

Rocky Boy's Reservation Timeline

Chippewa and Cree Tribes

March 2017

The Montana Tribal Histories Reservation Timelines are collections of significant events as referenced by tribal representatives, in existing texts, and in the Montana tribal colleges' history projects. While not all-encompassing, they serve as instructional tools that accompany the text of both the history projects and the *Montana Tribal Histories: Educators Resource Guide*. The largest and oldest histories of Montana Tribes are still very much oral histories and remain in the collective memories of individuals. Some of that history has been lost, but much remains vibrant within community stories and narratives that have yet to be documented.

Time Immemorial – “This is an old, old story about the Crees (Ne-l-yah-wahk). A long time ago the Indians came from far back east (Sah-kahs-te-nok)... The Indians came from the East not from the West (Pah-ki-si-mo- tahk). This wasn't very fast. I don't know how many years it took for the Indians to move West.” (Joe Small, Government. Ethnic Heritage Studies Program: Plains Indians, Cheyenne-Cree-Crow-Lakota Sioux. Bozeman, MT: Center for Bilingual/Multicultural Education, College of Education, Montana State University, 1982. P. 4)

1851 – Treaty with the Red Lake and Pembina Chippewa included a land session on both sides of the Red River.

1855 – Treaty negotiated with the Mississippi, Pillager, and Lake Winnibigoshish bands of Chippewa Indians. The Tribes ceded a portion of their aboriginal lands in the Territory of Minnesota and reserved lands for each tribe. The treaty contained a provision for allotment and annuities.

1863 – Treaty with the Mississippi, Pillager, and Lake Winnibigoshish bands of Chippewa Indians ceded a significant portion of their lands as designated in the 1855 treaty.

1887 – The Montana Territorial Legislature appropriated \$500 for relief for the Cree camped on the Sun River.

1893 – Crees camped at Silver Bow suffered an outbreak of Scarlet Fever.

1894 – Despite the policy criminalizing the spiritual traditions and ceremonies of tribes, the Cree held a Sun dance.

1896 – Congress appropriated \$5,000 Congress to fund the deportation of the Cree from Montana.

1896 – Buffalo Coat filed a petition with the court, saying he and the other Cree that were detained for deportation were not afforded due process of the law. Buffalo Coat claimed US residency since 1885 and noted the number of children in their group that had been born in the United States. A judge determined the state court did not have authority to give a ruling as the deportation was through act of Congress. The deportation to Canada went ahead.



1909 – Rocky Boy’s band ordered to the Blackfeet Reservation. Eleven thousand acres of 80-acre parcels were set-aside for them.

1912 – Fred Baker searched for a permanent settlement for Rocky Boy’s band and other landless Indians. Fort Assiniboine by the Bear Paw Mountains was offered as a possibility.

1914 – Frank Bird Linderman wrote letters to influence addressing the landless Indian issue.

1915 – A survey was done of Fort Assiniboine to determine its suitability for a reservation.

1916 – Chief Rocky Boy died April 18.

1916 – A September 7 congressional act designated a tract of land as a refuge for the “homeless and wandering Indians.” The land included part of the abandoned Fort Assiniboine Military Reserve. The original bill was to include four townships. Within this land base there were 21 tillable sections, 80 grazing sections, and 12 timbered sections. Unfortunately the bill was approved with one amendment – the removal of one township. This land included the lower valley of Beaver Creek that contained the tillable acres. The refuge ended up totaling approximately 56,035 acres. More land was added later during 1934 – 1946 almost doubling the size of the reservation, now totaling 107,613 acres. The reservation was named after Chief Rocky Boy as an honor to their departed chief.

1916 – The first agency school was built.

1917 – 1920 – A drought ended reservation gardening and eliminated most reservation jobs.

1925 – A health survey revealed 23 of 65 children attending school had advanced trachoma; nine had evidence of Tuberculosis (TB); and all showed signs of malnutrition. Of the adult population, 20 percent had TB.

1928 – Sangrey Day School was constructed to serve kindergarten through fifth grade.

1930 – Haystack Day School was established.

1931 – Parker Day School was constructed. These latter schools served the tribal member populations moving away from the agency out to the reservation districts. Sometimes the schools were empty as it was hard to keep teachers employed. Housing was scarce and conditions were challenging. Charles Gopher, born in 1933, remembered attending Parker Day School. In addition to formal schooling, one of his memories was the children being gathered together at a home to learn songs and cultural knowledge from elders such as Young boy, Chief Goes Out, and Well Off Man.

1931 – The Interior Department encouraged mining on the reservation as a 20-year lease was granted to the Bear Paw Mining and Milling Company of Havre to mine gold, lead, silver, copper, and vermiculite. The Bureau of Indian Affairs limited tribal royalties to seven and one half percent. The Tribe derived no income from this arrangement, and, in fact, the company failed to pay rents and provide safe working conditions.

1933 – Through the “New Deal” programs, several government projects accomplished road building, construction of an irrigation ditch, Bonneau Dam, and some house construction. Houses were built on “assignments”. At this time a house could be constructed for \$500.

1934 – With a vote of 172 for and 7 against, the Rocky Boy Tribes voted to organize under the Indian Reorganization Act.

1935 – Thirty-five thousand acres of land adjacent to the Rocky Boy Reservation was purchased and put in trust for the Chippewa, Cree, and other Indians. It became unclear just whom this land was purchased for. There were still landless Indians in the state at this time. Rather than set up two reservations, it was decided to make the 35,000 acres part of the Rocky Boy's Reservation, with the tribes' adoption of 25 additional families.

1936 – Dr. Henry Roe Cloud conducted a census of landless Indians that totals 550 families representing 3,000 landless Indians eligible for adoption. Eligibility required an Indian blood quantum of one-half or more.

1936 – The worst drought in the history of the state forced the tribe to sell the 350 cattle they were able to save.

1938 – The adoption of non-ward Indians.

1944 – Trusting the promise of Havre, Hill County, and the state to help the Rocky Boy Tribes with their land acquisition program, the Chippewa-Cree Tribal Council gave up their claim to Beaver Creek Park. The tribe never received the support promised.

1948 – 1949 – Record low temperatures required emergency airlifts of hay, food, and clothing to keep people and cattle alive.

1949 – The Bureau of Indian Affairs and Rocky Boy Business Committee worked to get a bill introduced for economic support for the reservation. Funding was requested in the form of low interest loans. The bill died without any congressional action.

1970 – The Rocky Boy's Reservation's petition for their own school district was finally approved. Tribal members testified and gave evidence as to the need for a reservation school district. Citing a 12 percent Indian student graduation rate in Havre High School, as well as other incidents of discrimination, a strong case was made for a separate reservation school district.

1979 – Rocky Boy Alternative High School opened to meet the needs of 32 students who had dropped out of the public school system.

1984 – A Tribal Ordinance was passed, creating the Charter for Stone Child College.

1987 – The Rocky Boy Tribal High School was built and the tribes petitioned to create a new public high school district. The tribes eventually appealed to State Superintendent Nancy Keenan and won, making their school a public school.