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SASKATCHEWAN
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SASKATCHEWAN
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Born and raised in Fish Creek where his father was the ferryman.
- Stories of the Riel Rebellion of 1885 as told to the informant by his father.

(Often difficult to follow because of inadequate command of English.)

Carol: Okay, you were born in Fish Creek and what did your parents do?

Octave: My father used to be a ferryman in Fish Creek there for 28 years.

Carol: And are both your father and your mother Metis?

Octave: Yes.

Carol: And where were they born?

Octave: In Winnipeg. The Red River settlement. (laughs)
(Inaudible)

Carol: Did your mother and father come right here from the Red River settlement?

Octave: Yeah.

Carol: Do you know why?

Octave: Well, why? To come and take homestead.

Carol: They couldn't get homestead there?

Octave: Well, I guess it was - I don't know - there must have been something wrong.

Carol: Do you know where your grandparents were from?

Octave: I guess my grandfather was born in Manitoba there.

Carol: That was your father's father?

Octave: Yes.

Carol: And what about your father's mother?

Octave: Well, she came from the same place.

Carol: And your mother's parents?

Octave: From the same place too.

Carol: And were they all Metis?

Octave: Yes. My mother, her father - he came from Montreal but we always called ourselves Metis so that's that. Metis and somebody else, they are just as good as the rest.

Carol: What did they do at Fish Creek for a living?

Octave: That is what I tell you, my father was a ferryman there for 28 years.

Carol: For 28 years. Did he have any land?

Octave: Yes, he had land.

Carol: Did he farm the land as well?

Octave: You know, he was keeping the ferry there by farming.

Carol: How much land?

Octave: He had one quarter.

Carol: One quarter section?

Octave: That is not a section...

Carol: No, but one quarter section?

Octave: Yeah.

Carol: When you were a boy, do you remember people talking much about the Rebellion of 1885?

Octave: Oh yeah.

Carol: What did they used to say?

Octave: What they used to say. The government put them in the pot pretty good that time. Take everything away you see, nothing to be... well, he had hunting and that still.

Carol: When you say the government took everything, what do you mean, everything?

Octave: Well, then he had nothing. He didn't even have a knife, my father and my mother. They come and clean everything up. Not a spoon or a knife. And at that time my father used to say... Fort Carlton here, you know where Fort Carlton is?

Carol: Yeah.

Octave: Well, the government gets the people use all freight from Carlton to Green Lake there. And it was two La Vallee with them and he said, "Before we climb up the hill," well it was the nighttime, you know, out there and up and up. In the afternoon La Vallee said, "We will make a bargain." He said, "You know there was somebody stealing there at the Fort and I see lots of people went across there. What we'll find, well, that belong to us, we'll divide into three." It was three.

...maybe fifteen, twenty two-wheel wagons at that time and two-wheel come in sight. And just after that, my father said, "We made about oh, a couple of miles. Oh," he said, "I had a big pile of stuff." He said, "I screamed those guys. Oh," he said, "scissors, knife, tea, sugar, all kinds of stuff. I hollered and well, what we do now? If we leave it here, the fellow bring it here, he would come back and come and get it." He said, "Well, why don't we haul that stuff another direction about a mile and half from there." And this La Vallee said, "By God, we have got to make a fast trip. We have to go day and night to Lac Vert and try to come back and save that stuff." He said, "When we come back the stuff was there all right." He said, "Right there we could buy the stuff." Only milk, mink, lynx, no mink (inaudible). You know the Hudson's Bay used to buy lots of food. Knives, sugar, tea, all kinds of that stuff, all the bank, right there.

Carol: Was what?

Octave: Divide the stuff by three, yeah. And he said, "When we come home to my spot there, a big bunch of people just happened to come there for a visit." He said, "I told my mother what we got. Fine lots of stuff. 'Don't let the kids go in there so nobody finds out.' And then the old lady was watching nobody should go to those wagons there." They said the next day, after the bunch went, by God, they had so much stuff. Right the next day, his father used to live at Fish Creek here, he said, "I brought him some knives, I brought him some scissors, I brought him thread and, the people had nothing. Oh, those people there, after you got that stuff, was welcome to them."

Carol: This was the soldiers from the east that took all this?

Octave: Well, my father said it wasn't the soldiers took them away. It was those fellows freighting. You know, from Winnipeg over there, freighting that stuff to there.

Carol: Was this after the battle of Batoche?

Octave: Yeah, right after the battle.

Carol: And it was the men that worked on the freighters?

Octave: Yeah, yeah, that is what they figure. He said - my father used to live across the river here about six, seven mile, maybe more.

Carol: But how did they manage to do it? There couldn't have been very many fellows working on the freighters. The soldiers must have protected them. Must have let them do it, eh?

Octave: I suppose in them days the Metis was here and there all spread around. And he said he had a nice team of horses, he lost his team of horses and a pinto colt.

Carol: Your father?

Octave: My father.

Carol: Did they steal his horses then?

Octave: Yeah, his horses was gone and one of his uncles came there and he said, "Johnny, I will give you that horse with the buggy now, nice harness, for that team of horses. And if we find the horses, well, you could take your colt, you know, off those men." That was a nice colt. "Well," he said, "I thought by God, I lose the horses." And then he said, "I told them, 'All right, but you have got to come with me.'" He said, "Right the next morning we went all along the river where we thought he used to stay the horses. Nothing! At last we get to Saskatoon there the next day. We had to go across. There was no ferry but we hollered. Another fellow could talk good English and a fellow came there with the roof." They cross it and he said the horses swim across. By the time they climb up the horse, by God, this colt was tied up there. He said, "I told him, that is my horse, that is my colt." He said, "You

(inaudible)." All the soldiers were there. They said all the policemen and everything was there. He said to that old man, "That horse belongs to me." Now he make out like it was his because he was a government sight then, you see. The fellow said, "By God, I bought that horse and I like to see the man who would take that horse from me." He said, "I have the halter. Johnny, give me the halter, that one." He take that old man's halter off and he put his own on. "Well, I give you the same chance. I like to see the man that take that horse from me." (Inaudible) He was a real fighter that man. And it was a fellow owned it from Fish Creek here. He was in a hospital there; he got wounded in Batoche. He said he was in the hospital early in the start of the war. He said he was getting on.

Carol: He was what?

Octave: He was getting all right, you know.

Carol: He was getting better?

Octave: Yeah, he was better.

Carol: What was his name?

Octave: Delorme, Joseph Delorme. "And by God, a bunch went this morning, at noon, those bunch of freighters. By God, he took me aside and he said, 'I bet you that thing is there.' So we followed them. It was getting dark. "Well, Johnny, I will tell you something. You go up the hill, those big hills there, try to catch the biggest. I will make a little fire. Those horses will be in that bunch; I will go and steal them." 'Oh,' he said, 'I'll wait there, I wait there.' He said, "I hear talking. I could hear the horses was coming and I keep on a little farther and you soon see the horses. By God, we come back and he had the team of horses." He told me, "I have to wait so long." Those people were thinking those horses was tied up to a wagon. That was his own horse. He didn't steal them because that was his own horses.

Carol: Did they talk about - were a lot of houses burned down or...?

Octave: No, no, they didn't burn no houses.

Carol: I thought that - some people told me about them burning houses.

Octave: Oh, maybe some places but I never heard. Well, what they burned down, the Fort at Carlton there. They stamped out the fire there.

Carol: But you say that they stole a lot of things?

Octave: Oh, well, they took everything from the people.

Carol: Why do you think they did that?

Octave: Well, to bring that home to their families.
(Inaudible) Those soldiers, what they did was all the freight where they had the wagon and everything.

Carol: Why did they do that? Was it right to steal all those things?

Octave: Well I guess they thought they didn't have no right there, for sure, to come and take everything without permission to do it.

Carol: Why did the fighting take place in the first place?

Octave: Why? It was for nothing. After the Rebellion was finished, Riel wanted the money from the people, you see. Scrip we call it. No, that is where it started.

Carol: Riel wanted the money...

Octave: For everybody.

Carol: He wanted everybody to get the money?

Octave: All those Metis to have so much money, you see. No, you won't get it. And after it was through, he turned back and gave them. Why they didn't give them the first time?

Carol: You mean after it was all over, the government gave it?

Octave: Yeah.

Carol: Well, do you think they would have given it if there was no fighting?

Octave: No, they didn't want to.

Carol: Who didn't want?

Octave: The government didn't want.

Carol: Didn't want to give it before that?

Octave: And after the Rebellion, what they get? He said if they give them before, then everything would have been good.

Carol: So who's fault was it then?

Octave: Well, to say the truth, that was us. It was Gabriel Dumont, Gabriel Dumont.

Carol: It was his fault?

Octave: It was his fault. Riel, he was in the States and he was a sheriff there.

Carol: Was Gabriel Dumont and those people, did they have the

right to fight?

Octave: He had no right. But when you make it, that was on their own, pick up a bunch, you see it starting.

Carol: And you think that was - was that okay as far as you see or...?

Octave: That was not okay. You say Gabriel and Riel was such a smart man. He should have told the poor Metis what is the end result. Fight with a government like that, you'll fight all your life and you will never win. But, he was strong for that anyway. He made the first one at Winnipeg over there.

Carol: Did people talk more about Dumont or Riel? Which one did they talk most about?

Octave: Well, they believed Riel more than they believed Gabriel, you see.

Carol: Who believed?

Octave: The people.

Carol: The Metis people around here?

Octave: Yeah, yeah, that was (inaudible). (laughs)

When he make that battle at Fish Creek there, it was only forty-five come. And it was maybe a couple thousand policemen there. At night two cowards there run away to the camp at Batoche (inaudible). You know, those old people had their boy there and everything. They were called to go and help them. Only twenty-five got to the river here and about six miles from here, they meet Gabriel Dumont.

Carol: Who was this that met Gabriel Dumont?

Octave: Yeah, he was running away from his bunch.

Carol: Who was this?

Octave: Gabriel Dumont.

Carol: Gabriel Dumont was running away.

Octave: He was running away. That old man took his rifle and he said to Gabriel, he said, "I'll tell you this now. If you don't turn back, I'll shoot you right here. You get our kid in trouble and now you going to run away." He had to run away. And it was too...

Carol: When was this, after the fighting was over or...?

Octave: No, no, that is the time he was fighting at - Gabriel - at Fish Creek there, and he had to turn back. And it was two

English boys there from Prince Albert that was with the Metis there. My father said they used to be brave boys. And now they are along, fighting with those was all English people. "Wait till our bunch come. Wait. Our bunch is gonna come. We'll give it to you." And when, before he get there, those fellows said we put on our comrade. That shot went off, you see. Those people heard that over there and they said, "You heard that shot, that is our front." It was only twenty-five, twenty-six with Gabriel Dumont. When they see the bunch coming, the whole bunch run away.

Carol: The bunch of English?

Octave: Yeah. Every one of them.

Carol: You mean the English from the east, you mean? From Ontario.

Octave: Yeah, yeah. From Ontario, they are soldiers. And this old man MacIntosh, he was an Englishman. He had a store there not very far from the battlefield in Fish Creek. And many time he used to tell him, "MacIntosh, you better move your family from there. Them Metis, they come and kill you." MacIntosh said, "No, I am going to stay right here." For sure, at night, the people used to go there and buy from him. And the camp was all around there. Those Metis used to go there and he used to sell them stuff. Old MacIntosh, he told me that hundred times. And he said, one day he said, "Middleton and his bunch went all around and," he said, "Gabriel came at night there to buy some stuff. Middleton told me, he said, 'Oh, we are safe here. There is nobody around.'"

Carol: Did Riel carry a gun?

Octave: No.

Carol: What about Dumont?

Octave: Oh Dumont, he was a first-class shooter. When he shoot, he didn't shoot for nothing. He said, "They told me, 'No, no, no,'" he said, "I know better. I told them, 'They are all around you. I know (inaudible).'" He said, "I know Riel and Dumont was there." It was a little hill that he was on top that. That is the time he took his picture. Maybe you seen that picture, Gabriel's.

Carol: Yes.

Octave: Well, that is the time he took it from there. He said, "Look, there is no Metis around. And with his (inaudible). I knew he was in fault because he came there." (Inaudible)

Carol: Where did you say that picture was taken?

Octave: At Fish Creek.

Carol: At Fish Creek. Did you know, when you were a boy, did you know Dumont?

Octave: Oh, yes, I know Gabriel Dumont.

Carol: Did people like him?

Octave: Oh yes, he was a good man. But he got this land right here by the creek. That was his land. He sold that, after he come back. He run away. It was seven years, seven years.

Carol: Because they were after him?

Octave: Oh yeah, he would have been caught.

Carol: He would have been caught?

Octave: Yeah, but the government gave him, he come back and everybody is free. That was seven, eight years.

Carol: Yeah, everybody - the government didn't go after them then when he came back in the '90s.

Octave: No, that was finished then.

Carol: Right. Could he read and write?

Octave: That is something. I don't think so.

Carol: You don't think so?

Octave: I don't think so, what would he write. No, I don't think so.

Carol: Was he religious?

Octave: Oh, like that.

Carol: So, so?

Octave: (laughs) Yeah.

Carol: Not like Riel?

Octave: No. Riel, that was some kind of a preacher.

Carol: He was some kind of preacher?

Octave: We used to have some policeman here in Batoche, an uncle. He used to stay at my place there and he came there with a (inaudible)... for me and McKay. Old McKay said...

Carol: Just a minute, a policeman came to your house...

Octave: Yeah, he came and sleep there...

Carol: With a guy by the name of McKay?

Octave: McKay, yeah.

Carol: When was this? When you were a boy?

Octave: Oh, that time... well, I was a big boy then.

Carol: About how old would you have been?

Octave: I guess I would be about fifteen or twenty.

Carol: About fifteen or twenty?

Octave: Yeah.

Carol: Okay.

Octave: And this McKay was saying, he said, "That Gabriel, it was not the man for money." He said, "The first battle we come here at Duck Lake when we meet. The English shoot first, you see."

Carol: He said the English shot first?

Octave: He said, "It was an old man there. He was blind and he was going to take a rifle from a policeman and the policeman shot him dead with stuff." And Gabriel, he said, "I shoot myself up." Right now, he had a cross.

Carol: Riel had a cross?

Octave: Yeah, everybody was shooting everybody. Nobody could struck him. He said, "At last, by God, it looked almost like it didn't touch the ground." He said that is the time they run away.

Carol: He protected himself with the cross?

Octave: Yeah, yeah, he had nothing.

Carol: And nobody could shoot him because he had...

Octave: Like somebody, like he didn't touch the ground, they said. That is the time Gabriel had the bullet, you see.

Carol: I see, that is when Gabriel got shot at Batoche?

Octave: Yeah, at Duck Lake.

Carol: Oh, that was Duck Lake.

Octave: And Riel told him, he said, "Get away, don't come too close." But it was too late, he got the bullet right - you could see where the bullet was. He could have run away.

Carol: He could have run away?

Octave: Well sure, Gabriel Dumont went in time and he had two

horses. The best horses that was around here. And he told Riel, he said, "Let us run away," and Riel said, "No." He said, "If I run away, I have put too much people in trouble." Gabriel Dumont run away. And then he reach that big lake there, that big lake. And then he is hiding. And he said it was five hundred behind him.

Carol: Five hundred people behind him, behind Dumont?

Octave: Yeah, five hundred policemen. He said, "I talked to myself. At five hundred horses, just as good as my horse," and he run away and hide then. He was hiding over there. That lake was so big (inaudible)... and one side there, it was close you see, about a hundred yards. And he was watched there and those fellows started to holler at him, "You better give up and give up."

Carol: He was running away and the fellows were hollering at him?

Octave: Yeah.

Carol: To give up?

Octave: To give up. And nobody want to go in the lake because they know he was such a good shooter. All afternoon, the people keep him there, the policemen. At night he went out of sight and he went across.

Carol: He ran away at night?

Octave: And he, what you call on foot, he went across...

Carol: On a footbridge?

Octave: Eh?

Carol: On a footbridge, a little bridge?

Octave: No bridge, on the lake.

Carol: Oh, he just ran through the lake?

Octave: Yeah, I guess there was swimming in some places.

Carol: Oh, I see, he ran on foot.

Octave: On horseback.

Carol: Oh, on horseback, okay.

Octave: Now he was watching and he hollered at him and all that. The fellow said, "By God, he went around. By God, he got away, Dumont did." (Inaudible)

Carol: Do you think he was right to run away?

Octave: Eh?

Carol: Do you think he was right to run away?

Octave: He was right until he didn't want the rope. (laughs)

Carol: No point in staying, eh?

Octave: He would get the rope like that other one did.

Carol: Like Riel. No point in staying. Okay, thank you.

Did Gabriel talk about the Rebellion much when you knew him? Do you ever remember him talking about it?

Octave: Oh, no. He didn't talk much.

Carol: He didn't talk much about it?

Octave: No. Only when he come back he worked in Buffalo Bill's Circus there, you know.

Carol: Uh huh, the Wild West Show.

Octave: Yeah. He never found this fellow to compete with him. He went to every country but nobody could beat him.

Carol: Nobody could beat him?

Octave: No, that is why he had those medals all over.

Carol: He got all the medals for winning all the events, yeah. Okay.

(End of Side A)

(End of Interview)

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