Chapter VII

SIGNING OF THE "OLD CROSSING" TREATY WITH THE CHIPPEWA INDIANS

It appears from the early records that informal attempts had been made to reach an agreement with the Red Lake and Pembina bands of Chippewa Indians regarding navigation rights on the Red River of the North prior to 1862. In that year, however, the first formal attempt was made to negotiate a treaty between these northern bands of Chippewas and the United States government. The date for these negotiations was set for the summer of 1862 at the "Old Crossing" of the Red Lake River on the Red River Trail west of the later developed village of Fisher. The Indians met at the appointed place. The meeting, however, was never held, due to the failure of the U.S. Commissioners to arrive. The failure of this meeting provoked a situation which seriously weakened the bargaining power of the Chippewas at the treaty meeting the following year. Due to a long, futile wait for the U.S. Commissioners in 1862, the Indians exhausted their food supplies and (in modern terms) "hi-jacked" an ox-cart train of supplies in the Grand Forks area. It was purported also that Indians were exacting toll from the boats plying on the Red River. These depredations entered prominently into the treaty negotiations.

The other point of interest about the first scheduled meeting is the identification of the "Old Crossing". Evidently, the earliest references to the "Old Crossing" referred to the crossing of the Red Lake River on the Red River Trail west of Fisher. All later allusions to the "Old Crossing" beginning to 1863, refer to the ford on the Red Lake River where the Pembina Trail crossed the river at the present day Huot.

The man appointed by the federal government to represent the United States as Treaty Commissioner, to deal with the Chippewa Indians, was Alexander Ramsay, the first territorial governor of Minnesota. The U.S. agent representing the Indians was Ashley C. Morrill. These men were appointed by the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The other parties negotiating in the treaty were the chiefs, head men and warriors of the Red Lake and Pembina bands of the Chippewa Indians.

In checking over the instructions given to Ramsey by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on July 24, 1863, I found the following: "The main object of the negotiations should be to secure to the people of the United States the uninterrupted navigation of the Red River of the North. To effect this object, it is important to secure a cession of the land on each side of the river as far as desirable. I would not advise the purchase of all the lands to which the Indian title is yet unextinguished, as the settlement by whites will not be likely to extend to that remote region of our country for many years. In this matter, however, you must exercise your own discretion. Should the Indians prefer to cede