

# Introduction

After the Second World War, Indian leaders and their associates across western Canada were active in political unions. Although they were unpaid, the time and effort they invested was extensive. Their aim: to gain the ear of Canadian governments and citizens. From British Columbia to Saskatchewan men and women gathered and worked to achieve that goal. For example, on the Northwest Coast Peter Kelly and Frank Calder planned the meetings of the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia; in Alberta, John Laurie spent evenings typing out minutes of Indian Association of Alberta conferences; in Saskatchewan, John Tootoosis rode the dirt roads of reserves to the many meetings of the Union of Saskatchewan Indians (USI). Sadly, despite the significant impact of Aboriginal peoples on Canada's political structure and system, few of their actions are recognized in the general Canadian historical record. The history of Aboriginal political action in Canada is long, and, in the mid-twentieth century, leaders across the west began to gain momentum in their drive to have their voices heard outside their own, often isolated, reserve communities.

In Alberta the IAA came to represent treaty Indian people's interests. Officially founded in 1939 by John (Johnny) Callihoo and Métis leader Malcolm Norris, the IAA derived in part from the League of Indians of Western Canada, which had been operating out of Saskatchewan since 1928. The founding of the IAA, however, represented a deliberate break with the league. The IAA's existence presented a new direction for Indian politics in the Prairie provinces – a move towards provincial organization. Although the IAA is perhaps best known for its role in spearheading the protest against the 1969 White Paper on Indian Affairs, and publishing the Red Paper soon after, its early history reveals much about First Nations perspectives concerning the place of Indian peoples in Canada before the civil rights movements and large-scale federal funding of Aboriginal organizations changed Canadian politics and society.

From its inauspicious beginnings in 1939 to its operation as a full-fledged

political association by the late 1950s, the IAA came to represent a large body of treaty Indian peoples across the province. Most important, the association shaped their collective identity within Alberta and made their concerns and demands known to both the federal government and the provincial government. During its first twenty years of operation, the IAA initiated and sustained dialogue between Indian Affairs officials and local representatives of various reserve communities. It agitated for the reform of the Indian Act and for changes in Indian education and health care. It also created awareness of the condition of Alberta's Indian peoples among the non-Indian community and fought to protect its members' treaty rights.

My purpose in this book is to investigate the first three decades of the IAA's existence. I seek to provide a much-needed narrative based on significant events in Canadian First Nations political history. In doing so I identify and describe significant factors – social, political, and economic – that contributed to the founding and growth of the IAA. I examine how the IAA functioned and seek to create an understanding of the role of non-Indian peoples in its activities. During this time period the IAA received a great deal of assistance from its non-Native secretary John Laurie, Opposition politicians, and citizens groups, especially the Edmonton-based Friends of the Indians Society. Finally, I attempt to characterize the relationship between the IAA and the state, that is, the provincial and federal governments.

The overall picture of the IAA that emerges in these decades is of an innately flexible organization that was a direct response to the poor social and economic conditions experienced by many Alberta reserve communities. It was also an organization that was concerned, on an everyday level, with treaty rights. It was not a singular product of war veterans or other “outsiders” but, rather, a movement that ebbed and flowed as a result of the interaction between Indian leaders and outside forces. The IAA lost much of its influence after its first generation of leaders died, limping on until the late 1960s saw its rejuvenation. From the beginning, the Canadian state appears to have responded relatively positively to the IAA. This may have been due to the desire of non-Native politicians to enhance their own image as liberal-minded citizens as much as to their desire to assist treaty Indians in their struggle to improve their position.

A subtle yet significant internal tension characterized the history of the IAA in the first decades of its operation. This tension derived from the differing views of the IAA held by Secretary John Laurie and First Nations peoples. On the one hand, it seems that IAA members perceived the association as an instrument for asserting their treaty rights and special status within Canada, for reaffirming their separateness from the state. On the other hand, Laurie saw the IAA as a vehicle for drawing Indian peoples into Canadian society by encouraging their engagement with the Canadian

state. Indian peoples saw the IAA as a protective or distinctive institution; Laurie saw it as a modernizing institution – one that represented redemption for Indian peoples, a chance for them to regain their freedom within the Canadian state through the exercise of democracy. As a result of the IAA's internal tension, during the first decade of its operation its policies vacillated between striving for distinct Aboriginal status and equal rights within Canadian society. The IAA certainly never presented a harmonized vision of the political, social, and economic change necessary to meet the needs of Indian peoples until it confronted the White Paper of 1969; rather, it asserted treaty rights while simultaneously seeking a closer relationship between Indian peoples and the Canadian state. By June 1970, however, the IAA's conflicted position was clear: it found itself integrated into the Canadian political system and in pursuit of treaty rights in the hyphenated form of "citizens-plus." The IAA's position was presented that month to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and his Cabinet in the form of a document that became known as the Red Paper. This document, drafted by the Alberta Native leaders with assistance from Preston and Ernest Manning's consulting firm (and borrowing heavily from the Hawthorn Report), launched Aboriginal politics in Canada in a new direction. Rather than focusing upon the social issues of the past, Native politicians began to focus upon reasserting a conversation about treaties and rights – a conversation that their forerunners had last attempted to initiate in the 1940s.

The main questions that I pursue throughout this book derive from themes established in the older literature pertaining to the history of Indian political activity. Over the past forty years, academic analyses of Canadian Aboriginal political activity – at both national and provincial levels – have been produced only sporadically. From Phillip Drucker's work on the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia to more recent writings (including biographies of Aboriginal leaders and surveys of Aboriginal political associations), existing works represent a disparate and relatively small body of literature. Even more significantly, historians have virtually ignored the intellectual structures grounding Indian political activity in the twentieth century.

In his work *Tribal Secrets* (1995), Native American scholar Robert Allen Warrior emphasizes the importance of investigating how American Indian intellectuals write and speak to each other in their social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual struggle for an American Indian future.<sup>1</sup> The history of Indian political activity in Canada consists of more than scattered and reactionary "protest movements" or homogeneous "Pan-Indian" movements.<sup>2</sup> The philosophies driving Indian political action, such as those expressed by Prairie Indian leaders in the early and mid-twentieth century, were complex and varied. Native American scholar

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn recognizes this when she writes of the American experience: "It is as though the American Indian has no intellectual voice with which to enter into America's important dialogues."<sup>3</sup>

The situation is much the same in Canadian writing: First Nations in Canada's history have rarely had their intellectual voices heard or recognized. This book represents the first application of Cook-Lynn's idea to the treatment of First Nations leaders in academic writing. An inquiry into the nature of Indian political thought and action in this interwar/postwar period provides insight into a political culture intertwined with belief systems, expressive symbols, and a unique historical experience particular to specific Prairie First Nations cultures and communities. In fact, as Cook-Lynn notes, Native American intellectualism distinguishes itself through its focus on tribal indigenism and sovereignty. This claim is applicable to the Canadian context as well.<sup>4</sup> My history of the IAA seeks to reveal what being treaty Indians meant to Native leaders in western Canada.

As a non-Aboriginal scholar, I came to this topic circuitously, and it has taken time for me to understand my own limitations. Despite my efforts, this work represents a superficial sketch of main trends in IAA history, from the perspective of an observer both culturally and generationally removed from the events described. I recognize that it is my own voice that has been added to those documents and accounts that make up the IAA's history. I also emphasize that much more oral history needs to be done on this subject. Cook-Lynn notes that, ideally, these stories and this type of research need to be generated from within the culture rather than from "the outside looking in."<sup>5</sup> Superficially, I agree with this ideal. However, I also believe that any scholar willing to discuss the political and intellectual heritage of First Nations communities in Canada should be willing to take up the challenges inherent in this topic. Multiple perspectives on these subjects are sorely needed if adequate intellectual discussions are to be held. And in Canada today these discussions need to begin.

I also believe that writing histories such as this one is a more complex business than Cook-Lynn's model of "outsider"/"insider" suggests. The IAA and its members represent a heterogeneous history with no true outsiders or insiders; instead, there were those in the centre and those on the periphery. By implication, there were also many between those extremes. All those lives affected by the IAA between 1939 and the 1960s were somehow connected – and not always by culture or language. Similarly, writers of this history are either closer to or more removed from the topic, depending upon their various personal characteristics. By extension, although the history of the IAA is not related directly to my own community, it is indirectly linked to my own family. The Norris and Downe family histories, prominent in the story of the IAA, are intertwined with mine, and these intersections indicate to me the extent to which this history – of reserve

communities and their political, social, and economic aspirations – is far more wide-ranging than are the boundaries of those communities, both geographic and social. It is for these reasons that I chose to tackle the difficult task of trying to present my own version of IAA history.

Over time my interest in the subject has deepened beyond the preliminary research this narrative represents. After investigating the activities and goals of the IAA, I became increasingly intrigued with the lives and ideas of Prairie Aboriginal leaders. For example, the more I read and heard about John Callihoo, the first president of the IAA, the more obvious it became to me that he promoted and symbolized a specific set of ideas and ideals. As I studied the history of the IAA's actions and interactions I began to hear a particular language of citizenship and sovereignty in tones and metaphors that I had not encountered elsewhere in the academic literature. Reflection on these texts led me to conclude that First Nations political unions in twentieth-century Canada are the embodiments of historically rooted visions – visions as diverse as any coming from Canada's many non-Aboriginal political leaders.

Identifying, documenting, and studying the politics and visions of Native leaders in Canada's west after the Second World War is a task that presents some special challenges to academics trained in documentary approaches to history. First, the existing literature is thin. Few published sources document historical Native politics from Aboriginal perspectives. Second, correspondence, speeches, and other standard unpublished primary documentary sources frequently used by intellectual historians to sketch political histories are equally scarce for many Indian leaders, including those of the IAA. This can be explained in part by the fact that most leaders were orators who spoke frequently and eloquently in their Aboriginal languages rather than from prepared written speeches. And those who did produce writings often kept their papers within their communities or families. As a result, the material is not easily available to outsiders. It is imperative that scholars interested in the historical development of Aboriginal political activity understand that oral history and community-based research are vital avenues to providing insight into the political history of Prairie First Nations communities. The truth of this history is in the people and so it is they who must be consulted.

This book follows the chronological history of the IAA. Chapters 1 to 3 investigate the origins and early years of the IAA. In its first twenty years of operation, the association assumed and expanded its role as the voice of treaty Indian peoples throughout the province. Initially, the IAA primarily represented people in the Edmonton, Saddle Lake, and Hobbema Agencies,<sup>6</sup> but gradually it recruited members in the southern and far northern regions of the province. By 1946 the IAA had formed a local on the Blood reserve, and by the 1950s it involved communities in the Athabasca

region. During this period the IAA's elected executive established its basic policies and practices, and standardized its meetings and agendas.

An examination of the IAA's origins raises a number of ancillary questions. Who were the individuals who created the first constitution of the IAA, and what were their intentions? What issues, both inside and outside Indian communities, spurred IAA founders to create a political association? Since the IAA experienced a period of "dormancy" during the Second World War, to what extent did the re-founded association continue with its original mandate? How was the IAA structured? What was the role of women in the IAA? To date, most studies of Indian political associations have emphasized the impact of the Second World War on their origins. It is commonly held that the overseas experiences of Indian war veterans during the Second World War contributed to Prairie Indian politicization by directly causing the former to assert their citizenship rights upon their return home.<sup>7</sup> The history of the IAA challenges this notion. In Alberta, Indian war veterans did not pursue local issues and treaty rights. In fact, few veterans had had much experience in the residential schools. Furthermore, the issues that concerned the IAA membership predated the Second World War.

Chapter 4 concerns itself with the role of non-Indians in the IAA. In its early decades of operation the IAA executive appears to have been heavily influenced by one individual, John Laurie, a non-Native high school teacher who served as IAA secretary and advisor until his death in 1959. The writings and actions of John Laurie indicate that he saw the IAA as a vehicle for helping Indian peoples integrate into non-Indian society. Through the IAA, Laurie, far from being the impartial secretary he held himself out to be, promoted specific issues and a certain political ideology. Though he often spoke on behalf of the IAA, Laurie's liberal democratic views tended to obscure (or sometimes redirect) the issues that concerned the IAA membership. It was only with his death in 1959 that his influence truly ended, and a new generation of leaders could begin to make their mark on the IAA.

Chapters 5 through 7 concentrate on describing the relationship between the IAA and the federal Indian Affairs administration. Again, John Laurie had a strong hand in directing IAA relations with the government. Laurie was well connected to both politicians and social reformers across Alberta, and he used these connections to support IAA interaction with the government. Interestingly, despite official reticence to facilitate Indian political activity, after the Second World War the IAA became one of the first unions to be officially recognized by the federal government. IAA influence in federal circles was partially a result of its successful presentations to the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons, which was empowered to investigate the Indian Act and Indian

administration. By the 1950s the association was prominent in the House of Commons and had forged a relationship with Alberta's provincial government. Over the course of the 1940s and 1950s the IAA moved from being on the fringes of the Canadian political system to participating within it.

Chapter 8 looks at the end of the IAA in the 1960s. Although the IAA lost much of its momentum in the mid-1960s, it did experience a revival in 1968, when it attained federal funding and new leadership. From that moment on, Aboriginal politics entered the modern era, were fully integrated into Canada's political machine, and were subject to a new set of conflicting interests. When it challenged the infamous 1969 White Paper, devised by the Liberal government of the day and aimed at eliminating the Indian Act, the IAA successfully pushed a new vision of the position of registered Indian peoples in Canada at the national level. The IAA had changed Aboriginal politics in Canada.

In Chapter 9, in moving from the specifics of IAA history to the level of political leadership, I attempt to refine and specify the discussion on changing political visions in Canadian Aboriginal communities. This chapter pioneers an attempt at comparing and contrasting the leadership of IAA president Johnny Callihoo with that of his Saskatchewan contemporary, John Tootoosis. The Union of Saskatchewan Indians, headed for many years by John Tootoosis, initially had a close relationship with the IAA, although their respective leaders considered each other "enemies." The provincial border was an open one in terms of the flow of political ideas, but Indian leaders in Saskatchewan and Alberta interpreted their roles in different ways. Although Chapter 9 does not fit the chronology underlying the rest of the work, I think that it is fitting that it close the history of the IAA because it poses larger philosophical questions about Aboriginal political thought and intellectual history.

Finally, Chapter 10 summarizes the general trends in IAA history between 1939 and the late 1960s as I view them. The contemporary landscape of Aboriginal politics in Canada at both national and provincial levels has been so strongly influenced by the IAA and its members that our connection to this past must be emphasized.

Obviously, the IAA story suggests many complex questions that are beyond the scope of this investigation. For example, I would suggest that there be further study of the role of the Church in the IAA. Archival evidence suggests that Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy supported the association from its early days through the 1950s. The clergy did influence Indian political activity at the grassroots level; however, the extent of their influence on the IAA is as yet unclear. The history of the IAA also raises questions about the interaction between the provincial government and Indian communities. The Social Credit government in Alberta, officially

reluctant to concern itself with Indian matters, did make policy and legislative decisions that affected Indian communities. Furthermore, the history of the IAA presents very interesting material relating to the role of women in Indian politics. Although I have noted the role of women in the IAA, I have not analyzed gender influence on IAA actions and agendas. And, of course, the political philosophies of First Nations leaders such as Tootoosis and Callihoo, as well as interaction between the IAA and the USI, are subjects deserving of more attention than I am able to provide in this work. In fact, students of Aboriginal history in Canada will find that comparisons of different Aboriginal political movements are in order.

The story of the IAA is rich in questions and themes, many of which are related to current issues in Aboriginal politics. Much oral history and community-based research can and should be done as this would shed additional light on Aboriginal views of the IAA and the role it played in Aboriginal politics in postwar Canada.

#### Theoretical Perspectives and Sources

This analysis of the IAA derives its perspective from anthropologists such as Jean and John Comaroff, and Pierre Clastres as well as from historians such as Natalie Zemon Davis, Lynn Hunt, and Robert Darnton. These authors have focused on wide-ranging issues related to processes extended through time: relationships between history and culture, social movements, state formation and power, and questions of identity and social change. Rather than presupposing or creating unity and coherence in historical events, what has been labelled by academic historians as the “new” history seeks to chronicle and identify intentions, contingencies, and relationships among people through time.<sup>8</sup> This new history emphasizes discontinuity, ambiguities, and the fractured nature of events. French philosopher Michel Foucault initiated this trend in historical investigation as early as 1972 when he stated: “the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations.”<sup>9</sup> While older works describing the history of Indian political activity emphasize the great continuities in, and developmental nature of, that activity, this work favours the disjunctures.

The writing of John and Jean Comaroff stimulated me to think critically about previous writings related to Indian political action. In *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, these authors develop the idea that the history of colonized peoples is not reducible to a series of cataclysmic events and ruptures that redirected their otherwise static social systems towards modernity or some assimilated state.<sup>10</sup> They emphasize that historical social movements are presented to the historian post facto as dispersed fragments within unbounded fields rather than as a chain of clear-cut



events. The function of the historian, in turn, is to restore the scattered shards of past events to a world of meaningful connections; these historical happenings “have to be anchored in the processes of their production, in the orbits of connection and influence that gave them life and force.”<sup>11</sup> If one takes these ideas to heart, then it seems obvious that, in order to reconstruct the history of the IAA, one has to anchor the swirling cross-currents of social activity to a larger context without denying the ambiguity and disunity of the events that constituted that organization. Thus I attempt to link the quotidian roots of the IAA to a larger Prairie and Canadian history. The founding of the IAA neither marked the “beginning” of Indian political activity nor constituted a sign of Indian peoples’ realization that they could now assert some form of public power; rather, the IAA simply represented a new forum within which reserve communities could voice some of their concerns. The IAA was not First Nations peoples’ only source of political power or collective identity; it was merely one they found most useful between 1939 and the late 1960s. The IAA may have been a new institution, but the ideas and collectivity it represented had a long-standing history.

Archival sources related to the IAA’s history are limited, but they do include the business papers of the early association as well as the personal papers of several of its prominent members. Former archivist of the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, Hugh Dempsey (John Laurie’s successor as secretary of the IAA), did much to save and preserve these valuable records. As a result, the John Laurie Papers, the James Gladstone Papers, the IAA business papers, and scattered documents deriving from other IAA supporters housed in the Glenbow Archives represent the largest collection of material on the IAA’s early years. These papers document the history of the IAA from 1939 through the late 1950s and are very revealing of John Laurie’s involvement in the association. I must acknowledge and emphasize that, when I conducted this research, some of those papers were not yet catalogued. Some of them were still in private hands, and others had not yet been filed. These papers derive from the private collections of Hugh Dempsey and Murray Dobbin and are documented as such in this work. Although I hold photocopies of these papers, they are now incorporated into the various Glenbow collections.

In addition, the National Archives of Canada Record Group 10 (RG 10) also contains a significant collection of government policy statements and Indian Affairs correspondence related to the IAA. The record in the National Archives primarily represents the Indian Affairs’ correspondence with the IAA, and it gives a good picture of the response of Ottawa bureaucrats to an Aboriginal association that demanded Indian Affairs’ accountability. Unfortunately, this federal record of government-IAA interaction thins out remarkably after 1964. It is not clear whether the IAA’s activities

slowed so much that the paper trail in Ottawa was reduced or whether the records have simply not yet made it to publicly accessible files.

Two other archives were relevant to my research into IAA history. The Saskatchewan Archives Board's Historical Records Section contains oral histories of Saskatchewan leaders who knew IAA leaders and who were willing to share their memories of them. In turn, The University of Alberta Archives contain the Reta Rowan Papers, which relate to the activities of the IAA at the provincial level. Reta Rowan was an important figure in the group known as the Friends of the Indians Society, which operated out of Edmonton, and her personal papers contain many interesting photographs of IAA members and IAA meetings. In addition, they contain the meeting minutes of the Friends of the Indians Society. These papers offer a non-Aboriginal perspective on the activities of the IAA into the 1950s.

Only a small, albeit very significant, fragment of the archival material informing this history derived from private collections. As is true for most investigations into any aspect of twentieth-century Aboriginal history in Canada, Aboriginal families have a substantive cache of information. In some cases, families allow researchers to make use of this material; however, much of it is not widely available. In my case, I am immensely grateful for two personal collections of papers that were made available to me. Other extensive private collections have not yet been opened to researchers, although they are known to exist and will remain unnamed out of respect for the privacy of the families that hold them. I hope that, one day, they will be used to highlight the significance of Aboriginal political history to the evolution of the Canadian state.

Last, but not least, a rich yet underutilized source of information on IAA history lies in the memories of those who participated in the organization in its early years. Gordon Crowchild, Muriel Manywounds, Harold Cardinal, William Norris, Ruth Gorman, Cynthia Downe, Hugh Dempsey, Maria Campbell, Stan Cuthand, and Pauline Dempsey were among those who generously shared with me their recollections of the IAA. Although far from comprehensive, these accounts acknowledge the importance of the undocumented, unpublished, unarchived sources and the significance of sharing them with a larger audience. Unfortunately, many of the major and original contributors to the IAA – such as Malcolm Norris, Johnny Callihoo, Albert Lightning, Clarence McHugh, and others – have died, leaving their memories of the IAA unrecorded. Conversely, there are many individuals who can still contribute to a deeper understanding of the IAA.

Photographs also serve as a significant source of information on the IAA. In the 1940s and 1950s, several IAA members and their supporters were avid photographers who enjoyed capturing friends and family on film at various IAA-related functions. Collectively, these images can reveal a great deal about the personal and intimate side of IAA history. They also provide

insight into many details of the IAA that are missing in the written record. Simple questions such as “Who attended the IAA meetings?” or “Where were the meetings held?” are more easily answered when photographs of the period are consulted. Most interestingly, the photographs of John Laurie reveal a highly personal view of Prairie Indian politics and social activity, often featuring Laurie’s closest friends and favourite activities. These photographs are held in the Glenbow Archives. Reta Rowan’s photos of her IAA adventures focus on a very different subject matter than did John Laurie’s: women. Rowan spent time with the Aboriginal women she met in reserve communities and always seemed eager to take snapshots of them. Although women’s participation in the IAA is not always obvious from the written records, it is clear from Rowan’s photographs. These photographs are held in the University of Alberta Archives.

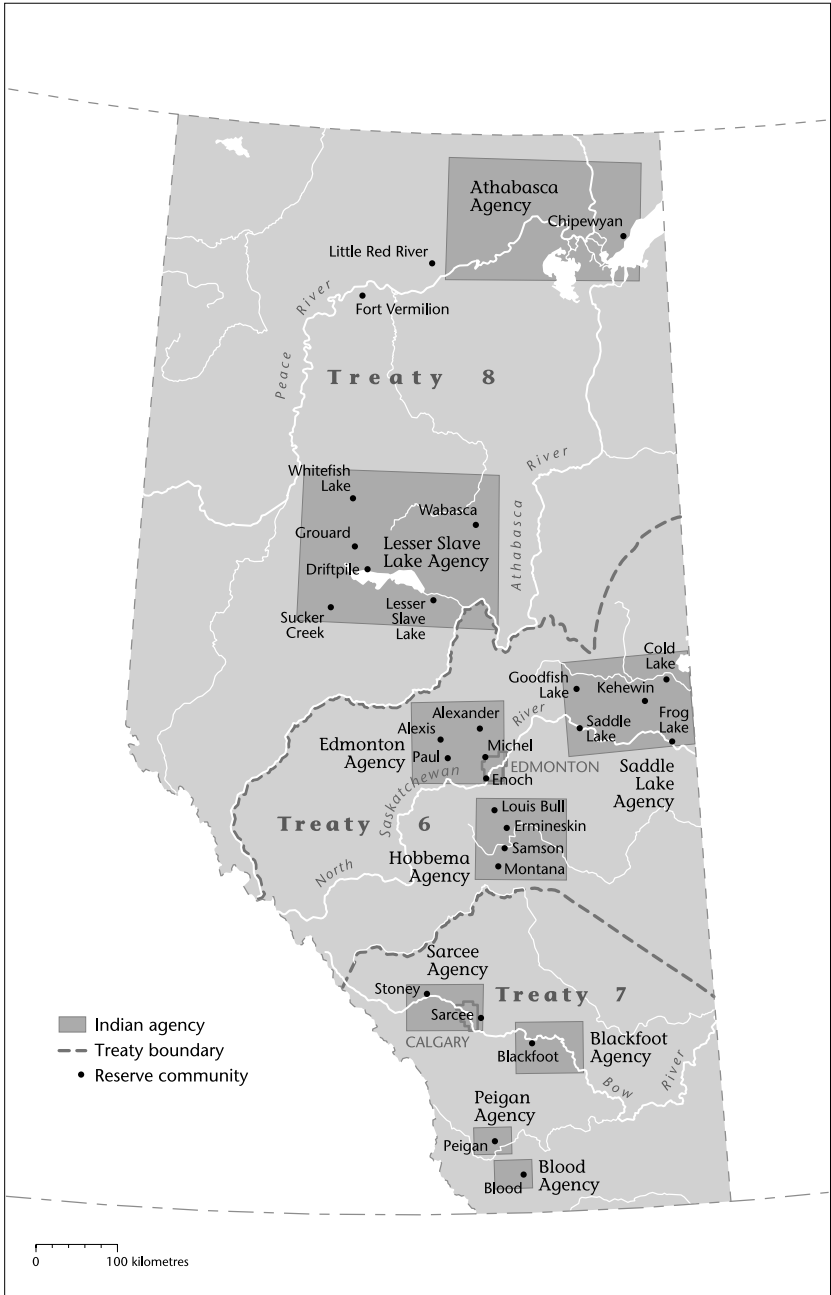
Despite the availability of some very interesting source material on the IAA, after 1966 much of the association’s history is difficult to document. Time may reveal that more documents are available through the regional Indian Affairs offices or through private collections; however, at the time of writing, documentary sources pertaining to the mid- to late 1960s were extremely thin. No record of IAA meeting minutes are readily available for the period after 1966. The tables and text presented here pertaining to this period are based on archival material.

Names of reserve communities and Indian bands used in this work are those that were in use from the 1930s through the 1950s. Recently, many bands and communities in Alberta have changed their names to better reflect their First Nation status and the use of indigenous languages. However, in the interest of clarity and accuracy, I use the older names – including Blackfoot, Sarcee, Blood, Stoney, and others. It is these names that both permeate the records and reflect contemporary usage. Because the IAA was concerned with representing “Indians,” in this book I refer to the First Nations residents of Alberta as “Indian” or “Indian peoples.” The federal and provincial governments engaged in Aboriginal affairs according to the definition of “Indian” contained within the Indian Act. Time and practice will change and clarify the usage of terms such as “Indian,” “Native,” “First Nations,” and “Aboriginal”; however, when dealing with this transitional period it is difficult to be both historically and politically correct at all times for all peoples. In this case, it is the historical record that primarily determines my use of names and terms. All views presented in this work are derived strictly from my own interpretation of the papers that I studied and the conversations in which I participated. I humbly accept responsibility for them all and acknowledge that some of my views may, unwittingly, be in error.



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# The Indian Association of Alberta



Map of Alberta showing treaty boundaries, selected reserve communities, and general location of Alberta Indian agencies.