

Mike Page. (b. 1939)

Master Métis Fiddler Michael Page was born June 30, 1939, the son of Jean-Baptiste Page¹ and Frances Fayant² (b. 1872). His parents had 14 children and were farmers who lived west of Belcourt and northwest of St. Anthony's Church. John B. Page was a fiddler who handed down his musical skills to his sons. Mike is married to Dorothy Azure Page (b. 1945).³ Mike was featured on the Smithsonian Folkway CD *Plains Chippewa/Métis Music from Turtle Mountain* (1984) and in the documentary film *Medicine Fiddle* (1992). His photograph appears in *Métis Legacy Vol. I* (2001), and an interview appears in *Métis Legacy Vol. II*, (2007).



Mike Page (centre standing), Lawrence Barkwell (right standing) at Métisfest, International Peace Gardens, 2009.

In the booklet that accompanies the documentary film, *Medicine Fiddle*, Mike says:

The Sioux would say they couldn't tell what a Metchif was, but when he played one of these (fiddles), they knew he was a Metchif.

¹ Born August 2, 1874 at Cypress Hills, the son of Charles Edouard Page and Nancy Landry. Charles was born March 21, 1834 at St. Francois Xavier. Nancy Landry was the daughter of Louis Landry and Isabelle Chalifoux.

² Francoise Fagnant was the daughter of William Fagnant and Julia Lafontaine.

³ The daughter of Alphonse Azure and Rose Delia LaFontain.

Well my Dad, he was pretty old. He remembers the buffalo days, you know. He was pretty young at the time. He said they'd leave and there'd be the band of them. They'd leave in the carts, the Red River Carts, and they'd always have a violin there. Maybe three or four, you know. They always had music. One of their favourite tunes was the "Red River Jig." that came from the late 1700s or maybe the middle of the 1700s.

Some of them old guys, they'd make up certain tunes for certain occasions. Well, Dad used to tell me of a certain fight they'd have with some other Indians, or a battle they got into and they'd get back to camp and they'd make up a tune about this battle they had.

He used to play a tune there, when Louis Riel was fighting in Canada with the Metchifs, "Le Bataille de Batoche." They had a certain name for it. Or when hunting, somebody would get the biggest buffalo, or whatever it was, from these hunts, they'd make up a tune about it. When they'd get back to camp, they'd all gather around and start playing. One guy would compose a tune about this. It was just on a violin.

Like all my uncles played. They were playing this "le boss," they called it. That's where you're bucking with that other violin. That's where I learned the music. From the old timers. And they'd keep time with their feet, like with "Soldier's Joy." A lot of them old guys wouldn't stand. They always had to sit down, and they always had their feet going (clogging).

See, the Metchifs, the oldtimers, they used to play with a double string. I don't know if you know what a double string is, but its more of a Cajun. Its got the same beat as the Canadians, but played with two strings. I don't know if it's a harmony or what, but we play the same beat and the same tunes as the Canadians, but played double string. As far as I know my music went back throughout the years.

And the oldtimers, they used to stick rattlesnake tails in their fiddle. Make them rattle. I don't know why they did that. Last year I played a violin in Belcourt, here, and was wonderin why it was rattling. I looked inside there and there's a rattlesnake tail. See that's one part of the culture. A lot of them old fiddlers at that time, like my Dad, I remember he used to spit on the keys, like this! So they'd catch. All the time your keys would slip. That's one of the bad habits they had. Ha!⁴

*Mike Page
Turtle Mountain,
Métis Musician*

⁴ These passages are from: Nicholas Vrooman, Frank Poitra, Fred Allery, Mike Page and Dorothy Azure Page. "Tale of the Medicine Fiddle: How a Tune Was Played and the Metchif Came to Be." In James P. Leary (Editor): *Medicine Fiddle: A Humanities Discussion Guide*. Marquette, Michigan: Up North Films and Northern Michigan University, 1992: 19-29.



The Page family in front of their home. Mike is the youngest boy pictured.

References:

Loukinin, Michael (Director) *Medicine Fiddle*: Up North Films and Northern Michigan University, Marquette, Michigan, 1992.

Vrooman, Nicholas Curchin Peterson (Editor). *Turtle Mountain Music*. National Endowment for the Arts, North Dakota Council on the Arts, and Folkway Records, 1984.

This booklet which accompanies the music recording gives a brief introduction to Turtle Mountain Michif music, the history of the Turtle Mountain Band and the Village of Belcourt. In a chapter entitled “Views from the Turtle Mountains” (pp. 5-10) Vrooman includes interviews with Michif Elders Francis Cree, “King” Davis, Alvina Davis, Delia La Floe, Fred Parisien, Fred Allery, Mildred Allery, Norbert Lenoir, Ray Houle, Mike Page and Dorothy Azure Page. The final chapter of the booklet gives descriptions of the songs, their cultural significance as well as the lyrics.

Vrooman, Nicholas, Frank Poitra, Fred Allery, Mike Page and Dorothy Azure Page. “Tale of the Medicine Fiddle: How a Tune Was Played and the Metchif Came to Be.” In James P. Leary (Editor): *Medicine Fiddle: A Humanities Discussion Guide*. Marquette, Michigan: Up North Films and Northern Michigan University, 1992: 19-29.



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