



Intermarriage between First Nations women
and the early Chinese male immigrants

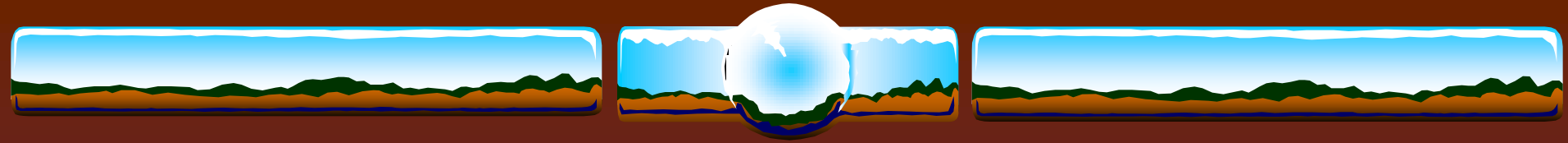
Senator Lillian Eva (Quan) Dyck, Ph. D., D. Litt.

U of T, Apr 15-2011



Outline

1. My family history as an example
2. The role of discriminatory legislation
3. Benefits of exploring this intermarriage history



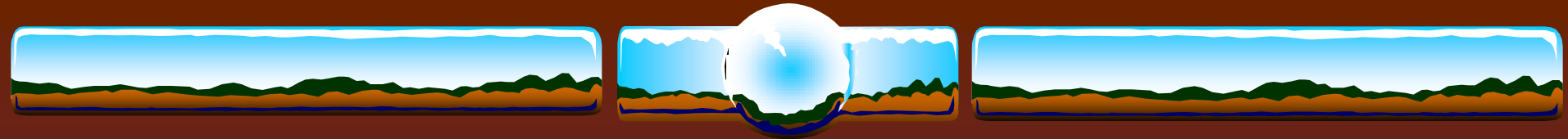
Xmas, Saskatoon, 1954?



Yok Leen Quan, 1897-1962

Jack, Happy

- ❖ came to Canada in 1912 as a 14 yr old.
- ❖ Paid the Head Tax
- ❖ Had a wife and 2 children in China
- ❖ Life long dream – bring #1 son to Canada
- ❖ We were his 2nd family.



Dad's Chinese family: Quan Sue Hoe & children



Discriminatory Legislation

- ❖ The Head tax was applied specially to Chinese (1885-1923).
- ❖ The Chinese Immigration (exclusion) Act (1923-1947).



Dad's trips to and from China

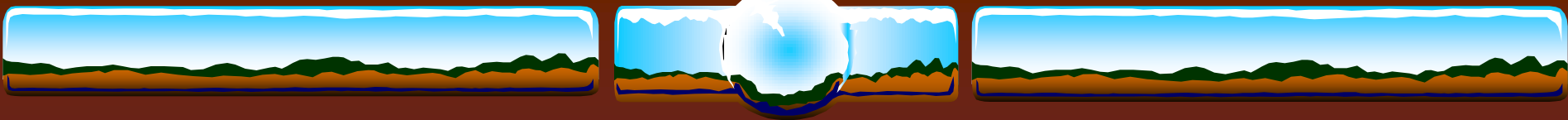
Before the Chinese Exclusion Act:

1914-1917 – back to China for 3 yrs

After the Exclusion Act: only 2 yr absences were allowed

1924-1926 – back to China for 2 yrs

1928-1930 – back to China for 2 yrs



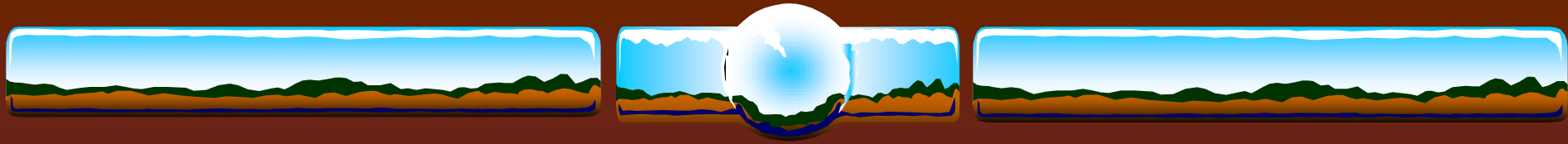
1957



Eva Muriel McNab, 1920-1956

- ❖ Born on the Gordon reserve, Saskatchewan
- ❖ Status Indian (Cree)
- ❖ Parents: Sam McNab and Harriet Pratt

- ❖ Great, great, great grandfather: John McNab, born 1755, Aberdour, Scotland. Chief factor and surgeon, HBC, 1779-1810.

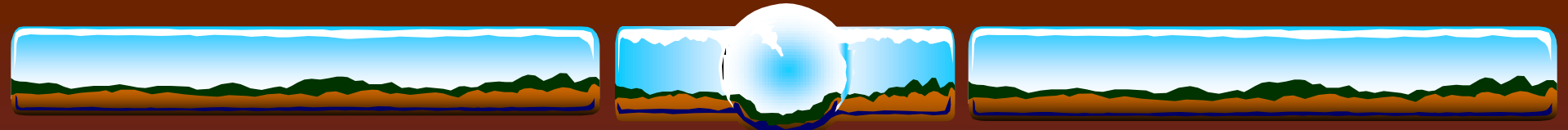


My mother lost her status when she married a non-Indian.



The Indian Act

- A repressive act that governs **all** aspects of an Indian's life.
- Has been amended numerous times since its inception in 1876.
- Defines who is and who is not a registered Indian.



Bills C-31 (1985) and C-3 (2010): Amendments to the Indian Act

Prior to 1985, Indian women lost their status when they married non-Indians.

- Bill C-31 restored status to these women and their children.
- Bill C-3 confers status to their grandchildren



Residential schools

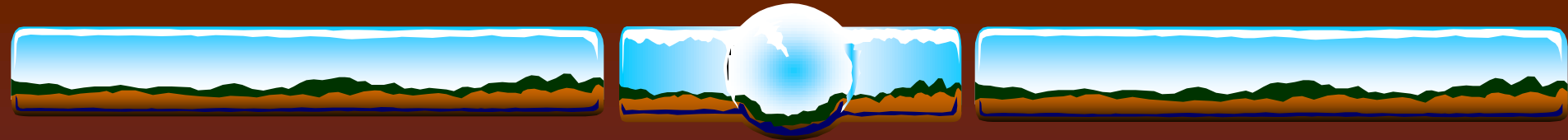
(also part of the Indian Act)

- ❖ When my mother was a child, like all Indian children, she attended a residential school.
- ❖ These schools were designed to kill the Indian in the child.
- ❖ Indian children were taught to be ashamed of who they were and some were sexually or physically abused.



Did my mother deliberately marry out in 1942?

- ❖ Reserves were terrible places to live.
- ❖ Keeping us off the reserve protected us from abuse.
- ❖ Hiding her and our Indian identity was a strategy to protect us from racism.
- ❖ She pretended to be Scottish. We pretended to be just Chinese.



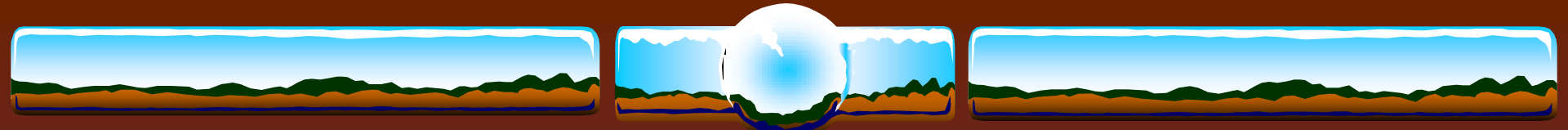
2 of 3 sisters married Chinese men

- ❖ Carrie McNab married Charlie Woo (Woo Yuen, Woo Shue, Woo Chao?) who ran a café in Punnichy
- ❖ Carrie introduced my mother to Jack Quan (Yok Leen Quan)



Charlie Woo

- ❖ Also had a wife and 3 children in China
- ❖ Had 6 Canadian children
- ❖ Went to Hong Kong in ? and is buried there.
- ❖ His home village is not known.



Did legislation and discrimination promote inter-marriage?

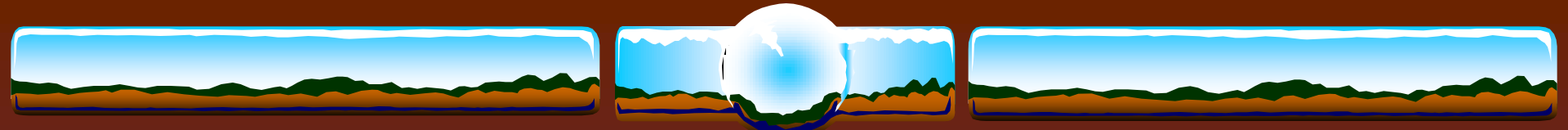
Chinese men were not allowed to hire white women to work for them. (the Female Employment Act, SK, 1912 – 1969)

The families of Chinese men were not allowed to emigrate to Canada from 1923 until 1948.



Intermarriage in the context of Canadian History

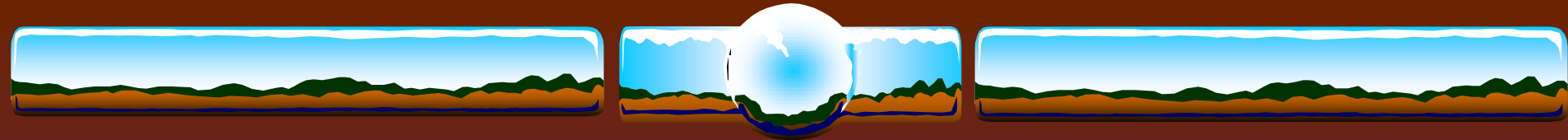
- ❖ Pre-confederation history – well documented:
- ❖ the English, Scottish and French ‘married’ First Nations women. Typically, the English men had “country wives” in addition to their ‘real’ wives, while the Scottish and French men stayed in Canada with their wives and families.

- 
- ❖ Post-confederation history – an area that needs more research. Lily Chow has documented First Nation-Chinese intermarriage in the B.C. interior.
 - ❖ The early Chinese immigrants helped build Canada through their labor on the CPR and providing services such as laundry, cooking.
 - ❖ On the prairies, virtually every town had a Chinese café which was the main social hub of the community.



Conclusion

- ❖ My family history provides 2 examples of the intermarriage between First Nations women and early Chinese immigrants.
- ❖ The First Nation-Chinese intermarriages is an area of our history that ought to be documented and become part of the history that is taught to Canadians.



- ❖ Educating ourselves and other Canadians about the history of intermarriage between First Nations and Chinese (and other races) will reduce racial discrimination, and make Canada a better place to live.
- ❖ Other Canadians will learn about discriminatory legislation and its unfair impact on our families, and intermarriage descendants can feel proud of their history and heritage.