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## Review of *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* By Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter, and Dorothy First Rider

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1929. Treaty 7, negotiated 19 to 22 September 1877 at Blackfoot Crossing, included the Bloods, Peigans, and Siksika, three of the divisions of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Stoney (all southern Stoney except the Big-horn Band), and the Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee) and encompassed the region of southern Alberta.

This volume represents a synthesis of information gathered by the Treaty 7 Project, a special collaborative research endeavor of the Treaty 7 Tribal Council and their Elders to gather and review systematically the "collective memory" of the Elders about Treaty 7, and to reconstruct the historical context before and after the treaty signing. Elders were interviewed about their understandings of the treaty's purposes and intentions derived from the oral traditions taught to them. In collaboration with their community-based researchers, the Elders also evaluated the scholarship of others who had previously interpreted the "spirit and intent" of Treaty 7, often considered "true" accounts consisting of an accepted consensus of opinion based on documentary "facts." The selected testimony of the Treaty 7 Elders, presented in a thematic and tribal arrangement, demonstrates the "true" historic perspectives of the five nations.

The limitation of written sources alone as official sources is illustrated by a qualitatively critical integration of information from hitherto unrecorded and unwritten oral accounts and compared with extant documentary sources. The resulting new synthesis demonstrates the importance of reinterpretation, especially when other new evidence reveals differences of perspective and detail, some of which remain unreconciled. Elders consistently report, for example, that they and previous generations comprehended the Treaty as a peace treaty, not a land surrender, although the latter remains the position of the government of Canada. The Elders assert that the issue of land surrender was never mentioned to Indian leaders at the negotiations, nor were copies of the final formal treaty ever supplied to the leaders after the signing, which meant the treaty's final language was never

*The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7.* By Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter, and Dorothy First Rider. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. Photographs, illustrations, maps, biographies, notes, bibliography, index. xx + 408 pp. \$60.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

The eleven numbered treaties between representatives of the Crown on behalf of the Dominion of Canada and First Nations resident within specific regions of central and western Canada were negotiated from 1850 to

communicated or translated by any formal process. The First Nations subject to its terms only learned of the *Indian Act* when it began to be enforced (also unexplained to the signers) and as select Treaty obligations were implemented—epitomizing a much different understanding of “being taken care of” from that which Crown representatives had promised.

This volume represents an important new contribution to treaty studies and supplies many new insights through its critical juxtaposition of information and interpretations derived from oral traditions and histories with previous scholarship by academic researchers.

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