

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: MARY ANN MCKENZIE
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: LA RONGE, SASK.

INTERVIEW LOCATION: LA RONGE, SASK.

TRIBE/NATION: CREE
LANGUAGE: CREE
DATE OF INTERVIEW: AUGUST 17, 1981
INTERVIEWER: JANET R. FIETZ
INTERPRETER: JANET R. FIETZ
TRANSCRIBER: J. GREENWOOD
SOURCE: SASKATCHEWAN ARCHIVES BOARD
TAPE NUMBER: IH-094
DISK: TRANSCRIPT DISC 21
PAGES: 4
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Memories of childhood: preparing food; making moccasins;
making fish nets; making snowshoes; growing gardens.

Mary Ann McKenzie interviewed by Janet Fietz, 17 August 1981, La Ronge, Saskatchewan, for the Oral History Project, INDIAN AND METIS ELDERS OF LA RONGE. (Partial transcript and translation from Cree.)

I remember staying with mother and my grandparents at a river, I don't know what they call that river in English.

When they had that big flu sickness, both my grandparents died.

Lydia Charles's mother used to live there also. My grandfather used to have a very big garden there.

We used to go to Stanley Mission on special days. I never went to school except to "summer school" while we were in the settlement. I can read letters but can't say the words. I can't read Cree either although my aunt taught me.

We made our own fish nets. There were no ready made ones in those days. Two of us used to make it, starting on each end, putting line on it too. At treaty time, we used to get five rolls of twine to make a net with. We would get other things like about 25 lbs. of flour and also salt pork.

We always had a chief. The first one was Amos Charles. The one they had at La Ronge was Joseph Charles. It was around 1945 when the three other reserves were put together, La Ronge, Stanley Mission and (New Reserve?) down near Prince Albert. Now we only have one chief to look after these three places. (Speaks of the reason this was done.

One person went from Stanley Mission to New Reserve to settle there. He was Daniel Cook who was born in Stanley Mission and went to La Ronge to go to school. Others she remembers are Philip McKenzie, Abbey Misastry and Amelia Halkett.

They used to dry and cook meat in the summer to keep it. It lasted a long time if kept dry and covered up with moose hides. Sometimes we left dried meat for a month. When we got back it was not spoiled. We had to take our children to Stanley Mission to go to school. We could not take everything with us. We had to leave a few things behind. We used to take all the bones because if you leave bones in, they got rotten there. No one ever bothered anything at all.

We never sold moose hides. Only moccasins were sold to a preacher that was here at that time. We did not have to put

beads on them. He used to give us flour in exchange for moccasins. We sold cranberries to Mrs. Tom Bear. She also asked people to haul wood by canoe. We used to help my mother to haul from the bush, put it in the canoe and haul it over close to Mrs. Bear's house.

We used to dry fish to keep it. Some would pound it into small pieces and eat it with berries such as cranberries, blueberries, raspberries and any other kind of berry which is not poisonous. We also used birch tree syrup with fish which is very good. We also used it when eating bannock.

Describes the process of making birch tree syrup. First they would make a rack. They used forked sticks to hold up a pail. A pile of green and dry wood would be gathered and hauled close to the rack. They would chop a hole in the side of a tree and put a birch bark dish under it to catch the sap. When there is lots of sap we start to boil it for two days. When it is the color of tea, then it is cooled. Sometimes we put a little flour in it to make it thick. Two pails were used. One was the boiling pot and one was a "finishing pot". The way they knew the syrup was done was when they put a little paddle in the boiling syrup, if the syrup stuck on the paddle it was done, finished. It thickens at that time.

They made their own snowshoes. They took a birch tree with no knots and split it in two, then four. They cut it smooth with the Indian Crooked Knife. They made holes in them for the webbing and used deer hide for strings as it was strong. You had to cut the deer hide into thin strings. Not very many people can do that now.

There were lots of big gardens in those days. He used to plant the long white potatoes. I used to like them. I never see them these days. We used to call them "narrow potatoes". When the old people settled in one place, this is what they did, planted potatoes. They built good houses too. They ate potatoes with fish. No one ever touched the gardens. Now you can't leave anything anywhere or someone will take it.

They used to build their own houses, splitting wood for the floor and using a saw which they held on each end. We had one of those saws. Our children used it and lost it somewhere in the bush.

We had a big garden too, at our trapline. But people started digging there so we quit gardening as we never got anything out of it. Years ago you could leave anything outside of your trapping cabin. No one would bother it. Now you can't

leave things like that anymore. You can't even leave a paddle by your canoe. It sure will be taken away. Even when you leave your house and no one is living in them, all of the windows will be broken. That's how it is now. Children seem to be running around as they please.

They had root cellars in their houses. They had root cellars outside where they kept the potatoes for next year's seed. They put dry grass at the bottom, then potatoes, then grass to keep them from freezing. Then they put thin logs on top of this hole and packed lots of dirt on top. The potatoes they kept in the house; they used them during the winter. I never saw the outside ones freeze. They used the red ones and the white ones.

The first person to plant potatoes was the minister McKay.

(Thomas McKenzie is speaking in the background).

My mother told me that the first person that planted potatoes was my grandfather John Cook. He used to go to The Pas. That's where he got potatoes. He planted these and did not eat them the first year. He kept them all for seed. That next summer he had more to plant. Then the third summer, he gave a few potatoes to whoever wanted to make a garden. This is the way they started planting. My grandfather used to get his groceries and other things from The Pas for his winter supplies. This is how he got the potatoes.

Mary Ann Hardlotte married Thomas McKenzie September 3, 1925.

Children:

Maria Jane	1925
Bella Flora	Aug. 29, 1929
Zaccharius	Sept. 29, 1931 - Feb. 13, 1942
John Jude	Aug. 18, 1935
David Nathan	April 4, 1936

Walter	Sept. 8, 1940
Sally Martha	Feb. 8, 1944
Moses	March 1, 1945
Benjamin A.	May 18, 1947
Barbara Elizabeth	Jan. 4, 1950

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INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
AGRICULTURE				
-gardening	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	3,4
CHILDREN				
-raising of	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	4
CRAFTS				
-snowshoe making	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	3
FISHING				
-nets	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	2
FOOD				
-gardening	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	3,4
FOOD				
-preparation of	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	3
FOOD				
-preservation of	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	2,3
FOOD				
-rations	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	2
FOOD				
-storage	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	4
VALUES				
-loss of	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	4

PROPER NAME INDEX

PROPER NAME	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
STANLEY MISSION, SASK.	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	2
THE PAS, MAN.	IH-094	M.A.MCKENZIE	21	4