

I DREAM OF YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW
A Celebration of the James Bay Crees

Michael Garowski
General Editor

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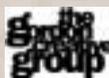
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FOREWORD

When this project was conceived, and from the moment of the first planning sessions, it was abundantly clear to all that every care would have to be taken to make this book as authentic as possible in its portrayal of the Crees. The intention, then, was to make the James Bay Crees and their story as accessible as possible to the reader. It was obvious from the outset, in preliminary meetings with interested and knowledgeable individuals, both Cree and others, that great care would have to be exercised not to force the story of the Crees into the tight jacket of earlier notions and beliefs. This became an imperative, and served to define the approach of all those who were called upon to contribute to the project's realization. It helped to guide us in our travels in Cree territories where interviews and much photographic work was undertaken, and the co-operation, way of life, and hospitality of many Cree people were gratefully experienced at first-hand. What fell into place for us was the understanding that the best way to realize a somewhat non-traditional but credible presentation of the James Bay Crees was to make sure that what would be seen and heard in this book would be, as much as possible, in their voice.

Of all the many remarkable and gripping accounts of Canada's Native peoples, there is not one that quite matches the extraordinary historical, social, political, and cultural ups and downs that have marked the epic process of the James Bay Crees—the coastal as well as the inland communities. One must add, at once, that the matter that has gone into the making of this book is taken, in the main, from the Cree people who inhabit the eastern and interior regions of James Bay. It is from these sources that interested readers will learn of a people that has inhabited the James Bay lands some 5,000 years, since the glaciers retreated and the landscape transformed itself into a domain of close to 350,000 square kilometres (135,140 square miles) of subarctic forest, rivers, and lakes that has provided sustenance, both physical and spiritual, to a remarkable people.

In a collection of this nature, which has drawn on the experiences and the voices of many individuals and organizations, it is obvious that these opinions and points of view must be seen as belonging to those who have expressed them. A clear note of hardship is sounded, and it is echoed and repeated from the earliest days—and while this serves as a counterpoint to the refrains of a much-loved and respected way of life—it continues to be an everyday experience, generation after generation, in the story of a people adapted to a life determined by nature and its ever-recurring cycles. This is a story of conflict, disappointment, accommodation, and great resilience exemplified, perhaps in an ultra contemporary sense, by the building of a community such as Oujé-Bougoumou. The reader will find the contrasts striking—the image of laundry drying side by side with a newly-stretched pelt outside a regular house, which in turn contrasts with the cone-like structure of poles that appears on the cover and is so typical of traditional Cree habitat. This and many other similar instances exemplify how much has changed and yet how much has remained the same in Cree life.

Finally, and as has been noted earlier, this is a collection intended to give expression to many voices—most of them Cree—most of them engaging those issues, political, social, or environmental that have influenced profoundly many aspects of Cree life. In this sense, this book is a record intended to inform and educate the reader about the concerns, the difficulties that had to be faced, and the adjustments that had to be made by the Cree people, as well as the successes that the James Bay Crees have achieved.

Michael Gnarowski