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No need of a chief for this band



*Martha Elizabeth Walls*

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No need of a chief for this band:  
The Maritime Mi'kmaq and Federal  
Electoral Legislation, 1899-1951



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*For Corey*



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# Acknowledgments

It is appropriate that this book began in the history department at the University of New Brunswick – an institution committed to recognizing and liaising with the province’s First People and one long committed to the study of Atlantic Canadian history. It is my hope that this study helps, in some small way, to reveal the important place of the Mi’kmaw people within a broader narrative of the region’s history.

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# Abbreviations

DIA	Department of Indian Affairs
IAB	Indian Affairs Branch
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
NAIB	North American Indian Brotherhood
NSARM	Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management
PANB	Provincial Archives of New Brunswick
<i>SC</i>	<i>Statutes of Canada</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Sessional Papers</i>
TARRNS	Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research Centre of Nova Scotia
UGICNS	United General Indian Council of Nova Scotia
UNB-HIL	University of New Brunswick, Harriet Irving Library
UNBASC	University of New Brunswick Archives and Special Collections



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# Introduction

On 16 May 1899, Order-in-Council 766 was quietly passed into law. Of little concern to most government officials (and probably to fewer Canadians), this legislation would profoundly influence the Maritime Mi'kmaq by implementing in Ontario, Quebec, and Maritime Aboriginal communities what became known as the triennial system of band elections, a political form that featured a federally devised band council structure and election protocol.<sup>1</sup> Every three years, male community members aged twenty-one and older were obliged to assemble under the supervision of the local Indian agent – the official tasked with implementing federal policy at the local level – to nominate and elect a community chief and a set number of councillors. For more than half a century, until the 1951 Indian Act ushered in new band election rules, Ottawa attempted to supplant local Mi'kmaq political practices by foisting the triennial system on the Mi'kmaq of the Maritime provinces. For more than half a century, these efforts failed.

The story of the triennial system's implementation has three protagonists: the Ottawa bureaucrats responsible for developing electoral policy for Aboriginals, the local federal officials charged with implementing policy, and the more than three thousand Mi'kmaq living in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island who were subject to it.<sup>2</sup> Although Ottawa was committed to making federally monitored triennial elections the sole means by which Mi'kmaq communities generated leaders, its attempts were frustrated. Between 1899 and 1951, Ottawa was unable to impose its political framework on the Mi'kmaq because Mi'kmaq communities variously accepted, rejected, ignored, and/or amended the legislation aimed at dictating their political behaviour. Even where the Mi'kmaq did accept the new electoral rules, they did so not in acquiescence to federal control but to achieve their own ends and

thus to preserve aspects of their community autonomy. Nor did the new rules displace old Mi'kmaw political forms or prevent the creation of new ones; the Mi'kmaq continued to rely on definitively Mi'kmaw political practices, both old and new, that distinguished them from their Euro-Canadian neighbours.

As it traces the creation, implementation, and impact of Ottawa's triennial system on the Maritime Mi'kmaq, this study sheds light on the relationship that existed between Mi'kmaw communities and federal policy makers during the first half of the twentieth century. The ways in which the Mi'kmaq experienced the triennial system were shaped by the world in which they lived, their long political heritage, and by a federal policy rooted in colonial North America. In the late nineteenth century, the Mi'kmaw homeland of Mi'kma'ki – which stretched from eastern Quebec through to Newfoundland and which included Prince Edward and Cape Breton Islands – was a complex place where both Euro-Canadian influences and Mi'kmaw ideals guided economic, cultural, and religious activities.<sup>3</sup> Politics in Mi'kma'ki similarly bore the marks of these two influences. Indeed, the comingling of political influences was not new in 1899. The more than three centuries between first encounter and 1899 saw a complex mixture of political adaptation, change, and persistence in Mi'kma'ki. Despite many generations of colonial and then federal pressure encouraging the Mi'kmaq to embrace European-style politics, the political ideals and practices that characterized Mi'kma'ki in 1899, though bearing the marks of long European interference, remained distinctly Mi'kmaw. It was this distinctive political culture that the federal government targeted with the triennial electoral system, a policy that represented just one more plank in the broader assimilative agenda of Canada's Department of Indian Affairs (DIA).

Ottawa's ultimate failure to undermine Mi'kmaw political practice and replace it with Euro-Canadian political values and processes emerges as a major theme of this book. Although committed to its triennial plan and armed with a myriad of tools to force its implementation, Ottawa was unable to impose the system universally on Mi'kma'ki. Although some Mi'kmaw communities did nominally adopt the system, they did so imperfectly, discarding certain features of it and blending others with local custom. Several factors enabled the Mi'kmaq to avoid the full impact of the efforts to replace community political traditions with the triennial system. First, confusion and misunderstanding surrounded the

legislation, slowing and discouraging its implementation. Second, conditions prevailing in Maritime agencies assured that Mi'kmaq chiefs, whether elected or appointed according to band custom, remained important to overworked government officials. Third, Mi'kmaq refusal to surrender community politics and attendant community affairs to Ottawa guaranteed some continued autonomy in leadership selection. Finally, successful, active, and strong-willed electoral contests and incumbents took the wind out of federal sails. Although the triennial system most certainly influenced Mi'kmaq politics, it failed to eradicate Mi'kmaq political structures and customs.

### **Methodology**

This study draws on Indian Affairs reports as well as more candid correspondence between Indian Affairs officials in Ottawa and their agents working in the field. Although the bias inherent in these official records places the Mi'kmaq and their experiences off centre stage, careful use of them can reveal much more than state interests in implementing triennial band elections. Changes in federal policies and attitudes over time are, in part, a reflection of how Mi'kmaq reactions to these policies could, and did, influence federal designs. Oral testimony does not inform this study. Because it encompasses a wide temporal expanse beginning in the nineteenth century, a balanced application of the methodology would not have been possible. This is in no way meant as a slight against the importance and validity of oral history. Instead, as Robin Jarvis Brownlie has eloquently phrased it, its absence is “indicative of the challenge confronting researchers in their attempt to integrate oral testimony into traditional, document-related historical scholarship.”<sup>4</sup> The non-appearance of oral testimony does not mean that Mi'kmaq voices are silent in this work, for by 1900, they were increasingly discernible in Indian Affairs records. In an era of growing literacy, some Mi'kmaq could put pen to paper and express their ideas on elected band councils. This they did with some frequency, and their letters to Ottawa have enriched and shaped this study.

### **Rethinking the Twentieth-Century Mi'kmaq**

In detailing the complex political responses of the Mi'kmaq to the introduction of elected band councils, this book builds on fairly recent research aimed at understanding the relationship between the Maritime Mi'kmaq, their non-Aboriginal neighbours, and the Canadian state in

the twentieth century – a subject that, until recently, has received little scholarly attention. In the 1980s, new scholars who recognized a dearth in the study of twentieth-century Mi'kmaw experiences began to explore both the architects and mechanisms of federal Indian policy as it affected the Mi'kmaq. These scholars challenged the assumptions of their predecessors, who emphasized Mi'kmaw apathy and cultural loss in this period – assumptions so clearly enunciated during the 1950s by Wilson D. Wallis and Ruth Saltwell Wallis in their 1955 book, *The Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada*.<sup>5</sup> Focusing on culturally rooted Mi'kmaw resistance to state policy, these new scholars stressed its role in challenging federal Indian policy goals.<sup>6</sup> Their work was given greater depth and colour by a spate of memoirs and (auto)biographies that provide glimpses into the complex world of Mi'kma'ki and offer ample evidence that federal initiatives alone did not determine twentieth-century Mi'kmaw experiences.<sup>7</sup>

Several studies of the Mi'kmaw economy in the first decades of the twentieth century likewise highlighted themes of resistance and accommodation, illustrating the complex ways in which Mi'kmaw economic undertakings were part of, and departed from, the dominant Maritime economy.<sup>8</sup> Also garnering much attention are studies that consider Mi'kmaw struggles for land and resource rights. Though largely concerned with pre-twentieth-century issues, particularly eighteenth-century treaty making, these are intended to inform and contextualize twentieth-century land and resource negotiations.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the landmark 1999 *Marshall* decision, which affirmed a Mi'kmaw treaty right to fish, has inspired a number of scholars to trace the roots of Mi'kmaw entitlement, which is central to this and other struggles for Mi'kmaw resource recognition.<sup>10</sup> A goal shared by many of these studies is to convey the twentieth-century experiences of the Mi'kmaq from a Mi'kmaw perspective. None have achieved this with more clarity and focus than Mi'kmaw historian Daniel N. Paul in his *We Were Not the Savages*, the importance of which is suggested by the fact that, to date, three editions of this monograph have been published.<sup>11</sup>

### **Aboriginal Politics, History, and the Triennial System in Mi'kma'ki**

My examination of Ottawa's efforts to impose a political system on the Mi'kmaq questions assumptions about political change in Aboriginal communities and explores what has become a central issue in the historiography of the Canadian state's attempts to assimilate Aboriginal

people – the importance of differentiating between the theoretical basis of state policy and the ways in which such policy was actually implemented in the field. Much of the scholarship of the past several decades has framed and explained the late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical experiences of Canadian Aboriginals through a prism of federal legislation.<sup>12</sup> Although valuable in its capacity to reveal motives behind federal policy, this scholarship may obscure the “real” impact of the policy by treating federal objectives as synonymous with the way in which policy was applied to, and received by, Aboriginal communities. In so doing, this approach can fail to recognize the important divide between the theoretical intent and the day-to-day operation of Canada’s twentieth-century Indian policy.<sup>13</sup> It has also led to the erroneous assertion that federal policies aimed at transforming and constricting Aboriginal politics inevitably succeeded.<sup>14</sup> It is from within this framework that Vic Satzewich and Linda Mahood suggest that Ottawa’s policy of triennial elections was enacted as precisely, monolithically, and successfully in Mi’kma’ki as the electoral legislation itself purported.<sup>15</sup> This book contests this conclusion. It heeds Ken Coates’ observation that “national [Indian policy] directives ... did not translate directly into local initiatives.”<sup>16</sup> It is inspired by a “new Indian history” that places Aboriginal people front and centre by problematizing the nature of colonialism to question the total hegemony of colonizers and the absolute powerlessness of the colonized; in this, it joins others that have demonstrated that policy-centred approaches cannot tell the “whole story.”<sup>17</sup> Factors including geographic location, the personalities of Indian agency administrators, and most significantly, Aboriginal responses to state initiatives all influenced the ways in which federal policy was experienced by Aboriginal groups. The many challenges faced by Ottawa as it attempted to apply the triennial system of band elections to Mi’kmaq communities speak to the profound importance of acknowledging this disjuncture between federal policy as writ and the ways in which it emerged on the ground.

The notion that Aboriginal political forms, including those of the Mi’kmaq, were susceptible to displacement by federal policy is fed by a broader assumption that, by the twentieth century, these forms and their leaders were moribund. A general failure to recognize the endurance and significance of subtle grassroots political activity has lent credibility to the idea that Aboriginals occupied a political void, one ready to be filled by federal policy. The fact that the so-called Red Power movement of the 1960s and the Aboriginal response to the 1969 White Paper

have often been championed as the starting point of Aboriginal political relevancy, rather than as an outgrowth of persistent practice, attests to this tendency.<sup>18</sup> Aboriginal political processes and structures did not, however, languish in limbo waiting for replacement by government initiatives; even in the face of pressure to adopt their European equivalents, they remained positive and active forces in Aboriginal community and extra-community life.<sup>19</sup> The imposition – and acceptance – of Euro-Canadian American political values and structures did not as a matter of course leave Aboriginal communities politically powerless. In retaining “traditional” political forms and by adopting new ones, Aboriginal people – including the Mi’kmaq – asserted themselves politically. What is more, by fashioning a syncretic system that distinguished their own old and new political practices from those mandated by federal electoral legislation, the Mi’kmaq asserted both their political distinctiveness and autonomy.

This study is premised on the notion that the identification of Mi’kmaq agency – the Mi’kmaq’s abilities to influence federal policy – requires a balancing act. Although the Mi’kmaq, like all Aboriginal people, outrightly resisted state interference in their lives, overemphasis of their autonomy may minimize the power and destructiveness of colonization and might, as some fear, absolve colonizers and their damaging policies of culpability.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it is possible to walk this line and to identify Aboriginal agency while remaining attuned to the strength of state power.<sup>21</sup> Scholars of Canadian Indian policy and Canadian Aboriginal experiences, drawing on this measured approach, have emphasized the vast reach of an assimilative federal policy that interfered in virtually every aspect of Aboriginal lives – from their economies, languages, and cultural identities to resource usage, law, and politics – while also stressing that Aboriginal people, without fail, resisted state efforts to recast their lives.<sup>22</sup> Such resistance assumed many forms and varied by time and place, and it saw Aboriginal people reject programs aimed at their assimilation. Federal efforts to confine Aboriginal people to reserve settlements, to limit their resource harvests, or to eradicate their cultural practices through schooling or other means all met staunch opposition.<sup>23</sup> So too did measures to supplant Aboriginal political structures and practices.

In reacting to the attempted implementation of the triennial system, the Mi’kmaq demonstrated a familiar and complex pattern of resistance. Some communities simply refused to take part; their stance was definitive

and clear. This form of refusal, however, represents just one element of the rejection of Ottawa's political initiatives. The Mi'kmaq's ongoing commitment to their own political forms and procedures speaks to a broader resistance of the triennial system. Echoing processes described as early as 1959 by ethnographer R.W. Dunning, who traced how encounters between the Northern Ojibwa and Euro-Canadian society both engendered cultural change and "reinforced [the Ojibawa's] own way of living," this study suggests that threats to Mi'kmaq political autonomy in the guise of the triennial system served in some cases to reinforce Mi'kmaq political practices.<sup>24</sup> Even amid concerted state efforts to implement a political system that operated on a community basis and featured elections for three-year terms of office, the Mi'kmaq continued to appoint life leaders and to engage in regional political cooperation facilitated by such long-standing institutions as the grand chief and Grand Council.

The responses of the Mi'kmaq to the triennial system highlight another important element of Aboriginal reactions to state initiatives: accommodation. Just as Aboriginal fishers adopted federal and provincial fishery laws to ensure their continued involvement in the industry, and just as some communities altered potlatching practices in order to preserve at least some aspects of the custom in the face of a federal potlatch ban, some Mi'kmaq endorsed the triennial system not out of support for it, but to satisfy their own political and/or community interests.<sup>25</sup> Some Mi'kmaq, for example, believed that acceptance of triennially elected leaders might engender political strength that would come from an affiliation with the powerful federal state. Others pragmatically asserted that the presence of such elected officials would lead to material benefit – a particularly compelling prospect during the difficult years of the Great Depression. This study illustrates that reactions to the prospect of a new federally directed political system were multi-faceted and complex. Resistance coexisted with accommodation.

The varied Mi'kmaq reaction to the triennial system was not the only factor to influence Ottawa's execution of its plan for Mi'kma'ki. As scholars of Indian policy have noted, competing state interests also shaped the execution of Indian policy. Tension between federal and provincial governments, and even competing visions from *within* the Department of Indian Affairs, necessitated policy reassessments on the ground.<sup>26</sup> The predilections of Indian agents in the field also affected the application of policy.<sup>27</sup> In short, policy was influenced by a whole host of factors.

The triennial election policy proved no exception, and Indian agency conditions – such as overworked Indian agents and their tepid commitment to triennial elections – undermined Ottawa’s objectives.

This book’s assertion that the Mi’kmaq variously responded to and successfully shaped the attempted imposition of Euro-Canadian political structures challenges a binary paradigm that once framed understandings of Aboriginal responses to political pressures. This paradigm supposes that Aboriginals invariably responded in one of two ways – they were either “traditionalists” who resisted external pressure or they were “progressives” who acquiesced to and embraced it. This division created “factionalism” – a phenomenon long defined as a negative and divisive force in Aboriginal communities. When confronted with the threatened imposition of the triennial system, the Mi’kmaq did not react rigidly in either of these two ways, a fact that illustrates the shortcomings of this binary approach. Rather, over time and space, Mi’kmaw communities fluctuated in their acceptance, accommodation, or rejection of Ottawa’s plan according to their own assessments of their changing needs.<sup>28</sup> What is more, these diverse responses did not paralyze Mi’kmaw political action. Instead, by variously embracing, rejecting, and/or remodelling political forms, the Mi’kmaq created a syncretic system that drew on new and old political ideas and practices.<sup>29</sup>

A second shortcoming of this binary approach rests in the supposition that the support of federal political policy both required the abandonment of former traditions and signalled Aboriginal acquiescence to federal goals. Again, the varied Mi’kmaw responses to the triennial system reveal this not to be the case. In maintaining their own political traditions even as they embraced elements of Ottawa’s new order, the Mi’kmaq demonstrated that the two responses need not be mutually exclusive. Likewise, acceptance of the machinery of the triennial system did not imply endorsement of Ottawa’s broader assimilative goal. As other scholars have noted, Aboriginal people were quite able to accept particular elements of Indian policy without supporting Ottawa’s assimilative agenda.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, certain aspects of Indian policy might be accepted as a means of opposing the broader federal plan to undermine Aboriginal autonomy: in some Mi’kmaw communities, the triennial system was embraced in order to enhance the political autonomy of the group. Discussing the Mohawk community of Kahnawake’s 1889 introduction to federally prescribed elections, historian Gerald F. Reid reveals that “participation in the first band council was not an indication of its acceptance and support for the new system but reflected a decision by

some ... to resist and obstruct the system from within and use it to gain greater autonomy for the Kahnawà:ke council."<sup>31</sup> As with the Mohawk, the Mi'kmaq's adoption of federal political policy was not motivated by a surrender to Ottawa but by an ongoing commitment to Aboriginal political autonomy.<sup>32</sup>

The 1899 implementation of the triennial electoral system in Mi'kma'ki cannot be seen within a simple context in which some Mi'kmaq flatly opposed the political interference of Ottawa, whereas others wholly accepted it. Responses were far more complex and nuanced. At various places, at various times, and to varying degrees, the Mi'kmaq both adapted to and challenged the triennial system. Even where it came to bear, the Mi'kmaq remained committed to their own political customs and structures. Mi'kmaw resistance and accommodation thwarted Ottawa's attempt to replace Aboriginal political structures with a system of triennial elections and in so doing, undercut one of the central planks in Ottawa's assimilative mandate.

# 1

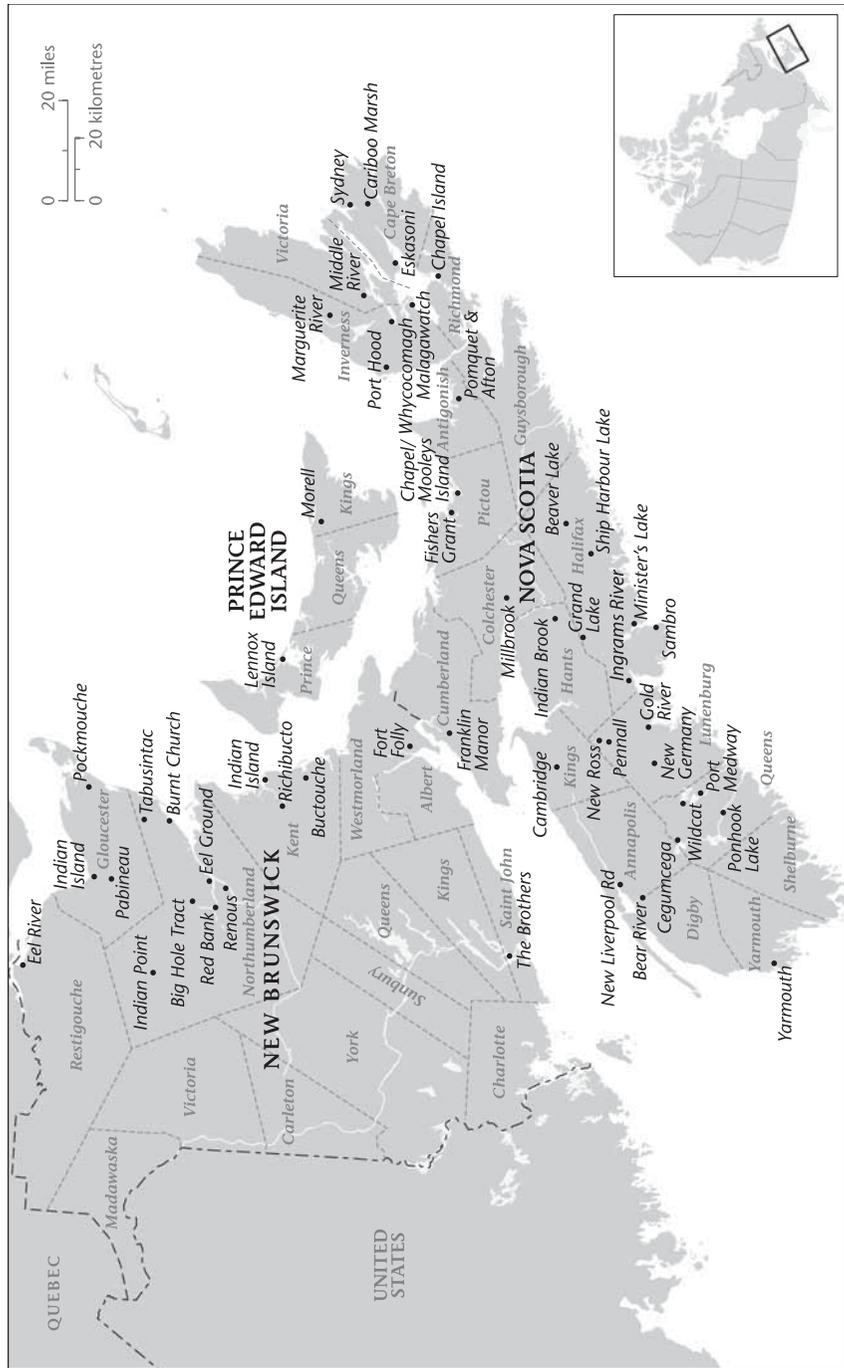
## The Mi'kmaw World in 1900

The federal government's 1899 effort to impose electoral rules on eastern Aboriginal Canadians elicited a complex response from Maritime Mi'kmaw communities. To understand it, one must consider the Mi'kmaw "world" into which this policy was introduced. The Mi'kmaq were both connected to and distinct from the non-Aboriginal population around them; their reactions to the new rules were shaped by the particular social, political, and cultural spaces they occupied.

In 1899, the Maritime portion of Mi'kma'ki, the homeland of the Mi'kmaq, was an extraordinarily complex place (see map).<sup>1</sup> In many ways, like the nineteenth-century Algonquian speakers described in Richard White's classic study of the Great Lakes region, the Mi'kmaq lived on a "middle ground" where their lives and those of their non-Aboriginal neighbours overlapped and "shaded into each other."<sup>2</sup> At the same time, however, older and distinctly Mi'kmaw economic, social, and cultural customs remained relevant to the Mi'kmaq and set them apart from their non-Aboriginal neighbours. These characteristics profoundly influenced the ways in which Mi'kmaw communities received the federal political rules introduced in 1899.

### **Historiography of the Mi'kmaq: Twentieth-Century Change and Adaptation**

This study is built upon a particular understanding of Mi'kmaw cultural change and adaptation as it occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. Early studies of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Mi'kmaw society, such as Wilson Wallis and Ruth Wallis' *The Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada*, emphasized cultural displacement and dependency. The authors, a husband-and-wife anthropologist team, expected their comparative approach to reveal "a loss of Micmac culture,"



Mi'kmaw reserves, c. 1900

and they found what they were looking for.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, anthropologist Philip Bock's 1966 treatment of the Restigouche Mi'kmaq argued that "almost all sense of cultural continuity has been lost."<sup>4</sup> Placing the roots of cultural collapse in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fur trade, these scholars contended that the Mi'kmaq-European encounter led to a profound and irreversible loss and corruption of Mi'kmaq culture.

More recently, this interpretation has been challenged. Anthropologist Eleanor Leacock's insistence that, "for ethical and political as well as scientific reasons," it is necessary to "document the resiliency and creativity with which different peoples moved to survive in, cope with, and take advantage of the new situations in which they found themselves" has compelled scholars to abandon the notion that Mi'kmaq cultural change was necessarily cultural loss.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in his 1996 book *The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation and Cultural Survival*, Harald Prins documents not Mi'kmaq cultural loss but "the stunning changes" of a "radical cultural transformation."<sup>6</sup> Likewise, scholars have disputed the assumption that the fur trade marked the beginning of massive cultural change for the Mi'kmaq and have suggested that Mi'kmaq culture and lifeways remained intact until the twentieth century. As historian William Wicken, a proponent of this concept, posits, it was only in "the early part of the twentieth century when the enforcement of provincial game laws and a more concerted attempt by the Department of Indian Affairs to marshal families on to reserves" occurred that the Mi'kmaq experienced "a gradual abandonment of traditional lifestyles."<sup>7</sup> Wicken is not alone in this assessment. Vic Satzewich and Terry Wotherspoon suggest that the "economic marginalisation of Indian people began not with the end of the fur trade, but rather some time in this [twentieth] century."<sup>8</sup> This interpretation of Mi'kmaq cultural change – one that emphasizes continuity – is embraced by this study.

### **Population, Territory, and Federal Administration**

Mi'kmaq cultural continuity may have been facilitated, in part, by the federal government's administration of the Mi'kmaq, a responsibility it assumed in 1867. In 1900, the Maritimes were home to fifty-four Mi'kmaq reserves – thirty-five in Nova Scotia, seventeen in New Brunswick, and two on Prince Edward Island – with a combined surveyed area of 54,389 acres (22,010 hectares). Geographically, the largest reserve was New Brunswick's Tabusintac at 8,077 acres (3,268 hectares), whereas the smallest was the 2.73 acres (1.1 hectares) at Sydney, Nova Scotia.<sup>9</sup> Distinct

administrative agencies operated in each province. The catchment area of Nova Scotia's seventeen Indian agencies, each headed by a part-time Indian agent, corresponded to county boundaries.<sup>10</sup> New Brunswick's Aboriginals were administered by two large agencies – the South-West Agency, charged with the province's Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) population, and the North-East Agency, which dealt with its Mi'kmaq. Each was headed by a full-time Indian agent. On Prince Edward Island, one agency, staffed by an Indian superintendent, oversaw the two reserves at Lennox Island and Morrell.

The Maritime Mi'kmaw population administered by the federal government was relatively small. In 1901, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) census placed it at 3,308, although this figure is certainly an underestimation.<sup>11</sup> The majority of the Mi'kmaq, 2,020 individuals (61.1 percent), lived in Nova Scotia, whereas New Brunswick was home to 973 (29.4 percent) and PEI to 315 (9.5 percent).<sup>12</sup> Compared to that of their non-Aboriginal neighbours, their population was small. As Table 1 shows, the Mi'kmaq accounted for just 0.37 percent of the region's total population of 893,953.<sup>13</sup> The Mi'kmaw population was also relatively young: 50.6 percent was nineteen or younger, whereas just 5.7 percent was older than sixty-five.<sup>14</sup> By comparison, 45.6 percent of the total Maritime population was younger than nineteen, and 6.4 percent older than sixty-five. (see Table 2).<sup>15</sup>

Despite their small numbers, the Mi'kmaq were widely distributed across the Maritimes (see Tables 3, 4, and 5). In 1901, the DIA reported that they lived in six of New Brunswick's fifteen counties, in all eighteen

Table 1

**Mi'kmaw and non-Mi'kmaw populations, 1901**

	Mi'kmaw population		Total provincial population	% of total population
	Population	% of total		
NB <sup>a</sup>	973	29.4	331,120	0.29
NS	2,020	61.1	459,574	0.44
PEI	315	9.5	103,259	0.31
<i>Total</i>	3,308	100	893,953	0.37

a New Brunswick figures include the North-East and Richibucto Agencies.

Sources: Canada, *Sessional Papers (SP)*, 1902, Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report (DIA Annual Report), "Census Return of Resident and Nomadic Indians," 152-159; "Population of Canada, by Province, Census Dates, 1851-1967," in *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd edition, ed. F.H. Leacy (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983), A2-14.

Table 2

**Maritime Mi'kmaw and non-Mi'kmaw populations by age, 1901 (%)**

Maritime population			
Mi'kmaw younger than 20	Total younger than 19	Mi'kmaw older than 65	Total older than 65
50.6	45.6	5.7	6.4

Sources: Canada, *SP*, 1902, DIA Annual Report, "Census Return of Resident and Nomadic Indians, 1901," 154-159; "Ages of the Population by Sex," Fourth Census of Canada, 1901, vol. 4, 1901, 1-19, in *Historical Statistics of Canada*, ed. Leacy.

counties of Nova Scotia, and in two of Prince Edward Island's three counties. In New Brunswick, the Mi'kmaw population was most numerous in Northumberland County, whereas Kent County's Big Cove was the reserve with the province's largest Mi'kmaw population. In Nova Scotia, the Mi'kmaq were concentrated in Cape Breton County, which was also home to the largest Mi'kmaw community, Eskasoni, with a population of 140 in 1900.<sup>16</sup> On PEI, Lennox Island was by far the largest Mi'kmaw community – 255 of the 315 island Mi'kmaq lived on the Prince County reserve.

Table 3

**New Brunswick Mi'kmaw population by county and community, 1901**

County	Population	Community	Population
<i>New Brunswick (total)</i>	973		
Kent County	348	• Big Cove	281
		• Indian Island	40
		• Buctouche	27
Northumberland County	419	• Burnt Church	230
		• Eel Ground	139
		• Red Bank	50
Gloucester County	37	• Bathurst	37
Restigouche County	48	• Eel River	48
Westmorland County	74	• Fort Folly and vicinity	74
Kings County	47	• Norton Station	47

Source: Canada, *SP*, 1902, DIA Annual Report, "Census Return of Resident and Nomadic Indians," 153-54.

Table 4

## Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw population by county and community, 1901

County	Population	Community	Population
<i>Nova Scotia (total)</i>	2,020		
Shelburne County	76	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jordan River</li> <li>• Shelburne River</li> <li>• Sable River</li> <li>• Barrington River</li> <li>• Clyde River</li> <li>• Mi'kmaq living elsewhere</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16</li> <li>8</li> <li>12</li> <li>8</li> <li>1</li> <li>31</li> </ul>
Hants County	85	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indian Brook Reserve</li> </ul>	85
Inverness County	153	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whycocomagh</li> <li>• Malagawatch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>131</li> <li>22</li> </ul>
Colchester County	109	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Millbrook Reserve</li> <li>• Carr's Brook</li> <li>• Stewiacke</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>101</li> <li>6</li> <li>2</li> </ul>
Cumberland County	102	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Franklin Manor Reserve</li> <li>• Springhill Junction</li> <li>• Amherst</li> <li>• River Philip</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>72</li> <li>9</li> <li>16</li> <li>5</li> </ul>
Victoria County	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle River Reserve</li> </ul>	100
Digby County	127	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bear River Reserve</li> <li>• Weymouth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>101</li> <li>26</li> </ul>
Pictou County	154	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisher's Grant Reserve</li> <li>• Chapel Island</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>116</li> <li>38</li> </ul>
Guysborough County	31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guysborough</li> </ul>	31
Queens County	87	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Milton</li> <li>• Mill Village</li> <li>• Wildcat Reserve</li> <li>• Greenfield</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>56</li> <li>13</li> <li>7</li> <li>11</li> </ul>
Yarmouth County	84	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County</li> </ul>	84
Richmond County	130	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapel Island</li> </ul>	130
Annapolis County	77	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lequille</li> <li>• Mochelle</li> <li>• Bridgetown</li> <li>• Paradise</li> <li>• Lawrencetown</li> <li>• Middleton</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>22</li> <li>12</li> <li>3</li> <li>13</li> <li>3</li> <li>24</li> </ul>



◀ *Table 4*

County	Population	Community	Population
Kings County	74	• Kentville	20
		• Berwick	10
		• Blue Mountain	6
		• Greenland	6
		• Middleton	10
		• Kingston	7
		• Gaspereaux	10
		• Black Rock	5
Antigonish County	155	• Summerside	23
		• Afton Reserve	82
		• Pomquet	50
Lunenburg County	94	• New Germany Reserve	54
		• Bridgewater	18
		• Lunenburg Town	12
		• Gold River	10
Cape Breton County	250	• Cape Breton	250
Halifax County	132	• Sheet Harbour	33
		• Cow Bay, Cole Harbour Reserve	16
		• Elmsdale	32
		• Wellington, Bedford, Windsor Junction	51

Source: Canada, *SP*, 1902, DIA Annual Report, "Census Return of Resident and Nomadic Indians," 155-56.

*Table 5*

**Prince Edward Island Mi'kmaq population by county and community, 1901**

County	Population	Community	Population
<i>Prince Edward Island (total)</i>	315		
Prince County	255	• Lennox Island Reserve and vicinity	255
Kings County	60	• Morell Reserve	60

Source: Canada, *SP*, 1902, DIA Annual Report, "Census Return of Resident and Nomadic Indians," 158.

### **The Economy**

The Mi'kmaq economy reflected a blend of cultural change and continuity. Turn-of-the-century DIA reports make clear that the Mi'kmaq were committed to lifeways connected to their traditional occupations as gatherers, hunters, fishers, and craft producers but were also integrated

into the wage work of non-Aboriginal industries. Income from farming, long held to be the domain of non-Aboriginal settlers, was also increasingly important.<sup>17</sup> Although the Mi'kmaq drew on their own economic heritage to make ends meet, in other respects, their economic world did

Table 6

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**Mi'kmaw income in Nova Scotia, 1897-1905 (in dollars)**


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Year	Farm products	Wages	Fishing	Hunting	Other	Total
1897	7,540.50	4,479.00	2,675.00	1,878.60	16,075.00	33,380.80
1898	7,397.40	8,825.00	3,730.00	3,613.00	20,110.00	46,551.20
1899	10,205.00	10,770.50	3,400.00	4,970.00	19,640.00	49,091.50
1900	12,104.00	14,562.10	4,530.00	4,316.00	21,122.00	56,735.40
1901	14,062.70	25,097.00	5,545.00	6,333.00	27,645.00	78,777.70
1902	14,272.20	26,189.00	5,905.00	3,800.00	23,520.00	73,787.20
1903	10,282.90	20,170.00	5,760.00	3,195.00	21,426.00	60,952.90
1904	13,147.50	27,750.00	4,510.00	5,505.00	20,320.00	71,323.50
1905	14,815.50	23,851.50	5,140.00	5,590.00	22,775.00	72,260.50

*Note:* Because the column "total" incorporates federal funding (such as relief) and incomes from land rentals, the numbers in the earlier columns do not add up to those in this column.

*Sources:* "Agricultural and Industrial Statistics, Sources and Value of Income," published each year in the DIA Annual Report: see Canada, *SP* (1898), 422; *SP* (1899), 468-69; *SP* (1900), 544-45; *SP* (1901), 213; *SP* (1902), 218-19; *SP* (1903), 140-41; *SP* (1904), 146-47; *SP* (1905), 136-37; *SP* (1906), 134-35.

Table 7

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**Mi'kmaw income in Prince Edward Island, 1897-1905 (in dollars)**


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Year	Farm products	Wages	Fishing	Hunting	Other	Total
1897	938.00	0	310.00	35.00	9,200.00	11,246.20
1898	1,185.00	300.00	330.00	30.00	8,800.00	11,407.15
1899	1,146.80	250.00	375.00	55.00	9,600.00	11,426.80
1900	1,372.00	260.00	380.00	40.00	9,600.00	11,652.00
1901	1,544.00	280.00	385.00	64.00	15,780.00	18,053.30
1902	1,698.00	350.00	490.00	84.00	15,780.00	18,402.00
1903	1,747.00	300.00	680.00	60.00	17,153.00	19,940.00
1904	1,830.00	280.00	1,250.00	60.00	17,400.00	20,820.00
1905	1,145.00	230.00	845.00	55.00	17,400.00	19,675.00

*Note:* Because the column "total" incorporates federal funding (such as relief) and incomes from land rentals, the numbers in the earlier columns do not necessarily add up to those in this column.

*Sources:* "Agricultural and Industrial Statistics, Sources and Value of Income," published each year in the DIA Annual Report: see Canada, *SP* (1898), 422; *SP* (1899), 468-69; *SP* (1900), 544-45; *SP* (1901), 213; *SP* (1902), 218-19; *SP* (1903), 140-41; *SP* (1904), 146-47; *SP* (1905), 136-37; *SP* (1906), 134-35.

Table 8

**Mi'kmaw income in New Brunswick, 1897-1905 (in dollars)**

Year	Farm products	Wages	Fishing	Hunting	Other	Total
1897	5,525.00	4,425.00	5,050.00	475.00	3,475.00	20,123.90
1898	6,395.00	9,350.00	7,000.00	550.00	4,500.00	29,125.10
1899	5,395.00	9,050.00	6,800.00	600.00	4,150.00	26,095.00
1900	6,300.00	11,250.00	6,600.00	550.00	4,800.00	29,400.00
1901	7,400.00	14,600.00	7,175.00	725.00	5,200.00	35,100.00
1902	4,935.00	15,150.00	8,500.50	525.00	6,650.00	35,750.50
1903	6,175.00	17,600.00	8,325.00	900.00	7,450.00	40,450.00
1904	7,425.00	23,750.00	8,500.00	1,050.00	6,525.00	47,250.00
1905	4,670.00	24,850.00	9,625.00	600.00	9,700.00	49,445.00

*Note:* Because the column "total" incorporates federal funding (such as relief) and incomes from land rentals, the numbers in the earlier columns do not necessarily add up to those in this column.

*Sources:* "Agricultural and Industrial Statistics, Sources and Value of Income," published each year in the DIA Annual Report: see Canada, *SP* (1898), 422; *SP* (1899), 468-69; *SP* (1900), 544-45; *SP* (1901), 213; *SP* (1902), 218-19; *SP* (1903), 140-41; *SP* (1904), 146-47; *SP* (1905), 136-37; *SP* (1906), 134-35.

not greatly differ from that of their non-Aboriginal neighbours, who, like them, were occupational pluralists (see Tables 6, 7, and 8).

### **Fishing, Hunting, and Gathering**

At the turn of the century, the Mi'kmaq derived a significant portion of their incomes from their natural resources. In the nineteenth century especially, these resources had come under siege as non-Aboriginal settlers cleared forests for farming and destroyed game and fish habitat.<sup>18</sup> Although Mi'kmaw access to natural resources declined as a result of lost habitat, fishing, hunting, and the use of wild crops such as berries nevertheless contributed significantly to their household incomes.<sup>19</sup>

In 1897, the DIA began to itemize the sources of Mi'kmaw income, albeit imperfectly, including the revenue generated by the sale of fish and game.<sup>20</sup> These figures reveal the importance of fishing and hunting to Mi'kmaw incomes. In 1900, fishing generated 11.6 percent of total Mi'kmaw revenues, though its importance varied between provinces and regions (see Table 9). Fishing was most valuable in New Brunswick, where it accounted for 22.37 percent of the total Mi'kmaw income; it was of lesser importance in Nova Scotia, where it generated less than 8.0 percent of income, and in Prince Edward Island, where 3.3 percent of revenues came from fishing.<sup>21</sup>

Table 9

## Percentage Mi'kmaw income from fishing, 1897-1905

Year	NS	NB	PEI	Total
1897	8.01	25.09	2.76	12.4
1898	8.01	24.03	2.89	12.7
1899	6.93	26.06	3.28	12.2
1900	7.98	22.37	3.26	11.6
1901	7.04	20.44	2.13	9.9
1902	8.00	23.78	2.66	11.5
1903	9.45	20.58	3.41	12.2
1904	6.32	17.99	6.00	10.2
1905	7.11	19.47	4.29	11.0

Sources: "Agricultural and Industrial Statistics, Sources and Value of Income," published each year in the DIA Annual Report: see Canada, *SP*, 1898, 422; Canada, *SP*, 1899, 468-69; Canada, *SP*, 1900, 544-45; Canada, *SP*, 1901, 213; Canada, *SP*, 1902, 218-19; Canada, *SP*, 1903, 140-41; *SP*, 1904, 146-47; *SP*, 1905, 136-37; *SP*, 1906, 134-35.

DIA reports indicate where fishing was most lucrative. In communities in New Brunswick's North-East Agency, situated along the Atlantic coast and home to the Miramichi River, the Mi'kmaq reportedly "[did] quite as well as their white neighbours engaged in the business."<sup>22</sup> The "valuable salmon-fishing privilege" enjoyed by the Bathurst and Big Hole reserves contributed to the fishery's success in this region.<sup>23</sup> Fishing was also important in Nova Scotia's northeastern counties, and the Cape Breton reserve at Malagawatch, though saddled with "inferior" and "marshy" land, was "well-adapted for the prosecution of the fisheries."<sup>24</sup> On Prince Edward Island, harvests of summer cod, autumn oysters, and wintertime smelts notably added to Mi'kmaw incomes.<sup>25</sup>

Hunting – rendered increasingly difficult since the nineteenth century because of depleted game and dwindling hunting territories – remained important and accounted for roughly 4 percent of Mi'kmaw incomes around 1900.<sup>26</sup> As was the case for fishing, the economic significance of the hunt varied by region. Hunting was relatively more important in Nova Scotia, where, in 1899, it was more lucrative than fishing and accounted for over 10.0 percent of Mi'kmaw income. In New Brunswick, hunting contributed 2.3 percent of annual income, whereas Prince Edward Island's dearth of game animals meant that slightly less than 0.5 percent of Mi'kmaw income in that province came from hunting (see Table 10).<sup>27</sup>

Maritime Indian agents painted conflicting pictures of the economic significance of hunting: some stressed the small numbers of Mi'kmaq

Table 10

## Percentage Mi'kmaw income from hunting, 1897-1905

Year	NS	NB	PEI
1897	5.63	2.36	0.31
1898	7.77	1.89	0.26
1899	10.12	2.30	0.48
1900	7.61	1.86	0.34
1901	8.04	2.07	0.35
1902	5.15	1.47	0.46
1903	5.24	2.22	0.3
1904	7.72	2.22	0.29
1905	7.74	1.21	0.28

Sources: "Agricultural and Industrial Statistics, Sources and Value of Income," published each year in the DIA Annual Report: see Canda, *SP* (1898), 422; *SP* (1899), 468-69; *SP* (1900), 544-45; *SP* (1901), 213; *SP* (1902), 218-19; *SP* (1903), 140-41; *SP* (1904), 146-47; *SP* (1905), 136-37; *SP* (1906), 134-35.

who hunted, whereas others emphasized its importance.<sup>28</sup> Such discrepancies reflect the regional variations mentioned above, but they probably also indicate an ideological stance that may have prevented some agents from championing hunting's economic value. The DIA was committed to the assimilation of Aboriginal people, an objective that required the replacement of "traditional" economic pursuits, such as hunting, with "civilized" Euro-Canadian undertakings – namely, farming.<sup>29</sup> In pursuing this mandate, DIA officials may have downplayed hunting in order to encourage farming and its assimilatory benefits or to improve their own status in the eyes of the DIA. Nonetheless, hunting remained important, particularly because, more than any other activity, it sustained the Mi'kmaq in lean winter months.

The importance of fishing and hunting to the Mi'kmaq grew with the increased popularity of sport tourism, which, by the turn of the twentieth century, augmented their incomes. In the 1860s, driven by an anti-modern impulse, wealthy Americans began to value an "authentic" wilderness experience and sought Mi'kmaw guides in forests and along waterways. Many Mi'kmaw men found work in this industry.<sup>30</sup> In 1896, Agent F. McDormand of Digby County claimed that, there, "most of the men ... were constantly employed [as hunting guides] for several weeks last fall."<sup>31</sup>

The Mi'kmaq also relied on other natural resources for income. Berry harvesting remained important enough that agents such as Cumberland County's F.A. Rand felt that it warranted inclusion in his 1899 annual

report. As he explained, “the women and children pick berries in the summer and autumn.”<sup>32</sup> Berry picking was probably under-reported as a source of revenue. As feminist scholars conjecture, this activity – the domain of women – tended to be devalued because, though it “contributed to the family well-being,” it was “not easily reckoned worth in cash.”<sup>33</sup> Federal under-reporting aside, the economic importance of berrying and other crop harvests grew in the twentieth century as whole Mi'kmaw families travelled to participate in them, an undertaking that, as Fred Wien suggests, could “provide a family with enough cash in a good year to see them through the winter months.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Handcrafts**

The production of handcrafts was important to the turn-of-the-century Mi'kmaw economy. Porcupine quill work, baskets, and woodwork items were peddled door to door, sold in urban markets, or used to barter for other commodities.<sup>35</sup> After 1860, as tourism expanded in Maritime Canada, Mi'kmaw crafts, popular with vacationers seeking souvenirs, became part of the tourist draw. Women were central to this production. In 1896, one agent noted that basket making was “carried on by the women, who are adepts in that line.”<sup>36</sup> In 1903, another commented that “the industrious squaws make dainty baskets and deftly ply the busy needle, making indoor footwear, which they sell at good prices in the neighbouring towns.”<sup>37</sup> This is confirmed by the 1901 decennial census: of the sixty-six basket makers identified in Nova Scotia, forty-three were women.<sup>38</sup>

Mi'kmaw manufacturers also found other niches, crafting wooden items for use in mining and sports. For example, a “principal resource” of the Cape Breton County Mi'kmaq was the manufacture of “pick-handles, &c” for the nearby coal mines.<sup>39</sup> The community at Indian Brook was known for its production of “goods for the sporting market,” most notably, hockey sticks.<sup>40</sup> The agent there commented in 1903 that “the principal occupation of those residing on the reserve ... has been the manufacture of the popular Micmac hockey stick, which is becoming every year a more permanent industry among those who are not prominent in agriculture.”<sup>41</sup> Unlike quill and basket work, this handcraft sector was male-dominated. Mi'kmaw men were also adept coopers and probably found buyers for their product among farmers who grew apples and potatoes.

In the census, 308 Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq reported working in a “profession,” 44.5 percent of which involved some sort of craft; 66 individuals

were basket makers, 69 were coopers, 1 was a tub maker, and 1 made oars. At Lennox Island, PEI, basket making was the only profession apart from farming to be cited in the 1901 census – six of the thirty-eight men whose professions were given for the community wove baskets for a living. Crafts were also important in New Brunswick. At Big Cove, twenty-seven of the fifty-nine professions enumerated were connected to crafting; sixteen individuals made baskets, seven made handles, and two were coopers.<sup>42</sup>

The DIA itself recognized the importance of handicrafts to the Mi'kmaw economy. In 1900, the DIA superintendent general noted in his annual report that Maritime Aboriginal craft production “consists chiefly of baskets, snow-shoes, moccasins, tubs, mast hoops, canoes and boats.”<sup>43</sup> Local agents also commented on the importance of the handcraft industry. In 1898, Agent A. Cameron reported of Eskasoni that “native handicraft” was what the Mi'kmaq “chiefly rely upon to keep the wolf from the door.”<sup>44</sup> A year later, Agent D. McIsaac of Inverness County, Nova Scotia, remarked that Mi'kmaw “merchants and traders receive almost all the woodenware they use from the Micmac of the reserve who are fairly well paid for their labour in this line.”<sup>45</sup> Another agent, who clearly wished that the Mi'kmaq in his agency would farm, disparagingly noted that “many of the [Mi'kmaq] ... still prefer making baskets, tubs and mast-hoops to tilling the soil.”<sup>46</sup>

Handcrafting was no incidental industry; whole families relocated in its pursuit. In 1899, W.D. Carter of New Brunswick's North-East Agency reported that the Mi'kmaq who were “engaged chiefly in the manufacture and sale of Indian wares” had moved to “points along Intercolonial Railway where they have better opportunities of shipping and disposing of their wares.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Mi'kmaq living near Sussex, New Brunswick, petitioned in 1913 for a reserved tract near that town because they wished access to its market for their goods.<sup>48</sup> The Mi'kmaq at Rocky Point, PEI, similarly valued their location for its proximity to Charlottetown and its ready market of tourists fond of Mi'kmaw baskets.<sup>49</sup>

Although handcraft production was important, attaching a precise dollar value to it is impossible as items were sold by individual producers, often directly to purchasers. When the DIA did document income from handicrafts, it was included in the catch-all category of “other.” Although this category probably included proceeds from the sale of various non-hunted and non-fished natural resources, the bulk of it was probably comprised of handicrafts.<sup>50</sup> An examination of this category confirms the economic significance of handicrafts (see Table 11). In 1897, Maritime

Table 11

## Percentage Mi'kmaw income from "other" sources, 1897-1905

Year	NS	NB	PEI
1897	48.16	17.30	81.80
1898	43.20	15.50	77.10
1899	40.00	15.90	84.00
1900	37.33	16.30	82.40
1901	35.09	14.80	87.40
1902	31.88	18.60	85.80
1903	35.31	18.40	86.00
1904	28.49	13.80	83.60
1905	31.52	19.60	88.10

Sources: "Agricultural and Industrial Statistics, Sources and Value of Income," published each year in the DIA Annual Report: see Canada, *SP* (1898), 422; *SP* (1899), 468-69; *SP* (1900), 544-45; *SP* (1901), 213; *SP* (1902), 218-19; *SP* (1903), 140-41; *SP* (1904), 146-47; *SP* (1905), 136-37; *SP* (1906), 134-35.

Mi'kmaq earned 44.4 percent of their incomes from it.<sup>51</sup> In 1905, the figure was a smaller, but significant, 35.3 percent.<sup>52</sup> As for fishing and hunting, the relative importance of handcrafts as an industry varied by region. It was most significant on Prince Edward Island, where, in 1899, "other" industries accounted for 84.0 percent of that province's income. That same year, handcrafts accounted for 40.0 percent of Mi'kmaw incomes in Nova Scotia and for 15.9 percent in New Brunswick.<sup>53</sup>

### Agriculture

Since the 1880 creation of the Department of Indian Affairs, its officials asserted that agriculture should form the economic base of Canada's Aboriginal communities. Agriculture would not only promote assimilation by imparting appropriate Euro-Canadian concepts regarding labour, landownership, and family structure, but it would improve Aboriginal economic self-sufficiency and reduce federal costs.<sup>54</sup> DIA officials assumed that the land reserved for the Mi'kmaq at Confederation would form the basis of an agricultural Mi'kmaw society; farming was advanced as the key to assimilation and a solution to impoverishment.<sup>55</sup> By the turn of the century, however, DIA officials, displeased with the limited scope of Mi'kmaw farming, blamed lack of Mi'kmaw interest in the venture.<sup>56</sup> Such blame belied the facts that much Mi'kmaw farmland was agriculturally untenable, that promised farm equipment often failed to materialize, and that Mi'kmaw farmers faced the same persistent difficulties

Table 12

## Percentage Mi'kmaw income from farming, 1897-1905

Year	NS	NB	PEI
1897	22.60	27.45	8.34
1898	15.90	21.96	10.40
1899	20.80	20.67	10.00
1900	21.30	21.36	11.80
1901	17.90	21.08	8.55
1902	19.30	13.78	9.23
1903	16.90	15.27	8.76
1904	18.50	15.71	8.79
1905	20.50	9.44	5.82

Sources: "Agricultural and Industrial Statistics, Sources and Value of Income," published each year in the DIA Annual Report: see Canada, *SP* (1898), 422; *SP* (1899), 468-69; *SP* (1900), 544-45; *SP* (1901), 213; *SP* (1902), 218-19; *SP* (1903), 140-41; *SP* (1904), 146-47; *SP* (1905), 136-37; *SP* (1906), 134-35.

endured by all Maritime farmers – poor weather and crop disease.<sup>57</sup> It also seemed to ignore the fact that, regardless of these challenges, agriculture was a growing source of Mi'kmaw income by the start of the twentieth century.

In 1899, farming accounted for 19.3 percent of total Mi'kmaw revenues. It had become a relatively stable source of income and was, unlike other industries, consistent across the region (see Table 12).<sup>58</sup> In 1900, farming accounted for 21.3 percent of Mi'kmaw income in Nova Scotia, 21.4 percent in New Brunswick, and 11.8 percent in PEI.<sup>59</sup> The decennial census of 1901 confirms the importance of agriculture. Of the 308 Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq who were assigned professions, 70 were "farmers" or "farm sons," and another 11 were "farm labourers." Agent reports also chronicled the relative significance of farming. In 1899, Agent D. McIsaac of Inverness County, Nova Scotia, reported that "farming is the principal occupation."<sup>60</sup> The Indian agent in nearby Victoria County mused that "about thirty percent of the Indians live almost exclusively by farming."<sup>61</sup> Thomas Smith, agent in Colchester County, similarly stated that, on the Millbrook reserve, one of Nova Scotia's largest, "the Indians ... appear to be willing to improve their condition by raising crops of potatoes and garden stuff."<sup>62</sup> Agents in New Brunswick and PEI echoed these sentiments. New Brunswick's W.D. Carter reported that "all" Mi'kmaq in his agency "do more or less farming."<sup>63</sup> And PEI Indian Superintendent Jean O. Arsenault recorded in 1898 that the Mi'kmaq on the Morrell reserve "raise[d] good crops every year."<sup>64</sup> The 1901 Canadian census also points

Table 13

Percentage Mi'kmaw income from wages, 1897-1905			
Year	NS	NB	PEI
1897	13.40	21.99	0
1898	19.00	32.10	2.63
1899	21.9	34.68	2.19
1900	25.70	38.14	2.23
1901	31.90	41.60	1.55
1902	35.50	42.38	1.90
1903	33.10	43.50	1.50
1904	38.90	50.26	1.34
1905	33.00	50.25	0.12

Sources: "Agricultural and Industrial Statistics, Sources and Value of Income," published each year in the DIA Annual Report: see Canada, *SP* (1898), 422; *SP* (1899), 468-69; *SP* (1900), 544-45; *SP* (1901), 213; *SP* (1902), 218-19; *SP* (1903), 140-41; *SP* (1904), 146-47; *SP* (1905), 136-37; *SP* (1906), 134-35.

to the significance of farming at Lennox Island. Assigning a profession to 38 of the community's 128 enumerated inhabitants, it listed 32 as "farmers" or "farmer sons."<sup>65</sup>

### Wage Labour

At the turn of the century, the value and proportion of Mi'kmaw earnings derived from waged work was on the rise. In 1897, the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Mi'kmaq earned \$4,479.00 and \$4,425.00 from waged labour, accounting for 13.4 and 21.9 percent of all income (see Table 13).<sup>66</sup> This sector grew over the next two years, and by 1899, Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq earned \$10,770.50 (21.9 percent of total income) in wages and New Brunswick Mi'kmaq \$9,050.00 (34.7 percent of total income).<sup>67</sup> By 1905, wages were the single largest source of Mi'kmaw income in both provinces – accounting for 33.0 percent in Nova Scotia and 50.3 percent in New Brunswick.<sup>68</sup> In predominantly agricultural Prince Edward Island, the Mi'kmaq were less affected by waged work. In 1897, none of their income stemmed from waged labour, and by 1899 only \$250.00 – or 2.2 percent – of Mi'kmaw incomes were thus generated.<sup>69</sup> Unlike in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the level remained consistently low on PEI, with wages accounting for just 0.12 percent of Mi'kmaw income in 1905.<sup>70</sup>

The relative unimportance of waged labour on Prince Edward Island stems in part from the fact that the island's largest reserve, at Lennox Island, was removed from major non-Aboriginal settlements where jobs

were more plentiful. Generally, reserve location affected the Mi'kmaq's ability to participate in waged work. In the 1897 departmental report, Agent William C. Chisholm connected the availability of wage work to residence, suggesting that "the cause of emigration lies in the greater facilities for money-making offered by the lumbering and mining districts, whither they generally resort."<sup>71</sup> Indeed, several agent reports reveal that the Mi'kmaq moved to find work. In 1899, the agent of Richmond County, Nova Scotia, remarked that twelve people, "having been discouraged by the failure of the crops and the fishing during the last few years," had moved to work "in the coal mines and in public works."<sup>72</sup> Likewise, the agent at Truro reported in 1902 that, "on account of living near the progressive town of Truro," the Mi'kmaq were "able to obtain good wages" by "working on the government gravel train" or "on the town sewers."<sup>73</sup> New Brunswick agents recorded the same phenomenon. There, Agent W.D. Carter reported in 1899 that "most of the Eel River Band had left their reserve and settled at New Mills and other stations on the Intercolonial Railway, where they can more easily gain employment."<sup>74</sup>

The wage labour of the Mi'kmaq was multi-faceted. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia agent reports reveal the significance of the lumber industry to the Mi'kmaq. Agent W.D. Carter noted in 1894 that "lumbering is carried on extensively up the Miramichi River," and the Digby agent in 1896 described the Mi'kmaq as being "very expert" at logging.<sup>75</sup> Mining also meant wages for Mi'kmaq men who found work in Cape Breton coal mines and in Pictou County, where they earned between \$1.25 and \$2.00 a day at the Ferrona ironworks in 1897.<sup>76</sup> Men were also involved in a number of so-called unskilled activities, which included working as stevedores, in brickyards, and as farm labourers. In 1899, Agent Roderick McDonald noted that residents of the Fisher's Grant reserve, Pictou County, participated in public works "such as loading and unloading vessels, at which they earn good wages."<sup>77</sup> Likewise, George Wells of Annapolis County reported in 1899 that some Mi'kmaq men worked at the Buckar brickyard.<sup>78</sup> Data from the 1901 census affirm the importance of waged work for Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Of the 308 Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq for whom professions were listed in the census, 39 were "labourers," 1 was a "tradesman," 10 were stevedores, and 3 were ship labourers. At New Brunswick's Big Cove reserve, "labourer" was the most common profession cited in the 1901 census. There, twenty men worked in sawmills and as stevedores.<sup>79</sup> At Eel Ground, New Brunswick, labour was even more important – thirty

of the forty people who pursued a profession were "labourers."<sup>80</sup> Women, too, relied on waged work, theirs found in domestic service.<sup>81</sup> In 1905, Agent D.K. McIntyre of Sydney wrote that "the women worked about town washing and scrubbing" and that "the girls frequently evince a desire to learn the art of housekeeping and are often employed by the day to assist in such work, doing their duty faithfully and well."<sup>82</sup> The 1901 census agrees, ascribing the professions of "domestic" or "servant" to several Mi'kmaw women.<sup>83</sup>

At the turn of the century, then, the economy of the Mi'kmaq remained centred to a significant degree on undertakings that had long been part of Mi'kmaw lifeways – hunting, fishing, and other harvesting. Handcrafts likewise had a long pedigree, though by the twentieth century, they were being sold as part of the market economy, and the nature of the crafts reflected the tastes of non-Aboriginal buyers. All told, fishing, hunting, and handcraft production accounted for 57.3 percent of Maritime Mi'kmaw revenues in 1899. The remainder was derived from agriculture, which generated nearly 20.0 percent, and from waged labour, which, in 1899, accounted for 22.0 percent in Nova Scotia and for nearly 35.0 percent in New Brunswick.

### **Settlement and Mobility**

At Confederation, the federal government assumed responsibility for the reserves upon which the Mi'kmaq were expected to establish permanent European-style communities with frame homes, gardens, and cultivated fields. To an extent, this expectation became the reality of life on the reserves. To varying degrees, the Mi'kmaq took up farming, and most lived on reserves for at least part of each year. According to the DIA census, for example, except for thirty Mi'kmaq in Kings County, virtually all the New Brunswick Mi'kmaq lived on one of the seventeen provincial reserves devoted to them.<sup>84</sup> On Prince Edward Island, all of the 308 Mi'kmaq enumerated by the DIA lived on reserves.<sup>85</sup> The situation differed in Nova Scotia, where, in 1901, 599 (or 29.7 percent) of the Mi'kmaw population reportedly lived off the thirty-five designated reserves.<sup>86</sup>

Although most Mi'kmaq lived on reserved tracts for at least part of the year, mobility was an important feature of their lives at the turn of the century. Like many Maritimers, they moved both within and away from the Atlantic provinces. Such mobility frustrated agents tasked with enumerating the Mi'kmaq for their yearly reports. In 1896,

Agent William C. Chisholm of Antigonish and Guysborough Counties in Nova Scotia complained that “the nomadic instinct is still strong in the Indian, and it is next to impossible to follow him in his various wanderings. Hence it is exceedingly difficult to compute the population with any exactness.”<sup>87</sup> In New Brunswick, Agent W.D. Carter reported several migrations. In 1894, he recorded that most Mi'kmaq from the reserved tract at Shediac had moved to “the vicinity of Moncton and Hampton” or had “joined the Big Cove Band.”<sup>88</sup> Five years later, he noted that the Pockmouche and Tabusintac reserves had been deserted, their inhabitants having joined the “Burnt Church Band” and that all but two families had left the Bathurst Reserve, the bulk having moved to St. Peter's Island to be nearer the town.<sup>89</sup> In 1900, he recorded cross-agency migration, stating that forty Mi'kmaq from his North-East Agency had moved to the primarily Wolastoqiyik-occupied South-West Agency of the province.<sup>90</sup> In Nova Scotia, Agent F.A. Rand observed that the Mi'kmaq in Cumberland County were “scattered over the county,” whereas Agent Charles E. McManus of Halifax County revealed that the Mi'kmaq there “move about considerably.”<sup>91</sup> Cross-agency migration also occurred in Nova Scotia. In 1900, John R. McDonald submitted that the population of his Antigonish and Guysborough agency was up by six “owing to new Indians joining the band.”<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Agent Alonzo Wallace of Hants County noted in 1900 that the population in his agency had increased by twenty “owing mostly to other Indians coming into the county.”<sup>93</sup>

Mi'kmaw mobility was predicated upon seasonal economic pursuits such as hunting and fishing but also on other conditions. In 1900, Pictou County agent Roderick McDonald wrote that “the reserve at Indian Island, Merigomish, has during the summer a population of about forty persons; but in the beginning of winter they remove to Pine Trees, where they are allowed by the owners of the land to build shanties. An island is not a convenient place to live on during the early part of the winter and spring. The state of the ice is dangerous, and it is not, therefore, easy to reach the mainland in case of necessity. This is the reason that they remove to the mainland in the fall.”<sup>94</sup> Like their ancestors and, indeed, like many of their non-Aboriginal neighbours, the Mi'kmaq moved to make most efficient use of the resources available to them.

### **Cultural Persistence and Change**

Although it is possible to roughly quantify and qualify the change and persistence that characterized the Mi'kmaw economy at the turn of the

century, the state of Mi'kmaw cultural practices and the extent to which they were transformed is much more difficult to identify. However, the same syncretism that marked economic pursuits seems to have been at play in the cultural arena as the Mi'kmaq adhered to distinctly Mi'kmaw cultural practices while also joining the cultural milieu of the non-Aboriginal world around them.

### **Language and Education**

Language provides a useful barometer of cultural persistence and change. In 1911, ethnographers Wilson Wallis and Ruth Wallis observed that “most Micmac men” had been “forced to learn English” because of their work with non-Aboriginal people.<sup>95</sup> It is difficult to ascertain the linguistic usages of the Mi'kmaq, but returns of the decennial and DIA censuses of 1901 seem to prove the Wallises right in that most Mi'kmaq were said to be fluent in spoken English. By the turn of the century, some Mi'kmaq appreciated English literacy and were, in the words of two 1906 petitioners from Halifax County, “anxious to educate our children in English schools” so that they would “learn to speak the English language fluently.”<sup>96</sup> These petitioners speak to the lack of English-language instruction available to the Mi'kmaq at the time. In 1901, the federal day school was virtually the only educational option for Mi'kmaw children.<sup>97</sup> In theory, they could either attend federally funded on-reserve day schools or their parents could petition for them to attend provincial public schools where their tuition would be paid by the DIA. In practice, however, Mi'kmaw students faced serious educational impediments. As late as 1901, formal English-language schooling was not the experience of most Mi'kmaw children.

DIA records reveal the poor state of Mi'kmaw schooling. In 1901, only fourteen of the fifty-four reserves had federal day schools, and just 299 of the region's 726 school-aged Mi'kmaw children between ages six and fifteen, approximately 41 percent, were enrolled in on-reserve day schools, with only 127, roughly 18 percent, attending “regularly” by DIA standards (see Table 14).<sup>98</sup> Poverty – particularly the want of warm clothing – and school schedules that competed with seasonal mobility were main culprits in these low rates of attendance.<sup>99</sup> These statistics stand in sharp contrast to their Canadian and provincial equivalents. In 1900, the average daily attendance rate of all Canadian schools was 61.2 percent – slightly higher than the 58.6 percent, 54.5 percent, and 56.2 percent rates prevailing in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick.<sup>100</sup>

Table 14

**Mi'kmaw children in reserve day schools, 1901**

Province	Mi'kmaw children		Total average attendance	Percent of children enrolled on-reserve	Percent of all children in average reserve school attendance
	Total (6-15 years)	Enrolled in school			
NB	210	73	27	34.80	12.90
PEI	56	21	11	37.50	19.60
NS	460	205	89	44.60	19.30
<i>Region</i>	726	299	127	41.20	17.50

Sources: Canada, *SP*, 1902, DIA Annual Report, "Census Return" and "School Statement," 152-59, 36-37.

Reserve schools were plagued by more than erratic and low attendance rates. By design, they had a limited educational mandate, offering instruction only to standard VI, a rough equivalent to grade 6. The quality of their tuition was also poor, marred by a myriad of shortcomings including high rates of teacher turnover, underqualified instructors, and poorly provisioned facilities. Of the 269 teachers who taught in Maritime reserve schools between 1900 and 1951, 40 percent did so for one year or less, and school closures caused by staffing problems were common.<sup>101</sup> Less than ideal learning conditions also impeded classroom instruction. In 1910, Nova Scotia Indian Superintendent A.J. Boyd reported that "I have been doing my best in the matter of repairs to Indian school buildings in Nova Scotia; but it has been impossible for me to overtake all the work of that kind that requires to be done."<sup>102</sup> Not surprisingly, the best teachers in the Maritimes preferred employment in provincial schools, where wages were higher and conditions more amenable. To save money, the DIA deliberately hired less qualified, lower-salaried teachers. Some did not even have licences.<sup>103</sup> When A.J. Boyd complained of the calibre of teachers retained by the DIA and suggested that "the Department ... insist on the employment of only Normal School graduates as teachers in Indian schools," the idea was dismissed as unfeasible.<sup>104</sup>

The upshot of these shortcomings was that reserve day schools offered students a meagre level of achievement. Of the 299 Mi'kmaw pupils enrolled in school in 1901, 233 of them, or 78.0 percent, were working at standards I, II, or III, whereas only 1.3 percent (4 of 299) had reached the highest available level, standard VI (see Tables 15 and 16).

Table 15

Attendance at Mi'kmaw reserve schools by standards, 1901				
Province	NB	PEI	NS	Total
<i>Total number enrolled</i>	73	21	205	299
Boys	41	14	108	163
Girls	32	7	97	136
<i>Average attendance</i>	27	11	89	127
<i>Standard</i>				
I	35	5	102	142
II	11	5	32	48
III	10	4	29	43
IV	8	4	29	41
V	6	3	10	19
VI	1	–	3	4

Source: Canada, SP, 1902, DIA Annual Report, "School Statement," 36-37.

Table 16

Percentage enrolment in reserve day schools by standards, 1901					
Standard					
I	II	III	IV	V	VI
47.5	16.1	14.4	13.7	6.4	1.3

Note: The numbers have been rounded to the nearest tenth of a percentage.

Source: Canada, SP, 1902, DIA Annual Report, "School Statement," 36-37.

For students who lived where there were no federal day schools, off-reserve provincial public schools provided an imperfect option. With the DIA paying their annual tuitions, some Mi'kmaw children attended these schools. Yet circumstances often stymied this alternative. First, the deliberate isolation of many Mi'kmaw communities made the daily commute difficult, especially during winter months. Resistance from taxpayers who opposed the attendance of Aboriginal students also blocked Mi'kmaw students from provincial schools.<sup>105</sup> An examination of the 1901 decennial census returns for Nova Scotia suggests that school-aged Mi'kmaw children living off reserves and away from reserve schools were even less likely to attend school than were those in reserve communities. For example, according to the census, of the forty-two school-aged Mi'kmaw children in Richmond County, just fourteen attended

school at all. In Antigonish County, only one of the nineteen school-aged children attended, and in Shelburne and Queens Counties, only six of the thirty-three school-aged children were recorded as having attended school. It is likely that, at most, only half of all Mi'kmaw children received some formal education and thus would have had formal training in the English language in 1901.<sup>106</sup>

Mi'kmaw adults had cause to speak English as they interacted with non-Aboriginal neighbours, co-workers, bosses, and DIA officials – but they also maintained their Aboriginal tongue. Although the 1901 decennial census shows that the vast majority of Mi'kmaw people could converse in English, it also indicates the persistence of the Mi'kmaw language. Across the Maritimes, an overwhelming majority of Mi'kmaw enumerates listed “Micmac” or “Indian” as their mother tongue. Somewhat surprisingly, only thirty-six are recorded as speaking French, the language many of their ancestors had learned during the French Regime in Acadia.<sup>107</sup>

Evidence also points to the ongoing importance of their own language in the Mi'kmaq's daily lives. Although the DIA insisted that day schools be conducted in English, the Mi'kmaq were eager to have their own language included in their school curricula. A group of five teachers, sisters from the reserve at Restigouche, Quebec, were among the first Mi'kmaw educators to work in Maritime reserve day schools. Mary, Margaret, Martha, Rebecca, and Alma Isaacs were in high demand in New Brunswick day schools during the first decade of the twentieth century, in part because they spoke Mi'kmaq in their classrooms.<sup>108</sup> The popularity of the work of the Isaacs sisters suggests that the Mi'kmaw language remained important in Mi'kmaw communities.

### **Religion**

By 1900, the Mi'kmaq had been Catholic for centuries, having converted during the French Regime. The faith still had a firm hold; all of the 3,403 Mi'kmaq listed in the 1900 DIA census were identified as Roman Catholics.<sup>109</sup> Many Mi'kmaw communities had a Catholic church, and priests were heavily involved in reserve life. Indeed, six of the nineteen Indian agents to the Mi'kmaq in 1900 were Catholic priests.

Mi'kmaw Catholicism, however, was marked by syncretism, and aspects of older Mi'kmaw spiritual traditions operated alongside it. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the most significant of Mi'kmaw Catholic festivals, St. Anne's Day, an annual 26 July celebration. In 1903, Anglican churchman and historian C.W. Vernon attended the St. Anne's

festival at Chapel Island, Cape Breton. His description of the celebration reveals elements of distinctly Mi'kmaw practices. Although Vernon interpreted this fusion of customs as evidence of the "religious influence" of Catholicism, his account also suggests an easy coexistence between Mi'kmaw Catholicism and a continued devotion to indigenous cultural practice.<sup>110</sup> For example, the first day of the mission, which featured the "erection of the wigwams," was followed by a second day of "high mass, catechism, rosary and vespers," and an evening of "dancing and games." The Sunday mass of the mission featured the sacrament delivered by the priest, but it also included an address from the grand chief, which consisted of "partly translating the words of the priest and partly ... speaking to them in his own words." Some prayers were in English, but others were recited in the "Micmac" language. The mass featured music "supplied by the Indians ... in Micmac."<sup>111</sup>

Although Catholic clergy played prominent roles in reserve life, Mi'kmaw spiritual leaders also retained influence. In the summer of 1908, for example, Haselma, who was also known as Germain Laksi, Jeremiah B. Alexis, and Lonecloud/Lone Cloud, reported to Ottawa that he had been named "chief medicine man" – an office with spiritual import that surpassed the realm of the Catholic tradition.<sup>112</sup> Describing himself as a "doctor" for 1901 census takers, Lonecloud stated that his duties were to "tell the great historical legends," to marry couples, and to instruct them after marriage "where to go and what to do for life to come."<sup>113</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Mi'kmaw world at the turn of the twentieth century was an economically, socially, and culturally complex one in which indigenous customs, habits, and lifeways coexisted with those derived from Euro-Canadian traditions. Hunting, fishing, and handcrafts continued to be significant sources of subsistence, but farming and waged labour were growing in importance. Although most Mi'kmaq lived on reserves separated from non-Aboriginals, the two groups were brought into daily contact via industry, trade, schooling, and church attendance. Mi'kmaq and non-Aboriginal Maritimers could easily have spoken to each other; despite the lack of English-language schooling available to them, most Mi'kmaq spoke English or French. And yet, the Mi'kmaw tongue remained their first language. Like many of the non-Aboriginal people living in their midst, the Mi'kmaq were Catholics, but their own religious customs were not forgotten. It is into this complex milieu that the

federal government introduced its system of band council elections in the spring of 1899. The same syncretism that marked other facets of Mi'kmaw life would come into play in governance practices. Though accepted in some respects and embraced in certain Mi'kmaw quarters, the triennial system of elections was also variously ignored and challenged by Mi'kmaw people who remained committed to their own political traditions.