

Treaty No. 9: Making the Agreement to Share the Land in Far Northern Ontario in 1905 by John S. Long

Christopher J. Wright

Volume 103, Number 2, Fall 2011

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065457ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065457ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Wright, C. J. (2011). Review of [*Treaty No. 9: Making the Agreement to Share the Land in Far Northern Ontario in 1905* by John S. Long]. *Ontario History*, 103(2), 224–225. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065457ar>

*Treaty No. 9:
Making the Agreement
to Share the Land in Far
Northern Ontario in 1905*

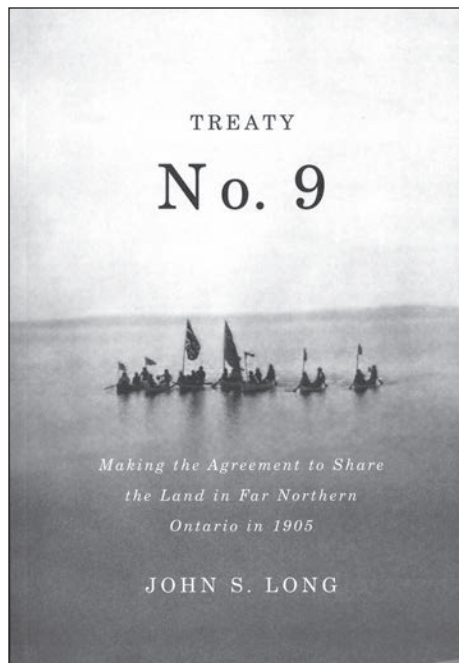
by John S. Long

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010. 624 pages. \$95.00 hardcover, \$34.95 softcover. ISBN 987-0-773537-60-6 hardcover, 987-0-773537-61-3 softcover (www.mqup@mcgill.ca)

This book is not merely an account of the signing of Treaty 9; it also encourages readers to re-examine their understanding of Indigenous and euro-Canadian engagement. John S. Long's most recent contribution to the scholarship that furthers our understanding of the treaty is presented in three parts: Part One—*Historical Context*; Part Two—*Historical Documents*; and Part Three—*Trick or Treaty No. 9?* This format helps the reader contextualize and evaluate both Long's arguments and the evidence he presents. The result is a complex, well-crafted, interdisciplinary argument that manages to remain accessible to a broad audience.

Treaty No. 9, also known as the James Bay Treaty, was the only time a provincial government played an active role in treaty negotiations. The 1905 treaty, in addition to 1929-1930 adhesions, covers almost two-thirds of northern Ontario. The government thought it was acquiring the land while the Ojibwe and Cree people thought they were agreeing to share it. *Treaty No. 9* reveals that the historical perspectives on the treaty are as varied as the number of historical actors who had a hand in its creation and execution. John Long augments the historical record by adding the long-neglected Ojibwe and Cree perspectives.

The Introduction is key to the book's



overall success. In examining Treaty No. 9, Long asserts “we all have a responsibility to understand it and honour its promises” (p. 11). Histories are the collective knowledge of individuals, each informed by their own perspective. Long takes time to explain the importance of Indigenous knowledge in conjunction with western knowledge, and in doing so encourages scholars to talk *with* people, and not just *about* people. Long’s framework is an invitation for readers to think, be critical and engage in an ongoing dialogue. The methodology explained not only helps the book shed new light on Treaty No. 9, but the ideas are transferrable and can be applied to various historical examinations of Indigenous and euro-Canadian engagement.

Part One offers an extensive background of events leading up to the commissioners’ trek through northern Ontario in order to collect signatures on the treaty. A couple of Long’s lengthier descriptions may seem digressive to some readers; how-

ever, the subject matter warrants his attention to detail. Readers less familiar with the subject matter will require the detailed context provided in Part One in order to appreciate the documents presented in the following section.

Part Two focuses on Long's transcriptions of three journals kept by commissioners in the 1905 treaty party, and photographs they took during their voyage. Long groups the journal entries of Duncan Campbell Scott, Samuel Steward and Daniel George MacMartin chronologically based on stops the treaty party made in order to collect signatures, starting each chapter with a brief introduction. The journals were kept as personal records, so background information and particulars are largely absent. Long's introductions help place the entries into context by supplying the reader with details on locations and individuals that are mentioned.

The journal of MacMartin is especially interesting. His entries recount details of the treaty negotiations that were not covered by the other two commissioners. For example, at the Fort Hope negotiations Scott simply wrote, "Signed Treaty in the morning." (p. 178). MacMartin's entry on the same day reveals that one of the signatories, Moonais, was very skeptical of the deal being offered, reportedly saying "if I buy as small an article as a needle I have to pay for same. You come here offering money we have not asked for[.] I do not understand, and should like to have it explained" (p. 183). The transparency of the commissioners' negotiation, explanation and interpretation of Treaty No. 9 is called into serious question as the reader absorbs the primary documents Long has so carefully transcribed.

Part Three of the book focuses on two questions: "What did treaty-making entail in 1905?" and "Are we to assume that the

Ojibwe and Cree understood the written terms of the treaty and readily agreed?" (p. 329). Ojibwe and Cree people maintain that both the governments of Canada and Ontario have neglected to uphold oral promises made by the commissioners during negotiations. Specifically, they were promised there would be no interference with their hunting and fishing, and they would not be required to live on reserves. Long's argument supports these claims. He shows how the Ojibwe and Cree oral histories documenting deceptive treaty negotiations are, in fact, corroborated by euro-Canadian documents.

At this point John Long attempts to reveal the complex web of perspectives connected to Treaty No. 9 by applying what he terms a theoretical "temporal or fidelity lens", which he says is better than a binary approach, but he concludes that these lenses are a "necessary but insufficient way to examine Treaty No. 9" (p. 365). However, the concept of the lens is not clear, making this small section difficult to understand without multiple readings. It is a very brief misstep in an otherwise extremely compelling argument.

The implications of Long's findings are significant, and not just within academic circles. Treaty No. 9 became the basis of a historic lawsuit—*Mishkeegogamang First Nation v. The Attorney General of Canada and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Ontario*—in May 2011. If the lawsuit is successful, damages and reparations awarded to the Mishkeegogamang First Nation could be in excess of \$1 billion (*Toronto Star*, 16 May 2011). The contemporary relevance of *Treaty No. 9* is one reason among many that should compel readers to engage with this exceptional historical work.

Christopher J. Wright, PhD candidate—*Dept. of History, King's College London.*