

WHERE HISTORIES MEET: INDIGENOUS AND SETTLER ENCOUNTERS IN THE TORONTO AREA

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Surviving, Rebuilding, Adapting, Resisting

In March 1838, Peter Jones finally met with Lord Glenelg to press the British government for title deeds to Indigenous lands. He arrived in London the same month Lieutenant-Governor Bond Head was recalled from Toronto in the wake of the rebellion. With Glenelg's support, Jones took his petition directly to Queen Victoria in September.

He offered her Wampum then "proceeded to give her the meaning of the wampum; and told her that the white wampum signified the loyal and good feeling which prevails amongst the Indians toward Her Majesty and Her Government; but that the black wampum was designed to tell Her Majesty that their hearts were troubled on account of their having no title-deeds for their lands; and that they had sent their petition and wampum that Her Majesty might be pleased to take out all the black wampum, so that the string might be all white."¹

The petition read, in part:

We are the descendants of the original inhabitants of the soil, who formerly possessed this, their native country, in peace and harmony long before the French, the ancient enemies of your people, came over the great waters and settled upon our territories . . . Our people have begun to improve their farms; they wish to sell the produce at market and buy goods from the white people, but they are afraid to clear much ground, because they are told by evil-minded persons that their farms can be taken away from them at any time . . . We know that our people in times past have sold lands to our late father the king, but we never sold our lands at the Credit.²

To Jones' great joy, Queen Victoria approved Glenelg's recommendation to grant title deeds.

But the victory was illusory. The Mississaugas lost their most important ally when Glenelg resigned in February 1839. In Upper Canada, the new lieutenant-governor, George Arthur, ignored the question of title deeds, and no one from the Colonial Office insisted that he issue them. Jones continued to press, meeting Lord Sydenham (Charles Poulett Thomson), the new governor general of British North America, but nothing came of this meeting.³

Two years after Indigenous warriors had defended the Crown, Sydenham remarked: “He (the Indians) occupies valuable land, unprofitably to himself and injurious to the country, and adds nothing either to the wealth, the industry, or the defence of the Province.”⁴ Such sentiments did not augur well for British-Indigenous relations in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

Farmland in Canada West was now in short supply. Non-Indigenous squatters continued to move onto Indigenous lands, and the poaching of game, fish, and timber from Indigenous lands was a serious problem. According to testimony submitted to an 1839 inquiry into the Indian Department, Chief Superintendent Jarvis “was not particularly upset to see local game disappear as he felt this would force the Indians to turn increasingly to agriculture for their livelihood.”⁵

Although Indigenous people protested, the 1839 Crown Lands Protection Act, supposedly passed to protect Indigenous lands, made the government the guardian of Indian reserves. Rather than restoring authority to Indigenous communities, the legislation made “Indians” minors or wards of the Crown.⁶

By the 1840s, approximately 10,000 Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee constituted a tiny minority in a colony of 450,000 settlers. This demographic imbalance only worsened over the next decades.⁷ Extensive deforestation, an expanding road network, the building of railways, and industrial development transformed the landscape and increased the economic and political domination of Toronto over its hinterland.

Indigenous peoples were keenly aware of changing power dynamics and the importance of maintaining good relations with the British government. In the United States, thousands of Cherokees had died in 1838 when forced to trek more than 1,600 kilometres to Oklahoma on the “Trail of Tears”; disputes between settlers and Indigenous peoples over land had led to open warfare, with significant loss of life.

Given this reality, local First Nations adopted a variety of strategies to safeguard their lands, communities, and governance.

An Inter-Nation Council at the Credit, 1840

In 1840, the Mississaugas and Chippewas once again turned to their alliance with the Six Nations in the hope of gaining greater political leverage to protect their lands and governance. The minutes of a significant nine-day Council held at the Credit River that year provide a snapshot of their concerns: How could reserve lands and hunting territories be protected? Did it make more sense to move to one Indigenous territory or retain the small reserves they already had? How best to manage relations with the Crown? Tensions between old ways and new ways and between Christians and non-Christians shaped decisions about how to organize and run Councils, the bedrock of traditional governance systems: “It was stated that our fathers never recognized a presiding Chief in their Councils, but as we are imitating the good ways of the White people, it was thought proper to appoint a Chairman.”

These words were recorded by Peter Jones, the appointed secretary, in English.

Twenty-seven Anishinaabe Chiefs and warriors attended, including John Assance; Musquakie, Thomas Nanigishkung, Negenau-na-quot / Big Shilling, and Joseph Snake from the Lake Simcoe area; Joseph Sawyer and Peter Jones from the Mississaugas of the Credit; and Chiefs Elliot and Johnson from the Mississaugas of Balsam Lake (later Mississaugas of Scugog Island). Christianity was front and centre. Each day opened with hymn singing and praying. On Sunday, Jones preached in Anishinaabemowin to “a large congregation of his Indian brethren.”⁸ The Council also approved the use of band funds to reprint and expand Peter Jones’s translated hymn book.

Items on the agenda included “to thank the British Government for giving them presents and to pray that they may still be continued”; to renew the title deed applications; to gauge the Council’s opinion on the establishment of a “colony” or “a Great Council Fire somewhere”; and to discuss the possibility of a central “manual labour school.” The Chiefs also wanted to consider “the propriety of petitioning the Queen to allow the Seat of Govt to continue at Toronto.” Kingston had been chosen as capital of the new United Province of Canada, guaranteeing even less access to colonial administrators.

The new chief superintendent of Indian Affairs, Samuel Peters Jarvis, was invited to attend on the second day. Jarvis smoked the ceremonial pipe tomahawk that had been presented to Peter Jones in 1838 by Sir Augustus D’Este, Queen



Peter Jones, in regalia, photographed in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1845, by Hill & Adamson. Jones holds a pipe tomahawk given to him by Sir Augustus d’Este, cousin of Queen Victoria, in 1838. The pipe had been ceremonially smoked at the 1840 Council at the Credit | National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh

Victoria’s cousin and a significant leader of the Aborigines Protection Society. Jarvis “solemnly assured the Council that the British Govt had no intention of discontinuing the presents nor

would they ever violate such a breach of faith as was made between the Indian Tribes and the Govt.”

But Jarvis was “entirely opposed to the Indians receiving title Deeds and . . . his opposition arose from the good will he had to the Indians, as he knew if the Indians had deeds many of them would soon dispose of their lands.”⁹

The Credit Chiefs later clarified that they were not seeking title deeds for individuals to hold plots of land in fee simple: “Our prayer to her Majesty’s Govt. has been for the obtaining of a Govt. Document securing the lands to our Tribe and their posterity for ever.”¹⁰

Jarvis offered the Chiefs a cosmetic alternative to the title deeds promised by Queen Victoria: “A map of the Reserve with a full description of it, and the names of Indians to whom it belongs, and the said map to contain the Seal of the province and the governor’s signature.” Given that the government had engineered the loss of most Indigenous land, this was hardly a guarantee of tenure into the future. But the government’s philosophy of protective control through the Crown Lands Protection Act had already eliminated the possibility of the Mississaugas obtaining a title deed.¹¹

In the government’s eyes, Jarvis confirmed, the Anishinaabek were no longer considered allies but subjects. Though in true bureaucratic fashion, he claimed the matter was “under consideration.” He was equally noncommittal about extending the reserve at Saugeen to create an “Indian colony.” The government in fact refused to return the Saugeen lands surrendered under

duress in the 1836 cession encouraged by Sir Francis Bond Head. Jarvis supported the idea of a manual-labour school, which would promote assimilation and teach farming skills to make Indigenous people less reliant on the government. Peter Jones also championed the proposal but for different reasons.

On the sixth day, fifteen Haudenosaunee Chiefs arrived to renew their peace and friendship treaty with the Anishinaabek and to work together to protect their sovereignty and lands. Of the Haudenosaunee Chiefs, only Mohawk Chief Sakayengwaraton (The Haze That Rises from the Ground in an Autumn Morning and Vanishes As the Day Advances) / John Smoke Johnson and Onandaga Chief Skanawiti (Beyond the River) / John Buck are named in the minutes.¹²

Chief Johnson told the Council “that the interests of all the Indians were one: that they had always supported the British Government, as they were strongly attached to it, and if that attachment should be lessened, it would not be their fault, but the fault of the government, in not keeping faith with the Indians.” He called for all Indian tribes to unite to obtain titles to their lands, as “the government and the white people were taking away their lands by fair promises.”¹³

As part of the treaty renewal, Buck and Musquakie each gave readings of the Dish with One Spoon and the Eternal Council Fires Wampums, which recorded the history and principles of the alliance between their peoples. Designated Wampum Keepers were trained from childhood to take on this important responsibility, and it was customary for both parties to an agreement

to review the meaning of the Wampum symbols together to ensure their understandings were consonant. However, there appears to have been a significant disagreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe interpretations of a key Wampum symbol—the Dish with One or Many Spoons—that may have derailed their joint action on land titles.

Buck, the Haudenosaunee Wampum Keeper, described the Dish with One Spoon agreement as

the first Treaty made between the Six Nations and the Ojebways [Anishinaabek] . . . The belt was in the form of a dish or bowl in the centre, which the Chief said represented that the Ojebways and the Six Nations were all to eat out of the same dish; that is, to have all their game in common. In the centre of the bowl were a few white Wampums, which represented a beaver's tail, the favourite dish of the Ojebways. At this Council the treaty of friendship was formed, and agreement was made for ever after to call each other BROTHERS. This treaty of friendship was made so strong that if a tree fell across their arms it could not separate them or cause them to unloose their hold.¹⁴

But according to Musquakie's reading of the Eternal Council Fires Wampum—which the Haudenosaunee had given to the Anishinaabek as part of the same peace process to signal recognition of Anishinaabe Council Fires (i.e., seats of governance) over much of central Ontario—the

sharing of resources was qualified. According to Musquakie, the Anishinaabek had placed a bowl with many ladles, including a ladle for the Six Nations, at the Narrows between Lakes Simcoe and Couchiching. While Buck related that the dish and ladle at Mnjikaning represented “abundance of game and food,” Musquakie described it as a limited sharing: “At the Narrows our fathers placed a dish with ladles around it, and a ladle for the Six Nations, who said to the Ojebways that the dish or bowl should never be emptied, but he [Musquakie] was sorry to say that it had already been emptied, not by the Six Nations on the Grand River, but by the [Kahnawà:ke Mohawks] residing near Montreal.”¹⁵

According to Musquakie, a dish had also been placed at the Credit, but he explained that “the right of hunting on the north side of the Lake was secured to the Ojebways, and the Six Nations were not to hunt here only when they come to smoke the pipe of peace with their Ojebway brethren.”¹⁶ It's not clear if this hunting provision applied only when the Haudenosaunee came to attend treaty renewal Councils or if it was meant to last as long as they maintained peace with the Anishinaabek.

These interpretive differences persist to this day and figure in legal arguments over rights to consultation and resources in the Toronto region.¹⁷ Because the Dish with One Spoon agreement was between First Nations and did not involve the Crown, its current legal status in relation to Ontario resources is unclear.

Despite these apparent differences in treaty interpretation, the historical alliance between

the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek symbolized by the Dish with One Spoon was renewed in 1840—for the fifth time. Chief John Smoke Johnson called for another joint Council to be hosted by the Haudenosaunee in the future. However, the Six Nations were not signatories to the 1840 Council’s petition to the lieutenant-governor requesting that he “secure to us and to our children, as soon as convenient, the lands on which we reside, as expressed in Lord Glenelg’s dispatches.”¹⁸ The Anishinaabek and Six Nations did not work closely together over the next decades, although they did collaborate occasionally, notably in meetings of what in 1870 became the “Great Council Fire”—the Grand General Indian Council of Ontario.

Trying to Find Consensus and Maintain Unity

Even among the Anishinaabek, internal divisions hindered launching a coordinated campaign to lobby for title deeds or the return of the Saugeen Tract.

In the months following the 1840 Council, the Methodist church split into two bitterly antagonistic factions. Peter Jones sided with the “Canadian” (Episcopal) Methodists because of his loyalty to his close friend Egerton Ryerson. The Credit Village followed him, as did the Methodist Anishinaabek at Lake Simcoe (Rama), Mud Lake (Curve Lake), Saugeen, and Munceytown. Chief Paudash of Rice Lake, John Sunday at Alderville, and the mission at St. Clair joined the opposing faction, the “British” (Wesleyan) Methodists. The

split ruptured decades-old relationships between Indigenous converts, missionaries, mission villages, and settler church groups.

Denominational rivalry between Catholics (especially after Jesuit missionaries returned to Canada in the 1840s), Anglicans, Baptists, Mormons, and others also strained relations between formerly close communities. John Assance’s people at Beausoleil Island embraced Catholicism. Chief Musquakie of Rama joined the Church of England, although most of his people remained Methodists. Some converts became disillusioned with Christianity and returned to traditional beliefs.

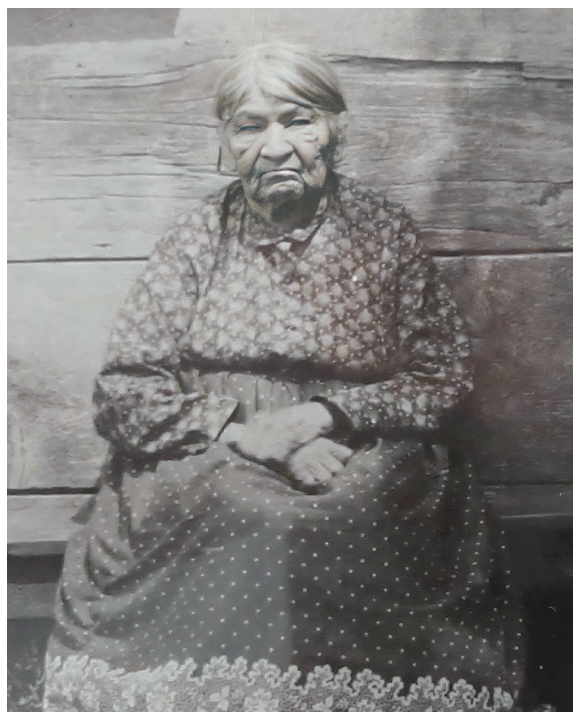
Increasingly separated from each other by large areas of European settlement, each First Nation had to develop strategies for survival, depending on its history, culture, and local circumstances. Communities had to navigate internal differences between Christian converts of various denominations who were struggling for dominance and differences between Christians and traditionalists. These groups disagreed on whether Indigenous people should give up their cultural practices and beliefs or join Canadian society and, if so, on what terms. As the colonial government pressured communities to abandon traditional forms of governance, disputes erupted between community members who wanted elected forms of governance and those who preferred existing structures and practices, such as the Clan-based leadership and consensus decision-making practised by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. At the Credit Village, majority

voting rather than consensus or Clan-based political organization took precedence.¹⁹

As important as governance was, most Indigenous communities focused on rebuilding their communities after being forced to relocate to smaller reserves. Although Peter Jones, Assance, Musquakie, John Sunday, and others had spoken at the 1840 Council of the necessity of farming, many people lost their enthusiasm as they saw their people increasingly marginalized and impoverished while settlers took over their resources and flourished.

For those from the fertile Coldwater-Narrows Reserve, the new communities of Rama, Georgina Island, and Beausoleil were comparatively isolated from one another on marginal land. By 1842, the Chippewas had cleared 300 acres at Rama, built twenty houses, raised four barns, and were selling produce to local settlers, but it was profoundly discouraging to have to start all over again. Hunting and gathering on their family territories in Muskoka were an important source of food and helped maintain cultural continuity. Some men worked as hired hands on settler farms, in logging, or as fishing guides. Women made and sold crafts, such as baskets and moccasins, and bartered surplus fish or farm produce.²⁰

Assance's people left Coldwater in 1842 for Beausoleil Island in Matchedash Bay. In 1846, Andrew Borland and his son John were contracted to build log houses for the 266 Chippewas who had moved there, but the soil proved too sandy to farm. In 1856, they moved to Christian Island in Georgian Bay.

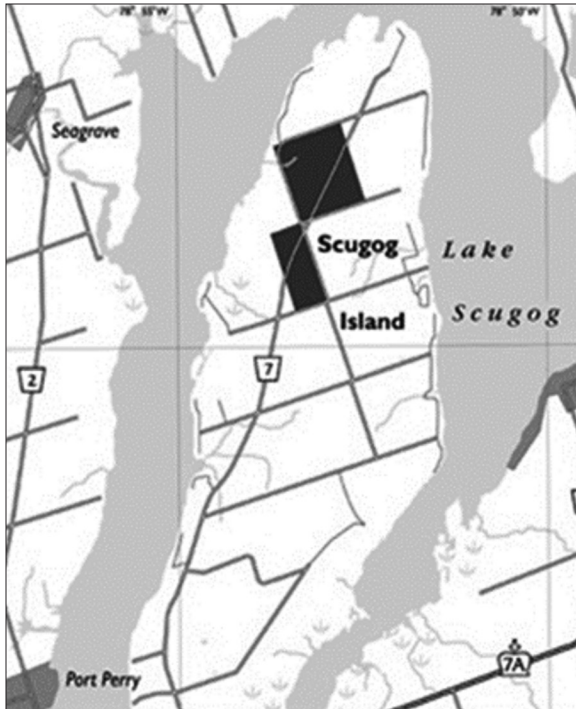


Jessie Big Sail, n.d. | Chippewas of Georgina Island
Historical Photo Collection

Similarly, Chief Snake's people returned from the Coldwater settlement to Snake Island and later moved to Georgina Island in southern Lake Simcoe. By 1844, they were farming 150 acres but continued to hunt along the Holland River.

They stopped viewing the whole lake as their home. They just viewed their little island as their sanctuary, kind of.

—Matthew Stevens, Chippewas of
Georgina Island²¹



Mississaugas of Scugog Island Reserve, 1844 | Courtesy of Lake Scugog Historical Society

By 1843, the Mississaugas under Chief Jacob Crane, who had moved from Lake Scugog to Mud Lake in 1830 and to Balsam Lake in 1836, were being encouraged by the government to move yet again and take up subsistence farming. Because the land at Balsam Lake was rocky and unproductive, they wanted to return to their traditional territories at Lake Scugog. But their former camping grounds had been taken over by settlers (and would later become the town

of Port Perry). The only land available was 800 landlocked acres on Scugog Island. Most of their land had been taken from them without compensation, and now they were being required to purchase a reserve with their own money.²²

The Mississaugas of the Credit were likewise facing relocation. Their village now included two sawmills, two carpenters, a shoemaker, a hospital building, two stores, a blacksmith, a school, a chapel, and a mission house. They were majority shareholders in the Credit Harbour Company, which shipped timber and crops from the area to ports around Lake Ontario.

We built our own schooner out of our own funds, the Credit Chief . . . And we used it to ship goods around Lake Ontario. It seemed to be a losing proposition, from what I understand at the time. But it was still a good try as far as I'm concerned.

—Darin Wybenga, Mississaugas of the Credit²³

Many band members could read and write, and a significant number worked as missionaries, interpreters, and schoolmasters at the Credit or elsewhere. By any measure, they had become “civilized” on terms the British understood. Yet they knew their land and all they had built could all be taken away from them at any time.

In 1840, they requested good farmland elsewhere, citing poor soil at the Credit, the need for additional land, and the “evil example of nearby whites.” They were running out of timber for firewood and salmon, which had once been so

abundant. By 1846, *Smith's Gazetteer* reported that because of "the great number of mills which have been erected on the river during the last four years, the fishing is destroyed, the salmon being unable to make their way over the dams."²⁴

The Credit Mississaugas had hoped to move to the fertile lands of the Saugeen Tract, but when the most fertile portion was surrendered in 1836, most decided to look elsewhere. (Three families, including Nahnebahwequay and her husband and David Sawyer, did relocate there on the belief that others would soon join them.) Chiefs Peter Jones and Joseph Sawyer reluctantly decided to move the band to a tract of rich agricultural land near Munceytown (close to present-day London), where Peter Jones had become resident missionary in 1841.

Although the Credit band approved the decision to relocate to Munceytown, a group of families led by the Herkimer brothers refused to move, rekindling a power struggle between the "progressives" (the Jones party) and the "moderates" (the Herkimers and their followers). Superintendent Jarvis supported the Herkimer faction and refused to allow the move. Jarvis was strongly disliked by the Credit Chiefs. Joseph Sawyer and John Jones described his behaviour as "uncourteous and repulsive."²⁵ Reluctantly, in 1844, the band abandoned its plan to move to Munceytown and renewed its search for a new location. The following year, Jones wrote: "The Indian territories have been taken away till our possessions are now so small that you would almost require a magnifying glass to see them. We are surrounded on all sides by white settlers, still encroaching on us."²⁶

At Six Nations, Haudenosaunee lands had likewise been whittled away through 999-year mortgages, conditional surrenders, illegal surrenders, life leases, and squatters who simply built houses and cleared farms illegally.²⁷ White residents living in Brantford gained title to much of the Mohawk village. In 1835, the government ratified many illegal transactions after the fact.

Chief Superintendent Jarvis recommended that Haudenosaunee land could be better protected if the Mohawk, Cayuga, Seneca, Oneida, Onondaga, Tuscarora villages along the Grand River were consolidated into one area and the rest of the Haldimand Tract sold off, with the proceeds going to the Haudenosaunee. Although many Haudenosaunee contested his proposal, ten months after the 1840 Council, Upper Canada passed an Order-in-Council drastically reducing Haudenosaunee lands. While some, such as Chief John Smoke Johnson, agreed to the measure, others strongly opposed it. This fundamental political difference over land policy divided Haudenosaunee families and communities for decades.²⁸ The loss of most of the original Haudenosaunee land holdings and the size of the original grant under the Haldimand Proclamation are now under litigation between Six Nations of the Grand River and the federal and provincial governments.

And, through the passage of time and the ill dealings of the Crown, we're left with less than 5 per cent of the [Haldimand] tract.

—Phil Monture, Six Nations of the Grand River²⁹

Settler Self-Government and Responsibility for “Indian” Affairs

The union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841 into the Province of Canada (Canada West and Canada East, now Ontario and Quebec) increased local settler self-government. The governor general rather than the British Colonial Office administered Indian Affairs, although the British government did not formally cede control of Indian Affairs (and its financing) until 1860. The Crown’s role in offering Indigenous people protection against settler interests was significantly reduced, and the status of Indigenous peoples as allies was downplayed, although colonial officials gave lip service to the alliance when useful. Six Nations historian Keith Jamieson captures this shift: “After 1841, the long-term impact of the transition of power from Britain to Canada proved devastating for the Six Nations of the Grand River community. The honoured relationship they enjoyed with the Crown was reinterpreted by the Province of Canada as one that relegated the Haudenosaunee as wards of the government, and their sovereign lands as reserves to which they would be restricted.”³⁰

Educating Colonial Officials amid Government Ineptitude

In 1841, Peter Jones tried another strategy to influence government policy. Under his Anishinaabe name, Kahkewaquonaby, he published “The Indian Nations: A Short Account of the Customs and Manners of the North American

Indians, Particularly the Chippeway Nation,” in the *Monthly Review Devoted to the Civil Government of the Canadas*.³¹ He hoped that by educating British colonial officials and settlers about the history and culture of Anishinaabe peoples, settler governments would treat them in a more enlightened way. The article became the germ of *History of the Ojebway Indians: With Especial Reference to their Conversion to Christianity*, published posthumously in 1861 with additions and revisions by his British wife, Eliza. (The book was based on notes made over several decades until 1854–55, when he was too ill to continue.) Jones’ published works offered readers valuable oral tradition from Elders as well as his own account, with numerous anecdotes of nineteenth-century Anishinaabe life viewed from a Christian perspective.

Despite Jones’ efforts, the Indian Department continued to be unresponsive. It had the reputation of being “notoriously the worst and most inefficient department in the province.”³² An 1839 inquiry confirmed that until James Givins’ long-deferred retirement in 1837, few records had been maintained. More information on Indigenous lands could be located in the Crown Lands Office and other departments than in the Indian Department. Although the duties of the chief superintendent and local agents had expanded since 1830, the department lacked central planning and clear roles for its officers. The inquiry reported on the “injudicious disposal of much valuable property and the disappearance of unaccounted funds.”³³ Excessive, intrusive, and paternalistic bureaucracy was evident on

many fronts, including the handling of annuity payments, which were not paid in cash unless requested by the Chief and approved by the chief superintendent. Instead, the chief superintendent unilaterally arranged the purchase of cattle, seeds, agricultural implements, and other items needed for farming. First Nations then had to apply to the local superintendent, who forwarded the request to the chief superintendent, who then directed the commissariat to transfer the supplies to a local depot.³⁴

To make matters worse, Jarvis often did not act in the interests of Indigenous people. In 1843, Chiefs Joseph Sawyer and John Jones of the Mississaugas of the Credit reported to the governor

general's secretary that, according to several Lake Simcoe Anishinaabek, Jarvis had fathered a child by a Snake Island woman.³⁵ The Chiefs also accused him of financial irresponsibility: since his appointment in 1837, there had been "no balance sheet furnished us . . . we do not know whether we get the full amount of our annuity, and the proceeds of the sale of our Reserves."³⁶ The Six Nations of the Grand River also contended that he misappropriated their funds while in office. In 1844, the Bagot Commission corroborated that Jarvis kept few, if any, accounts of band finances. In 1845, he was ordered to return the 4,000 pounds he had diverted from the people he was supposed to protect. He was then dismissed.³⁷

