

The Last of the Life Chiefs

Trish Rae

Until 1869 the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, for the most part, ran their political system without great interference from the Government of Canada. And even before Confederation, actually from the time of the Landing in 1784, the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte had their own ways of selecting a council to manage the affairs of the community.

But in 1869 the Government of Canada passed a piece of legislation called:

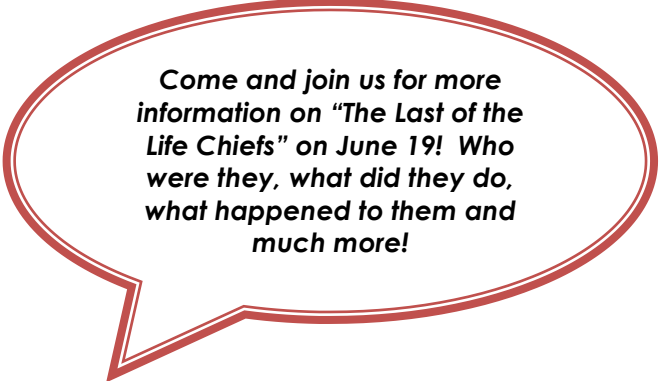
An Act for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians, the better management of Indian Affairs, and to extend the provisions of the Act 31st Victoria, Chapter 42 S.C. 1869 c. 6 (32-33 Vict.). In this act, the Government of Canada instituted council elections.

Section 10 of that Act states:

THE GOVERNOR MAY ORDER THAT THE CHIEFS OF ANY TRIBE, BAND OR BODY OF INDIANS SHALL BE ELECTED BY THE MALE MEMBERS OF EACH INDIAN SETTLEMENT OF THE FULL AGE OF TWENTY-ONE YEARS AT SUCH TIME AND PLACE, AND IN SUCH MANNER, AS THE SUPERINTENDENT GENERAL OF INDIAN AFFAIRS MAY DIRECT, AND THEY SHALL IN SUCH CASE BE ELECTED FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS, UNLESS DEPOSED BY THE GOVERNOR FOR DISHONESTY, INTEMPERANCE, OR IMMORALITY, AND SHALL BE IN THE PROPORTION OF ONE CHIEF AND TWO SECOND CHIEFS FOR EVERY TWO HUNDRED PEOPLE; BUT ANY SUCH BAND COMPOSED OF THIRTY PEOPLE MAY HAVE ONE CHIEF; PROVIDED ALWAYS THAT ALL LIFE CHIEFS NOW LIVING SHALL CONTINUE AS SUCH UNTIL DEATH OR RESIGNATION, OR UNTIL THEIR REMOVAL BY THE BY THE GOVERNOR FOR DISHONESTY, INTEMPERANCE OR IMMORALITY.

One objective of the imposition of elected councils was to move communities away from traditionally selected Chiefs including hereditary chiefs towards an elected council that looked more like a municipal council. The Government of Canada saw the movement towards standardized elected councils as a step towards "civilization" and "democracy" (but only for men at or beyond the age of 21!). Another objective was to make sure Indian Affairs directed how councils would be elected.

But in the legislation they did not unilaterally depose all those current Chiefs who had been traditionally selected. They recognized them as "Life Chiefs" and allowed them to continue in their roles until death or resignation or removal for bad behaviour. But the legislation did not allow them to be replaced. **The Act recognized the last of the Life Chiefs!**



Come and join us for more information on "The Last of the Life Chiefs" on June 19! Who were they, what did they do, what happened to them and much more!