

In our Words - The Robinson Huron Treaty

Bomgiizhik –

So, the indigenous people fought in the war of 1812 to protect their own autonomy. They weren't fighting to protect the British land, because at that time, there simply wasn't any. Those were still indigenous lands. And it didn't take long before they started to resist, and they started to rebel. And, of course again it was Chief Shingwauk and a small band of people that started a rebellion. Chief Shingwauk was arrested, he was brought down to Yorktown, what is now Toronto. And he went to court and he told the judge, "You kick our people like dogs, and these dogs are going to bite back." The Crown at the time said, "We can't charge this man. And we have to let him go, because we don't have agreements with them we don't have treaties with them." They never surrendered their legal autonomy or jurisdiction over how they govern affairs in their lands. But, even at that time when he was arrested, the people were ready to go to war. It was a very volatile time. So, of course the British sent Robinson down to make the treaty and negotiated what Canada calls a "cede and surrender" of our traditional territory. Which is false. Which, afterwards, he actually bragged to the Crown, stating that he was able to get so much land for only 2500 dollars. The British actually offered the Anishinaabek, our tribe, a couple of wampum belts. One of them was the great covenant chain wampum belt. And so, the idea of that belt was that if one nation was in need they would roll what was needed down the belt and it would go to the other person. Because the two people are carrying the belt. What happened was the British, they just

kept asking for this, asking for that, they kept taking, and nothing was rolling our way. Everything was rolling their way and because the British kept taking, and taking, and taking, and not giving anything back, it forced a revolt, and it forced what we know now as the Robinson-Huron treaty. There was over 20 chiefs that signed and there was some British officials. What was funny was that years later we found out the British that actually signed the treaty, that negotiated the treaty, were actually bragging to the crown after, about how much they got for so little. So, the written document that states a land surrender to the crown, and her heirs forever, and it gives mining special privileges. So, the written document is an absolute lie. Our oral history and our songs state that the treaty was something different. And so, I have to question the very foundation of treaty right now as we know it.

What they agreed to was that the British were allowed to live in indigenous territories for a little bit. And were allowed to dig the depth of a plow to feed themselves, for gardens. And it wasn't a permanent agreement, that it was a conditional agreement. And that the waters were never to be surrendered or the land and that the British were to be given free passage on that land. That's what I was told. So, this is what I would like to see done with the Robinson-Huron treaty, because it was one of the largest land thefts in Canadian history and our people really fought hard. They died so our people could have healthy land, and animals to eat. Right now, under the current idea of treaty everything is being polluted and destroyed. Its done. Its over. We need new agreements, we need something that's more realistic.