

SSHRC STORYTELLERS CHALLENGE 2024

Top 20 Finalists

CONCOURS J'AI UNE HISTOIRE À RACONTER 2024 DU CRSH

20 finalistes



A Dubious Honour

In the late 1800s, a lawyer and Member of Parliament bought property adjacent to *Kun'tewiktuk*, a tiny Mi'kmaw reserve nestled on the shores of Sydney harbour on Cape Breton Island. It had been a 'stopping place' for millennia and was now a permanent settlement.

The new landowner was unhappy with his neighbours. "They milk my cows," he complained to Indian Affairs. "They break my fences." Indian Affairs sympathized, and so began a years-long campaign to remove residents from *Kun'tewiktuk*.

Section 49 of the Indian Act required a majority of males living on a reserve to consent to any land surrender. Amendment 49a, passed in 1911, removed this requirement for reserves near towns with populations greater than 8,000. Land security for people on small, urban reserves across Canada vanished.

Using records held at Library and Archives Canada, historical House of Commons debates, and other archival materials, I will examine how and why the Indian Act was amended and expand this history beyond the existing colonial narrative.

Missing from this narrative is that the people of *Kun'tewiktuk* **were** prepared to relocate. Yes, wrote Chief Denny in 1899. Our reserve is too small. Yes, we will leave, with one condition. His people needed easy access to Sydney where they worked and sold goods at weekend markets. Mi'kmaw family economies depended on Sydney.

Chief Denny wrote several letters which are in the Ottawa archives, but there are no responses on record. His words seem to fall on deaf ears.

In 1911, the amendment became law and *Kun'tewiktuk* holds the dubious 'honour' of being the first reserve in Canada to be evicted under amendment 49a.

There has been little academic interest in *Kun'tewiktuk*. My research will add to the knowledge base around amendment 49a and will contribute to an expanding bibliography to inform future researchers.

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