



## **Chief Isadore**

Isadore, Chief of the Ktunaxa was a very influential presence in the area during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He held a substantial amount of power and respect and was an effective ruler through an intense period of change. As the buffalo herds of the prairies of Alberta and Montana diminished and cut off the Ktunaxa from their traditional food supply, the hunters shifted to cattle raising and farming. At the same time settlers were entering the valley in search of gold and staying to take land, beginning a period of change and struggle for all. Chief Isadore, described by Superintendent Sam Steele as the most influential chief he had ever encountered, was born into a position of authority and was able to use his strong personality and personal wealth to lead his people. He also formed a strong connection to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate at the St. Eugene Mission, which added to his authority but was unable to prevent the changes around him from affecting his people and their lifestyle.

When in 1884 Indian Commissioner, Peter O'Reilly, set aside land for Chief Isadore and his people, he probably did not consider all the needs and wants of those most affected. The offer excluded the land that Galbraith owned, known traditionally as A'qkis ga'kleet, later as Joseph's Prairie and then Cranbrook, which was a major camping spot and had been used for his horses as well as the plentiful hunting and fishing by Chief Isadore and his people for years. Colonel James Baker ignored Chief Isadore's claims to Joseph's Prairie and his long history of use of the land there, and tensions increased until only Superintendent Sam Steele in 1887 was able to set up negotiations resulting in a stand down. When the land was bought by John Galbraith, he promised that there would never be fences across the land. However, Galbraith could not bind future owners to this promise, so this was not held up by Colonel James Baker, and resulted in escalating tensions in the area. With the arrival of Superintendent Sam Steele in 1887, discussions took place as well as a legitimate trial for the arrested Kapula and Little Isadore (no relation) resulting in a dismissal of charges and a release of the tension.

In later years, Chief Isadore focused on his farm and land on the edge of the Kootenay River. He died in 1894 from a strain of the flu that infected many of his people that winter. At his funeral he was described as a remarkable person with strong will and considerable influence.