

METIS VOICES/METIS LIFE



Ste. Ann Ledoux and Florence Chartrand of Duck Bay

Interviews by Larry Krotz
Photography by Cheryl Albuquerque
Editing and layout by Raymond M. Beaumont



Frontier School Division No. 48
June 1995

**Cover Photo: Ste. Ann Ledoux and Florence Chartrand
in front of the Ledoux home in Duck Bay
Cheryl Albuquerque, Photographer**

METIS VOICES/METIS LIFE

The following stories are designed to acquaint the reader with the way of life and memories of Metis people in the more remote and northern parts of Manitoba during the twentieth Century. It is hoped they will encourage the collection of more such stories in the future.

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Larry Krotz and Cheryl Albuquerque, 1995.

The anthology, *Metis Voices/Metis Life*, is part of Frontier School Division's continuing effort to put Manitoba's rich heritage into print. This book highlights the Metis contribution to our community histories through the words of Metis men and women, as well as a few non-Metis people, who add their insights on the Metis way of life. These are their stories as told to our writer.

This project was over a year in the making, and I would like to thank some of the key individuals who helped to see it through, Larry Krotz for the research, interviews, and writing; Raymond Beaumont for the editing and layout; Nellie Munroe and Lee Heroux for driving Larry to the communities, taking him to people's houses, and interpreting where necessary; Cheryl Albuquerque for the photography; and Manitoba Education for its financial assistance through the Student Support Grant for Native Studies Curriculum Development.

I would also like to extend, on behalf of Frontier School Division, our most heartfelt appreciation to the contributors who gave so freely of their time to be interviewed and photographed for this publication.

Cam Giavedoni
Area Superintendent
June 1995

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INTRODUCTION

The population of Manitoba is as diverse as any place in the world, and becoming more so all the time. Our province possesses an incredible mix of racial, ethnic, religious, and language groups. Most have come from somewhere else, but two groups have ethnic roots which are unique to this part of the world. They are the Aboriginal or First Nations people, and the Metis. It is the Metis who are the subject of this anthology of stories.

Shortly after the opening of the continental fur trade in the 17th and 18th centuries, French and British traders established posts at Red River, now Winnipeg, and throughout the north. There they met and traded with Cree, Dene, and Ojibway peoples, and very often intermarried with them, too. The descendants of these intermarriages are the Metis.

There are many names for the Metis, not all of them agreeable or flattering. Because they were both European and Aboriginal, they were frequently seen as neither. As outsiders, they often faced discrimination. Throughout these narratives, you will encounter names the people themselves encountered, names like "Halfbreed," "Road Allowance Indians," "Outsiders," "the Forgotten People." But though it was sometimes difficult to explain who they were to strangers, they always knew who they were themselves. They established a way of life, a system of values, a culture that remains unique and important.

Metis people vary from one region to the next in Manitoba. The French-speaking Metis of the south, whose traditional heroes and leaders are Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont, come from a tradition markedly different from that of communities along the Nelson River where last names are often Orkney Scot and languages are Cree and English. Still, all recognize the common distinctiveness of their race, with both European and Aboriginal ancestors.

Metis culture is also distinct. Although it shares with its First Nations neighbours a culture and life closely tied to the land, it is a different culture and a different life, with a strong hint of a European memory. In this anthology, that culture is explained through the words of the elders. Thirty-four different persons in thirteen different places share parts of their stories, their recollections of life in their families and in their communities. None is

complete or full in and of itself. Instead, the stories work together, so that the information of one builds on the information of others. Together, like a giant jig saw puzzle, a picture emerges and takes shape. It is a picture of life in our communities in the past, sometimes a past going back to the 1920's and earlier, a memory of events that helped create the present as we know it today.

Like the Metis people themselves, this anthology is inclusive. This flies in the face of the divisiveness often promoted by history and contemporary Canadian law. In recent years, for instance, Bill C-31 has expanded the definition of a treaty Indian to include many people who were born non-treaty, or Metis. Even though such people are legally treaty Indian in the eyes of government, they still may be Metis in their own minds and hearts. A couple of these people are in this collection, in part so we understand the confusion between who we are legally, and what our own history or definition of ourselves tell us we are. Also included are a couple of elders who do not strictly fit the definition of a Metis, but who have Metis wives and children and have identified by adoption with a Metis way of life. Finally, three non-Metis traders and storekeepers have been included because their stories reveal another perspective on the Metis way of life. This anthology is not a legal document, but a celebration of being and becoming. In that respect, it reflects the rich heritage and legacy of the people who created and became the Metis people.

Larry Krotz
Winnipeg 1995

METIS VOICES/METIS LIFE

JACK AND BEATRICE BILOW OF BARROWS



Jack and Beatrice outside their home

Jack Bilow is eighty-two. He has a white beard, a face like a good-natured woodsman, and a lean, lanky frame. He came from the Roblin area after the Second World War, and stayed on in Barrows. He claims that if you drink the water from the nearby Red Deer River, you will never leave. But most likely he didn't leave because he met Beatrice, his wife, who grew up at Red Deer Lake, and is now sixty-seven. They live in a cozy house with a big garden outside, and the smell of a wood fire inside.

There are five communities clustered around Red Deer Lake, two hours south of The Pas; their names are Barrows, Red Deer Lake, Baden, Powell, and National Mills. This is rich forest country, and all the communities were once lumbering towns on the rail line that ran between Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan, and The Pas. The railway was built in 1903 and carried both passengers and

lumber. Five million board feet used to be taken out of Red Deer Lake each year.

The people in the communities were predominantly Metis, and their language Saulteaux. Beatrice's family story is typical. Her grandfather, Charles LaRonde, was a fur trader who came from Montreal to work the territory in the middle of Manitoba, and spoke only French. Her grandmother, Nancy Bighead, was from Pelican Rapids and spoke only Saulteaux.

"How they understood each other at first, I'll never know. But because he was a trader, my grandfather was able to give my grandmother silk stockings," Beatrice laughs. "Eventually he could speak Saulteaux as well as she could."

Beatrice's mother's family came from Duck Bay. Beatrice went to school for four years. A school inspector named Mr. Peach from Winnipeg visited for a few days each year.

"I remember one of the other kids approached him and spoke to him and called him Mr. Plum. He looked at the boy and said, 'My name isn't Plum, it's Mr. Peach.' The boy, Jim Templeton, said, 'Oh, I knew it was some kind of fruit.'"

In those days any trip was a major undertaking.

"I never went to The Pas; I never went anywhere," says Beatrice. Her first trip was in 1939 when she was twelve years old and had to go to Swan River because her family was being tested for tuberculosis.

"We went on the train with mother and some of the McLeods. It was exciting. There was a local train that came every day and it stopped at every little place. It cost us \$1.55. We went shopping and stayed at a rooming house because we had to stay over night. Some kids came out of a Chinese laundry and said to us, 'Hi Indians.'"

On a later trip when Jack and Beatrice went to Dauphin to get married, Beatrice amused Jack by asking if the hay stacks she saw out the train window were bee hives. She had never seen hay stacks before, and these

things looked like the bee hives on the label of corn syrup cans. Jack still thinks this was funny. "He thought I was bushed," laughs Beatrice.

Jack ran the local post office, but he was a trapper, too. The main item for trappers was squirrel, and each year huge numbers of pelts were taken in the Barrows region - as many as 16,000 a year for which the trappers received 60 cents each. Jack also worked in forestry, and had a job each summer fighting forest fires, a seasonal occupation for many people in the area then, as now.

"In 1950 we fought a forest fire with picks and shovels. We carried water tanks on our backs. If there was no water nearby, we dug a trench by hand to contain the fire. A crew might have thirty people. We didn't have radios yet in those days, so we built emergency telephone lines in to the fire site. Often the poles would catch fire when a burning tree would fall. Every summer there were fires, regular as clockwork. We had a lot of trouble from Saskatchewan where they used fires to clear land for farming and sometimes they would get out of control and burn across into Manitoba. A fire fighter would be paid \$2.50 a day."

It was dangerous work but he recalls no serious accidents. Though in 1950 a major fire caused Red Deer Lake to be evacuated, the people being moved to Barrows.

"Harry Sutherland was the store-keeper at Red Deer Lake. He had loaded all his stock on his wagon and was ready to take it out. I told him, 'Leave it here, we may need it to feed the fire fighters; we'll pay you for it if you lose it.' So he unloaded it all again."

EDWARD HEAD OF COLD LAKE



Edward Head of Cold Lake, now living in Winnipeg

“Metis people can adapt very quickly. I always maintain that Metis are people who could quickly become Indians or they could quickly become white people. Through our European background we know the value of land and the value of things; through our Indian background we have cunning and ability to hunt, and a strong instinct to survive.”

So says Edward Head, who was born sixty-four years ago at Cold Lake, Manitoba, a Metis community next door to Sherridon, the town built around the Sherritt-Gordon mine. Cold Lake is linked to Sherridon, but also pre-

dates and is very much separate from it. Edward Head spent much of his life there, but also lived in Thompson, and now lives with his wife in Winnipeg. He was a miner, who worked as a diamond driller in mines across Manitoba. In mid life, he also became involved in politics, serving eventually as the president of the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF), 1974-75.

“On my mother's side my ancestors came from St. Norbert; they were part of the Louis Riel/Gabriel Dumont Metis. I heard a lot of French songs when I was growing up. They left Red River and followed the migration of the buffalo west to Prince Albert, [Saskatchewan], and from there they moved north. My great grandfather had a guiding service out of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan, which was where my mother was born.

“Cumberland House was the main juncture going into the north in the late 1800's. Eldon Brown, [the prospector who discovered the ore body at Sherridon] came through Cumberland House and needed a guide. My great grandfather was busy, so my grandfather, James Sayiese, hooked up with Brown and became his guide. They got along well and Brown later hired him as his personal guide for a long time. My grandfather later went to work for Sherritt-Gordon.

“My father's people came from northern Saskatchewan; they were half breeds. During the Riel Rebellion my great grandfather was one of the men who cut the cable on the *Northcote*.”

During the Northwest Rebellion and the Battle of Batoche in 1885, government troops arrived up the Saskatchewan River on a steamer, the *Northcote*. At Gabriel's Landing the *Northcote* was trapped when Dumont's men cut the ferry cables that crossed the river. The *Northcote* “plowed into the cable just as it scraped the top of the pilothouse. The *Northcote*'s two stacks, its mast, its two tall spars and its whistle were yanked off and flung on the upper deck. The deck immediately began to burn.” (See Joseph Howard, *STRANGE EMPIRE*, 464.)

“My mother's name was Mary and my father's name was Charles Thomas Head. They got married in The Pas, but because my grandfather had settled at Cold Lake, they moved in there too. We were no different than any other Metis community; we were on the outskirts of the dominant society, and we were on the outskirts of everything. The place

we lived was nick-named "Moccasin Flats." That's where the Metis lived, and it was the way the Metis always lived. They called us "Road Allowance Indians." We lived on the outskirts of the reserve, or on the outskirts of the dominant white society. The term was derogatory to people who used it that way, but to us it wasn't; it was where we chose to live.

"We spoke Cree with a lot of little bits of French thrown in. Growing up as a kid I had to fight everywhere, literally fist fight. I only went to school for three or four years. As a kid when I went to school before I went into the classroom I had to take a couple of tablespoons of cod liver oil. That's something I hated the most in my life and I still hate it.

"My dad worked for the mine as a mucker. But he was also a fisherman, and he did odd jobs in the community. We ate a lot of wild meat and a lot of fish. I remember that one of my delicacies that I liked to eat was maria liver, the liver from the maria fish which was very rich in oil. They'd fry it and put it on my bannock and it was just like butter. As children, we would have to help in the preserving of the food we'd eat through the year. My mother did a lot of canning, a lot of preserving. There was a lot of cranberries and blueberries and raspberries. We used to paddle out with grandpa and his family, a whole bunch of us. He had an 18 foot freighter canoe. It was a big canoe, and we had that filled with blueberries when we came back. We sold some and preserved the rest. It was a thing you had to do, and grandpa was there to make sure you did it.

"My mother used to do the washing once a week, Monday morning. So our chore on the weekend was to fill a 45 gallon drum with water, so mother could do the laundry. We would have to carry water by bucket in summertime, or in winter pull it by a sleigh, and cut wood to heat the water. Every weekend our chore was we had to cut enough wood to last us through the week. I was raised to be self sufficient, not to depend on anybody. Everything was out there; you just had to go and get it. That was our way of life. Our very existence was an education; every waking moment was a learning process for me. My wife can preserve food, and I can kill it.

"My grandfather, James, was one of the last great Metis clansmen. He lived at the edge of where all his children lived and he kept a close eye on

us. When I was growing up, if he didn't like something that I was doing, my mother heard about it. With my grandchildren now, I take more of an elder role. When you're going down the river you need someone who's a steerer. That's my role with my grandchildren. I used to be a radical, belligerent and angry, but I'm becoming more of an elder now both with my grandchildren and with the Metis people.

"The Metis have become much more politically aware in recent years. The Metis are very aggressive. You get us in a meeting, you'll see Metis jump up all over the place. Everybody contributes to that leadership and that way of life. From a very early age I saw the necessity to help my people and I have been doing that for many years. In the late 1960's I was working in the mining industry, and I moved to Thompson where I first became involved in the Manitoba Metis Federation. Later I was involved with them in fighting the flooding of South Indian Lake (for hydro development). I came from Granville Lake which was being talked about as part of what would be flooded, and I came from there, so I was asked to speak. I remember the first meeting I went to, I couldn't speak very good English. They asked me to speak and I got up, but I remember I was holding the back of my chair and when I looked at my hands I was shaking so bad I couldn't talk. We Metis people were told we should leave the politics to the white people, and that enraged me. It took me ten years to learn English, to speak it properly. I listened and mimicked until I had a repertoire of my own.

"That was my first go at it. We people going into Thompson didn't have proper places to stay, and we were discriminated against. So we had to fight back. I learned to speak and got more involved, I was a trustee in the Frontier School Division, and in the MMF I became a housing development officer and eventually I was on the board of directors and then MMF president. There's a lot of hidden discrimination. In the last twenty years we've done a tremendous amount of work to stop open discrimination against Metis people, but I think what we did, was we drove it underground. The open discrimination isn't there, but it's more subtle.

"I've got two granddaughters who think they're white. I bring them in here and I tell them, 'You've got white blood, but you've also got my blood. And that's different.' I tell them, 'You've got to be proud of who you are, not who you want to be, but who you are.'"

MARGARET HEAD AND EMILY McNICHOL OF CRANBERRY PORTAGE



Margaret Head and Emily McNichol

Margaret is seventy-seven; Emily is seventy-two. Born of European fathers and mothers with deep roots in the north, both women were raised in the vicinity of Cranberry Portage. This was a traditional gathering and fishing spot for Indian people as far back as 500 A.D.. However, a permanent settlement was only established there after 1928, when prospectors, excited by mineral finds at nearby Flin Flon and Sherridon, started working the Cranberry area as well. In 1929, the town was barely established when a massive forest fire forced its evacuation. All children, including wee Margaret and Emily, were loaded onto a barge on Lake Athapapuskow while their parents unsuccessfully fought to save their homes. Later, their families returned and rebuilt.

MARGARET:

"My family has been around for a long time. My grandfather on my mother's side was named Matthew Buck. He trapped here in the late

1800's. My father was born in Belgium and came here in 1914 to work on the railroad. His name was Tom Wyckstadt. He met my mother, Harriet Buck, in The Pas."

EMILY

"I was born in Baker's Narrows, half way between here and Flin Flon. My grandfather, David Collins, was an Ojibway Indian and came from Minnesota. My grandmother, Betsy Cook, was from Cumberland House in Saskatchewan. She was a Sioux. When Sitting Bull came across from the States, he brought all his Sioux along because they were being massacred in the United States. Some settled at Red River; others went to the other side of Saskatoon where there is a big settlement of Sioux. My mother's name was Rosa Collins. My father was from England; the family came to Canada in 1832. His name was Alex Moody. I went to England and saw my grandmother's home. It was a mansion, and I took pictures of it."

MARGARET

"I went to a convent school in The Pas. My parents were running a trading post at Reed Lake. There were a lot of commercial fishermen. There was no school there. I was seven years old. I liked it at the convent. It was strictly a girls school, run by the Black Nuns. But after four years my older sister got married, so my mother took me out of school because they needed me to help at home. My dad went trapping on the Burntwood River and set up a trading post at Nelson House. I had to help with the store. I would help my mother with the customers. I also cooked, cleaned, hauled water. When my dad was home I helped him, driving dogs, cutting wood. He didn't have boys, so I had to do both girl's and boy's work.

"When anybody was sick they would call my mother and she would sit by their bed, deliver babies, whatever. Then I would have to look after the store. I started quite young, having a lot of responsibility. I learned to bake bread and pies for my dad on the trap line when I was twelve years old. There was no play in my life. Washing clothes was all on a washboard and you hauled snow for water. But you accepted it because that was the way life was. We used to go snaring rabbits. We'd have

moose and bear and fish and deer. When dad wasn't around, I'd go with my grandfather and lift nets both for dog feed, and also for us.

"I learned to speak both English and Cree. I'd speak English to my dad and Cree to my mother and to the customers. When I went to the convent I had to speak French. The rule was that at breakfast time you had to ask for everything in French. When I'd go home for holidays I'd get the languages mixed up and I'd speak French to my mother."

EMILY

"I went to a Catholic residential school at Sturgeon Landing in Saskatchewan. You can't tell me it was a good place for children. We were abused like you wouldn't believe. I was eight years old, and we were made to work. We had maybe two hours in the classroom, then the sisters would pull us out: go to the sewing room, go to the laundry, go to the bakery, and do the work. I learned to serve the sisters in their dining room. I'd walk in with big trays of food. There was every different kind of meat and fruit and cakes and pies and everything. When we were finished serving we'd go into our dining room and eat boiled fish and potatoes. We got lard for our bread only on Sundays.

"We weren't supposed to be there because we weren't Treaty. But the bishop said we could go there even though we were Metis. So when the Indian agents came, we were rushed upstairs and locked up in a room where we had to stay until they went away. There were five of us weren't supposed to be there. We didn't feel any different than the Indian kids; we were all kids."

A major event across the north was the influenza epidemic in the winter of 1918-1919. It settled like a plague, devastating communities everywhere. People could only react, look after the sick as best they could, and bury the dead.

EMILY

"My husband used to tell a story about her (Margaret's) father. There was only three people walking around The Pas looking after everybody. Everybody else was sick. Those three men went and cut wood and made

fires for everybody. They went from house to house. They saved a lot of people.”

MARGARET

“My mother and my dad would make a big kettle of soup and they would put a stick through the handle and go around at night and give everybody a bowl of broth. My dad would haul snow in for them so they could wash.”

EMILY

“My husband was a trapper. When we got married I left and went up north for seventeen years. I did the work. My husband did the trapping, but I did the stretching, the skinning, the looking after the fur, hauling wood. I had my own dog team. I fished in both the summer and the winter. I had all my children out there. I had one baby by myself with no assistance. My husband went to get help but by the time the midwife came my baby was a day old. I did my own hunting because I was always alone. My husband was away ten days at a time. And when he got the fur he would go to town and stay there until the money ran out. He would leave us out there as long as a month at a time.”

Margaret’s husband went overseas in World War II for five years.

“Some of the boys we grew up with hoboed out to join up. They rode in box cars; they wanted to go. They wanted to get in with the excitement. My husband was in the Armoured Corps, Lord Strathcona Horse Regiment. He was gone for five years. It was quite rough. I had three children when he left and was pregnant with another. My parents helped me survive; my dad went trapping. They had chickens and a big garden, so I always had vegetables. My dad would get meat and fish so I’d have that. We had ration books during the war, so we could get only so much, but because my dad was a trapper, he could get things in bulk. They didn’t ration him. He would get tea and coffee and my mother would give me some of that. And sugar. That’s the way I survived. My in-laws always had a huge garden in Cranberry, so I didn’t have to buy vegetables. And they were always knitting so I got wool mittens for my kids.”

HENRY McKAY AND HIS COUSIN GLADYS McKAY OF CRANE RIVER



Henry McKay

Crane River is a small community of one hundred and fifty people that hugs the west shore of Crane Bay on Lake Manitoba. It is across the river from the Crane River Reserve (First Nation). The roots of the Metis people at Crane River are in Fairford, from where the first settlers, the Moar family came in the late years of the 19th Century, shipping their cattle across lake Manitoba Narrows on a raft.

Gladys and Henry McKay are cousins, both grandchildren of those first Moars. Gladys has lived in Crane River all her life, raising ten children, five girls and five boys. For much of his life, Henry McKay has also been a fisherman on Lake Manitoba. He has also done other things, including work for the Manitoba Metis Federation. Patriarch to his family, Henry and his wife Katherine head one of Manitoba's most famous baseball families. Their

nine sons (they have three daughters as well) formed "McKay United," a one-family ball team that won the Canadian Native Fastball Championship twice, in 1988 and 1991.

HENRY

"The secret of being a fisherman is to know where the fish are, where they feed. If you don't know that, you won't be a good fisherman. You have to know where to go in the lake. Anybody can catch a netfull in the fall when the fish are moving around. But in the summer and the winter seasons, holy baldhead, you have to know where they're feeding and go to those places.

"We are having some problems with fishing, in Lake Winnipegosis and here. Fishing is the same as anything. Some people have got too greedy, and they want to take more than they should. That's where our problems lie."



Gladys McKay

CHARLIE AND ETHEL McLEOD OF CROSS LAKE



Ethel and Charlie McLeod, daughter Margaret Sweeney holding her granddaughter Maria, and Nellie Munroe, translator.

Charlie McLeod is ninety two; Ethel is eighty-four. They have been married for sixty-four years. True northern pioneers, they trapped, surveyed the uncharted country, and canoed together for many years. Until a year ago when she suffered a stroke and had to move into a wheelchair, Ethel kept her own trapline at Walker Lake east of the Cross Lake community. She was proud of her independence as well as the fact that she often got more fur than her husband. The sixtieth wedding anniversary portrait on their living room wall shows the McLeods standing beside a ferocious-looking wolverine, now stuffed, which Ethel killed.

ETHEL

“The wolverine was breaking into beaver houses, so I set a two-springed trap next to the opening at the beaver house, and I caught him. He was

stealing the beaver that I wanted. I killed him myself by shooting him between the eyes with my .22."

The McLeod ancestry in the Cross Lake area goes back to the 1800's. Charlie's grandfather, Hector Morrison, was born in 1814. Like many young adventurers of his day, he wanted to leave his native Scotland to seek his fortune in the fur trade wilderness of Rupert's Land. So when still a teenager, he left home and stowed away on a Hudson's Bay Company ship. He arrived at York Factory and spent the rest of his life in the fur trade, including work as a steersman on the boats that travelled the inland rivers. He also went overland with Sir John Richardson's expedition, one of several sent into the Arctic to look for the lost explorer, Sir John Franklin.

In 1852, Hector, like other traders before and since, took a "country wife," a Cree woman from Norway House named Mary Ann Scott. They had seven children, and their descendants form a good part of northern populations in the Cross Lake and Norway House area. After Mary Ann's death in 1867, Hector married another Cree woman named Skwaokan or Margaret, the widow of Sandy Colen.

Charlie and Ethel's fathers were both involved in the fur trade. Charles Isbister, Ethel's father, ran the Hudson's Bay post at Island Lake (Garden Hill). Henry Charles McLeod was Hudson's Bay post manager at Cross Lake.

CHARLIE

"My father was the Hudson's Bay Company manager for sixty years at Cross Lake. But we met each other at Norway House. Her dad died and her mother moved to Norway House. She jumped into my canoe when I was coming home and she wouldn't get out."

Ethel laughs and won't admit whether or not this is true.

CHARLIE

"I started trapping when I was ten years old."

Ethel didn't trap with her family, because her father was the Hudson's Bay manager. But after she and Charlie were married, they would go out to a trapline at Walker Lake, taking their whole family of children with them.

ETHEL

"I used to run ahead with the dogs. I had a team of six dogs. I'd run forty five miles sometimes. He (Charlie) wouldn't give me a ride (laughs)."

CHARLIE

"I was born in 1903. There was a boarding school at the R. C. (Roman Catholic) mission and I went to that but as a day student, not as a resident. I went to grade eight."

Asked if families of HBC managers had special status, Charlie answers that they had servants, a girl who worked inside the house, and a man who did chores outdoors.

CHARLIE

"It was all bush country here, and there were lots of moose. One time we put on the kettle to make tea and went out to hunt a moose. I got a moose and got home before the tea kettle was even boiling. When we got a moose we used to give the meat away. The people all did that.

"It was all bush country; there were no houses at all. In 1916 was the first time surveyors came here. In the years after that, they hired me and my dogs to go with them in the winter to survey the Ontario-Manitoba boundary line over past Shamattawa. There were thirty of us with ten teams of dogs. Fourteen were from Norway House, and sixteen were from Cross Lake. The boss was from Norway House. The government of Manitoba hired us. I was also a canoe man, me and Roddy Garrioch. I could carry an eighteen foot canoe by myself, just lift it up over my head for a portage."

Charlie's job in the 1950's was to take engineers up the Saskatchewan River at Grand Rapids while they sounded the river and picked the spot for the construction of the hydro dam. In the 1960's, when he was almost sixty years

old, he did the same job for engineers on the Nelson River, taking them out into the middle of the river, including the rapids, so they could ascertain the depth of the water at various places in preparation for building the Limestone Dam.

The McLeods had eight children, five boys and three girls. One of their daughters is Margaret Sweeney. The McLeods believe that the secret of a good marriage and making it last sixty six years is to work together, as they did on the trap line. The whole family went out and Margaret recalls two months at a time from October to Christmas out at Walker Lake, watching her parents cooperate, and learning to work herself. "We respected our parents," she says. "We never said 'no,' like kids do today. We also worked. I remember getting water, hauling wood."

CHARLIE

"People used to go to bed early. As soon as it got dark. Not like now. People shack up now; they don't get married. If you love a girl you should marry her."

When asked how they settled disagreements through sixty-four years of marriage, they joke.

CHARLIE

"She was scared of me."

Ethel laughs.

In some communities the gap between treaty and Metis people is more extreme than in others. Cross lake is one of those places. Thirty-five hundred people form the Cross Lake First Nation; three hundred Metis people live next door, off the reserve. Twenty five years ago there wasn't much difference. Everybody got along; everybody was in the same boat. When Nelson River hydro power projects flooded communities along the Nelson system, including Norway House and Cross Lake, compensation was negotiated for the communities affected. It was during the negotiation of these claims that the Metis feel Status people were recognized more than they were by the governments and by Hydro.

BOB SMITH OF CROSS LAKE



Bob Smith at Jenpeg

Bob Smith, thirty-nine, is a grandson of Charlie and Ethel McLeod

BOB

"We've dated Cross Lake back to the 1700's. In 1790 a fellow named James Tate was sent here by the Hudson's Bay Company to look into establishing a fort here. When he arrived he observed that there were seventeen Frenchmen here already. They were either free traders, or they were with the Northwest Company. It was a good spot here, because they could see all the traffic coming from the Grassy River system, and they could see all the traffic from the Carrot River system. The name of the fort was Fort Apsley.

"We have a hard time convincing people in Cross Lake that we were here for a long time. Even the governments don't seem to acknowledge that

the Metis people exist here. When the fort was established, the native people started to settle around it but it was a very long time before there were more than about thirty families.

“We’re supposed to be classified as aboriginal people but the government doesn’t recognize that. We’re taking the case of the Cross Lake Metis people to the courts. They recognize people two hundred yards across the river as being damaged by hydro projects, yet they won’t acknowledge people on our side. It’s been a struggle, and it has made the tensions here at Cross Lake between the status and the Metis people pretty bad, which is too bad because historically we got along pretty well. But now we lose face because of what the government is doing. If the government doesn’t recognize us, why should (our neighbours) recognize us. What they call us in Cree is *Om a Wee Waks*, Outsiders. It’s causing a division between our two communities here. It’s sad what’s happening here.”

A lot of Metis people across the north have been able in the last ten years to get treaty status through the federal government’s Bill C-31.

BOB

“I’m proud to be from two different cultures and I don’t think I would change for the sake of a dollar. I’m proud of being a Metis, and that’s what I would stay. There’s a lot of people wouldn’t agree with me, but that’s what I feel. It’s getting hard to be a Metis because you’re stuck between the native people and the white people. Historically, we lived the same lifestyle as the native people, but it seems like people are losing sight of that and you’re not accepted. You can see that in this community; it’s something you really notice in the last twenty years. It was never like that before. No matter who walked in to my grandmother’s place, native or Metis or white, there was always a plate set in front of them, a cup of tea, something to eat. And that’s changed. Things were pretty close-knit in these communities before the flood. People got along pretty good.

“And it really hurts to see the older people have to suffer through something like this. Something the government is causing. When the government doesn’t recognize us, in some way it spills over to the local people, in their attitude.”

STE. ANN LEDOUX, FLORENCE CHARTRAND, AND VIOLET CAMPBELL OF DUCK BAY



Violet Campbell, Ste. Anne Ledoux, and Florence Chartrand

Ste. Ann Ledoux and Florence Chartrand are sisters. Ste. Ann is eighty-three, and Florence is eighty-six. They were born in the early years of this century at Smokey Island in Lake Winnipegosis north of Camperville. There were eight children in their family.

In 1920, when Ste. Ann was eight, their father, William Ferland, died after being ill for seven days. Florence, who was then twelve, and knew her father was ill, says she was peeling potatoes when a drop of blood fell on her hand. She looked up apprehensively to see if the blood might perhaps have come from meat hanging in the rafters above her head. There was no meat up there, and she knew instantly "that the blood was a sign," that her father had died. His body was taken by sailboat to be buried at the cemetery at Camperville.

After their father's death, Ste. Ann and Florence's mother started fishing in order to provide for the family. Florence went to live with grandparents. An older sister had been attending the mission school run by the nuns at Camperville, but the family could not now afford to send the other children, so Ste. Ann and Florence received no formal schooling.

Ste. Ann and Florence now live next door to one another at Duck Bay, near the end of the road as it disappears into Lake Winnipegosis. Both are healthy and independent, still keeping house for themselves. Ste. Ann's yard is pleasant and spacious, filled with out-buildings and trees ablaze in coloured autumn leaves. Inside her house, a warm fire crackles. Photographs of children and grandchildren (there are seventy grandchildren, sixty great grand-children, and nine great-great grandchildren) mingle on the walls with religious pictures. The women are both strong Catholics.

Despite not having gone to school, the women are highly knowledgeable and speak Saulteaux, Cree, French, and some English. For our conversation, translation was done by Lee Heroux.

STE. ANN

"In those days you could trust everyone. When people went fishing, they left their supplies, their boxes and running lines, right on the shore overnight, and they wouldn't be touched. If you went off for a few days for Seneca root digging, you tied a string on your door; when you came back, it wouldn't have been touched. Children showed respect to elders; now they will step right over you.

"The only church in the community of Duck Bay was Catholic, so there were no religious rivalries. Our lives were always surrounded by the teachings of the Church. Dances on a Saturday night always ended at midnight, because the next day was Sunday. On Sunday we walked three miles to mass. Children were forbidden to play with guns or slingshots, or bows and arrows on Sundays. It was a day of rest and quiet, a day for people getting together to visit."

A FUNNY STORY

In the old days everyone wore moccasins, made out of moosehide. When it got wet the moosehide would stretch, when it got dry it would shrink. Ste Ann's husband, Napoleon Ledoux, and her brother, Baptiste Ferland, were fishing and became completely soaked by the spray. They built a fire to dry themselves, and fell asleep. Suddenly, Baptiste awoke in pain. The fire had dried out his wet moccasins, and they had shrunk so much they were squeezing and cutting into his feet. He had to hobble to the water's edge to wet them before he could get any relief.

COURTSHIP and MARRIAGE

A traditional practice was for parents to arrange the marriages of their children. Florence was given at age fourteen to a man five years older, whose parents had made an arrangement with her parents. There was no question of romantic love; in fact, she says she was not attracted at all to this man, but because it was the custom, and her mother told her to go, she went. They figured out how to get along, and the marriage lasted many years. Florence now has twenty-seven grandchildren.

Ste. Ann was also promised to a man from a far off community, but she had her eye on Napoleon, the man who eventually became her husband. So she rebelled. "I told my mother, 'I will marry the man I love, not the strange man from St. Lazare.'" And she did. But the custom of arranged marriages persisted right up into the 1950's. Ste. Ann's daughter, Violet, had to confront her mother on the same issue. When she was eighteen, she was sent to Grand Rapids to marry a man who had been selected "because he was a Catholic and a good man." When she got to Grand Rapids and had a look at him, she decided she wouldn't go through with the marriage and returned home to tell her mother she was making the same decision she had made many years before.

DISCIPLINE was strict. Corporal punishment was not prohibited in either home or school. A common tool was the red willow switch, a pliable stick that really hurt when you got a spanking with it. The fear or threat of it stayed with people for a long time. "It was that red willow, twenty four hours a day," says Violet Campbell, who recalls her mother administering it.

VIOLET

"I had a pink dress for going to church. One Sunday instead of going to church, we went off toward our friend's house. There was big puddle of water, and my older sister told me to jump across it. I refused at first because I was worried about getting my dress dirty. My sister said it was okay, and if anything happened she would protect me. I was so stupid that I tried to jump and, sure enough, I slipped. I was all wet. We went in to my friend's house and tried to dry me out as best we could in front of the fire, but my mother knew anyway. My sister, instead of protecting me, told her she had tried to stop me, but I had jumped anyway. My mother went and got the red willow."

TUBERCULOSIS, which is almost non-existent now, was a dreaded disease. When people became ill, they had to go away to sanitariums, and even if they didn't die, they might be away for a long time. Violet's husband, in the mid 1950's, was away for six years in the sanitarium at Ninette. One of the preventions for tuberculosis was to get X-rayed. The children from Duck Bay had to go to Camperville to get X-rayed and Violet remembers as a twelve year old, walking from Duck Bay to Camperville with her younger sister Rose, who was seven, and her brother Julius, who was ten. They walked all day. At the mission in Camperville, they got the X-ray and the four little needles that would show if they were healthy or ill. They slept there overnight and the next day, walked the long trip home.

ABE LEDOUX OF DUCK BAY

Abe Ledoux, son of Ste. Ann, brother of Violet, is sixty-three. Over the years he has worked at many jobs, which is what you have to do to be independent and survive in the north. He has been a trapper, a fisherman, a social worker, logger, probation officer, community development researcher, and mayor. "You have to work like hell to make a living," he observes. One of his jobs was wildlife management officer, and he has very strong views on questions of the land and conservation.

"The way things are going there soon won't be nothing left. In the old days people respected the animals. Nowadays too many people, if they see a moose across the road, they will shoot it anyway. They don't stop to

care if it's a bull or a cow or a calf. The attitude has changed. Economics has changed attitudes; you can get illegal meat, a moose or a jumper or some ducks if you put out the money. It's the money. But that will soon be the end of everything. In the old days, part of it was that everything was harder to get. Shells were hard to get, so you had your own powder and filled your own casings. You had a .306 rifle with one shot, so you were careful to make sure what you shot at was what you wanted. When you got a moose, you spread it around to feed the families. Now it is changed. Training could be done in school to get kids to respect the animals. My family sure as hell knows what I'm talking about. If they don't hunt properly, I tell them to stay in the house. Take your pick. Maybe I'm just an old fool, but that's the way I think."

WHY HE STAYS IN DUCK BAY...

"I got my house, my garden, my trapper's cabin isn't too far off. If I want to pick berries, I know where to go. The livelihood is there for me. If I go to the city, it costs money every time I turn around."

But of his eleven grown children, all have professional jobs, and only one remains in Duck Bay.



Abe Ledoux with grandchildren Kaitlin Ledoux and Kodi Thompson

ANN AND NORMAN LAQUETTE OF MALLARD



**Norman and Ann Laquette with grandchildren
Tara, Juliette, Tyler, Michael, and Duane-John**

Mallard is a Metis community on Waterhen Lake, across from the Waterhen First Nation and the village of Skownan. Brightly painted houses form two neat rows along a road and around a poplar-treed bend. This was chosen as a place for settlement because there was good fishing in the lake, lots of deer in the bush, and good pasture and hay for cattle and horses. The first families were Spences, Campbells, and Laquettes.

Ann and Norman Laquette have raised a family of seven children at Mallard. In 1994 they built a new house facing the river on the very spot where Norman's grandparents had their cabin in the early days of the settlement. Norman's grandfather came from Belcourt, North Dakota. His grandmother, whose last name was Neepinak, came from the reserve. As Norman tells it, life was rarely easy in the past, and people never rich in material possessions.

NORMAN

"Life was very basic, just wild meat and potatoes. Everybody had a big garden. I remember all the vegetables sitting in the house, stored for the winter, and the cellar filled with beets and carrots and onions. That's what we lived off. During the Depression, my dad fed twenty people here.

"It was like one community, Mallard and Skownan, (the Metis community and the reserve). Of course, people had to cross over by rowboat in the summer and with horses and sleighs in the winter. The only time I remember you couldn't cross, was in real strong winds."

ANN (who went to school in Ebb and Flow)

"That school only went up to grade eight, and for grade nine you had to walk to Bacon Ridge, which was five miles. There was ten of us; we used to walk together and take care of each other. My dad was on the school committee ever since I can remember. The students were really well-behaved. At that time the strap was used; the teacher had strong arms. I really felt it once. We'd been sitting outside in the shade because it was too hot in school, and we didn't come in so we got the strap."

NORMAN

"If your parents found out you did something wrong, you got another strap when you got home.

"There was a lot of visiting back and forth, over long distances sometimes. Even in the days when they had only horses and wagons. I remember my parents used to go all the way over to Lake St. Martin, maybe a week's journey through the bush. Native people are very friendly. They always have an open door; you were welcome. They would go around to visit people, and go to sports days. At sports days, which every community had, there would be baseball, boxing, and horse racing. Just about every family had horses. They used them for their livelihood, fishing, hauling wood, transportation. People were very proud of their horses. Every community had a sports day and people went around to all of them."

ANN

"In the evening we used to have outdoor dances because we didn't have no halls. Square dances with fiddles and accordions; it was a very different lifestyle compared to now. They didn't have any alcohol or drugs."

Ann and Norman recall their wedding in 1961.

NORMAN

"Weddings were very much like today. The bride wore white. People decorated their horses, usually with coloured ribbons attached to the harness. When we got married, there were three weddings at the same time. The priest showed up infrequently, only to marry us or bury us (laughs). So the services were done by the people. My dad, especially, was a strong Catholic. He went from house to house and took over when the priest wasn't there. We didn't even get married on a Saturday, it was a Thursday because that's when the priest was there.

Ours was a tough wedding, because there were no jobs, there was no money. We had gone out trapping that spring, but it was a poor season; there was nothing at all. I had no money to buy a suit to dress up for my wedding. I had one pair of jeans, and a red shirt; I went to the store and asked the manager if he had any dress pants. When I told him I was getting married, he laughed and said, 'I have a pair you don't have to buy, I'll just give them to you.' He went in the back and got these old dress slacks that were so old they were shiny, they had been ironed so many times. But he gave them to me and I took them and put them on. The only problem was he was five foot four, and I'm five foot eight, so my ankles stuck out about four inches. A friend of mine had a white sport coat, and he said he would lend that to me. I couldn't find a shirt nowhere, so I wore the one red and white polka dot shirt I had. And that's how the three couples got married. That's how it was. It was very simple."

After their wedding, Ann and Norman headed for the bush at Duck Mountain to cut pulp.

ANN

"We've always been working together. My job was to peel the logs. You have a flat bar that's sharp at the end. You push that under the bark and you pull it along. It peels easy, but you have to wear gloves so you don't cut yourself. I also had an eight-foot measuring pole to measure so he could cut for the cord lengths. I pushed the trees so they would fall the right way, and after they cut a lot, I started peeling. We stayed in tents. We got paid ten dollars a cord."

LEONARD CHARTRAND OF MALLARD

Children from Mallard now attend the school fifteen kilometres away at Waterhen. But when Leonard Chartrand was a boy, in the early 1940's, he remembers Mallard people putting up a strong fight to get education for their little community. The school was in such bad condition the community had trouble keeping a teacher.

LEONARD

"We kids wanted to learn. We endured cold drafty schoolrooms. We had to throw snakes out of the school because they crawled in through the holes in the floor. We had an old buckstove, made out of a barrel, and we'd all crowd around that. On really cold days we'd take turns sitting in the seats at the front so each of us would get a chance to stay near the stove for awhile.

"One day we got a letter from the government that it was time to pay our school taxes; they were about two dollars a year. My dad called a meeting and said to the people, 'You should protest this.' Protest is a different word in Sauteaux. 'You shouldn't pay taxes,' he said, 'You have an old school here and you never have a teacher. You should write a letter to the government to get a school teacher.'

"There was a lady by the name of Ellen Whitford. She went to residential school and wrote pretty good. So she was 'the writer,' and my mother

explained to her that none of the families that lived in Mallard at that time had ever received land scrip. I was listening because I was pretty interested in these things. But finally they were going to protest by not paying taxes to the school unless we got a teacher. She wrote that letter and really demanded an education system. She mentioned that the treaty people got schools. And that's the first time I heard that we were the forgotten people; we'd really been forgotten. We were isolated. The nearest doctor was eighty miles away and there were no roads, only dog teams in winter or boat in the summertime.

"When we got a letter back, my mother took it down to Ellen Whitford, and she read it. It said someone would be coming to look at the old school. They promised that the school and the teacherage would be renovated.

"Then we heard of a teacher, a Mr. Taylor, who we were told, might be available. I remember going down the old road here in a horse and a buggy. We went to see Mr. Taylor. I stood outside, because I was bashful around white people. But they came out smiling, and Ellen said, 'You're going to have a school teacher.' I tell you, as a kid, boy, I felt something lift up within me. That really encouraged me. This was so exciting. I just spoke Saulteaux; I wanted to learn English.

"We went home and they had a public meeting, not in a hall, but everybody sitting out on the grass. And they appointed a school committee. The next thing we knew, the teacher and his family pulled in and the people went to work with them to fix up the school and the teacherage. They didn't wait for no inspector, patching and whitewashing, and re-roofing. In no time at all the school looked good.

"Education to me was very exciting. I'd have to be really sick to stay home. I didn't want to miss school. I finished my grade eight. That was as far as the school went in Mallard.

"When family allowance day came, you would see the rowboats going across to the post office at Skownan. I used to look forward each year to get a new cap; a real, professional, store-bought cap. We got that from the family allowance.

“People were always visiting, a different house every night; make sandwiches, cook some moose meat. People of all ages would gather, and next thing you know they’d pull out a fiddle and a guitar and there’d be a hoe-down. There was no drinking. A few men smoked, but you never saw a woman smoking. I remember one night, there was a big dance and there was a woman drunk, a young woman. You know, you’d think it was the end of the world, everybody was so shocked that that woman was drunk because we had never seen anything like this.”

SENECA ROOT was the source of summer income for many Metis and Native families. Whole families would go to the bush with a spade and dig the root, dry it, stuff it in sacks, and sell it to local merchants who sent it on to drug companies. Seneca root was one of the main sources of survival for native families.

HOW TO COOK MUSKRAT

After a muskrat is skinned and gutted, boil it for fifteen minutes. Then bake, covering and watching carefully so it doesn’t dry out. For tangy seasoning, add strips of bacon, onion, and lemon juice. It’s very good.

SOME MONTHS OF THE YEAR AND THEIR MEANING IN SAULTEAUX

January: New Year Month

February: Eagle Month, when the eagles arrived back

March: Goose Month

April: Frog Month

June: Laying Egg Month

December: Christ Month



Leonard Chartrand with his Fiddle

HARRIET SIMARD OF MANIGOTAGAN



Sarah and Jenna Simard with their Grandmother Harriet

“I cannot stand the city, I like looking at the bush instead.”

Harriet Simard was born in 1928 in a little log cabin that still stands, lopsided and long abandoned, facing the tumbling waterfalls of the Manigotagan River. She lives now, a hundred metres away, in a newer house surrounded by the cars and auto parts that kept her and her husband, Edward, in business for many years. She is also surrounded by children (twelve, seven girls and five boys) and grandchildren (twenty-nine grandchildren and seven great grandchildren), many of whom still live nearby in the eastern Manitoba Pine Falls-Manigotagan area. After a serious car accident in which she lost her husband and left doctors worried that she might never walk again, she is back, involved with the interests that shaped her life: local education, Metis and community political issues, and her family.

"They always called us "Half-breeds." I had an Irish grandfather, and an Indian grandmother. She hardly spoke English. My dad came from York Factory. His adopted name was Peter Swain, though his real father's name was Halcrow. My mom was born here. Her name was Alice Clark which was a real big family here. Her mother was Treaty from Little Black River. When she married a white man, they never put them in Treaty and that knocked us out of there. There wasn't any French, though my husband was part French.

My mom didn't want us to learn Sauiteaux, because in those days you would get the strap if you spoke it at school. Now I'm sorry I didn't learn it. My dad was thirty years older than my mother, and I was the third youngest of ten children. We had a little farm with chickens, a cow, horses, a garden. My dad also trapped and fished. I went to school until the middle of grade six, just before Christmas; that's as far as I got. Then I had to go to work. First I went to a fishing camp with my sister; I was 13. I went to work at Hecla Island for an Icelandic family doing housework and everything under the sun. Then, when I came back from Hecla, my mother sent me to the city (Winnipeg) where I was a maid for some rich people on Oxford Street. I didn't have to scrub anything, just answer the door wearing a maid's uniform with a funny little thing on my head. I was sixteen."

To be Metis in eastern Manitoba meant a hard life, lived close to the land, with few amenities and little assistance. People who lived by reserves or had relatives who were Treaty, rightly or wrongly envied some of the things that came to registered Indian people.

"The treaty people, we seen them growing up and they got everything, housing, medical care, while we had to pay for every move we made. I had to go to work at 13. I was involved in the MMF right since 1968, and I'm still vice chairperson in this local. We were fighting for our rights, looking for our land. I was also involved with Metis women, of which I'm still on the board. And Indigenous Women, IWC. I'm an elder now. I was always the mouthy one, so I always got into something.

"My husband was my next door neighbour, on the next homestead. We did whatever we could to make a living. He was a good commercial

fisherman and trapped and hunted; that's how we survived. He was one of the people who got the (fishing) co-op started, using the Mennonite missionary people to help him. My daughters ask me, 'How did you and dad stay together so long and make things work?' I say 'Fight every day.' (laughs) You have to work together as a team.

"One time my husband had to go way up to Berens River to fish; there was no fish here. And he wasn't sending home enough money to run things. So I went to a meeting and told the (community) council that we, the women wanted the job of cutting brush. There were six of us; I said, 'You know, not only men should have jobs, we can fight for our rights too if we want a job.' And we got the contract. We had to take axes and cut that brush that grows up on the side of the road and burn it. This was in the winter time. The men watched us and said, 'I want to see this.' They measured our work and we got a little further than the young guys."

Harriet Simard's lifetime has spanned the Depression, the Second World War, and the transition from coal oil lamps to television and computers. One can imagine that over such a life, observations are made. Her home communities of Manigotagan, Seymourville, and Hollow Water, she says, have not changed much, though some bigger houses and subdivisions have been added. A lot of young people, she notes, have decided to stay in their rural areas.

"It's much easier for women now, for jobs, compared to what I had to do, and there's running water. All that we never had. They have to go to school a lot longer than we did, but it's easier to get a job.

During her lifetime, Harriet has observed transitions in social services and medical care, and recounts experiences that are close to home for her.

"None of our children (from this community) were ever taken away. When I was young there was one man who looked after all that. I didn't know my dad was over talking to him, telling him he couldn't afford to look after me and my baby. He called me over to his house and he had a bunch of papers. I was only seventeen, but almost eighteen. I said, 'What is this? I'm not giving my boy away.' I said 'No.' My dad was quite mad, but I said, 'Don't worry, I'll get a job.' And that was that.

“My mom was a midwife. I don’t remember any child she delivered dying; they’re still around. When she was seventy-eight, she was living over there in the subdivision and a lady couldn’t make it to the hospital, so they took her to her house. My mother was seventy-eight, and she delivered that little boy. He’s not very little now.

“For social life we had dances and bingos. I thought bingo was a waste of money. I still do, and the kids are left home alone. The things in the hotel, the slot machines, I’m really opposed to them.”

A plaque placed at Wanipigow School at its construction in 1983, has Harriet’s name on it, commemorating the work she and others have contributed to education in their community. Education is close to her heart. ‘That’s my home,’ she says, referring to the school. ‘I’m always there whether I’m there or not.’ She was active in many levels of school affairs for a long time, serving on Frontier School Division’s Central Advisory Committee and Area Advisory Committee, and also on the Brandon University Native Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP) committee.

“It’s working quite well since they got the school there, people (treaty and non-treaty) are working together and getting to know each other. They’re working together quite well.”

BETSY BUCK OF MOOSE LAKE



Betsy Buck

Betsy Buck was born seventy years ago, the eldest child of Charlie Dysart, one of the founders of South Indian Lake, where he arrived in 1920 with his brother Bob from the United States.

“Six white men started South Indian Lake. My father and my uncle, and four other men, Anderson, McLeod, Clee, and McIvor, who was the Hudson’s Bay manager, thought it was a good place to fish and trap, and they settled there.”

Betsy's father met her mother, Josephine Linklater, at Nelson House, and later persuaded other Nelson House families to move to the isolated site on Southern Indian Lake. Betsy lived there until 1948, when she was twenty-four. That year she married Louis George Buck and moved to Moose Lake where she raised seventeen children. She has lived there ever since.

"I spoke both English and Cree as a child. My dad didn't understand Cree, so I had to speak to him once in awhile in English. He lived among the Indians for seventy-two years, and he never learned to speak Cree. He could understand a little bit, but he couldn't speak it. My mother was good in English, but whenever she gets mad she'd say something to my dad in Cree. He wouldn't understand, so that's why they didn't fight. They never quarrelled because when they got mad they couldn't understand each other.

"When I was small, my dad would take the whole family out on the trapline. I was the oldest. I remember the first time I had to baby-sit, we were living in a tent in the spring, and my mother had to go for some water. She had twins and she spread out the blanket to put them on and gave me a little stick and told me to watch that the dogs didn't come into the tent. I was four years old. Ever since then I've been baby-sitting.

"I hardly went to school. There was no school when I was a child. The first teacher we had was Oscar Blackburn, who came when I was thirteen. I went to school then for five years. Oscar made us work hard for the first year, even on Saturdays. We went to the school every night from seven to nine to do homework. And we covered three grades in one year.

"I heard about places like Winnipeg and cars, but I never saw any. I saw pictures of cars, but I didn't know how they worked. All I saw was horses and dogs, That's the way we used to travel. The first vehicles I saw were tractors that brought freight across the ice. And then they brought bombardiers. We had lots of white people in our settlement, so we heard a lot about those things from people who had gone out.

"I was eighteen when I went to The Pas for the first time. I had to get my appendix out, and I went to Sherridon by airplane, and then we took the train to The Pas. It was the 1940's. The only time we got a plane was for an emergency. The nuns at St. Anthony's Hospital needed helpers,

and after I got better they asked me if I would stay and work. My sisters wrote and asked me to come home, but I said, "This is easier than trapping and fishing." I used to work in the kitchen, and later I worked in the wards. At the same time I was taking my first aid. That's how I became a midwife.

I've delivered three hundred and four kids in Moose Lake already, including one of my own. In the bush, on the trapline. It was in the spring, March 21. I went to get some willows. I cut them with an axe. I was going back to the tent and I fell through the soft snow. Then I had the baby. I had pains all day, but I didn't tell nobody.

"There were drugs in the store in those days, but there were also people who knew Indian medicine, and that's what we used to use. If you had a burn, there are leaves that look like tea. You take that and crush them, soak it and put it on the burn. When you have a cold, you take wild root, *wie kis* we call it, boil it in water, and put just a little drop into the throat. That's strong stuff. It also is very good for ear ache drops.

"For social life, we had our handicrafts, bead work, Indian work. The young girls would sit around and do that. The old ladies would go somewhere else to tan their hides, and we'd do the fancy work. And sometimes we'd put up a dance. We'd have lots of fun. We'd go sliding on the ice, or we'd go boating, fishing, picking berries. We'd have a dance whenever we felt like having one, in somebody's house, whoever had the biggest house and lots of room for dancing because we didn't have a hall. If we couldn't get a fiddler, we'd use the record player. We'd have all kinds of music, square dancing, jigging waltzes. We used to order our records and our clothes from the catalogue; Eatons, Simpsons.

"When we'd go camping, it was just a bunch of girls and boys. It was a small community and we were just like brothers and sisters. The girls would go in one tent, the boys in another. If the boys gave us any trouble, we'd throw them in the lake. (laughs) We never asked the boys to take us home. If we wanted to, we'd just say, 'Let's go'; we'd steal the dogs and drive them home."

LILLIAN AND ARCHIE McLEOD OF NORWAY HOUSE



Lillian McLeod of Norway House

Norway House is two communities. The reserve side, Norway House First Nation, has a population of about three thousand people. The non-treaty side of the imaginary, though very real, boundary, has one thousand people. These latter people are the Metis or, as they traditionally called themselves, 'the Outsiders,' those outside the reserve. Norway House has always been home to mixed-blood people. Its long history as a fur trade centre meant a constant traffic of people coming and going, both European and Native. Metis, is not a term that was ever readily used in Norway House because the European half of the mix was mostly Scottish or English, not French. The local term 'Outsiders' did not mean anything negative, and no one was offended by it. People used it to describe themselves. It is only in recent years that the term 'Metis' has come into use for and by people at Norway House.

Lillian McLeod was born into treaty, but gave up her status for \$100 and the right to marry Archie. 'The government bought me,' she laughs. She and Archie McLeod have been married for thirty-seven years. 'I didn't think about my status when I was in love.' With Bill C-31, a few years ago, she regained her status but continues to live off the reserve with her husband. Her story is significant because it tells much about the gaps between what people in communities feel, and what the governments impose on their lives. Non-status and treaty people in northern communities have always been neighbours; often they are relatives. They have always lived together, side by side, worked together, fallen in love, married, had children. A person's treaty number, or lack of that number, is an intrusion into their life and their community that is not of their making. It comes from the outside, from regulations of far-away governments. People sometimes ignore it, sometimes they are amused, sometimes they resent it. They don't resent the notion of treaty so much as they resent the artificial disruption to their sense of community, and sometimes even their sense of family, that is represented by having two distinct designations for people who all live in essentially the same community.

LILLIAN

"I never thought about it too much, that I was going to give anything up. I was raised by my grandparents who lived on the reserve, but at one point my grandfather bought property over here and decided to be a 'white man' (laughs). They raised me, though I was still treaty, but my grandfather gave up his treaty. Most of my relatives are in Fisher River where there is a large connection to Norway House. My grandparents were Sinclairs; my dad was Albert Clarke."

ARCHIE

"In those days people weren't aware of it too much (the differences between treaty and non-status). Not like now. My grandfather came from Scotland to work for the Hudson's Bay Company. His name was Donald McLeod, and he was an Orkneyman. My dad and all his sisters were born at York Factory. Then, in 1906, they decided to move here. He built a house and had a little farm on the next lot to where we are here (on the west bank of the Nelson River). My grandfather married an Indian woman from around Fort Severn; her name was Sally Neepin. I never got

a chance to go, but my brother went to Scotland and saw the place where our grandfather was from. My mother was Dora Arthurson."

LILLIAN

"Sunday was always a special day. We went to the Anglican church. There would be church twice in the morning, then Sunday School at one o'clock, then another service. We'd have to attend those."

ARCHIE

"You had to go to church whether you liked it or not."



Archie McLeod

LILLIAN

"Our parents made us go. Our parents did all the disciplining, not the Awasis agency, like now. That's one thing that makes me so mad now; it's like your kids aren't your responsibility.

"After church we'd come home and my grandmother would cook supper. Then if it was winter we'd go slide; if it was summer, we'd play ball. But not ten o'clock at night. When nine o'clock came around you'd have to go in."

ARCHIE

"My dad had a few animals. He never used to fence them, so sometimes I'd have to go about four miles down along the river, find the cows, and drive them back. Then we'd do our chores, every morning. Get dressed, go to church. We'd cross the river by boat, and then we'd walk. After church I'd have to do the chores again, play for awhile, go to bed."

LILLIAN

"People would all visit one another. But when the adults were talking, the kids had to go outside; you couldn't sit there and listen. I'd make excuses to go in and out because I was curious. I wanted to know what they were talking about. But you weren't allowed."

ARCHIE

"In the 1940's, everybody had a few animals, and everybody had big gardens. Our garden was all along in the front here. Potatoes, carrots, turnips; we had a root house to store them in. My dad used to kill two or three cows every fall for meat for the winter. There was no meat in the stores in those days. Dad was also a hunter, fisherman, trapper, so he would bring in moose meat, caribou. My dad was very self supporting; he never had welfare. But he never had a steady job either, he lived off the land. But he sure made us work, us kids. He used his horses to haul wood, and sometimes to haul freight for the Bay. They would go to Wabowden, four days one way.

"My dad used to sell potatoes, but when the Bay started to sell potatoes, people didn't buy my dad's potatoes any more because they weren't government tested. That put an end to that. We don't have a garden now."

LILLIAN

"For Christmas we had no tree, but Grandma had two little bells and a bow that she hung at the door. I used to look forward to that. There was nothing in the store like Christmas candy, but I remember one time I got a package of prunes. I got a pair of stockings, fleecce-lined bloomers, and a comb, side combs. They'd have a Christmas dinner at the Anglican hall, and everyone would go there. We'd have a feast there. Christmas pudding was the best, raisins, currents, white sugar, brown sugar, little bit of butter, little bit of lard, molasses, add lemon flavouring, and mixed peel. After dinner we kids would slide outside on the hill. We didn't have sleighs, so we used the tops of the old desks from the school. The old broken ones. It was fun; the snow would be flying. You'd be all covered with snow, and you'd be screaming. And the old people would be sitting there enjoying each other's company. That was Christmas here. A week before Christmas, we'd have a concert at the school and we used to have a Santa Claus. George Brown was just the one to be a Santa Claus. They made a special thing for him to come in through the window like he was coming down the chimney. He'd do a little dance and give out the gifts. One time I got my gift and I was so anxious to open it, and it was a handkerchief and two boxes of snuff. I was so disappointed. My name was Lillian Clarke, and I looked over and this William Clarke, who was an old man, was opening his gift and he had got a pair of stockings and some bloomers. They got the packages mixed up. It was so funny. I was just a little girl and I had these two boxes of snuff. I don't know what my grandmother would have said if I came home with two boxes of snuff. When I think back now, we didn't have much but it was nice."

ARCHIE

"The river used to be the only highway."

LILLIAN

"At freeze-up you would go to the first place where it froze over so you could walk across. You had to be careful. Same thing in the spring. I remember one time, it was me and him (Archie) and there was open water all around, just this one place where there was still a bit of a road across. When you were walking, you could just see the ice sinking. We had to have pack sacks, one each, to carry our groceries. We were coming across and he said, 'I'll go ahead.' He had a long stick, and we were walking and you could just see the water coming up. And he turned around and said to me, 'Try to make yourself light; walk on your tip toes!' We made it, and the next day it turned nice and hot and we were able to go by boat."

There were six schools at Norway House in the 1940's and 1950's; South School, R.C. Mission School at Jack River, Playgreen School, North School, a school at RCMP Point, and the United Church boarding school in Rossville.

LILLIAN

"May 24 was the day I used to look forward to. We'd go on the Catholic barge to Rossville for sports day, all the schools. The Catholic barge would dock at Crooked Turn, and they reserved a place on it for the kids from Jack River school.

"Early in May we all practiced for sports. I was good at the high jump. We'd go to Grosser's store, and my grandpa would buy me a pair of pants, white runners, and socks, and a blouse. Blue pants, a white blouse, and a red sweater for this special event. My grandmother and some of the other women would get together at somebody's place where they had a sewing machine, and they made these banners that had 'Jack River,' using cloth to make the letters. We'd be so proud to wear those. On the morning of the 24th we'd go to school early and then we'd all go to the Crooked Turn to meet the barge. We sat on the floor wearing our banners, all the way to Rossville to have our sports day. Joe Keeper (who had represented Canada at the Olympics) and James Apetagon were the guys who looked after the races."

During World War II a number of Norway House men signed up in the armed forces and went off to Europe. The war and the number of people who were overseas fighting left a shortage in the labour force at home in Canada. One job that required lots of labour was the annual harvest on the wheat farms of western Canada. So every year young men from Norway House, as well as Cross Lake, Oxford House, God's Lake, went out from July to November to work as labourers in the wheat harvest. Their leaving was almost like going off to war.

LILLIAN

"They would have a special church service for the guys who were going on the harvest, and I remember my grandpa played the organ and they sang 'God Be With You Till We Meet Again,' and everyone was crying. Then we all went down to the dock so they could get on the *Chickama* which would take them south. Everybody started crying again. I started crying. I didn't know why I was crying, but everybody else was crying, so I cried too. They were kissing each other and going on the boat. It was such a sad time."

ARCHIE

"It was a big thing when people went out. The boat was the only transportation and there were no phones, so it was a big thing."

GILBERT AND ILA LAUGHER



Gilbert and Ila Laughler

Gilbert Laughler spent many years as a wheelsman on the big boats that used to travel up and down Lake Winnipeg between Selkirk and Matheson Island, Berens River, Warrens Landing, Norway House. He started when he was fourteen years old, in 1947, and between then and 1960, he made twelve hundred crossings of Lake Winnipeg between Selkirk and Norway House.

Now the only boats on the lake are fishing boats, the *Goldfield* being the largest of them. But before 1960, boats were the main if not the only form of summer transportation, both from the south into the north, and locally. They were the means for moving in both freight and people.

In those years, Norway House was a major centre of tourism. Tourists from the south came to visit, arriving at Warrens Landing on the *Keenora* and then transferring to a boat called the *Chickama* for the trip in to Norway House. The standard trip was to arrive on a Wednesday, and stay for a week. People

lodged at the Playgreen Hotel, toured the community, attended church, visited the stores, and were both curious, and objects of curiosity.

Ila Laughier has represented the Manitoba Metis Federation in Norway House. "I'm proud to be a Metis," she has said. "My father came from Ottawa and married my Half-breed mom, and that's where I come in. You're not binded; you're a free person. You speak out and do what you have to do."

NELLIE MUNRO AND CAROLINE ROBINSON OF NORWAY HOUSE

According to Nellie Munro,

"People don't know what to call themselves; they say, 'I'm Metis now,' but they don't think of themselves that way in the past. Even the word Indian or Native is recent, and now everybody's 'First Nation' or 'Aboriginal.' But in the past, most of the time people were referred to as Swampy Cree or Muskego. We accepted each other as people and we didn't put divisions. People from the north never call us Metis or Natives; they call us Swampy or Muskego."

Nellie Munro grew up in Norway House, on Robinson Point, named after her family. Her father's name was Alex Robinson. Her mother, Caroline Robinson is eighty-seven and lives there still. Nellie spoke of her childhood as well as translated some of her mother's thoughts.

"Important beliefs of the people centred around respect. Respect your elders, respect yourself, don't be a gossip, don't backstab your neighbour. When we were growing up, those were the things we were taught. If your elders were talking, you didn't jump in with questions or interruptions. That wasn't allowed. There was a time for you to talk, so you respected that. The best time for young people to talk to the elders was at the dinner table. The whole family sat down to a meal and you ate after giving thanks, and that was the time to talk. Then and at bedtime. As children, we had to be in at eight thirty, and that gave us the time to settle down and you talked to your mom or your dad, or somebody would be telling

stories. Story telling was part of teaching; you learned how Wesakayjack got to be bad or whatever.

“At the family table, there was always room for one more. If you walked in, there was a place for you, and there was no question. There was always food or a bed. If somebody next door was short, you always gave them what they needed. But you never said, ‘You owe me; you pay me back.’ No. People shared what they had.

“Most of what I learned was from my mom or from having my granny around. And anybody who came who was older than my mom or my dad was automatically my granny or my grandpa.

“A temper tantrum was never allowed with children, and they weren’t allowed to say ‘No’ to their parents or elders. You’d get a spanking. But today you don’t see that.

“The way of life: You go to bed early, and you get up early with the sun. Time to pray first, give thanks, then you eat, then you have your chores. If you are small you still had chores, getting a glass of water, carrying wood. It didn’t matter how small we were. Sweep, make the bed, get up on a chair and help with the dishes. The way my mother taught us to make our own clothing, to sew, was we had dolls, and we had to make the clothes for our dolls. She would cut them out for us but then we had to sew them, by hand. She taught us how to knit, and then how to do bead work. Then there was embroidery work and silk work, with fine silk. Then we had to learn how to look after whatever was brought into the house, how to cut up meat. We were always at her side to learn things.

“My brother would be out with my dad, cutting wood in the bush, trapping in the winter, hunting, snaring. Preparing for tomorrow, making sure there was enough wood, enough meat, looking after the dogs. The garden took a lot of work too. Also my dad had horses, so you had to get hay. It took a lot of time. Work was made into play, because all the family were there. We didn’t know it was work; we always found a way to enjoy it. My parents were always right there to play with us too, my mom made a ball out of moosehide, and my dad went into the bush and cut bats for us.

“Respect for nature came by watching. If my dad killed a beaver or a goose or anything, it was never put on the ground, and everything was kept clean. They didn’t throw the insides to the dogs, they had a dig-out and that’s where they would bury it. They didn’t just throw it in the garbage. Anything my dad killed wasn’t given to the dogs, except fish. The pouch in the throat of a moose, they took it and they hung it on a tree. That was respect for the dead moose. And you kept the water clean; you didn’t dump things in the water. You had a place where you threw your used water; you didn’t throw it back in the river.”



Caroline Robinson and Nellie Munro

BEATRICE McLEOD OF NORWAY HOUSE

Beatrice McLeod, who is sixty-six years of age, comes from a family that has lived in the north since the early years. Both her grandfathers were named McLeod. Donald McLeod, her mother's father, worked for the Hudson's Bay Company at Norway House. Henry McLeod, her father's father, was Bay manager at Cross Lake. They came from Scotland into the Norway House area via York Factory. They married native women when they arrived in Canada.

"I've been in Norway House all my life. Dad did a lot of trapping, fishing, hunting, gardening. My mother did a lot of gardening, too. We had cows. It's altogether different to look at the communities now. In the old days the older people respected everybody. Everybody had nice living, and everybody shared what they had. Whether they killed a moose or had a garden, they shared what they had.

"There were no restrictions on Metis hunting in those days; a hunter was a hunter, both treaty or non-treaty. They were allowed to do what they had to, to provide the food to their families.

"There was very little welfare in the old days. People worked hard to provide for their families, and what they couldn't get, they went without. The older people had a lot of pride in themselves, even though they weren't educated. They were proud, and they shared a lot. Whenever anybody built a house, lots of people would show up to help, all your friends and relatives.

"Not many in my family had a good education, because you had to quit school in order to help around the house, the garden, cutting wood, carrying water.

"We started off talking Cree, and didn't learn English until we went to school. I went to Norway House Public School, which was over where the RCMP and the Natural Resources office is now. We used to walk around Robinson Bay, and then Dad would come with the boat to bring us across here. The older boys spent a lot of time cutting wood, and we used

to huddle around the fire. Our teacher was the game warden's wife, Mrs. Durant.

"We went to church a lot, to the Anglican church. We used to row there, up the river. Mom would take a lunch, and at noon we'd take a dinner break and make a fire outside. And then we'd go back into church for another service in the afternoon. Not only my family, but everybody who came to church brought their lunch. We'd make a big pot of tea and sit outside until the next service started, that's how we went to church. In winter, we didn't go so much because it was a long way to walk, about five miles. Summer was better, because rowing wasn't so bad.



Photo by L. Krotz

**Beatrice McLeod with her grandchildren
Michael, Corey, Raven, and Christina Gamblin**

People were more strict with their kids. Kids didn't wander around late at night; you did your work and you went to bed. If you did a hard day's work, then you would want to sleep.

"We had a radio in the house. Mostly my dad used to listen to hockey and boxing.

"On Saturdays, across at R.P. Low's, they had a picture show, silent movies, 25 cents. You might get a popcorn or a candy bar for five cents. Then after, they'd clear up the place and have a square dance. We didn't go every Saturday, just whenever we had money. It was fun.

"For medical care, the old hospital used to sit on the reserve at Rossville. It served Norway House and also God's Lake, Island Lake, Oxford House. The doctor and nurses often made house calls. When it was time to get your vaccinations, the field workers would go from house to house. People didn't seem to get sick much in those days. There were some home remedies too. They'd make muskeg tea and make the kids drink that, and they'd use that root (Seneca) for sore throats. I remember my mother used to give us coal oil, the same oil they used in the lamps. A little bit of that when you had a croup chest; just a little bit to keep your tonsils from getting dry."

BILL ARTHURSON OF NORWAY HOUSE

Bill Arthurson's family is a mix of Scottish and Cree roots, brought together by the Hudson's Bay Company. In the Hudson's Bay system, Scottish men were recruited, young, mostly in the Orkney Islands and signed to long contracts to come to Canada to work at the trading posts. The natives were the trappers. The young traders from Scotland married the daughters of the Cree trappers, and the mixed blood or Metis race was born. On Bill's mother, Andrena Sinclair's side, John Sinclair was a Bay employee whose father came to Norway House from the Orkney Islands via York Factory. On the Arthurson side, his grandmother was a McLeod.

"I went to the Jack River School which was by the Anglican mission, where there were both treaty and outsider kids. I knew we were different because the treaty kids used to be given biscuits. We called them 'dog biscuits.' They were round, vitamized biscuits, and they'd get them twice a day, during school and then again after school. What used to happen

was we would take these biscuits from the Treaty kids by threatening to beat them up. That's how we got to taste them too.



Photo by J. Knitz

Bill Arthurson

“On the Outsider’s side, the Nelson River side, we were brought up with both English and Cree. On the Jack River side, the reserve side, those guys hardly spoke English. Generally we got a higher education on this side; we’d have maybe grade six and they’d have maybe grade two. When I think back, though, it was one community. We all got along fine. There was a difference, though, between the River people, and the Rossville people. People would be proud of which side they came from, and there would be tensions. We never got along. But as far as the River people, (whether treaty or outsider) we all got along fine. The River people were called *Cepeewineesak*, and the Rossville people were *Sabawineesak*. There was a difference there that you can still feel.

“The way we were raised, you didn’t call a white man by his first name, always ‘Mr.’ or ‘Mrs.’ The way my mom taught us, when you’re in a

crowd or at some function, when a Mr. or a Mrs. walked in, you got up and gave them your seat. If they were a white person. My mother always felt that way. Before my mother was married, she worked for Mr. Walters, the Anglican minister. The people in the white society had servants, maids and cooks and everything, and my mother was a house maid. My mother basically had to keep the house in order, make beds. They also had night watchmen who stoked the furnaces.

"My first trip out to Winnipeg was with my mother to go to the TB hospital. I was about ten. We went on the boat (the *Keenora*), which itself was like a hotel. I was really excited; we were going to Winnipeg. I had never seen cars before, only pictures. It was a totally different world. We stayed at the hospital in big wards, men on the one side, women on the other.

"My first job out was when I was fourteen. I got a job at a summer camp, a fish camp, and I got to travel all the way to Gimli. I worked on the lake a lot. I later worked on the *Chickama* and on the *Goldfield*. There were no cars at Norway House; transportation was all on the river. You either rowed your boat, or you walked. There were a few outboard motors, 2 1/2 Johnsons. There were 3 horsepower Johnsons, and then the 5's came. Most people rowed their boats. I used to think a five horse Johnson was fast, boy. But gradually the motors got bigger, ten horse.

"I remember quite clearly when the trappers would come in at Christmas or in spring with their furs, and Charlie Campbell at the Bay would pack these furs with the fur press. A stack of muskrats, and they'd press them into a bale about three feet square, wrap them in burlap, sew it up at the corners, and then you'd have these bales of fur going out, south on the *Chickama*. By this time there were no more York boats.

I remember also quite clearly people coming in from Island Lake to get their supplies from here. They'd come in a long line of canoes. They'd be all tied together, with maybe one or two 2 1/2 horse motors on a couple of them, and the rest paddling. Coming down for their freight. The main Bay store was the Fort, and they'd camp across from the store, on the rocks. At Crooked Turn on this side from the bridge, they would also camp, across from another store, Grosser's store.

My grandfather, George Arthurson, was a big man with hands as big as a table, and feet so big they couldn't find shoes for him at Norway House, size thirteen. He was quite a go-getter. He used to freight with horses from Norway House to Wabowden, and in his younger years he used to run the mail down to Riverton with dogs. He had maybe four dog teams.

"My father worked for my grandfather when he was younger. My father always had horses. I remember the barn, a log barn, and the horses. They had big gardens too, and dogs. Hauling wood was a big job. My dad would get contracts to supply wood to the school, or to the RCMP. The Hudson's Bay store would want forty - fifty cords, Low's store would want twenty-five - thirty cords, the smaller schools would want ten - fifteen cords. The church would need maybe ten - fifteen cords. My dad and a lot of men would get these contracts, maybe two, three dollars a cord. They'd spend weeks out at camp cutting wood, and then they'd have to haul it. Cutting wood was a big industry. Other people would go out to Ward Island and cut wood for the steamship, hundreds of cords.

"You had to hump your butt to survive. People had gardens, and then you'd go out in the fall to do your hunting, get your ducks. And there was fishing; they'd hang these whitefish, tons of them hanging to dry. You'd cut the gills for the blood to run out, and you'd cut a hole and put a stick through it to hang the fish. There was ten fish to a stick. People would have sticks and sticks and sticks of fish. A lot of this was to feed dogs. The game warden and the RCMP had dogs, and the doctors had dogs, and they'd buy fish from the locals for dog feed. We also had to put up hay for the horses.

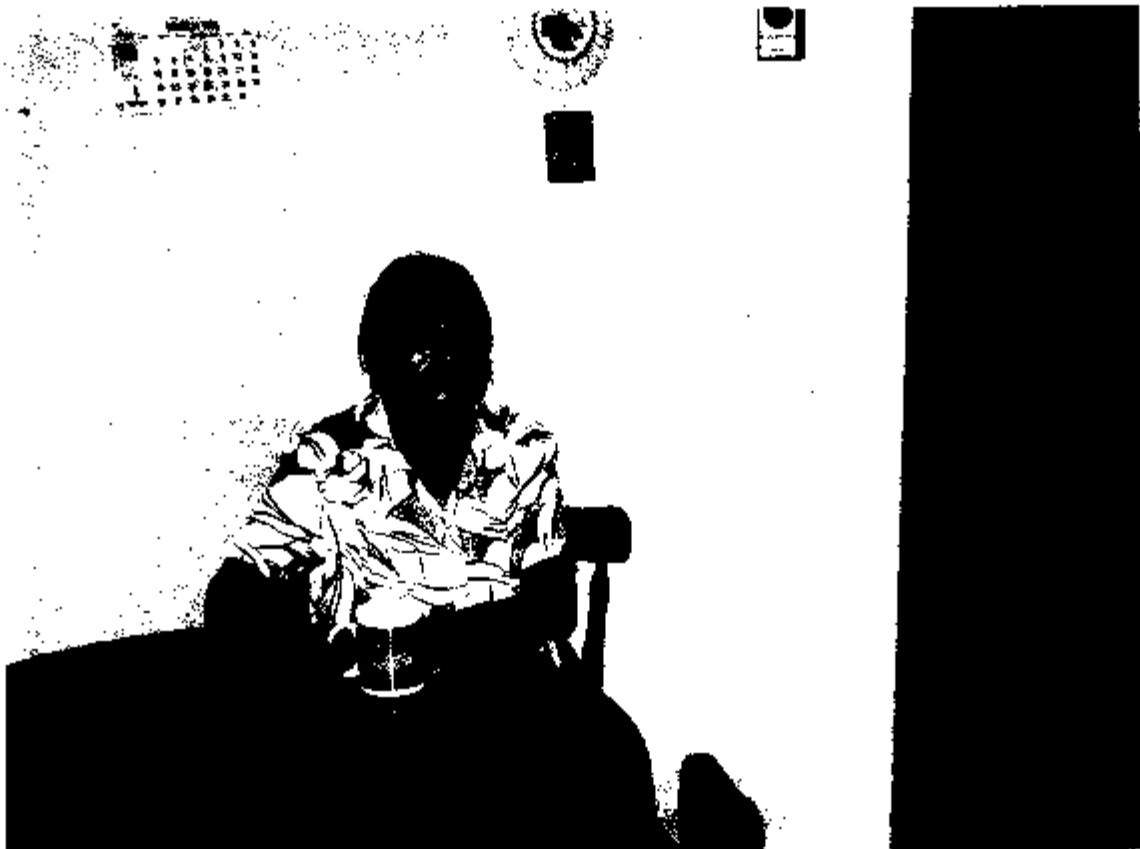
"For fun, people would have dances. There was a hall, the Outsider's Community Hall, where Shell Oil is now, near the airport. Word would get around that there was going to be a dance. People would come with their horses or their dogs, or they would walk. There'd be a fiddler, a guitar, and a caller. It would be square dances and jigs. The most famous jig dancer was a man named George Brown. He was light on his feet. People can't jig worth a damn now.

"Other things we had were socials. These were usually fund raisers, to raise money maybe for the church. Box socials were popular. Women would make a lunch and put it in a box, and the men would bid on these

boxes and sit and eat with whoever's lunch they bought. Then you could dance with the girl. But you wouldn't know whose box it was until you bought it. They served tea.

"There were also pie socials and 'cuff' socials. These were popular with the trappers. When you were out on the trapline, you would get cold wrists in the area between your mitts and the end of your sleeves. So the ladies would knit these cuffs, real fancy, to keep the trapper's wrists warm. And at the social the woman would wear one of the cuffs they had knit, and the men would buy one out of a big box that they had them all in. And then you'd spend the rest of the evening looking to find the woman who had the cuff that matched the one you had just bought."

ELIZABETH ISBISTER OF NORWAY HOUSE



Elizabeth Isbister

Elizabeth Isbister was born Elizabeth Crowe; her father was from near James Bay, and her mother was from Big Trout Lake. They moved around a great deal when she was small. When she was four, she arrived at Island Lake and, when her mother died, she was adopted by the storekeeper/trader, Harry D'Arcy. They moved to God's Lake, where she spent most of her youth. When she grew up, she met and married Charles Isbister who had a job with medical services. By marrying a Metis man, she lost her Indian status. They continued to live at God's Lake until 1960, when an illness forced Charles to move to Norway House to be close to the hospital and medical attention. Elizabeth, who is now seventy-four, had an earlier connection with Norway House when she had spent seven years as a student at the residential school at Rossville.

"I was ten years old when I went to the residential school. I can't say anything bad about it. I guess each one of us got what we got out of it. Some of them say negative things about it, but to me, I think I learned a lot from the school. We lived in the school. We weren't free to roam around; we could go out if some relative came and got us. Other than that, we had to stay in the school. We worked half a day, and studied half a day. The work was part of our training. Some of us did the cleaning; some of us had to work in the sewing room; some of us worked in the laundry and in the kitchen. The boys worked outside; they cut wood and hauled wood, and they worked in the garden.

"It's true that we weren't allowed to speak our language inside the school. Outside it was okay. They had a Cree chart put up on the wall with all our names, and if we were caught talking inside the school, they put a mark beside our name. On Friday night, we used to have a recreation evening. If we had too many marks beside our names, we either missed that social evening, or we missed our supper."

Question: Did you ever miss your supper?

"Oh, yes (laughs). Lots of times. Nobody was going to take that away from me, though, my language. The reason they did this was, I don't know, maybe they thought we were talking about them and they didn't know what we were saying. Or maybe they wanted us to learn English.

"We went home for our holidays once a year, in the summer, by canoe. The men from God's Lake came down to pick up the freight and take the children along home with them. If the going was good, we could get there in three nights. But if the weather was bad, if we got wind-bound or rain-bound, it might take a week. The men would paddle, but we would help on the portages. It was funny, when we left here from the school, they would give us some flour, some salt pork, some tea and sugar for the trip. I remember the first time the men said, 'Get the girls to make bannock.' It was on the open fire. I burnt mine, it didn't cook inside. They were good to us. The men would put up a tent at night, and all us girls would sleep together.

"At Christmas we didn't go home. We'd practice for weeks to get ready for our concert, and every school here at Norway House had a concert. Everybody came. We'd have our concert at the United Church. Then people feasted, trappers came in from their trap lines. Those of us who didn't have families stayed at the school and they made a Christmas dinner for us.

"My first time to go to Winnipeg was an awful feeling. We went by boat, and it took two or three nights. I was about twenty, twenty one, and I was going to take a job as a maid in a house in River Heights. We landed at Redwood dock, and the lady, Mrs. Adelman, came down to pick us up. It was a most terrible feeling, not that I was homesick, but I was so lonely. I didn't know the city, so I couldn't go out unless her daughter, Brenda, would take me. It all bothered me, the crowds of people on Portage Avenue. The first time I went for a trip on the street car by myself, I stayed on right to the end of the line. The houses were so close together, and I missed the nature. The first evergreen tree that I saw, I just sat down and I cried. I stayed in Winnipeg for four years.

"I first learned my leadership (skills) at the residential school. I was a leader in the CGIT group. All that I learned stayed with me; I started a group of young women at God's Lake, how to look after their babies, and then I started an organization to get our own school for Metis children at God's Lake.

Elizabeth has been active in many organizations. In the late 1960's she was involved as vice chairman of the Manitoba Metis Federation; in 1972, she

was on the Norway House Community Council, serving as mayor. She has been a member of the National anti-poverty organization, the National Native Women's Organization, and the Indian Rights For Indian Women organization, which was responsible in large part for C-31 legislation that returned treaty rights to many native women. Even into her 70's, she is on her community's hospital board, child and family services, and has been on the school committee, the board of the Norway House radio station, and senior's residence. She is active on a committee promoting Aboriginal employment and training, and sits on the provincial Aboriginal Advisory Committee to the RCMP.

"In my mind and my heart, it doesn't make any difference to be Indian or Metis. But it's the government that divides people. Even when you're a Metis you're treated different; you're half there, you're in between. I (personally) really don't feel discrimination, but I feel the Metis (as a people) are discriminated against. You own your own land, you pay your own taxes, you're just like any other person. But there's still the feeling that you're not quite there. I felt that most when we first started with the Manitoba Metis Federation. I wanted to see the Metis people get recognized as a nation, the Metis nation. I felt very strongly about that. By the time I could apply to get my Indian status (Bill C-31), I had worked so long for the Metis cause, that it wouldn't have been easy to give up my Metis identity."



The Old and the New at Norway House

JOE GENAILLE OF PELICAN RAPIDS



Joe Genaille in front of Pelican Rapids School

Joe Genaille is seventy-four, with a bald head tufted round by white hair, horn rim glasses, and a cap that instructs you to "Kiss a Moose." He is the composite public servant, though an odd one by southern or urban standards. He was the first mayor of Pelican Rapids after working hard to get what had been considered a "squatter settlement" acknowledged as a community. For eleven years he was an official of the Manitoba Metis Federation; for eighteen years he was mayor; for twenty-eight years he has been chairman of the school committee.

"In 1952 I was chosen to represent the community when we used to go to Winnipeg. We used to go together with the Indian Chiefs, we had to meet with the Premier and the Ministers. We'd all go together.

"In those days we didn't have a community. We were called squatters. There must have been about two hundred and fifty of us. We lived all over the place. All of a sudden you went down a trail and there was a house standing. But we weren't recognized as people. When you're a squatter, you can go and ask, but you won't get anything. The government people won't take a look at you. They say you don't belong to anything; we just belonged to the bush. Our main concern was we wanted a community, so we kept after them. At that time we had no funding; we paid our own expenses for those meetings.

Then the MMF was formed and it started to help the Pelican Rapids people get organized.

"Angus Spence and Walter Menard came in and told us we should form a committee. They said we could get repairs for our houses if we joined the MMF. So we did. We formed a committee. We got \$200 for each family to buy materials for houses.

In 1969, the provincial government awarded community status to Pelican Rapids. The community was surveyed, and ten houses were built. Joe Genaille became Pelican Rapids' first mayor.

"To be mayor meant we had to deal with a lot of things. I fought for the road for thirty years, and we finally got that. We fought for the right to choose the people who get the houses; we say who moves in.

"There was an old school here in the 1940's and the kids all went together. But when the reserve got their new school, they kicked our kids out. They said, 'This is not your school, get out.' So we built our own school, a little building that we built ourselves. Volunteers. The government supplied the materials, and we built the place. Then all of a sudden, in 1960, the official trustee, Mr. Jasper, came in and said they'd selected Pelican Rapids for a new school and that was called Frontier. (That's how it became a Frontier School Division school.)

"We had no money to pay taxes. So we had a meeting at my place with the officials, and we said, 'How would it be, if instead of paying taxes, each family would supply a cord and a half of wood and that would be for the fuel.' So we did that, and before you knew it, outside the school the wood was all piled up, and they still had some wood left in the spring.

"Another thing was health care. We didn't have enough money to get things like dental care. So we organized a social committee and started having bingos. And we found out that after one year we had enough money to bring in a dentist for a whole week to look at all the kids' teeth. All from bingo money. A lot of people will tell you it's crazy to put up a bingo. It's not crazy; bingo takes care of a lot of things.

"All these things were going on. The people went ahead and did it. But now they want to go to town where the big bingos are.

"I can tell you, we had a good community. The reason people selected this place in the 1940's is that this was a rich place for fish and fur. At that time, if you went out and set a net, you'd get seventy to eighty pickerel. You'd get about twenty tons out of ten nets. But not now; today you go set twenty nets, you might get two or three pickerel. And something happened to the fur, the foxes and the wolves.

"We used to walk all day to Camperville at Easter and at Christmas to go to mass. That's how the people were then. We walked forty to sixty miles. Now there's people who live forty yards from the church, and they never see them."

ABEL AND FRANCES HALL OF WABOWDEN



Frances Hall in front of her home at Wabowden

Frances Hall's grandfather, Fred Beebe, came from Kansas City and spoke no Cree. Her grandmother, Mary Garrick (Garrioch) came from Cross Lake, and spoke no English. Their marriage lasted almost fifty years. Her grandfather was a carpenter and arrived in the north via York Boat in 1910. They had to leave Cross Lake because, when an Indian woman married a non-Indian man, they were no longer allowed to stay on the reserve. They took up fishing, and moved to Setting Lake next to what became the community of Wabowden. Wabowden was named after W.A. Bowden, a railway chief engineer, and after 1920 it became an important railway centre. Long before that it had been an important meeting place for people from Nelson House and Cross Lake. It had also been a centre for fur traders.

FRANCES

"My grandmother told me that it was named Setting Lake because if there was a really big wind people wouldn't be able to get their boats across the lake, and they would have to set and wait.

"From the time I remember as a small child, my grandmother would say something in Cree, and my grandfather would say it in English. They must have understood, though, maybe from their actions.

Frances' father, William Mead, came from London England, worked on construction of the railway, and then worked for a trader, Mr. Davidson, at Wabowden. He hauled wood and worked in the gardens. In 1922, the Hudson's Bay Company set up a store at Wabowden. It became a major distributing centre for mail, freight, fur for Cross Lake, God's Lake, Island Lake, and Nelson House.

"Every spring we'd go out trapping, my dad and mom and my grandparents. We'd go out for a month. We'd be let out of school, but we'd have to take our schoolwork with us. We'd go out in March or April, and come back in May when the ice left Setting Lake. And we were made to do our work.

"When I started school the only children who could go to school were the non-treaty. The treaty children could not go to our school, because they were not tax payers. There weren't that many of us going to school. My grandmother's sister's children, my cousins, were treaty and they weren't allowed to go to school with us. I remember going to school and getting my cousins to pull me on the sleigh, but they couldn't come in. They'd go on to the Anglican mission and learn their reading, writing, and math. They were supposed to go to school in residential schools, and if they didn't they weren't allowed to go to our school.

"My school was grade one to grade eight, all in one room beside a pot bellied stove. There was two students to one desk. I remember the teacher coming to hit my fingers with a yardstick, because I was writing left handed. But I'm still left handed to this day.

"The teacher was a Mr. Trudeau. He must have been in the war, because he only had one arm, the other arm was artificial. I used to love to draw. Any excuse to stay in school at recess time, I'd go up to the blackboard and I'd draw. Mr. Trudeau always wore a glove on the artificial hand, and I never knew what it was but I never asked him. But I was standing there drawing, and all at once I could feel a hand on my shoulder, and him telling me I should go outside and play with the other children. And I

turned around and it was this hand that's got the glove on it. I was so scared.

"There were Catholics here, but this was more an Anglican community. Anglican missionaries were here all the time. For Christmas concerts my dad would harness up the dogs and take us down to the hall and we'd get Christmas presents from the Santa. That was through the Anglican mission. They sent a pair of socks or a pair of mitts with a little doll or whatever, and it had on the package, 'girl age 8.' They'd be sent in from outside. I never knew Santa was a local man. He carried bells from the dog teams.

"Christmas was a big thing. We'd have our Christmas stocking, and next morning it would be filled with candies. We'd have a feast for anyone who'd walk in. It would be all wild meat and fish, ptarmagins, bear. A lot of pies and a lot of vegetables, because my grandfather had a big garden.

"When my grandfather planted his garden, he'd get old fish from the fishermen, and he'd make tunnels and he'd bury the fish and then he'd plant the potatoes on top of them. He'd trade his vegetables for fish and meat.

"My grandfather also had a cow. Every morning before I went to school, I'd go with my grandfather to the barn and I'd get a glass of nice warm milk, straight from the cow.

"The train was the only way to travel out. When the train came, everybody would go to meet it. The train came by here maybe once a week. At certain times, a dentist would be on it, or a doctor. The train would stop, and if you were sick or needed the dentist you would go on. I was little, maybe ten, and needed a tooth pulled. I had this tooth ache, and my dad said we'd see the dentist when he came by. He explained what the dentist would do. They had this dentist chair right on the train. But I was scared. My dad held me down, and an RCMP held me down, and the dentist pulled my tooth. I bit his finger. This was in the 1940's. After they were done here they moved on further up the Bayline. After it was over, with no tooth ache I was happy. But I never liked the dentist after that."

Abel Hall is sixty-four. When he was a trapper he had sled dogs. Now he breeds, trains, and races dogs for sport. They are a Husky-Malamute cross. He chooses his best teams from among thirty-five such dogs he keeps in kennels behind his house. Then, he takes them to winter carnivals across northern Manitoba: Cross Lake, Grand Rapids, The Pas, Leaf Rapids, and Thompson. A taciturn man, Abel is shy with strangers. However, he is comfortable when he is with his dogs, each one chained to a small box inside his fenced in kennels, like a village for dogs.

“When the skidoos came, that’s what spoiled trapping. When I used to go to my trap line with a dog team, I would stay out there for two weeks. With a skidoo, I’d go out for a couple of days and then I’d come back because there was nothing to keep me interested out there longer than that. Before, I used to take my time and enjoy myself.”

Abel now enjoys himself with his dogs. He spends hours looking over the fastest among them and breeding them selectively to get even more speed from the next generation of pups. Then he trains them for the thirty-five mile races they will eventually have to run. If you expect to come even near to winning, a ten dog team must be able to cover that distance in less than two hours. That is an average speed of almost thirty kilometres per hour. Abel looks after his dogs, including catching enough fish to supply them with food. His pen area is set in a grove of spruce trees near his house at Wabowden. It is strangely silent, for a place that has so many dogs. There is not a lot of yelping and barking and whining, though on a full moon night you might hear a chorus of baying and howling. It also smells fresh. The place is kept immaculately clean, and the prevailing odour is the fish that is their food. It takes twenty tubs of fish to keep his kennel going for a winter. He cooks fish and oatmeal for them each morning. When it gets close to race time, he switches to chicken and beef to give them more strength.

You train a team of racing dogs much the way you would train a long distance runner; building up stamina by starting slowly, and working up to the distance you need. Abel starts his dogs at two miles per day, then five, ten, until their stamina builds for thirty-five miles at a run. He brings the young dogs into the team at about nine months of age by putting them behind older, more experienced dogs. His oldest and favorite, is a lean and mean looking six year old that looks like a hyena. His odd looks notwithstanding, this is the

best dog Abel has. He will still be the leader this winter when Abel Hall takes his racing team to Alaska.



Abel Hall with one of his dogs

ALEX SHLACHETKA OF CORMORANT



Alex Shlachetka

Not everybody who has a perspective on Metis life, is themselves Metis. Traders, for example, played a critical role in the economy and life of the north and of both Metis and First Nations communities. The stories of some of the people who were in that role, are very interesting and important in showing what life was like. Alex Shlachetka is eighty-six. He arrived in Cormorant in 1947, persuaded to open a trading post. For a dozen years before that, he had been a fur trader along the Bayline, with a post at Herchmer, between Gillam and Churchill. The life of a trader along the Bayline was never dull.

"Fur was the main thing. I worked for Fred Kerr who was the biggest fur buyer in Manitoba, and he wanted me to get all the fur I could get. This was a very good place for fur at that time. There was a lot of muskrats, quite a few beaver, and other things, weasels, and squirrels, and mink. We trusted most of the people. We would give an advance; they would catch the fur and bring it over and pay their bills. We had a general store; we had dry goods, groceries, hardware. We had just about everything a

trapper would need - boats, engines. We were the dealers for just about everything.

"If you came to me, you would say that you had a trapline and you needed some groceries to tide your family over until you had some fur. In those days, most families asked for two or three dollars a day. They bought staples like flour, lard, possibly milk, coffee, tea. These would support the family while the trapper was out on the trapline.

"Goods came in by train only. Sometimes the 'Muskeg Train' came in only every two or three weeks. The agents, the fur buyers, would be on the train and our groceries would come on the train, and we would have to get enough supplies to last us until the next train. The train would come from The Pas, headed toward Churchill. The train that left The Pas would stop overnight at Wabowden, and when it got to Gillam it would stop overnight again. It was quite an event when the train arrived; everybody would meet it. These were steam trains, burning coal. Other than our radio, that was our only connection to the outside world. On the radio we could get Watrous, and CKY in Winnipeg.

"I knew everybody between The Pas and Churchill. Herchmer is a small substation. We had trappers from York Factory, Split Lake, Gillam, and Churchill. We had a lot of trappers there. In the spring, when things weren't too busy, I'd leave the key with my pump-man, and I'd get on the train and make the trip up the line to The Pas. I sold everything; suits of clothes, boots, groceries. I sold them right out of the train to folks from the section crews who worked for the railway.

"Sometimes the train would get stuck in the snow, and it would be delayed. But it always got through. The section crews would know the bad spots, and they'd have snowplows ready.

"I had to know the size of the furs just by looking at them, and the grade. First of all, the skin had to be prime, taken at just the right time. The muskrat had to be stretched with the fur inside, but there's enough at the tail end that I could tell how good the fur was, what colour it is, how long it is. If the skin is prime, it is a meat colour, reddish, there are no black spots on it. If it is un-prime, then it's got black spots. Too early caught. If it's too un-prime after it's tanned, the hair will come out. A fur buyer

can tell a piece of fur just by looking at it. I used to buy polar bear furs up north. The fur would be rolled up in a ball, but I could just tell by looking how big that fur was and what it was worth. You had to, you can't unroll it.

"Sometimes we got live little bear cubs and they ended up in the United States in a zoo. The trapper would bring them in in a gunny sack with just their heads sticking out."



Jock and Carol McAree

JOCK AND CAROL McAREE OF MOOSE LAKE

In 1900, Carol McAree's grandfather, T. H. P. Lamb (nick-named Ten Horse Power), opened a trading post at Moose Lake. It was run in later years by her father, Tom Lamb, legendary throughout the north as an aviation pioneer, trader, and conservationist. In 1953, Jock McAree arrived to work in the store which is now operated by Carol and Jock's son, Greg, the fourth generation of the family to operate the store in Moose Lake.

For a few years the Hudson's Bay Company was a competitor, but in 1927, the Bay left and Lamb's store remained the main trader in Moose Lake.

JOCK

"We had the store operation, and freighting. The tractor trains came in the winter from The Pas. In the summer, we had a boat and barge operation that came up the river. We brought in more stuff in the summer than in the winter. We filled every warehouse and the basement. Canned milk, flour, macaroni, baking powder, tea, tobacco and coal oil were the main products. The meat, people got out of the bush. A very odd time we'd get some sausages; that was the closest we got to meat that didn't come out of the bush. Our kids went to school for some time before they realized there was any meat other than moose meat.

"People's houses weren't in a straight line, a row. You couldn't put in hydro or telephone or water works, because one house was here and the next one was over there. People moved into the bush so there would be wood handy for the winter. They cut down the bush, and moved the house the next year."

CAROL

"Every spring people moved their houses. They got tired of who they were living beside. Or they got tired of their neighbour borrowing from them, so they'd move to get away."

JOCK

“You’d put sticks under the house, and hitch a tractor to it and move it to a new spot. Everybody moved their houses. It was a ritual for years. I couldn’t get over it. ‘Why do you want to move your house?’ I asked one woman. ‘Well, it’s dirty here. The kids made a mess all winter long.’ So they just moved the damned house. A hold-over from camping - Tipi days.”

“Prior to 1962, the economy was trapping, commercial fishing, and hunting. People hunted moose and rabbit; they gathered eggs in the spring time, seagull eggs, mudhen eggs. The government set up a trapping system. Six men to a group were sent here, a group over there. All over this country, down almost to Cedar Lake, north almost to Cormorant, west almost to The Pas. The Summerberry Muskrat Ranch, the Summerberry Project they called it. The provincial government set up the territories, built the dams and the ditches, and gathered the rats. The people were paid \$25 a month. It didn’t matter if you trapped a thousand dollars worth of fur.”

In 1964, the Grand Rapids Hydro Electric Power Dam changed everything. A huge territory behind the dam, a million acres was flooded, including Moose Lake where the water rose five feet.

JOCK

“Today there are very few muskrats in this country. In the winter of 1963-64 they flooded; in the spring of 1964 they turned the power on at Grand Rapids. There was very little trapping after that.

“The people had to move back from the creeks and lakeshore to higher ground. The community changed because they got hydro; the houses had to be in a row, close to the hydro poles. You could no longer move your house every year. People who were used to living close to water, on the lakeshore, had to move up into a townsite. People got jobs building the new townsite, the houses, roads, airstrip, new docks, all to replace the stuff that was going to be drowned out.

"One old guy said, 'They always believed the water at Grand Rapids is so strong you can't stop it. But if the white man says he's going to stop it and make a dam, the white man will make a dam.' They were fatalistic. What the white man said he would do, they believed he would do.

"Hundreds and hundreds of moose died in the flooding. They flooded Cedar Lake under seventeen feet of water in the winter. The moose were standing on the ice eating off the tops of the trees; they didn't give a damn. Now spring came, there went the ice. No moose. It was horrible. They made a valiant attempt to save them. They had people driving them out. Moose Lake men, helicopters, bombardiers, the Natural Resources people. They drove that whole country west past the Red Earth Lake to where the water wouldn't have been very high. Boy, they felt good, one hundred and fifty, two hundred moose they drove up there. Everybody went home. The next day, the helicopter went for a ride; the moose were all back where they came from. Back in their old territory. As the ice broke up, they saw a lot of them drown. They had their babies on a piece of ice and then they fell into the water. It was hard on all the wildlife. Stanley Naskapow came in one day with eight beaver pelts, they were so heavy he had to skin them out there. I said, 'How did you get so many?' He said, 'Oh, I just opened up the top of the house, the water was coming up so fast they were glad to get out. I just had to bop them on the top of the head.' That was in the spring of 1964.

"After 1964 we became storekeepers instead of traders. Trapping went from 35,000 rats a winter down to five or six thousand. Also welfare started to come in. Here's this guy who didn't catch any rats, he didn't get a moose; after the flood the hunters from Moose Lake couldn't get a moose. There was less fur; welfare started to enter into it."

CAROL

"When family allowance came, people couldn't take their kids out of school to go fishing or they'd lose their family allowance, which was \$5 a head."

JOCK

“We became storekeepers. People would get a credit for a hundred dollars worth of groceries. They got everything at the store from then on. I asked one guy not long after that, ‘Are you going to get your moose?’ He said, ‘No, you’ve got bologna, don’t you?’ He didn’t need a moose because we still had bologna. It was the end of living off the land.”