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PIERRE DORION

Pierre Dorion was a 12 year old schoolboy in Cumberland House when Jim Brady worked there as a field officer.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Early attempts to organize a Metis Society in Cumberland House.
- Brady's work in the community, particularly his efforts to get jobs in the area.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Pierre Dorion is a resident of Cumberland House and was a young boy when Jim Brady was living in that community from 1948-1951. He recalls Brady and his activities in the community - including his efforts to get people jobs, his attempt to get a Metis Society established, the formation of an informal village council, etc.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I'm speaking to Pierre Dorion. I'm wondering if you could tell me when you first met Jim Brady and what were the circumstances.

Pierre: Well, he was here in Cumberland as a field officer, conservation officer I guess is what they were then, and working, he was in Cumberland House.

Murray: Was he there to sort of explain the programs of the government, was that part of his job?

Pierre: What I think his job was to get work for the men around Cumberland and he had a project going across the lake here on McDonald's Bay somewhere. They were cutting pulp wood. Looking after jobs for the men.

Murray: That was his main concern, eh, was to find jobs for the people in Cumberland?

Pierre: Well, not really. His main job was he was the field officer here. He started this Metis Society also in Cumberland House, you know. He started what they call the Human Rights now, I think, him and his partner. I forget what his name was.

Murray: Not Malcolm Norris?

Pierre: Yeah, Malcolm Norris was his partner. He started the Metis Society in Cumberland House back then. But it wasn't too strong then. Not like the way it is now.

Murray: What year was that? Do you remember? That they first started it?

Pierre: No. That's quite a while back. I was going to school, still going to school then.

Murray: Would that have been about the middle sixties? Was that the time they first started it or was it earlier than that?

Pierre: No, it was way earlier.

Murray: That was when Jim was in Cumberland House then, eh?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: In maybe 1949 or 1950, something like that?

Pierre: Something like that, yeah.

Murray: So they actually started a local in Cumberland that early.

Pierre: Yeah. That's right.

Murray: Were there many members of the Metis Society at that time?

Pierre: I don't know really. I wasn't that old. You know, the best person for you really to see, to really get a good story of Jim Brady, is my grandfather, you know. Old Jack Dorion.

Murray: Yeah, I saw him today.

Pierre: Did you interview him?

Murray: Yeah.

Pierre: Oh.

Murray: That's the fellow, he's about oh, 77 or, John or...?

Pierre: Yeah, that's my grandfather.

Murray: Yeah, I got some good stuff from him but he says that his memory isn't so good any more and a lot of things that he'd like to remember, he couldn't remember. But I did get, I did talk to him.

Pierre: It's true. (talks to a small child around the room)

Murray: Did he start talking about a Metis Society as soon as he came to Cumberland House? Was that something he wanted to start? Or did it take him a while before he thought of that?

Pierre: I think they had it going in Prince Albert when he was here. The Metis Society started in Prince Albert. And he tried to get a few people involved in Cumberland. Like, the older people like, you know.

Murray: Who were some of those people? Do you remember?

Pierre: No, not really. More older people, I know that.

Murray: You were pretty young at that time, eh?

Pierre: Yeah, I was going to school. I think I was in grade 6 then. When I was at home there he used to come and visit at our place. Actually I don't really remember too much about him and his activities like. I remember he took pictures of all the people in Cumberland House one time.

Murray: He always had his camera going, eh?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: Was he a popular person in Cumberland?

Pierre: Oh yeah. Everybody liked Jim.

Murray: Was he a leader, do you think? Did people see him as a leader?

Pierre: Yeah. All the time he would get things organized in Cumberland and like with jobs and whatever money was available with the DNR for winter works, he'd get it going. Get some money for them while he was the conservation officer.

Murray: Do you think he had an influence on Cumberland that

lasted longer than he did? Do you think, after he left, his influence was still around?

Pierre: Oh yes, definitely.

Murray: What kinds of things did he teach people to do that stayed with them? Did he talk about people being self-sufficient and doing things for themselves and that sort of thing?

Pierre: That's one of the things. And you know, sort of speak up for themselves. Because in Cumberland then if a fellow didn't speak up for himself there would be nothing for him, you know. And there was always Jim around. You'd see Jim for advice and get Jim to do this and that for them.

Murray: So he tried to encourage them to be more independent did he?

Pierre: That's right, yeah.

Murray: In those days, do you think that people fought for themselves very much or did people more or less go along with whatever the white man said, the guy who had power?

Pierre: Yeah, mostly they went along. Yeah, mostly the white people were, the ones that were in Cumberland House would have the power. And the people, they were mostly depending on welfare. There wasn't much doing and that's how Jim started getting these jobs going.

Murray: Trying to get people off welfare.

Pierre: Yeah, and get the winter works program. Money was available at the government out there and they were really proud of that. And he established a camp across the lake for pulp wood and made sure the guys got their wages. Some kind of a pulp wood camp, you know.

Murray: There were people in the community who were leaders as well as Jim were there? And they all sort of worked together? Or was Jim the main figure as far as those kind of things were concerned?

Pierre: Yeah, they'd pretty well have to consult Jim, you know. Or get Jim to get things organized and sort of take over from there.

Murray: They'd go to him for advice and then they might carry on by themselves.

Pierre: They really looked up to Jim because he was a conservation officer and a conservation officer is a big man in Cumberland House.

Murray: Because he had the authority to get things done, that

was what it was, eh?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: But did they look upon him as a friend as well as a conservation officer?

Pierre: Definitely.

Murray: So it wasn't just doing his job but he had an interest in people too, did he?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: What kinds of things might they go to ask advice about to Jim?

Pierre: How to talk to the people and how to get, say, get word to Regina, you know, the head office.

Murray: Who to complain to and who to write to and that sort of thing?

Pierre: Yeah, uh huh.

Murray: Would he write letters for people? Was that something he used to do?

Pierre: Oh yeah, he was always writing letters. And he would be visiting my grandfather and other people would come and visit as well and try and get advice at the same time, you know. And Jim was always active in these things. Trying to get what was best for people in Cumberland House then. I remember, he was at my place quite often and people would come there, you know. And evenings like, he'd come and visit my grandfather and pretty soon there would be four or five men plus grandpa and Jim, you know.

Murray: They'd all sort of follow him around, eh? And want to listen to him.

Pierre: Listen to him talk. You know, how people should go about getting what they need and what they want. Welfare was there and he would fill out their forms and he was sort of a social worker at the same time and conservation officer.

Murray: He was a bit of a father figure for people, was he? Sort of? I mean, he would help them with everything.

Pierre: That's right.

Murray: So he would come over and visit your grandfather just for a personal visit and then you'd end up with a whole bunch of people over there?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: And they'd be talking business or politics or something, eh?

Pierre: Yeah. That's right.

Murray: Did he talk politics much? Do you remember?

Pierre: Well, not really.

Murray: Not NDP politics but organizing kind of stuff, eh?

Pierre: He might have talked about the local boys, trying to get an LCA or something like that going, because there was no LCA then.

Murray: Did he get one started then?

Pierre: There were some people that got into an LCA then. Charles Chaboyer was one of them who was here.

Murray: Who was that?

Pierre: Charles Chaboyer.

Murray: Oh yeah.

Pierre: You get this LCA in Cumberland House going. They didn't know nothing about it. They couldn't be an LCA. And he explained to them and with some of the leaders he tutored them, and make them, you know.

Murray: Yes. And so after a while there were some councillors, eh?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: And Charles Chaboyer was one?

Pierre: Yeah. Charles.

Murray: Do you remember any of the others?

Pierre: I just remember Charles. I was here, he was the mayor or whatever.

Murray: He was one you remember.

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: And that was while Jim was still here, eh?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: Would these councillors have meetings open to the

public and things like that?

Pierre: Well, maybe once a year or something like that.

Murray: But they would meet by themselves mostly?

Pierre: Yeah. They just kind of formed an LCA then.

Murray: Just sort of a local government. What would it try and do? Do you remember any of the things it was trying to do?

Pierre: I think jobs was the biggest. You know, like if there was money available for programs and Jim, he couldn't do it himself alone, he had to get these people involved. First, they would apply for it and eventually it would come through but he got them organized, you know. Showed them how to go about it.

Murray: Right.

Pierre: He would be writing the letters. I remember people talking that there was going to be some work because Jim was going to get some work going.

Murray: Yeah.

Pierre: But give them a few dollars for guys to make, especially married men, you know. And these little bits of information I used to listen to them speak back home when I was doing my homework at the same time. And I'd listen while they were talking about these jobs coming up and everybody was enthusiastic about it because there would be some work. Especially for the married men, you know.

Murray: So that was the big problem in Cumberland at the time, eh, that there just wasn't enough work for people?

Pierre: That's right. Fishing wasn't too good. They used to fish in Namew Lake, that's around Sturgeon Landing, you know.

And then there is Suggi Lake. The commercial fishing is not very good in Cumberland Lake. And I remember one time you had to get a license for sturgeon fishing and it wasn't open as commercial fishing then. And Jim, I guess, somehow managed to get the lake open for commercial fishing as to sturgeon as well.

Murray: Up to that point, sturgeon wasn't allowed?

Pierre: Yeah, so I remember that part anyway. The people were really excited about it. They could go fishing because the lake would be good fishing.

Murray: Because it hadn't been fished for a long time.

Pierre: Yeah, that's right. And there was a lot of dog teams left Cumberland House to go fish there. I guess they had camps

going there and then, and they were selling the fish to The Pas and they were flying them out to The Pas, Manitoba. Then they would pick it up. They would pick up. Some of them had single horses. You know, a horse, fishing with a horse.

Murray: You'd haul the fish by horse, would you?

Pierre: To the lakeshore and out.

Murray: That's quite a while ago.

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: So things started to improve quite a bit after Jim came?

Pierre: Yeah. Before that there was nothing but what little trapping they could do and welfare.

Murray: Living off rabbits and moose meat and stuff I guess, eh?

Pierre: It was quite plentiful, lots of moose. A fellow could go out and kill his moose. Now you have to get a permit. But then you know...

Murray: In those days, you didn't need a permit, eh? You just go out and shoot one?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: Did you have to shoot at a certain time of year then?

Pierre: Any time you get hungry you go out and get a moose. They'd just hitch up the dogs and go hunting and...

Murray: Come back with the meat.

Pierre: Yeah. Everybody had a dog team then. I had three dogs.

Murray: There must have been hundreds of dog teams in town then, eh?

Pierre: Oh yeah, there was quite a few, yeah. Yeah.

Murray: When did they change the law about having to have permits and stuff like that?

Pierre: Quite a while back.

Murray: Would the CCF government have done that? Was that something they brought in?

Pierre: Yeah, that's right. The CCF government. Because they were talking about CCF. He even wanted trappers to trap

without opening the rat house, you know. Just chop a hole beside the rat house, put your trap in there and hope to get a muskrat. Cut a hole there. Well, they weren't used to trapping like that around Cumberland. They cut a hole in the rat house and set your trap in the house. That's how they used to trap here. These guys come in and wanted the trappers to just cut a hole in the ice and put the trap in the water...

Murray: And wait for the muskrat.

Pierre: And watch the muskrat house. Hope to get a muskrat that way.

Murray: So people thought that was pretty stupid, eh?

Pierre: Oh yeah. The trappers figured that was really stupid. Takes a white man to think like that. (chuckles)

Murray: Did that happen quite often, that kind of thing where they thought the CCF was doing things backwards? Or did they think the CCF was trying to help people?

Pierre: Well, some people were in favour of CCF, of course. They were starting up the family allowance, I remember them talking about that. Family allowance was a good thing then. Helped, really helped the people.

Murray: That was the only cash they had sometimes, eh?

Pierre: Yeah. The CCF wasn't such a bad guy then. But when he come up with that scheme about trapping, cutting a hole through the ice, they had no use for them then.

Murray: So sometimes they thought they were good and then other times they thought they were crazy.

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: Did the CCF government try and consult with people and try and find out what their needs and problems were do you think in those days?

Pierre: (No response)

Murray: Pretty hard to say, eh.

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: Jim would have tried to do that but...

Pierre: Jim was doing that, yeah.

Murray: I'm trying to find out some more about that early Metis Society. Did it meet very often do you remember?

Pierre: All I know is that him and his partner - what did you call him again?

Murray: Malcolm Norris.

Pierre: Yeah, Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady had started this Metis Society and that's all I know. I don't know how strong it was or...

Murray: But that was when you were a young boy.

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: You were in grade six then, eh? That's when they first started it?

Pierre: Yeah. Then it sort of - never heard about it for a while. It suddenly come up strong.

Murray: It started again in 1964 I guess, eh?

Pierre: I guess so, yeah.

Murray: Did it sort of die down after Jim left? Was that what happened do you think?

Pierre: I imagine, yeah. When Jim went prospecting, started prospecting. I guess he wasn't too involved with people then.

Murray: Kept to himself quite a bit?

Pierre: It sort of died down, I guess.

Murray: Do you remember when he left Cumberland House, why he left?

Pierre: No. I don't even remember when he left or what year he got here. All of a sudden I knew there was a Jim Brady in Cumberland House.

Murray: And then all of a sudden he wasn't there again?

Pierre: Yeah. That's about the size of it.

Murray: Were people sad to see him go, do you think?

Pierre: Oh, I imagine, yeah. I imagine they were.

Murray: Did he come back quite often and visit?

Pierre: I think so. I think he stayed quite a bit around Flin Flon, Beaver Lake, Cumberland House. Around La Ronge, you know. He travelled quite a bit while he wasn't prospecting, I guess. Yeah, I can really say the people of Cumberland House really looked up to Jim as a leader because I can remember back home in the evenings, just kind of have heater, tea brewing there, coal oil lamp and then sit down and talk. I don't quite remember all the things they talked about except that they were always talking about these jobs opening up, coming through.

They would be coming through and Jim would assure them there would be, you know, within another couple of weeks and there would be money and they would get a job.

Murray: And it would usually come through as he said, eh?

Pierre: Yeah. And in the meantime, couple of weeks, while they were waiting for a job, they would set off to go get a moose and then the men would say, "Well, that gives me enough time to put up enough wood before the job starts."

Murray: So Jim would plan it that way, would he?

Pierre: Yeah. Get the guys together and tell them there will be a job in a couple of weeks. And the guy would get some moose meat for his family and put up wood.

Murray: And then he could work?

Pierre: Then he would be gone for a couple of months to go and do some work.

Murray: So quite often the work would be outside of Cumberland House. He'd have to leave the town to do the work, eh?

Pierre: Quite often, yeah. Fishing like and cutting pulp and they would have to go another lake and fish. And they'd have to stay there, you know.

Murray: Who might remember who would have been in the Metis Society, that early one around 1950?

Pierre: How many old-timers have you consulted so far?

Murray: Oh, I've talked to Pierre Carriere and Jim Carriere, Joe McAuley, Bill McKenzie, Lawrence Cook.

Pierre: Did you talk to Lawrence? Did he mention anything about starting...?

Murray: Yeah, he did. He was the first one to mention that early Metis Society. I knew about the one in 1964 but he was the first one to talk about the early one and I wasn't sure if maybe he just didn't remember properly but you've mentioned again so he must have been involved in it to some extent.

Pierre: He may have been one of the members, Lawrence Cook. I don't know about Jim Carriere enough.

Murray: I don't think they were, from what they said.

Pierre: Then I don't think they were. If they had any dealings with Jim, well... How did they figure? Did they get along with Jim by talking to him?

Murray: Well, I heard before I came here that they probably

didn't get along with Jim but they told me they liked him, that they had respect for him, you know.

Pierre: Oh.

Murray: But I think that they probably would have disagreed with him about some things like the Metis Society or about CCF politics, you know. So there was a disagreement but I think that they, like everybody here, they had respect for what he tried to do I think. That was the feeling I got.

Pierre: Oh yeah. They didn't like him yet they liked him. That's the kind of a guy he was, you know.

Murray: That even if you disagreed with him, people respected him?

Pierre: They still liked him. Because I can remember Lawrence Cook as one of the men sitting around the campfire with Jim quite often. Lawrence Cook, I can remember, but there would be four or five guys there all the time.

Murray: And your grandfather would be one, eh?

Pierre: Yeah. Jim and Lawrence Cook, I can remember. I don't know why. But then there was always some other guys around there, you know.

Murray: But you can't remember them so well?

Pierre: No. It could have been, one of them could have been a Deschambault. Ed Deschambault.

Murray: Is that Lionel's father?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: Is he still alive?

Pierre: Yeah, he is around.

Murray: Did Lionel ever know Jim? He would have been too young, I guess.

Pierre: Yeah. Even myself, I wasn't too old.

Murray: Was there a fellow by the name of Ewe(?) who used to live in town?

Pierre: Yeah. Mike Kew(?), archeologist. That was quite a bit later, you know.

Murray: He wouldn't have known Jim then?

Pierre: I don't think so. Mike Kew(?). He was about the same

kind of a guy, like Jim now. You know, he would talk to people.

Murray: He worked for the University I guess, did he?

Pierre: Yes. He was studying people.

Murray: And Jim worked for that same department, I think. So he may have known him.

Pierre: He might have known him, yeah. Not only at my place, you know, there would be a place here, oh at the crossroads there. The place where people would hang around in the evenings, you know. And then there would be a bunch of them in there.

Murray: Where was that? At the DNR place or...?

Pierre: Just about where the cafe is now, there used to be crossroads there.

Murray: They would just be standing around there, talking.

Pierre: In the evenings, yeah. Just by the pool room here. Then the pool started.

Murray: And Jim would always be among those men talking.

Pierre: Yeah. They liked to listen to Jim talk and get Jim going.

Murray: So they counted on Jim to initiate things and talk, and get things going, eh?

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: Do you think that things slowed down a bit after Jim left? Or had people learned to do things for themselves?

Pierre: Well, they must have learned quite a bit. They knew him well by... I don't know how long he stayed here. It could have been about three...

Murray: About three years I think from what people have said. From about 1949 to the end of 1951 or something like that.

Pierre: Yeah, about that, I guess. Well, I was 12 years old then so I can't remember that well.

Murray: You were sort of on the edge of things. You weren't really involved.

Pierre: Right. Well, I listened, you know.

Murray: You listened?

Pierre: I always listened a little bit but especially when I was, when they talked about fishing. How come he's sleeping here?

Murray: He likes to listen too.

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: Did Jim ever talk to you...?

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Murray: What else might he talk to you about? Would you ever ask him any questions that he would answer or would he just treat you like a young kid and not pay too much attention? Was he interested in young people, do you think?

Pierre: Yeah, about schooling. I remember especially, I got to go, I had to go on a hunt, when he was going to go on a hunt. And he told me, "You better not go on that hunt. You better go to school." I said, "Well, I'm doing that every day." And he said, "You go to school every day."

Murray: Did you listen to him?

Pierre: Oh yeah.

Murray: So when he said something, you took it seriously, eh? I mean even as a young boy, you respected him?

Pierre: Oh, yeah. I was sitting around listening to the guys talk and it was getting dark and he would tell me, "Pierre, it's getting dark. You better get us some wood," and I'd go put up some wood and bring it in the house.

Murray: There was no electricity in those days, eh?

Pierre: No.

Murray: What did you use, coal oil lamps for light or...?

Pierre: Yeah. Actually, if I would have known you were coming, you know, I could have probably started thinking about...

Murray: That's the trouble. I didn't know who I'd be talking to before I came. I knew a few names but not very many because I'd never been to Cumberland before. But I'll be back, you know.

Pierre: Yeah.

Murray: I'm not sure when I'll come back but...

Pierre: Next time I'll... when I'm laying in bed there, I'll

start thinking back in the old...

Murray: And it'll start coming out.

Pierre: It'll come out and then I'll jot down some things that I think that might be important. And maybe give me an address. If you don't come I'll drop you a line.

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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