



Treaty of La Grande Paix de Montréal

By the end of the 1600's, the fur market in France had collapsed and the country was oversupplied with beaver pelts. With no market for their furs the merchants of New France were going bankrupt. Trading posts in the west were being closed and furs were stockpiled in warehouses in Quebec. Epidemics of disease and sickness spread throughout the colony. The indigenous nations were weak and decimated by European diseases and wars. Bloody conflict between the colonizing French and the indigenous nations raged on.

In 1701, Montréal was a small French village with a population of 1200. It was located on the banks of the St. Lawrence River and named Ville Marie. It was to become the hub of political importance and elaborate pageantry by August of that year. On August 4, 1701, the citizens of Ville Marie, including noblemen, military officers, merchants and craftsmen, would witness the signing of one of the most significant peace treaties in the New World. This peace treaty, "The Treaty of La Grande Paix de Montréal" or "The Great Peace of 1701", was a combination of a trade agreement and a security agreement between French settlers and the indigenous people.

Responding to an invitation from the French Governor, Hector de Caillères, some 1300 delegates from the indigenous nations began to set up camp along the banks of the Little St. Pierre River. They came to negotiate a comprehensive peace among themselves and the French. Among the 39 indigenous nations represented were the five Iroquois nations of Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, as well as the Huron, Ojibwa, Sable, Ottawa, Cree, Hochungra, Potawatomi, Mississauga, Kiskakon, Sauk, Amikwa, and Mascouten.

Negotiations dragged on for days and there was no guarantee that an agreement would be reached. By August 1, many of the chiefs continued to be wary. The great Huron chief Kondiaronk of Michilimackinac spoke to them for hours in favour of the peace treaty. Many of the chiefs were moved by his speech, but Kondiaronk would not live to see the signing of the treaty. On August 2nd, he died of influenza. On August 3, he was given a magnificent funeral. The French paid homage to him.

The next day, August 4, 1701, the treaty was signed!

Aftermath

Immediately after the treaty was signed, commerce and exploratory expeditions resumed and the Jesuit priests resumed their spiritual mission-based work. It ended the Iroquois wars with the French and enabled Montreal to prosper and the fertile land around it to be farmed. By accepting a position of neutrality toward the French and British, the Iroquois were able to maintain commercial ties with the British, thereby avoiding economic dependence on either power.



The treaty is still valid today and is recognized as a unique diplomatic event in the history of the Americas. This treaty set the precedent of negotiation to settle disputes between the First Nations peoples and European colonial representatives in Canada. It recognized the independent sovereignty of each signatory nation.

