

Aboriginal people make up roughly 5% of the population of Edmonton (2006 Census)

38% of Edmonton's 'homeless' population is identified as Aboriginal (2010 Homeless Count)

Why do Native people make up such a disproportionate amount of the city's 'homeless' population?

Dismembering and Displacing a Treaty Nation in Edmonton

1876: Treaty Six is negotiated and signed between The Crown and First Nations bands of what would become Alberta and Saskatchewan. Bands are to be consulted about the location of their reserves.

1877: Chief Papaschase signs Treaty Six at Fort Edmonton. The band numbered 249 people by 1879.

1880: Chief Papaschase is promised 48 sq. miles of reserve land at Two Hills, in present-day south Edmonton.

1881: A group of Edmonton citizens, organized by Frank Oliver, forwards a petition to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald demanding that the reserve be moved twenty miles further south.

1883: Cree chiefs from the Edmonton area send a letter to Prime Minister Macdonald accusing the government of breaching its treaty obligations and detailing widespread poverty among Cree people.

1885-1886: Papaschase band members are encouraged to leave the treaty in exchange for Métis scrip. The band is reduced to 82 members.

1887: Papaschase band members are removed from their reserve. The people are dispersed.

1888: The Papaschase reserve is surrendered in a process that did not follow the Canadian law of the day. The land is sold as private property.

A Place to Call Home?

"Now is the time for the Government to declare the reserve open and show whether this country is to be run in the interests of the settlers or the Indians." **Frank Oliver, Edmonton Bulletin editorial on the Papaschase Band, 1881**

"We are reduced to the lowest stage of poverty. We were once a proud and independent people ... Our young women are reduced to starvation to become prostitutes to the white man for a living, a thing unheard of before amongst ourselves." **Edmonton-area chiefs to Prime Minister Macdonald, January 7, 1883**

"The band is composed for the most part of stragglers ... A large proportion of them get their living by begging and other questionable means around the town." **Frank Oliver, Edmonton Bulletin editorial on the Papaschase Band, 1884**

"The above named Indians lived in these places during the winter. The shacks are made of logs, cardboard and mud. These Indians are non-treaty Indians and do not belong to any reservation, and as they are on relief some arrangements will have to be made for their removal." **Edmonton Police report, Indigenous people camping near 140 Street and Stony Plain Road, 1937**

"These people are trying to exist by gathering rags and empty bottles from the dump. ... While visiting the dump I noticed some of the halfbreeds gathering foodstuffs there." **Edmonton's Chief Health Inspector, 1937**

"We understand there are at least One hundred and fifty Breeds living in old box cars and tents around the old C.N. right-of-way on 105th avenue. We also wish to protest against these half breeds being allowed to ride the bus carrying bags of garbage picked up on the city lanes. The odor from these half breeds and garbage is far from pleasant on this overcrowded bus." **Jasper Place Community League letter to City Health Board, 1939**

"Out on the street later, I met two policemen. One told me to beat it, but I told them I wasn't drunk. They were young cops. They put the handcuffs on me and threw me hard, head first, into the paddy wagon. One of them got in with me. My arms were fastened behind my back with the iron cuffs. He put his foot on my back and forced my arms up to my neck. I howled with pain, but the policemen were laughing. Something snapped in my right arm, also in my head. I blacked out." **Anthony Apakark Thrasher lived on the streets of Edmonton periodically from 1957 to 1989**

"We weren't drunk. We weren't doing anything. We're just homeless." **Diane Wood on the Edmonton Police sweatbox incident, 2006**

The disproportionate number of Indigenous 'homeless' people in Edmonton should be understood as part of a long history of Indigenous displacement in this region. Indigenous 'homeless' people – citizens of sovereign political groups who signed treaties with The Crown – represent the ongoing breach of Treaty Six by the government of Canada. We must take responsibility for the active role citizens and police in Edmonton have played in dispossessing and displacing Native people. Homelessness is not just an economic or housing issue – it is a Treaty issue.