

Roger “King Trapper” Carrière (1929-2010)

By Anne Carrière Acco and Lawrence Barkwell

Roger Carrière of Cranberry Portage was an amazing individual; he was a nature conservationist, champion canoeist and won the King Trapper contest in Le Pas, Manitoba 16 times. Roger Carrière was born in 1929, the son of Louis Leonile Carrière and his third wife Agnes Morin. His parents were married on February 1, 1913 at St. Joseph R.C. Mission at Cumberland House. His paternal grandparents were Theodore Carrière born 1835/38 at St. Vital and Angelique Dorion born 1850 at Grand Rapids. Roger was predeceased by his wife Olive Whitehead from Opaskwayak and their son Leonard Carrière who wrote *White Eagle Speaks* a book of poetry published by Pemmican Publications in 2000. He is survived by their children, Bev, Gail, Marlene, Elaine, Roger Jr. and Brenda.

James B. Wilson the director of Education for the Opaskwayak Educational Authority wrote a moving and fitting tribute to Roger¹:

He is a cultural icon of the North and a man who lived the history of Canada's fur trade. True to the ideals that helped found our country, Roger Carrière brought together the best of the aboriginal world and mainstream Canada. He lived a life in pursuit of excellence, a life that was never easy yet whose achievements were second to none.

Roger Carrière was my hero.

He died last week.

While his death marks the end of an era, his lifetime holds lessons that must be followed by future generations of Canadians. The legendary status he held in our northern communities conveys the importance of fitness, strength of spirit and knowledge in our culture and our environment. Most importantly it demonstrates the cultural importance of a strong work ethic and maintaining high expectations.

Sesame Street showcased Roger's talents years ago. Some of you may remember him as the Elder, teaching a group of youngsters how to make bannock over a fire and other bush skills. He taught us all that we could compete with the best in the world, that hard work pays off and that our culture is based on a pursuit of excellence in everything we do. He is everything that I respect and admire about my culture and Canada.

Roger was born in Cumberland House, Sask., in 1929. He worked for the Canadian National Railway for 43 years and was a fur trapper all his life. He was well-known



¹ *Winnipeg Free Press* February 27, 2010.

throughout Western Canada as King Trapper of the North and holds the record for most titles in prestigious king trapper events — competitions that showcase the skills that were at one time so important for survival in Canada's North. Being able to light a fire in any conditions, run for miles in snowshoes and efficiently set a trap are not commonly practiced skills today. But they were the basis of the fur trade and integral to the development of the Canada we know today.

Roger exemplified the fierce self-reliance of Canada's fur trappers and voyageurs. Years ago, at the height of his reign as King Trapper of the North, Roger's canoe-paddling partner did not show up for the start of the canoe race at Opaskwayak Indian Days, the pinnacle event in this summer festival. When the other two-man teams raced away, Roger jumped in his canoe and took off after his fellow competitors alone. At the end of the daylong marathon race, he placed second.

As part of Canada's centennial year events in 1967, Roger paddled in the Centennial Canoe Race for Team Manitoba. Following the watery trail of Canada's famous voyageurs, they raced more than 4,800 kilometers across Canada from Rocky Mountain House, Alta., to Montreal. Roger paddled in the fourth seat — the power seat — for the duration. Roger used his trapper's skills and knowledge of the land to help propel the Manitoba team far ahead of the others.

For example, after arduous paddling for several daylong stages, Roger's teammates complained of blisters on their hands. Roger taught them to warm a young poplar sapling over a fire. He then had them grasp and hold the hot branch until it cooled — no more blisters.

His skills helped them safely cross massive Lake Winnipeg far ahead of the others, part of why at the end of the race, Team Manitoba won by days.

The Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant of 1967:

Ten teams representing eight provinces and two territories took part in this race which left Rocky Mountain House in Alberta on 24 May 1967 and arrived at the Expo site in Montreal on 4 September, a race of over 4,800 kilometers. The Manitoba team led by power paddlers Roger Carrière and Joe Michelle not only won this 104 day race but won by a margin measured in days.

In Manitoba, as in other provinces with an active canoe-racing scene, paddlers were chosen by the team captain based on points awarded for competing on the largely white two-man canoe racing circuit.¹⁹ Those Métis and First Nations paddlers who did participate (notably Roger Carrière of Cranberry Portage, an almost legendary figure in Northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan who regularly won “trapper” competitions as well as canoe races, and his paddling partner Joe Michelle) took part as representatives of their provinces, and not as representatives of ethnic, racial, cultural, or reserve communities.

The Canadian Pacific Railway granted paid leave to Métis Roger Carrière, who was a CPR sub-foreman, and declared their pride in his career as a paddler.²

According to Pierre Berton, the Voyageur Canoe Pageant was listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest ever canoe race. (Berton 1997, 56).

King Trapper:

Roger was legendary in his prowess at the Trappers Festival events; needless to say he was nicknamed “King Trapper.” He won this title an incredible 16 times; from the first festival in 1955 for 11 straight years to 1965, then in 1967, 1970, 1973, 1974, and finally 1975. At his funeral, the old trappers made goose calls in his honour.

1967: The Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant



The “Big Six” pulling hard, Gib McEachern (Flin Flon), Wayne Soltys (Flin Flon), John Norman (Denare Beach), Roger Carriere (Cranberry Portage), Joe Michelle (Sturgeon Landing) and Norm Crerar (Flin Flon). Note that Carrière and Michele are in the power seats of the canoe.

² Dean Misao, “The Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant as Historical Re-enactment.” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Volume 40, Number 3, Fall 2006, pp. 43-67.



To The Winner—Mukluks

Mukluks are being fitted to Manitoba team member Roger Carriere, of The Pas, by National Revenue Minister Benson Mevor. E. G. Hudson of Lloydminster and William Newberry, city editor of The Journal.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute

