

Starvation at Turtle Mountain (1894)

Fort Peck Agent Deals with 200 Starving Métis from Turtle Mountain.

The superintendent of the Fort Peck Agency [in Montana, 30 miles west of the North Dakota border] reported on troubles he was having with half-breed Métis haunting his agency during the year of 1894. According to his report, there were many of these people coming from Canada and from Turtle Mountain, and he was increasingly overwhelmed by the sheer numbers requesting assistance after fleeing harsh conditions and starvation at Turtle Mountain.



Montana Métis

According to his letter to the Secretary of Indian Affairs, he stated that he was "*...a great deal annoyed by Indians and half-breeds coming from the Turtle Mountain country, from the American and Canadian side of the line. Late in last fall nearly 200 poverty-stricken and diseased wretches of half-breeds, foisted themselves upon me, and stated that they had come from the sub-agency of Devils Lake, at Turtle Mountain, and that starvation compelled them to leave. They had to be taken care of. The Department acted very generously in their cases. To have returned them at that season of the year would have caused much suffering and loss of life to the children. I got rid of them as soon as I could.*"¹

Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, Vol 2, 1894: 183.

In 1894 the Turtle Mountain sub-agency reported: *It is not a country where farming can be made successful....they see their efforts [at farming] destroyed, sometimes by drought, sometimes by frost, and always exposed to the ravages of the gophers, they then become discouraged and then turn their attention to other directions to make a living. If fur animals are plenty they hunt them in the spring, leaving the farm work to the last minute, and as soon as the leaves of the Seneca root are above ground whole families go out on the prairie and are gone most all summer. They*

¹ <https://www.dibaaJimowin.com/Métis/archives/01-2018>.

must do this in order to live the government does not provide sufficient to enable us to feed them and compel them to remain at home. The grain crop is just being harvested for this year, the oat, potato and vegetable crop is practically a failure. Wheat will not go over 8 bushels an acre and that only on favourably located land, the hills are all bare.

The other means of employment is to hunt for such as muskrats, badger, foxes, wolves and minks, and these are not at all plenty Although the mountain is full of lakes there are no fish in them and such animals as deer, elk, antelope and bear are all killed off.

Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, Vol 2, 1894: 221.



LOUIS RIEL INSTITUTE
Knowledge • Culture • Heritage

Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute