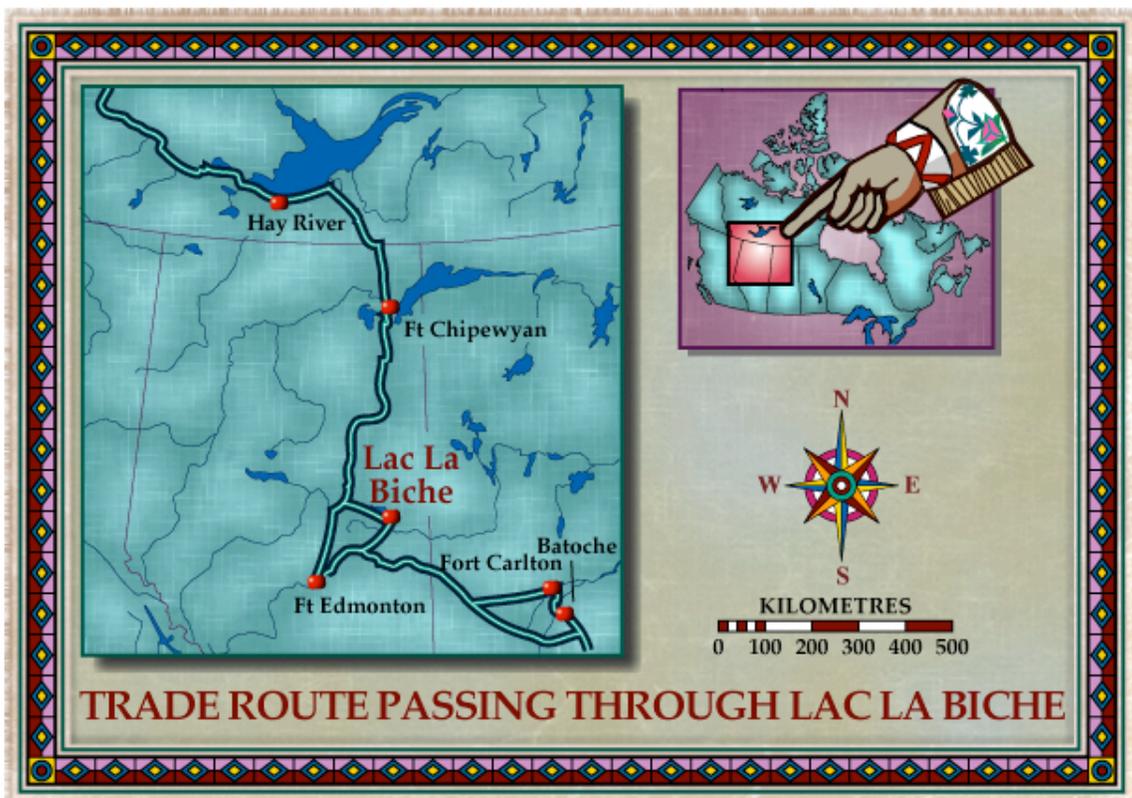


Some Métis Communities in Western Canada - Darren R. Préfontaine, Patrick Young, Todd Paquin and Leah Dorion

Objective: In this module, the students will learn about a diverse group of Métis communities in Western Canada: Lac La Biche, Alberta, St. Laurent and Ste. Madeleine, Manitoba and Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan. By reading this module, the students will learn that the Métis are builders of Canada. Many of the communities, which exist in Western Canada have been founded by the Métis. The students will also learn that these communities are very diverse in terms of economic development and cultural orientation, which is a testament to the diversity of Métis experience.

The Early History of Lac La Biche, Alberta: A Traditional Métis Community



Lac La Biche is one of the oldest communities in Alberta. It was founded in 1798-99 as a product of competition between fur trade companies. Lac La Biche later became a well-established Métis settlement, and by 1872 it had more than 15 times the population of Edmonton. Other than Fort Chipewyan, it is the oldest known settlement in Alberta. The first person to erect a house for a post on Red Deers Lake (now Lac La Biche) was David Thompson of the North West

Company (NWC) and the house, raised in October of 1798, was known as Red Deers House. One year later Peter Fidler founded a house for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) on the bank of the lake at the head of a small stream, which fed the Beaver River. The construction of a post at Lac La Biche was unique in that it actually was outside of Rupert's Land, in the Athabasca County.

The HBC required a post in the Churchill River Valley above Frog Portage to oppose and compete with the NWC and free traders, who up to that point had no rivals in the area. Portage La Biche was a major link in the Northwest Passage to the Pacific coast besides being the best location at which connections could be made between the river routes of the Saskatchewan, Athabasca, and Beaver Rivers. It became imperative that, if the HBC wanted and to secure a portion of this trade it would have to establish a post at Lac La Biche. Fidler's house was completed November 12, 1799 and was called Greenwich House. It was a log building with an earthen and grass roof, split board doors, windows and fireplaces. By December 1799, Fidler began acquiring trade article from Edmonton House.

Métis, Europeans or Euro-Canadians knew Lac La Biche and Portage La Biche prior to David Thompson's arrival in the area. Laderoute, a Métis, was familiar with the area prior to the arrival of David Thompson in 1798, crossing Portage La Biche numerous times before Thompson described it in his writing. The first White man purported to visit Lac La Biche was a NWC trader from Lower Canada (present-day Québec) named Ladouceur. He married a First Nations woman and started a family, but he left for Lower Canada while the wife and family remained. Shortly thereafter another Nor'Wester from Lower Canada by the name of Desjarlais arrived, a name now synonymous with the community.

The Lac La Biche post was administered from Edmonton and operated as part of the HBC Saskatchewan District. By 1801, the post closed though traders in the area were supplied by and operated out of forts on the North Saskatchewan. It later reopened in 1817 under the name of Red Deers Lake House. In 1819, the post was renewed as a trading post and district headquarters, but due to the 1821 merger of the HBC and NWC and the construction of an overland transport route in 1824 it was abandoned. The post was not reestablished until 1853, and was known as "Post Lac La Biche".

By 1889, several outposts were established within a 50-mile radius of Lac La Biche, at Jack Fish, Heart and Buck Lakes. Antoine Moostatup (Cardinal) operated the Buck Lake outpost in 1889. He took a 10% commission on the trade done and whatever he could make on the prices of goods and furs. Louis Janvier operated the Jack Fish Lake outpost, and also took a 10% commission on the trade conducted plus whatever he could make on the prices of goods and furs. This post was in danger of failing, however, as too many Chipewyans (Dene) had been given debt. The Heart Lake Outpost was operated by a man named Fabien Mooneas and, unlike the other outpost operators who worked on a commission. He was paid an annual salary of \$300.00. The outposts charged the same prices for furs as did the Lac La Biche post, and they bought their goods from Lac La Biche at the main post's prices.

The pay contracts and rations given to employees at the post in 1889 were based on their positions. For instance, the interpreter, Pierre Ladouceur was on a \$35/month contract and received a weekly ration of fourteen pounds (6.35 kilograms) of flour, seven pounds (3.175 kilograms) of bacon, half a pound (227

grams) of tea, and two pounds (907 grams) of sugar (an expense of \$2.33). In addition, the interpreter was entitled to one hundred pounds (45.36 kilograms) of flour as an annual allowance. The labourer, Louis Ladouceur, received \$15 a month in pay and a weekly ration of 14 pounds (6.35 kilograms) of flour, four pounds (1.8 kilograms) of bacon and 3/8 of a pound (170 grams) of tea (an expense of \$1.54).

Shortly after posts and missions were constructed, voyageurs and retired HBC servants began to settle along the lake. The founding settlers of Lac La Biche were First Nations, Métis, French Canadian and Scottish. Some of the earliest names associated with the settlement were Auger, Desjarlais, Cardinal, Nadeau and Ladouceur. Lac La Biche was a community established primarily by French-Canadian Métis during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was an ideal location because of its beauty, rich resources, and the high flow of traffic through the area. While the men continued to follow a rather nomadic lifestyle of hunting and trapping, their families lived along the lakeshore in a settlement of tents and lodges because of the ready food supply which could be taken from the area. The population of the community, including those who were settled and those who were more transitory, grew steadily and at one point was spread along the south shore of Lac La Biche over an area of approximately 29 kilometres including several islands in the lake. The settlement grew most rapidly after the establishment of the mission, in 1853, with people establishing their homes near the post and the mission. The community was and still is one, which straddles many cultures. In 1874, the settlement had a population of approximately 600 people, comprised of 200 French-Cree Métis, 300 Woods Cree and 100 Chipewyan (Dene) or French Chipewyan.

The land provided much in terms of food, water and shelter. The lakes were very rich with whitefish, pike, pickerel and sucker, which became a staple of many of the first traders and settlers as flour was scarce or non-existent until the establishment of a mill in the mid-1800s. The First Nations, to secure a winter's supply of food, traditionally met in the islands in Lac La Biche to take advantage of the fall fish spawn. Between nine and twelve thousand whitefish were needed to sustain the post at Lac La Biche for a year (in the mid-to-late 1800s), and most families make use of between two and three thousand fish. The whitefish could be readily acquired by spearing them in a shallow area on the lake.

During the fall spawn people from the post and the community at large spear ed fish from dusk until midnight. It was a regular occurrence to end up with over one thousand fish per-day, not including what was taken in nets in less productive areas of the lake during the same period. However, because of the increasing number of sedentary settlers, the whitefish stocks plummeted. During the spawning period in October 1888, it was estimated that over 100 000 whitefish had been caught, and the daily summer catch was regularly between 500 and 1,000 fish.

The countryside around Lac La Biche is hilly and covered with a mixture of both deciduous and coniferous trees providing shelter and food for numerous animal species. Large game animals such as moose, wood bison, deer and bear were present as were ducks, swans, geese and game birds. The eggs of these birds were commonly collected and strawberries, raspberries, currants and blueberries were found in abundance. The different furbearing animals of the area included beaver, black and grizzly bear, martens, otters, minks, fishers, wolves,

wolverines, hares, foxes and "cats". While traveling to Lac La Biche and during the process of establishing Greenwich House, Fidler's party employed First Nations guides and local First Nations men to hunt for them and the guides supplied the party with moose, ducks, geese and swans.

The acquisition and distribution of dried meat, fish and pemmican were important activities in the region. Having enough food was always a concern for trappers, traders and missionaries, particularly if they were new to the region and not familiar with the resources or how to etch out a living in the forest. Dog teams were used in the winter to transport furs and meat from the Lac La Biche post to the various camps to keep the trappers and traders outfitted. Wood bison and moose were the two most commonly used food sources. However, the wood bison was decimated by the middle nineteenth century, so in order to secure a consistent supply of pemmican plains bison, which wintered in the parkland were exploited.

Trapping and trading were the activities and industries, which prompted the origin and establishment of permanent settlement on Lac La Biche. Métis and First Nations were involved in many aspects of the local fur trade. However, there are many journal references by managers and inspectors, which state that for many years the fur yields were poor in the area, and that the beaver population had been severely depleted on more than one occasion because of a combination of zealous trappers and winter deaths.

The Lac La Biche posts did not make much in profit, as Inspector H.S Young reported in 1889. It is probable that if the establishment of posts on the lake were not a necessity in curtailing the activities of free traders and the NWC, the

HBC probably would not have maintained its posts there. For instance, Fidler makes reference to the price he had to give to remain competitive with the “French traders” or else the First Nations would refuse to trade with him. In December 1799, two mink or marten were worth one beaver, while one otter had the equivalent value of two beaver. At the end of the 1799-1800 outfit, Fidler’s trade at Greenwich House totaled 1073 Made Beaver¹. The post had serious competition for many years from petty traders who roamed throughout the region, primarily those who entered the region after cart trails were opened. People in the community, particularly during the period(s) in which the post was closed or abandoned, would often save their best furs to trade with the free traders from the Red River area because they would get better prices or goods from them. However, because of its strategic position and function, Greenwich House is regarded as the first important HBC post outside of Rupert’s Land.

Fur prices at the post fluctuated in response to demand and availability. A list, which compares prices for common furs from May 15, 1886 and September 1889, is as follows:

Fur	1886 Price (\$)	1889 Price (\$)
Beaver	2.75-3.25	2.50-6.00
Bear	9.00-12.00	6.00-14.00
Fisher	3.50-5.00	5.00
Cross Fox	2.50-5.00	2.00-6.00
Red Fox	not available	1.50
Silver Fox	" "	40.00
Wolf	" "	1.25
Muskrat	0.12-0.17	0.08-0.10
Mink	0.75-1.00	0.50
Marten	0.80-1.00	1.50
Otter	8.00-10.00	6.00
Wolverine	not available	4.00
Skunk	0.25-1.25	0.50
Lynx	2.75-3.50	not available

¹ “Made Beaver” was the standard from which all other beaver furs were judged. Essentially, these adult “prime” pelts were extremely lustrous and thick.

While furs were priced in terms of currency, the First Nations and Métis trappers took their earnings in goods rather than cash. The posts had to establish equivalencies between goods and furs. This, of course, was in the favour of the fur trade companies, who would charge much more than the actual cash value for an item in made beaver to make a handsome profit. It was a common practice for post managers or inspectors to establish low fur prices while keeping the price of goods high to maintain a profit. The cash value of goods at the Lac La Biche store and sale shop in 1889 is as follows:

Item	Price/Quantity (\$)
Flannel (red, orange, white)	0.25/yard
Double barrel gun	16.50 each
Single barrel gun	8.74 each
Mens' fine tweed coat	3.06 each
Boys' long boots	1.62 pair
Girls' boots	1.28 pair
Colour beads	0.07 each
3 gallon copper kettles	0.48 each
Butcher knives (8 inch)	1.43 per dozen
Moccasins	0.89 pair
Vests	1.44 each
Belts	0.66 each
Flannel shirts	1.09 each
Corduroy trousers	1.80 pair

The Métis were involved in the trade and transport associated with the Lac La Biche post. The Métis were engaged in the transport of goods across Portage La Biche, and their skills in river transport and portaging ensured an easier crossing. They were also employed as canoe builders since birch trees with good bark could be found around the lake. Once trails were opened up, the Métis became heavily involved in the movement of goods by Red River cart, a means, which came to surpass the use of the York boat in the region. Carts moved goods from St. Paul to Lac La Biche after which men from Lac La Biche transported the goods down the Athabasca River in boats.

The district's overland transport system came about as a result of HBC Governor Simpson journeying from York Factory to Lac La Biche in 1824. The effort required to travel the water routes leading into and exiting Lac La Biche was astounding. Simpson ordered a good horse road to be built from Fort Assiniboine on the Athabasca River to Edmonton House on the North Saskatchewan River to offer a reprieve from the hardship of the river and portage journey. Jacques Cardinal, a Métis who was knowledgeable about the area conducted the project, and the 80 mile (129 kilometre) route was completed in 1825. In essence, the construction of this overland trail minimized the need for the Churchill River route.

Once the trail was completed, transport from Cumberland House could be carried on along the Saskatchewan River to Fort Edmonton and then overland to Assiniboine House. Because Portage La Biche was no longer the vital link in inland transportation and trade after the construction of this road, the post at Lac La Loche was closed for thirty years and did not reopen until 1853, though trapping in the region around the lake continued. Another long overland route was cleared in the mid-1800s from the community to Fort Pitt, about 100 miles away which became a popular route for ox-carts, traders and missionaries. In 1889, all of the goods coming into Lac La Biche arrived by overland transport from Calgary.

Aside from trapping and transport Métis men from Lac La Biche, such as Antoine Desjarlais, were also employed as post managers. If Métis were capable of reading and writing, they could advance in the trade companies' employ. Inspector H.S Young noted Pierre Ladouceur, an interpreter with the post, in 1889 as a trustworthy and invaluable man who was knowledgeable in the

customs of the area. However, because he was not literate Ladouceur could not take over the post from a less competent non-Métis manager by the name of Gairdner.

As the population of the community grew, which was composed primarily of Métis and First Nations, missionaries began to visit and eventually establish themselves at Lac La Biche. Prior to establishing the first mission in the community, Roman Catholic missionaries and Oblate priests such as Reverend J.B. Thibeault and Reverend Joseph Bourassa had been visiting and conducting services at Lac La Biche since 1844. The missionaries, arriving from Lac Ste. Anne, held services twice a year, in November and again at Easter. These times were selected because the people had not yet left for the winter hunt or had just returned from it.

After a decision by Archbishop Taché, Father Remas officially organized and built the early mission post in 1853, which was consecrated as "Our Lady of Victories". Remas learned Woods Cree, the most commonly used language by Métis and First Nations living in the settlement and trading at the post. During his first year at the mission he performed 72 baptisms, seven marriages and four burials. The mission moved several times: once present in the community, the first time being rebuilt in 1855 10 kilometres from the post and was then rafted across the lake the following spring. Then, in 1857 the mission was rebuilt to accommodate school facilities for children in the district who came under the tutelage of the Grey Nuns.

From very early on, settlers in the community were involved in raising livestock, gardening and grain production to supplement the food reaped from hunting,

trapping, and fishing. The soil around the lake ranges from sandy to a sandy loam, but is quite fertile. Some of the common crops grown were potatoes, cabbage, turnips and grains such as wheat and barley. The first wheat field in what is now Alberta was planted in the garden plots cultivated by the Roman Catholic mission. The first gristmill was also constructed for the mission to supply people with flour from their crops. Some of the settlers, post employees and clergy raised cattle, oxen, pigs, and fowl.

Agriculture was not a subsistence activity that most settlers came to readily as, like in other areas, they could make a living hunting, trapping and fishing until the downfall of fish, bison, and beaver stocks. The effort required to clear and break the land, seed it and care for a crop until harvest also dissuaded people from adopting agriculture in place of a hunting and gathering based economy. However, starvation was a motivating factor in the switch to gardening and agriculture by First Nations, Métis and Euro-Canadian trappers and hunters. Soon people began clearing plots for gardening, planting such crops as wheat, barley, carrots, turnips and potatoes. The land around Lac La Biche was unique in that, being in the forest proper and not in the parklands, it was remarkably fertile and crops grew quite well once the trees and bush had been removed.

The Métis on Lac La Biche maintained the rectangular waterfront lots, which had been in use in present-day Saskatchewan and Manitoba for a considerable period of time, with each lot having lake frontage. However, in 1873, 1,000 acres of land fronting the lake was surveyed as part of the HBC Reserve and there was concern among the Métis and First Nations that land would soon be divided up around the lake into rectangular parcels for settlement and farming in preparation for incoming migrants.

Surveys generally disregarded the configuration of the Métis' long, narrow lake front lots and the First Nations' traditional rights to the land. However, the initial land parcels were surveyed in 1889 to comply with the template introduced by the Métis and other settlers, no matter how irregular, and the owners were given patents. The other, rectangular land parcels which were being surveyed in expectation for the arrival of new settlers, were staked around these long, narrow lake lots in such a manner that they would not infringe upon or alter their original design. These lots followed the lakeshore for a distance of approximately 64 kilometres.

Fishing was always an important activity on Lac La Biche, both as a subsistence activity and later as a commercial activity. The First Nations, Métis, and European/Euro-Canadians used several species of fish as food. Later, as families became established around the lake, people began fishing more intensively. However, government imposed fishing restrictions came into effect in 1917 and, while being meant to protect the stocks which, as already mentioned, had plummeted due to over fishing during the fall spawning period, were not well understood by the Métis and First Nations around the lake. The inspector realized this, though, and was quite lenient in imposing fines for "illegal" fishing. The regulations imposed by the Marine and Fisheries Department stated that First Nations and Métis could have free permits for fishing with nets to 60 metres in length for domestic use throughout the year.

People requisitioned buildings in the community to fix up their nets in preparation for the upcoming season, which opened December 15. Fishing soon became a big business on northern lakes because of the abundance of fish and the increasing ease of access due to the construction of the railway. In order to

protect themselves from large companies, which were quickly discovering the wealth of these lakes and establish a market for their fish, people formed a fishing cooperative in Lac La Biche. Everyone received a share of the profits from the catch, and dues and taxes were used to buy and maintain equipment. While fishing did become very business oriented, there was always a big dance and social held in the community to celebrate the end of the fishing season.

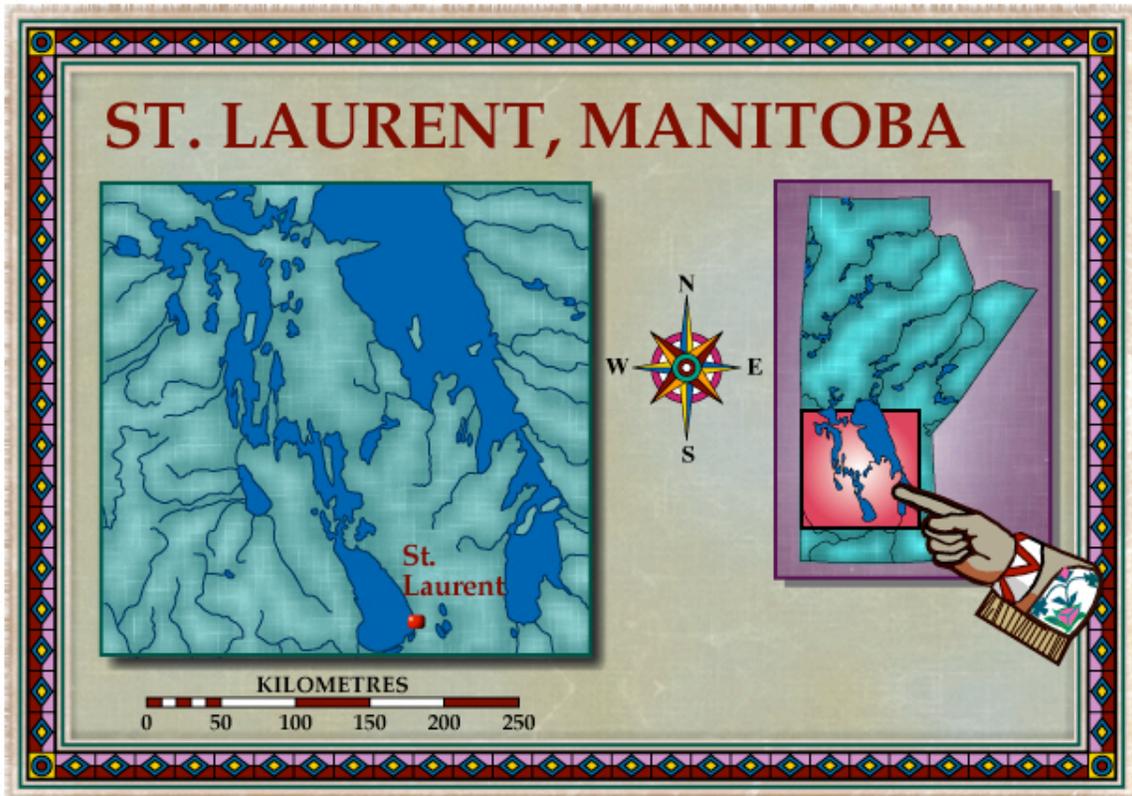
Lac La Biche began to develop as a “modern” town prior to World War I, in general as a result of the construction of the rail lines through the region. The Alberta and Great Waterways Railway was not originally slated to travel from Edmonton to Lac La Biche to Fort McMurray but the builder, J. D. MacArthur, concocted a scheme to get rich off the rich stands of timber and the tourist potential of the town, and thus the line went through the town. The construction of the railroad required many men, and numerous employees came from Lac La Biche. As a result of the opening up of the north, the timber and fishing industries grew, where the fishing industry grossed over \$75,000 and the lumber camps employed 150 or more men in 1917. When the railway reached the town, a grand hotel called the Lac La Biche Inn was built as part of the plan to establish Lac La Biche as a first class tourist resort. People who vacationed along the lake could look forward to steamboat rides, excellent fishing, tennis, a ballroom for dancing, first-class dining, billiards, and miles of soft sand beaches.

As the town flourished, numerous other fur buyers came into the area on the train, paying high prices for furs, prices, which the HBC post could not match. In fact, one buyer paid over \$150 in two days for furs he received from Métis near the north end of the lake. In order to stay competitive and profitable, the post had to act as a buying agent for another firm. In this way they could outbid

other buyers and remain in business. The post also had to diversify its services to remain in business, at times acting as a lumber supply contractor as well as shifting their trade to the fishermen.

A major stumbling block in the development of the town was a horrendous fire, which swept through Lac La Biche in 1919, a fire, which destroyed approximately 7.5 million acres before being extinguished. Many of the town buildings and residences were burned but, by some stroke of good fortune, there were apparently no fatalities. The town was slowly rebuilt, but the days of the HBC fur trade posts was over. Yet, people maintained their hunting-trapping lifestyle and the fur industry remained an important part of the community.

A History of St. Laurent, Manitoba: A Unique Métis Community



St. Laurent, Manitoba is located on the southeast curve of Lake Manitoba, about 76 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg. The community was settled in 1824 by a group of Métis that were forced to leave Pembina after it became American territory. Another group fleeing the Red River flood of 1826 later joined them. The families were attracted to the area by its natural bounty, and subsisted on fishing, collecting berries and hunting the wild game that was abundant in the wooded land. By about 1850, twelve families had established themselves at St. Laurent, including the Lamberts, Chartrands, Lavallées, and Ducharmes. The early 1900s saw a new influx of settlers from Brittany, and the drought of the 1930s brought yet more settlers to the community. Currently, the population stands at about 1100 people, three quarters of which are still Métis.

There is no actual town-site in St. Laurent, rather the houses are randomly scattered along the highway and side roads, which reflect the community's French-Canadian style river lot land-holding system. In this way, the households had access to the water for transportation and fishing, and also land for cultivation.

In the first part of the twentieth century most of the townsfolk lived in log houses constructed out of local poplars using a horizontal French-Canadian design. They were then mudded with yellow gumbo, mud and grass, and painted over with mortar, plaster and lime inside and out. The roof was occasionally covered with hay and black dirt on top to prevent leaks. During the winter straw bales and snow 3 to 4 feet (91 to 122 centimetres) high were piled up around the walls to contain the heat. Larger two storey houses were also common with large living rooms that sometimes served as a dance hall. The

houses were heated by large pot bellied stoves located in the living room and were lighted by kerosene and coal oil lamps.

The local Métis were attracted to the area by the abundant fish and game, and this fishing, hunting and trapping, influenced their diet. In the past, pickerel and whitefish were considered delicacies, and waterfowl, deer and rabbit formed an important aspect of the diet, as did muskrat meat. In the nineteenth century at the height of the great Métis buffalo hunts on the plains, St. Laurent residents also participated in this activity during the summer months. Gardens provided the basic vegetables, and there were many kinds of wild bush berries including bush cranberries, raspberries, strawberries, saskatoon berries, and chokecherries. In less abundance were pinch and gooseberries as well as hazelnuts.

The region's soil consists of glacial till and lake deposits and as a result is not suitable for agriculture. The arid, rocky nature of the soil, however, is excellent for pastureland, haying and raising cattle. As time progressed beef and dairy cattle were raised, as were pigs and chickens, which formed a part of the diet. Women also routinely baked 20 to 25 loaves of bread once or twice a week, and fall canning provided fruit and vegetable provisions for the winter months. Children were taught not to waste food at an early age since food was seen as a gift from the Creator and it was the reward for an honest days work.

In the early years of the settlement, family members made clothing. Into the twentieth century with the advent of catalogue shopping, orders from Eaton's and Simpson's could only be made once or twice a year, therefore clothes production within the family continued. A women's sewing club operated for many years, where woolen socks, mittens and sweaters were knitted for the

entire families. The women were also very skilled at designing moccasins, mittens, and parkas from deer, moose and rabbit hide. The recycling of clothes also occurred whereby old and worn out articles of clothing could be used to make new ones.

St. Laurent traditionally has been a very religious community, due to the close contact and presence of Roman Catholic missionaries. For the first few decades of the settlement's existence church services were attended 48.2 kilometres to the south at St. François-Xavier, until 1859 when a church was built in the community. A few years later in 1861, St. Laurent received its first resident priest, Fr. Simonet. In the 1890s, another church was built, followed the next year by a convent for the Sisters from the Order of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

Roman Catholicism played a very significant role in the lives of the St. Laurent Métis. At one time almost every household contained religious ornaments of some sort such as crucifixes, statuettes, souvenirs of religious events, and palms tacked up in prominent places, as well as holy pictures. Grottos to the Blessed Virgin were also occasionally built in the backyards of homes. At home the main devotion centred on Mary with the family reciting the rosary almost every night. Holy Water was also plentiful and was sprinkled around the house during thunderstorms. Mass was the most observed practice and one had to have a good reason to miss it on Sundays, and it was strictly believed that it was a sin to work on Sundays.

During the Easter season of Lent religious practices were also strictly adhered to. A favorite food or habit was given up to observe the sacrifice Jesus made for all

people there was no dancing or entertainment to distract from the somber Lenten atmosphere. Other religious events occurred throughout the years that were also significant. The visit of the statue of the Blessed Virgin stirred up excitement, as would a rare church sermon in Saulteaux (Plains Ojibwa).

Holy week services and midnight masses at Christmas were occasions of intense spirituality and prayer. The month of May was also a time of celebration, because in Catholicism, May is the month devoted to Mary. The family attended a Benediction every night at 7:30, then on the last day of the month there would be a crowning of a local high school girl as the Queen of May, and additional youth formed her entourage based on their good conduct throughout the year.

Another significant religious celebration was the annual procession in June of the Blessed Sacrament on the feast of Corpus Christi. The procession covered a kilometre consisting of various church organizations each dressed in special attire and carrying group banners. There was a specific order beginning with the Ladies of St. Anne, followed by the Children of Mary, the men's groups, the congregation, the altar boys, the Crusaders and Cadets, and finally the priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament. The procession would recite the rosary, sing hymns and recite the litany of the Sacred Heart as they walked to a special temporary altar. The altar was decorated with flowers and covered in an arch made of trees and branches, where there would be Benediction and prayer for the community.

In recent years, religion and traditional religious practices no longer appear to be as prominent in the lives of the St Laurent Métis. The family rosary, daily Catechism, Catholic action, parish processions, most of the Lenten observances,

the month of Mary and some sacramental ceremonies such as confession have all but disappeared. Some of the other ritual practices such as Sunday Mass, parish retreats, and the use of religious items such as holy water, holy pictures and crucifixes still exist today but in a lesser degree. As in most contemporary western societies, secularization has occurred in St. Laurent, resulting in the church losing the influence it once had over the Métis. As well, many Elders do not understand the changes brought in by Vatican II and seem disenchanted.

In the nineteenth century while some community members went to hunt buffalo on the plains during the summer, others went to Lake Winnipegosis to extract salt from the water on the flats where they would receive \$2.50/100 pounds (45.35 kilograms). By the 1870s, there were three stores operating in St. Laurent. They included the Hudson's Bay Company Supply Store, the meat shop, and the Bonnet followed by the Trudel store, neither of which flourished. In 1939, the major industry of St. Laurent was commercial fishing. This was only a seasonal occupation, however, and this left the non-farmers unemployed during the summer. Farmers in the meantime formed a cooperative and purchased machinery and a wooden building to develop a dairy that operated from 1939-1945, at which time they received a higher return for their milk with companies in Winnipeg.

Fishing, trapping and hunting, however, remained the mainstay of the local economy until the Agricultural and Rural Development Association or ARDA opened a sewing factory in 1966. For many years some people supplemented their income by catching frogs. In 1969, the frog market opened again and pickers received 45 cents/pound providing the frogs were at least one inch (2.54 centimetres) in length. In 1970, 25 tons were shipped from St. Laurent, however,

undoubtedly due to over harvesting of the resources, production the following years decreased and is very little today.

In 1970, the Manitoba Metis Federation bought the old convent and school and converted the property into the Louis Riel Industrial Park. A factory was built in which stepladders were produced and this later expanded into the manufacturing of pews, office chairs, desks, library shelving, and children's furniture and toys. Fishing remains the primary source of income for some residents, with the season beginning in November as the lakes freeze and closing in mid March with the spring thaw. There is no fishing during the summer. A fishing co-op was started in 1970 among St. Laurent, St. Ambroise and Oak Point with \$60.00. Within three years they had increased their assets to \$23, 000.00. The fishermen sell their catch to the co-op who in turn sold it to a company in Winnipeg for a greater price than which they received for the fish.

In the early years of the settlement many Métis did not view education as necessary in their children's life. Still existing on a subsistence economy and dependant on the land and its natural resources, education did not factor into the economic welfare of the community. A successful Métis man was one who could hunt, fish and trap successfully, and as a result provide adequate food, clothing and shelter for himself and his family. As well, it was not unusual for parents to take their older sons or daughters out of school to work at home to help raise the family.

Formal education first began when Fr. Simonet began teaching in 1862. The arrival of Brother Mulvihill saw the first school built and operated under his direction in 1870, with an enrollment varying between 20 to 25 students. By

1897, the enrolment had increased by so much that the Bishop of St. Boniface requested that six sisters from the Franciscan missionaries of Mary be sent to St. Laurent to aid in instruction. Simonet School on the south side of town was often crowded with three or four grades in one classroom and usually only one teacher to instruct.

In the younger grades, the children learned the basics in reading, writing and arithmetic. The pupils read letters of the alphabet on a chart, used slate boards to write on, and for arithmetic they counted on their fingers and used wooden balls attached to pieces of wire. This was the children's introduction to formal education, although some knew how to count and do basic reading before attending school as their mothers taught it to them. In the higher grades the students learned grammar and composition and had to do homework. The nuns were very strict and segregated the boys and girls by having them sit on separate sides of the classroom and at recess having separate play areas. The boys and girls were not even allowed to talk to each other without the permission of the nuns, but as one former student recalls they were still able to exchange notes as they crossed paths in the vestibule or at recess.

In 1902, a second building was constructed to serve as the elementary school for the children on the north end of town and also as a convent for the sisters. Five years later an addition was built creating three classrooms for the 61 pupils, and from 1939 onward high school was taught here. The school had grown so much that in 1964 a new collegiate was built, and in 1970 an elementary school was added making it the only bilingual school in the Interlake Region, serving 450 students. Although in the beginning there was a low percentage of graduates

from school in St. Laurent, over the years education has become much more valued in the community resulting in the graduation of many Métis youth.

The students at the various St. Laurent schools were also punished for speaking Michif-French or Métis French. The educators usually French Canadians or Bretons tried to force their Métis students to speak "standard" French and not Michif-French, which they felt was a bad dialect. Michif-French was brought to the region in 1820. Today, only a handful of elders speak a First Nation language, but a majority of Métis people still speak the Michif-French language at home and among themselves.

Traditionally, the majority of mothers in St. Laurent gave birth at home with the older women of the community acting as midwives, although it was not uncommon for some to have their babies on the trap line or a hunting expedition. Families were very traditionally large averaging six or eight children. This required the children to sleep more than two to a bed, with the boys sometimes sleeping crossways at the foot of the bed to make more room. Girls would usually have rooms to themselves, while the living room sometimes had to double as a bedroom for additional children. For cradles, the primary concern was functionality where anything from a hammock to a home made crib was used.

Most St. Laurent children learned their roles early in life by emulating their parents. Boys learned from their fathers to hunt, fish and trap by accompanying them on many expeditions. The boys were also brought up to help around the farm as much as possible performing any number of chores such as cleaning the barn, haying, feeding the pigs, or tending the garden. After school some boys

earned extra money by sawing a wagon load of wood for the neighbor for \$1.25, or dig seneca root and sell it to the general store for 5 cents a pound. The girls meanwhile would be learning the skills of housekeeping, cooking and sewing. As well, they would help their mothers bring up the younger siblings.

The Métis children of the past learned at an early age through sharing and caring to contribute to the strengthening and to the closeness of family and of the household. Therefore, the family and household chores provide appropriate settings for Métis youth to develop qualities such as self-reliance and communal responsibility, as well as a sense of interdependence with all family members. Family outings were also significant in developing close family relationships. In earlier times, two or three families got together, packed a day's lunch and traveled by horse and buggy to the lake to pick raspberries, dig for seneca root or just have a picnic. These traditional communal values have been eroded within the community since the 1960s.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the romance of many Métis couples would start in their childhood when they first met at school or while visiting families. They caught each other's eye and the relationship developed from there. In some instances, the couple were not allowed to speak to each other, in which case they would write notes to each other expressing their feelings, passed on by a third party. Dating was difficult and rare as the couple usually had a little brother or sister tagging along as the chaperone, and the parents often had very strict rules on when to be home. Courtship did not usually last long, and endogamy or marriage to someone within your own village and of the same Catholic faith was the rule. Marriages were not arranged and the St. Laurent Métis married young, commonly in the late teens or early

twenties. With regard to post marriage residence, the ideal situation for newlyweds sixty years ago was to stay with either of the parents for economic reasons or at least until they had their first child.

Weddings in the past were big celebrations, and were a period of feasting and celebrating the joining of a young couple in a life-long union. The women served meatballs, wild meat, pork, vegetables, pastries and cakes. The bride's father served his choicest homemade wine made from chokecherries, potatoes or rhubarb. At the conclusion of the meal, the bride's uncle toasted the couple. At the conclusion of the meal, Elders gently teased the groom in the duties of being a new husband and how to look after his young bride. Finally, the toast concluded with the singing of a few humorous songs.

After this the furniture was removed from the living room, and musicians playing the fiddle, accordion and spoons entered to begin the night of dancing. Old time waltzes, fox trots, waltz-quadrille, two-steps, heel and toe, and schottisches were played, with a caller directing the square dances. Other popular dances included the Red River jig, "Drops of Brandy" (*la danse de crochets*), the "Broom" Dance (*la danse de balai*), and the "Handkerchief" Dance (*La danse de mouchoire*). After dancing until dawn, during the next evening, people celebrated to honour the bridesmaids and the best men. Sometimes the wedding celebrations stretched into a third night to cut the wedding cake. Within the past 50 years much has changed with regard to courting and wedding ceremonies, due largely once again to the secularization of society.

Despite the presence of strong family values and economic interdependence, it was not always easy to live as an adult and raise and support a family. The

subsistence economy was not always reliable and some families had to turn to others for money or clothing. The families of St. Laurent did their best to help each other out in this regard, selling livestock and farm produce incredibly cheap. The 1930s also had a serious effect on the community. However, happiness in life was possible if a couple had some of the basic economic means, their health, and was willing to work hard.

The transition from subsistence to a cash economy affected the community in a number of ways. In the quest to get more money men often went away from home for the week working at various jobs in Winnipeg, or gone for a few months working in the north. This created some difficulties in family life as some traditional ties were being disrupted. Family values such as making mutual decisions were often replaced by what was most pragmatic at the time. As well, the making of money and economic progress often became the number one priority of the Métis family, as it did of many Euro-Canadian families, at the expense of traditional family values.

Wakes and Burials serve an important social and psychological function. They provide social cohesion and solidarity for the community, as well as social comfort and support for the grieving family. In St. Laurent, the church bell solemnly rang to mark the passing away of a community member. People stopped their activities and listened to the number of strokes; nine signified that it was a man, and seven that it was a woman. In a few hours word would spread on who the individual was, and everyone would then commence preparations for the wake. Traditionally, the wake would last three days and three nights.

Close friends washed and clothed the body of the deceased. The house served as a temporary funeral home, with white drapes hanging on the walls where the body would be placed. The body was set on planks and covered with a white sheet until a casket arrived from the city. A white covered table stood in front of the body with two burning candles, a crucifix and a dish of holy water placed on it. Relatives, friends and neighbors began to arrive in the early evening to pay respect to the deceased and offer condolences to the family.

The main activity during the wake was the reciting of the rosary. About every hour a person kneeling in front of the body in prayer would lead the visitors. People sat quietly together in clusters and spoke only in hushed tones if need be. Throughout the evening people would come and go, with some staying almost for the entire night. The following evening they would start over again, with some school children stopping by during the day to pray briefly.

On the morning of the funeral, pallbearers wearing black armbands and black and white boutonnieres would carefully carry the casket out of the house. A horse drawn sleigh or open carriage then carried it to the church. Depending on the season, a devout procession would accompany the body in cutters, cabooses, sleighs, wagons, buggies, and on foot. Once inside the church the casket was placed on high rollers and covered with a cross shaped black and white pall. The funeral mass would last about an hour and a half, and would be conducted in Latin with traditional hymns being sung throughout. The family members remained seated in the front pew on one side throughout the Mass, while the pall bearers and relatives were seated on the other side. Following the Mass the procession began towards the cemetery, with the church bell tolling one last time.

After the blessing of the grave and prayers for the deceased, the casket was slowly and carefully lowered into the ground. A worker would then go down and remove the crucifix from the top of the casket and hand it over to a family member. After the coffin was firmly nailed shut, family members filled in the grave using a shovel or their bare hands. Most of the people would remain at the gravesite until the burial was complete. Mourning would last a year and a half for a spouse, and one year for the siblings. During this time there was no dancing or listening to music, and family members and close relatives wore black. In more recent years these mourning customs have all but disappeared. Wake vigils held in private homes no longer exist, instead, wake service and prayers are said in the local church or in the funeral home the night before the funeral service. A funeral director is in charge of the arrangements and a hearse carries the body.

Biographies of two St. Laurent Métis

Father Guy Lavallée

Father Guy was the last of 14 children (ten girls and four boys). By the time he came along his parents were already quite old. He said it was like living with his grandparents. There was only one other child at home when he was young and so he does not know his brothers and sisters very well. They are spread across Canada and Father Guy only sees them at weddings, funerals, and other family gatherings. His relationship with them is more like that of aunts and uncles than brothers and sisters. He really felt like an only child at home.

He remembers being spoiled by his parents in a loving, caring home. His father, in retirement, worked as a blacksmith trapped and hunted. Father Guy remembers eating a lot of the wild meat captured by his father. His mother had a big garden and she canned 500 to 600 sealers each year. They had chickens and pigs, as well as a cow for milk, cream, and butter.

Father Guy first got interested in the priesthood through his contact with the students from the local seminary that was located in St. Laurent until 1950. He played hockey with the seminary students and was exposed to their values and ideas. He wanted to emulate them and that eventually led him to the seminary in 1960. He went to university at St. Paul University and the *l'université d'Ottawa*, both in Ottawa, Ontario. He was ordained in 1968 as a Roman Catholic priest in the parish church at St. Laurent, Manitoba. In 1988, he received his Master of Arts (Anthropology) from the University of British Columbia.

Father Guy has many talents. He is a pastor, teacher, lecturer, researcher, and political activist in local, national, and international Indigenous organizations. He has been politically involved with the Manitoba Metis Federation (founding member), Native Council of Canada (founding member), National Indian Brotherhood, and World Council of Indigenous Peoples.

He was the research director for a Métis history project known as "Proud of our Roots". He is documenting oral history and Métis family genealogies in Manitoba. He hopes to help Métis people trace their genealogical roots. Father Guy claims that, "I dream of the day when Métis youth will take their proper place in the universities of this land and contribute to the establishment and the

building of a strong sense of Métis family and nationhood with pride, determination, and vision.”

Mary Louise Lavallée Walstrom

Métis Elder Mary Louise Walstrom (née Lavallée) was born in 1905 in the Métis fishing community of St. Laurent, Manitoba to Baptiste Lavallée and Catherine Chartrand. She was the second oldest child, and had to look after her siblings and help with the family's chores, especially after her older brother Arthur died as a child. Her parents moved to St. Laurent in 1886, the year that they were married.

Her father was an ice fisher, and young Mary Louise assisted her father in the actual fishing and with mending the nets. Sitting in a shed upon the ice, she would wait with her father until the fish were ready to be harvested. During the winter, the family had 20 to 25 nets in Lake Manitoba, and they would use dogs and horses to pull the fish-filled nets out of the water. The fish were, in turn, sorted out and put in different boxes for Jack Fish, Whitefish or Carp. The fish, unprocessed, were sold to purchasing agents who then loaded the product into railway cars.

Unlike some other children, she did not board at the school run by nuns, but walked the 3.2 kilometre journey every day until she was nine years old. When the weather was inclement, Mary Louise had to stay home. The family was poor, and often the local priest would ensure that the Lavallée children were fed while at school. And while in town, she had to purchase the family's supplies, especially what food they could not produce themselves. Like most Métis women of her generation, she wore clothing, which her mother, a seamstress for

Eaton's, made. Other children were jealous of her "store quality" and colourful dresses, which her mother made so lovingly.

The big event in the St. Laurent Métis community was the *Réveillon* or New Years Eve celebration. The family would travel to the festivities in a horse-drawn sleigh covered in blankets warmed by hot bricks. The whole community got together, and it was a great opportunity to learn the latest news. Everybody danced, sang and listened to the fiddle players playing traditional Métis music. She often had to hold her baby siblings when her mother danced, usually square dances. Marie Louise remembered that everyone spoke "French mixed with Saulteaux", or Saulteaux influenced-Michif at these and other occasions when they were among other Métis. The Church played a great role in her life as well – every Sunday she attended Mass.

Marie Louise had to grow up quite early: at age nine she quit school and went to work as a domestic and a labourer for a farmer's wife who was unable to work and look after her children at the sometime. Her father forced her to leave her school over her mother's objections, but her father said it was necessary to bring in extra income for the family. At the time, young Mary Louise felt sorry for the state, which her father left her in. She only had a grade three education and she had to work for an English-Canadian lady, Mrs. Peacock, without knowing any English. She stayed with the family for three years, and she only got to stay with her own family in December. Despite the isolation from her family she loved babysitting because she loved little children. While babysitting for the Peacocks' she still managed to help her father with the chores.

As an adult she had no regrets because she felt that somebody had to help her father support the family. She fished and sawed wood during the winter. It could be dangerous on the frozen lake: people would fall through the ice after being caught in a storm. In one storm in 1927, five people perished. She also helped her father during haying season when he worked for local farmers. Another activity besides fishing and farming was muskrat hunting. She enjoyed eating muskrats. Her mother would wash them overnight in water, baking soda and vinegar. The animals were then wrapped in bacon and onions and roasted.

Ste. Madeleine

Throughout the Prairie West, during the later years of the Depression, whole Métis road allowance communities were uprooted and families were forced off the land. Many of these Métis, while living on the same piece of land for several years, were considered squatters since they could not afford to pay their property taxes. Since their taxes were in arrears, the state felt that it had a legal means to move them off the land through the 1935 *Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (PFRA)*. The *PFRA* was a piece of legislation, which converted marginal seeded land into communal pastureland. This was meant to restore nutrients to the soil, after decades of poor soil management. Unfortunately, only those farmers who owed no property taxes received compensation for lands appropriated from the government. Ste. Madeleine, Manitoba, located in the southwest corner of the province near the Saskatchewan border, was one of several Prairie communities affected by the *PFRA*. In 1938, Ste. Madeleine's 20 families were forcibly removed from their home community in order to create grazing land for the district.

Ste. Madeleine was a thriving Métis community from 1902 to 1940. The Métis who first settled the district in the 1880s and 1890s, came largely from St. François-Xavier and Baie St. Paul, Manitoba. Located near the left bank of the Assiniboine River, in scrub bush country, the land was ideally suited for the Métis because it allowed them to grow fodder for their livestock, cultivate gardens, harvest wood, trap and hunt. The residents of Ste. Madeleine were not farmers since their land was not conducive for cereal agriculture. As a result, local Métis made a living as farm labourers, in addition to hunting, trapping and gathering. Families lived in log cabins made with nearby tree stands. Some of the Métis family names in Ste. Madeleine were Pelletier, Flammond, Ducharme, Boucher, Bercier, Bellehumeur, Fleury, Venne, Vermette, Lemay, Fisher and MacKay. Many of these families were related; therefore, Ste. Madeleine was a community of extended families. In 1913, twelve families constructed a log church, paid for by basket socials and personal donations, thus saving local residents a 21kilometer journey to St. Lazare, Manitoba. Unfortunately, parishioners had difficulty in convincing the local priest to conduct Mass at the church, which he considered too "rustic". In 1922, a bilingual school, Belliveau School, was built for grades one through eight. During the Depression, there were approximately 250 residents of Ste. Madeleine.

Louis Pelletier, an Elder originally from Ste. Madeleine, felt that the community was an ideal place to make a living:

It was a nice place. Lots of bush, lots of sloughs, lots of hay. Good living place. People could make lots of hay for their stock in winter. Put a little crop in, nice garden and everything. Everything was nice. Lots of good wood. One of the best places there was. (Zelig p.111)

Joe Venne, another Elder, indicated that people in the community worked hard:

...There was trapping to be gotten, and wood to be gotten and sold. That was their main living for many years. We hauled wood into town to sell

because everybody was using wood at the time. I saw up to thirteen or fourteen teams going to Binscarth one day to sell a load of wood each. (Zelig p. 35)

In *Ste. Madeleine: Community Without A Town*, Métis Elders offer a particularly poignant discussion of the destruction of their community by the government and their eventual dispersal to various parts of the Prairies. It is interesting to note that while the Elders lost all their material possessions and sense of place, they have retained their dignity, and sense of humour. In the book, the Elders painfully describe how authorities tried to shoot children's dogs, and more disturbing how their homes and church were burned in what appears to be a deliberate and concerted effort by municipal, provincial and federal authorities to obliterate their presence from the area. After the community was dispersed, many Métis moved to nearby Selby Town, Fouillard's Corner and St. Lazare, all along the east bank of the Assiniboine River. In 1942, children were forced to attend the Gambler School. This final event signaled the end of their community. Harry Pelletier, a war veteran and resident of Ste. Madeleine, felt that moving the Métis out of this community was very cruel.

(They) pushed them out of their homes. If they didn't do this, didn't do that, they'd burn them out...If they didn't move their stuff out, if they wanted to stay, their houses would be burned down...They made slaves out of the Metis. In St. Lazare, they made them cut brush and build bridges...They had to go in water to build those bridges, in the winter. And they pretty near froze to death, breaking ice and getting them to build those cement forms for the bridge. That's cruelty. That's not helping people at all...(Zelig p.145)

Others such as Joe Venne argued that while the land cannot be returned to the Métis some sort of healing gesture is needed because:

They shouldn't have been pushed out of there because...it was their homes. They felt as if they were killed. They felt that they were dead. They had no home. They felt that they had no place to go. They would be just like a dog. (Zelig p.71)

Maurice Ledoux, only a small child when his family was pushed out of Ste. Madeleine, remembers that his family really struggled to survive after being dispersed:

We moved away from Ste. Madeleine because the people were chased out of their community...When we left Ste. Madeleine some of the people lived in a small community called Selby Town, and the other community was a ways from there. And I was only able to go to school in the wintertime because we had to cross the river otherwise to go to school. And another reason why we never went to school very much was because we had to follow our family, we had to follow our father. He used to go out working for farmers and then we used to travel a lot. My father also trapped and he worked for farmers a lot. Besides trapping, my father used to cut posts in the valley. Then he also stooked, he did thrashing, and he also cut some scrub, clearing bush for the farmers...In those days it seemed like the Métis people weren't allowed to go to school with the white people. (Fleury, 1999)

Before the dissolution of the community, the Métis were always in high spirits and tried to alleviate their poverty by being festive. For instance, Joe Venne argued that the Métis were "...a nation of people that liked pleasure... and had a lot of parties..." (Zelig p. 43) Agnes Boucher also stressed that the Ste. Madeleine Métis were very closely knit and when they celebrated, their communal instincts always took over:

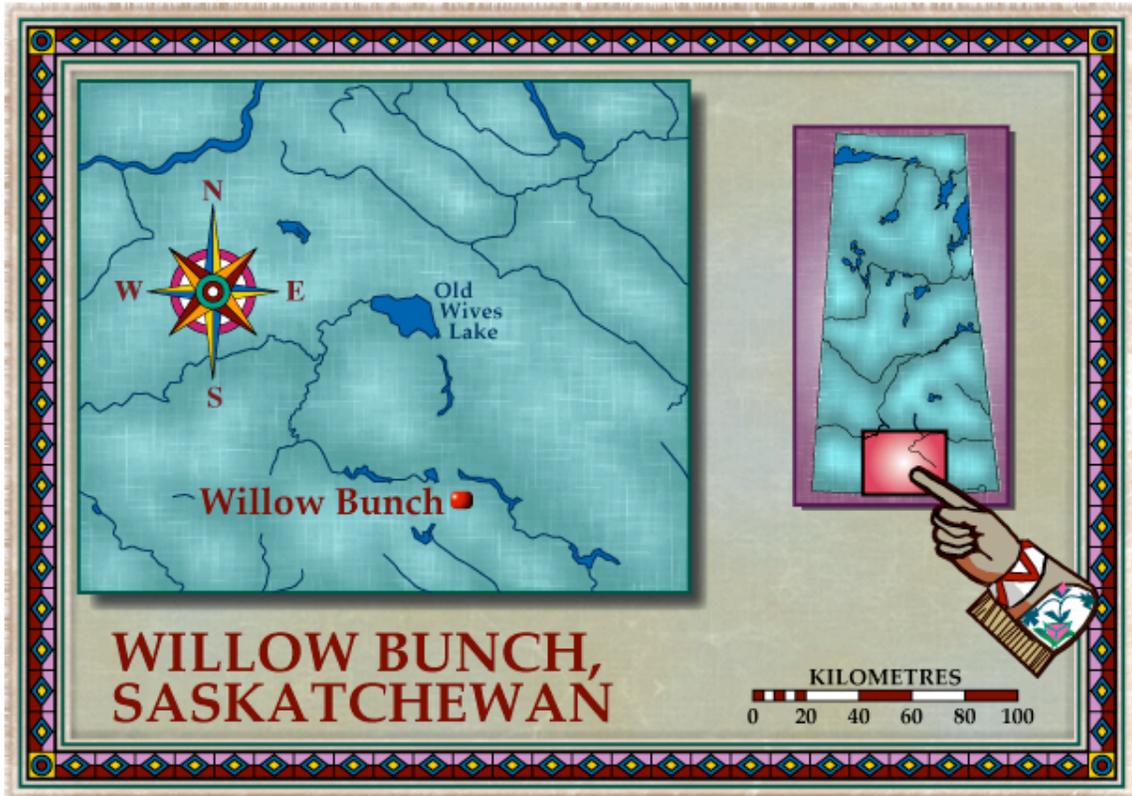
We'd start about eight o'clock and go until daybreak... It was so cold that nobody went home. We were milking cows for breakfast. Everybody went to help milk the cows. We made a great big pot of porridge and everybody had porridge, right before they went home. (Zelig p.98)

Even when it came to fundraising, local Métis retained a sense of fun. Norman Fleury from nearby St. Lazare says that basket socials were popular among local Métis:

They used to also have basket socials, they 'd sell the baskets at the dances and that's how they raised the funds... I remember going to a dance in Binscarth. They called it the "Corner", and they, they were selling baskets...if somebody liked to have a little liquor...the person who made the basket would hide a little bottle of whisky in one of the baskets. And that way if somebody knew about it, the sale went much higher. And if there was going to be another dance then they had funds to go to another dance. (Fleury 1999)

The Willow Bunch Métis

Willow Bunch, one of the oldest settlements in southern Saskatchewan, is a picturesque community located in a scenic valley approximately 150 kilometers southeast of Moose Jaw. Its most prominent landmarks are its Roman Catholic Church and museum, formally a Catholic public school. Originally known by the Métis as "*Talle-de-Saules*" or "clump of willows", Willow Bunch was originally a "*hivernant*" or "wintering" camp founded by Red River Métis in the early 1870s. In 1870, 75 Métis families from the Red River set up camp at "*La Coulée Chappelle*", a few kilometers west of the present village. In the early 1870s, the area around Willow Bunch was relatively free of habitation. The nearest First Nations were Nakota (Assiniboine) to the east and Lakota (Sioux) to the west (Wood Mountain). There were very few French Canadians in the area until the 1890s. McGillis, Beaupré, Bellegarde, Morin, Hamelin, Lacerte, Ouellette, Bonneau, Beaudry, Chartrand, Roy, Gosselin and Gaudry were some of the common Métis family names present in Willow Bunch in its early history. Until 1880, most Métis in the area settled at the present site of Wood Mountain or "*La Montagne de Bois*" approximately 100 kilometers to the west. In 1880, Willow Bunch became a permanent settlement under the leadership of Jean-Louis Légaré, a French-Canadian trader, who had empathy for the Métis.



Willow Bunch was an ideal location for the Métis to harvest natural resources. Geologically, it is located in a glacial valley, with plenty of water and wood nearby. Some of the animals in the area that the Métis hunted included pronghorn antelope, mule deer, white tail deer, elk (wapiti), bison, jack rabbits, badgers, porcupines, snow geese, Canada geese, prairie chickens, mallards and mudhens. Coyotes, foxes, badgers and beaver were trapped. The occasional cougar, prairie wolf and prairie grizzly were also hunted or trapped. Nearby lakes such as Willow Bunch Lake and Fife Lake provided the Métis with fresh pickerel, and jackfish. Saskatoon berries, chokecherries and wild strawberries were abundant in the region's many valleys and coulees. The Métis also made *kinnikinnik* from the willow tree bark and smoked it on its own or mixed it with tobacco. Even after the disappearance of the plains bison, the Métis continued

to use nature's bounty. In fact, as late as the 1881 census, the Métis at Willow Bunch were listed as "*chasseurs*" or hunters.

Willow Bunch has a unique, colourful and for the Métis, a colonized history. The local Métis stayed neutral during the 1885 Resistance, thanks in large part to the efforts of Jean-Louis Légaré and other French Canadians who knew that military resistance against the Canadian state would only lead to oppression against the Métis. Despite opposition from Métis Elders, who felt that it was treasonous to work against the interests of the Batoche Métis, Légaré managed to convince 40 Willow Bunch Métis to patrol, in partnership with the North West Mounted Police, a large area of southwestern Saskatchewan during the 1885 Resistance.

By the 1885 Resistance, there were few economic opportunities open to the Willow Bunch Métis other than ranching and farming. However, becoming ranchers and farmers was not always easy for them. One Willow Bunch Métis, Edouard Beaupré (1881-1904), the "Willow Bunch" Giant, even worked as a circus freak and a sideshow oddity before dying in 1904. (Sadly, Edouard's family only received the body in 1990, after it was on display at the "l'université de Montréal for several decades). Many Métis were worried that incoming settlers would not respect their title to the land; therefore, they petitioned the federal government in order to receive title to the lands, which they occupied. However, the Willow Bunch Métis did not receive scrip until 1900 – with about 100 families receiving scrip certificates. Scrip speculators worked to deprive the Métis of their land base, leading to wide-scale dispossession and poverty. While waiting to receive title to the land, many Métis left the community for better opportunities elsewhere, while others worked as ranch-hands, and did other menial work. Some such as Alexandre "Catchou" McGillis, Antoine Gosselin and

Louis Chartrand had large cattle and sheep ranches, although their successes were the exception.

After 1900, French Canadians largely excluded the Métis from the public life of the Willow Bunch. In fact, early in the twentieth century, the Métis were actually removed from the village by the French-Canadian elite and were forced to live in a nearby road allowance community known as the "Métis hamlet". French-Canadian pioneers also brought cultural, religious, economic and political organizations such as the *Société St. Jean-Baptiste*, *l'ordre de Jacques Cartier*, *Les Chevaliers de Colombe* (Knights of Columbus) and *les caisses populaires* (credit unions), which were not only alien to the Métis, but also largely excluded them from membership. The French Canadians also brought racism with them. Their French-Canadian neighbours derisively called the Métis "*les michifs*".

In 1923, Père Clovis Rondeau, a French-Canadian Priest, wrote a virulently racist community history of Willow Bunch, which argued that the Métis:

..had no liking for culture, nor were they industrious...They were superior to the Indians because of their strength, their intelligence, their appearance and sometimes by their complexion that was lighter than that of the Indian...Many of them are erascible (sic), inconsistent, wasteful, and love alcoholic beverages. They cannot work consistently nor can they adapt themselves to a routine of life...Today, with a few exceptions, the Metis are rather miserable. After the Metis rebellion, they were abandoned and now appear to be a race that us slowly disappearing...The inequity of the races; Indian, Metis and Civilized, is a fact, a reality that has been evident for centuries, a reality that the facts of history have never denied...(Rondeau pp. 8-12)

What is remarkable about this passage is that it was written in 1923 and translated and re-released by local French Canadians in 1970. No introduction or disclaimer to the re-released version of this book was written to disavow, what could only be called the racist leanings of a priest who obviously dishonoured the universal creed of his Church.

Despite such racism, intermarriage between Métis, and French Canadians and French in Willow Bunch still continued. Nevertheless, the orientation of the community was solidly French-Canadian and most Métis were assimilated. Those who would not or could not be assimilated were marginalized. In the late 1940s, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation government, in Saskatchewan, developed a Métis colony and farm coop (the Lacerte Coop) in Willow Bunch, which while desiring the Métis to become more self-sufficient was paternalistic and integrationist. Many Métis relocated to urban centres or to Green Lake and many other northern locales. Very few Métis remained in Willow Bunch by the 1940s. In the 1991 census, only 30 people out of a possible 1003 in Willow Bunch and the surrounding rural municipality declared themselves as Métis. The Métis were marginalized for decades, most left the community, and it was only recently that the Métis became empowered, that some moved back to Willow Bunch. Today, the Willow Bunch Métis community extends into Assiniboia, St. Victor, Lisieux, Scout Lake, Rockglen, Canopus, and Wood Mountain.

Questions and Activities

- 1) How are these communities – Lac La Biche, St. Laurent, Ste. Madeleine and Willow Bunch similar? How are they different? What common experiences would the Métis in these various communities have encountered?
- 2) Which community had the strongest ties to the fur trade? Why?
- 3) Which community is a fishing community?
- 4) How did people make a living in these communities? Did this vary over time and space?
- 5) How did racism and church and state actions affect the Métis in these communities?
- 6) In which of these communities do you think Métis identity is the strongest? Why do you think that this is so?
- 7) Research other traditional Métis communities in Western Canada such as Camperville, Manitoba, Buffalo Narrows, Saskatchewan or St. Albert, Alberta. How are these communities similar to the ones on this module? How are they different?
- 8) Be studying these communities, you now realize that the Métis are a very diverse people with many different experiences. You will also realize how difficult it would be for a national governing agency such as the Métis National Council (MNC) to provide programming for these diverse

Métis communities. If you were in the MNC what would some of the policies that you would develop to promote the social wellbeing, economy and culture of these four Métis communities. What are some of the problems and concerns of these community residents? How do you think that these could be addressed?

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