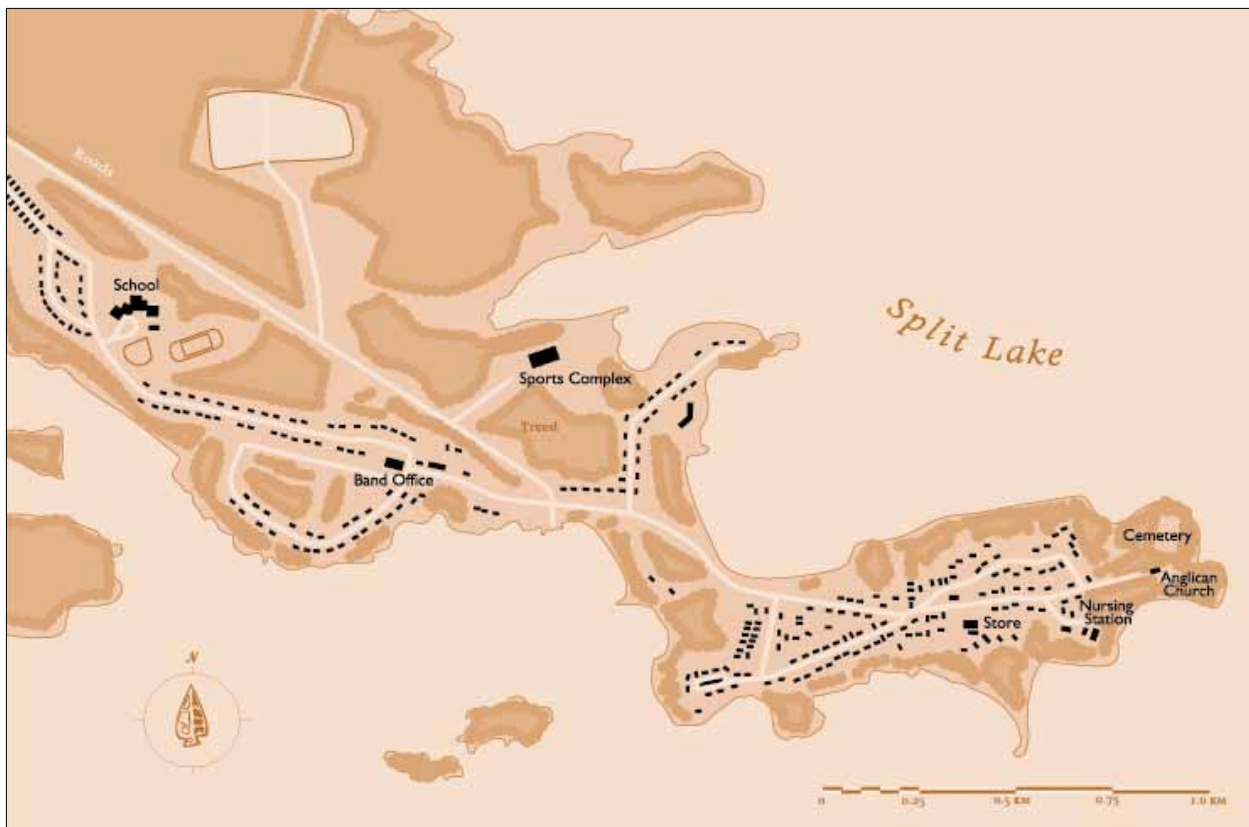


Figure 11: Extent of Split Lake Community Development in 1995.

Hydroelectric Development Effects

As in the 1970s and 1980s, hydroelectric project impacts continue to affect Split Lake Cree lands and waters and, through bio-physical linkages, their social, economic and cultural systems. While the wounds inflicted by the residential school system and other negative aspects of change are beginning to heal, and while some negative effects of modernization continue, the Hydro-related impacts and damages may never diminish. Nevertheless, Split Lake Cree are confident that they are better equipped than ever to deal with them.

Community Governance

The growth in the size and sophistication of the First Nation government that took place in the 1980s, has continued as the nineties unfold. Government staff now number about 36, the Tataskweyak Education Authority employs 43 people, and the Tataskweyak Trust, responsible for the implementation of activities related to the 1992 agreement, has 11 employees. In addition, relationships with the federal and provincial governments and with Manitoba Hydro, defined in contract as well as politically, are actively managed through multi-party structures created under the 1992 Implementation Agreement.

This agreement also provided the opportunity to formalize several of the traditional forms of self-government. These include the Elders' Tribunal to resolve certain disputes, the autonomous financing of the peacekeepers, and the role of general band meetings in determining implementation objectives and expenditure priorities.



Today, Split Lake is a thriving community of nearly 1700 people.

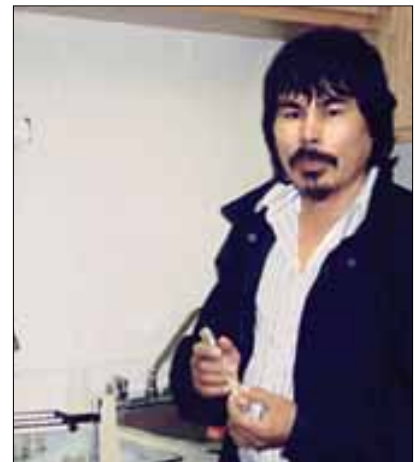
Overseeing all of these activities, with strict accountability to the people, Chief and Council today perform the legislative functions of a much more complex government. Even here traditions are maintained, as bi-annual elections continue to return a Council which is broadly representative of both the family and age groups in the community.

Conclusion

The Split Lake Cree have chosen the path of blending the old and new in order to gain control of their lives and destiny with confidence and determination. The people, faced with new challenges, are continuing, as their forefathers did, to exercise their inherent right to govern themselves, across a wide spectrum of governmental functions. While the First Nation is employing

modern means of doing this through various new institutional and operational arrangements, these are rooted in practices passed down through the generations.

The Split Lake community continues to modernize and evolve but traditional pursuits and respect for cultural practices and customs are not forgotten; they are growing, and are forming part of an exciting new synthesis of the traditional and the modern. One could fairly characterize the past decade in Split Lake as a time of community renaissance.



Victor Spence manages Split Lake's Tataskweyak Environmental Agency. Without him this report would not have been possible.



Split Lake Elders and other members at the 1992 signing ceremony for the Split Lake Implementation Agreement.



*Signing of the Split Lake Cree NFA Implementation Agreement in Split Lake on June 24, 1992. From left to right:
Hon. Thomas Siddon, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development;
Chief Norman Flett, Split Lake Cree First Nation;
Hon. James Downey, Minister of Northern Affairs, Manitoba;
Mr. John McCallum, Chairman, Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board.*



Split Lake 'New Core' showing band office, Tataskweyak Trust office and security office.



Chief, Councillors and Elders cutting the ribbon at the opening of the new band office.

Table 1

SPLIT LAKE CREE FIRST NATION
CHIEFS SINCE 1937



1937 TO 1951	SAM COOK
1951 TO 1953	DANIEL KIRKNESS
1953 TO 1959	ALFRED SPENCE
1959 TO 1960	JACOB SPENCE
1960 TO 1961	WILLIAM GARSON
1962 TO 1963	ALFRED SPENCE
1963 TO 1965	ADAM MAYHAM
1965 TO 1967	DAN FLETT
1967 TO 1969	ADAM MAYHAM
1969 TO 1972	DANIEL KIRKNESS
1972 TO 1973	BILL SPENCE
1973 TO 1975	JOHN WAVEY
1975 TO 1977	KENNETH WASTASECOOT
1977 TO 1979	MICHAEL P. GARSON
1979 TO 1982	KENNETH WASTASECOOT
1982 TO 1983	DANIEL KIRKNESS
1983 TO 1987	NORMAN FLETT
1987 TO 1989	LARRY BEARDY
1989 TO 1994	NORMAN FLETT
1994 TO 1995	JOHN GARSON
1995 TO PRESENT	NORMAN FLETT



Split Lake peninsula in 1927 (above) and in 1990 (inset).



Since 1992, a joint board of Split Lake Cree and Manitoba appointees controls land use and manages the resources throughout the 18,000 sq.mile Split Lake Resource Management Area.

Meeting of the Split Lake Resource Management Board at Recluse Lake on August 10, 1994. From left to right: Bill Kennedy; Bryant Keeper (B); Loretta Clarke (B); Chief Norman Flett; Doug Barrett (B); Harold Smith; Samuel Garson (B-now deceased); Michael Garson (B); Don Cook (B); Eric Wilson (B); John Garson (B); Lazarus Kitchikeesick (B); Bernie Osiowy (B); and Anthony Mayham. The (B) denotes board member.