

Rat Portage – Name changed to Kenora in 1905

Rat Portage, the successor to Hungry Hall¹ and Whitefish Bay was the main trading post on the north side of Lake of the Woods in the Rainy Lake district. The “Rat carrying place” was the major portage linking Lake of the Woods to the Winnipeg River. Its outposts were Keewatin, Eagle Lake, Wabigoon, North West Angle, White Dog and Shoal Lake. The Metis managers of this post were: James Isbister (1836), Francois Mainville (1838 and 1850), Charles Goulait (1844-45), George McPherson (1858-1871), Robert Laurensen (1871) and Peter Sinclair (1874)

By 1836 a post had been set up on Old Fort Island on the Winnipeg River. The Rat Portage post, whose name was a shortened and corrupted version of Wauzhushk Onigum was moved to the mainland in 1861 and around it grew the community of Rat Portage.

The town was to become the main object of interest in the Ontario-Manitoba boundary dispute which lasted from 1870 to 1884. Each province claimed the town as part of their territory. Both provinces had jails in the town, and both issued titles to mining claims and timber licenses. Even though Rat Portage, Manitoba was incorporated as a municipality in 1882, on September 28, 1883, polling took place here to elect members to the Provincial Legislatures of both provinces. Finally, in 1884, the Privy Council of England, to which the dispute had been taken, decided in favour of Ontario. It became official in 1889.

Reference:

Gwen Reimer and Jean Philippe Chartrand. *Historic Metis in Ontario: Rainy River District and Kenora District*. Orleans, ON: Praxis Research Associates, 1999: 50-51.



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¹ On the Rainy River upstream from Lake of the Woods.

