

## Carmen Thompson's Parks Canada Interview, January 25, 2012

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Bradley Brown: This is Bradley Brown conducting an interview on January 25, 2012 on behalf of the Gabriel Dumont Institute for the Southwest Métis project that is being done in conjunction with Parks Canada. Now Miss, Can you please state your name and your home community please?

Carmen Thomsen: My name is Carmen Thomsen and I live in Rolling Hills, Alberta.

BB: Thank you. Question #2. Who were or are your parents and grandparents, where were they from?

CT: Where were they from? Well, my mom was born and raised in Brooks, Alberta and her name is Colleen. Albert, my dad, was born in Ponteix, Saskatchewan and Grandma Lafontaine was ... I have to look that up. Okay, Grandma LaFontaine was born in ... She was born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

BB: Okay.

CT: And Albert LaFontaine was grandpa and he was born in North Dakota.

BB: In North Dakota?

CT: Yup.

BB: Thank you. I guess, just in order to add, In general, where do you say that your family is from? The family that you descend from ...

CT: All over the place.

BB: All over? Okay.

CT: I'm a Heinz '57 in general on where the Métis stuff comes from, they were pretty much in the Maple Creek area.

BB: The Maple Creek area?

CT: Yeah. That's where pretty much everyone settled I guess. Shaunavon, Maple Creek, that area is where they pretty much settled.

BB: Okay, I think that's what we're trying to take away from that question too. So, awesome. Okay, moving on to question three, did or does anyone in your family speak Michif or serve in the military? Do you speak Michif?

CT: Now... like great-grandpa probably spoke Michif, but the rest of us don't. Grandma never did, my dad never did ... So as for that no one I know does. As for serving in the military, there's two of my great-uncles, Ed, he was on a battleship, and he was, I believe, a radio operator, and uncle Moe, he was in the army and played in the military band as well.

BB: Okay.

CT: And they were both overseas, so that's about as much of them two as I know.

BB: Okay. Awesome, Thank you. Question #4, How were the Métis treated in your community? Did your family encounter racism from the larger community? Do you have specific examples?

CT: Basically what I know is that Grandma didn't really talk about being Métis until the grandchildren were much older, so that was more like they're shunned and embarrassed and felt like they were second-class citizens, but as for racism I don't think no one was racist towards the kids or anyone else.

BB: Okay. Thank you. Question 5. What other Métis families lived in the vicinity? Were they Michif speakers?

CT: That I don't know. Grandma never talked a whole lot about the different families they associated with and whether or not they spoke Michif. So I don't know.

BB: Moving on to question #6. Do you know any traditional Métis stories or songs? Would you care to share them?

CT: I don't have a clue.

BB: Fair enough. Question 7. What sort of resources did your family harvest? Where and when were these collected?

CT: Well, I know Grandpa, like Great-Grandpa, he would have hunted and fished and stuff like that. He remembered hunting buffalo as a little kid.

BB: Okay.

CT: They hunted buffalo and deer, travelling back and forth from North Dakota and Saskatchewan.

BB: Hunting a lot of game between those two ...

CT: Yeah.

BB: ... areas you would say?

CT: Yeah.

BB: Do you know of any other trends your family may have had? We noticed a lot of the families in the area had become ranchers and stuff like that. Can you identify any other trends?

CT: Some of them, like I know some of the families do have, like, you know the one cousin of my dad's has a ranch in Maple Creek area, as for other members I'm not 100% because I didn't get to know my dad's relatives, besides my aunts and uncles.

BB: Yeah. Okay. Question #8, what sort of traditional medicine was used in your community and family? Who were the medicine people in your family/community?

CT: As for the medicine people that I can't answer at all.

BB: Okay. Fair enough. Moving on to Question #9, did anyone in your family live in a Métis Road Allowance Community?

CT: What is a road allowance community?

BB: Métis road allowance community was the crown you would find outside of town that a lot of families would actually live kind of in the ditches of roads and that's because when the crown or the government was making areas to make roads in the province there was, there would be the road and they would estimate so much distance between the road and a farmer's field and so a lot of this land was unoccupied, so what happened was it's actually, this is really prevalent in the ... probably in the 1890s to the 1940s-ish 'cause you would see these Métis families living in these ditches, or in this area between the road and land and what this was called, was called the road allowance because that was their estimation of the amount of land they would need so there actually was communities that would live in there because they had been dispossessed of their other lands, and had no where else to go and couldn't afford to live anywhere else.

CT: Not to my knowledge that anyone has spoken to me of that or none of our families did that. Like I know in one area in the one story I have, they're called squatters, but they weren't called road allowance people, like they have little tracks of land near a river, but that was.

BB: Yeah, and I think that's common. I don't think people in that area, where your family grew up, it wasn't as common as other areas. Question #10. Did you have anyone in your family that made beaded or embroidered moccasins or other items? Do you know what happened to any of these artefacts?

CT: Not that I know of or that anyone spoke of and I have not seen anything. So, I don't think so.

BB: Question #11, How did your family celebrate special occasions and holidays, such as Christmas, Easter and New Years?

CT: Dad, growing up, celebrated Christmas, Easter, and New Years just like everyone else.

BB: Question #12, Was anyone in your family involved with the Métis society?

CT: Myself, my dad, my children, and numerous other relatives, we are all a part of the Métis Society of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Yeah, we are involved.

BB: So are you guys all members?

CT: Yes we are.

BB: Is anyone in the family involved with the Métis Society other than being a member?

CT: No

BB: Question 13, how are the local Métis connected to Fort Battleford, Fort Walsh, and or Grasslands National Park? And before we get started on this one question, Carmen, your family history is to Fort Walsh, right? Am I correct?

CT: Yes, exactly.

BB: Okay, so for the questions list of all three, we'll just stick to Fort Walsh, okay?

CT: Okay.

BB: So how are the local Métis connected to Fort Walsh?

CT: On my side of the family,

my relatives were actually out on the Northwest, so they went back and forth. They were guides.

BB: Do you know which ones were scouts for the ...

CT: There were four that were scouts, they were both brothers. There was ... Just have to look up the name. There was Louis Leveille, and I can't remember the other guys name. Pierre Leveille were scouts, and Grandpa Gabriel and his brother were scouts.

BB: What time period would have this been in?

CT: Basically how it went was Pierre Leveille was the other brother of Louis Leveille, and Pierre was a trader, and he had an outfit with a Red River Cart, so he was employed by HBC and he was employed by Commissioner French a guide in 1874, and Gabriel, my grandpa's father, Louis, met up with Pierre coming up from Fort Benton mining camp, and they met back up and then Louis took over for Pierre because Louis was able to speak French, Assiniboine, and English, but he couldn't speak any Blackfoot. And Grandpa Gabriel, once his father retired then he became a scout as well.

BB: Question 14 says how was your family involved in Fort and I think you've pretty much answered that, but in general would you say that you noticed that a lot of the local Métis around the Fort Walsh area were scouts with the NWMP?

CT: I'm going to say that all of them were scouts, I know a few of them that were scouts, but I think maybe just some of them were not.

BB: Yeah, you just saw that it was sort of prevalent in your family that they took on that role?

CT: That what my knowledge is. When you go to Fort Walsh and look at the pictures, you see 8-10 guides and you think that two of them are probably, because of how old the pictures are, two of them will probably be Louis and Pierre, and the rest I don't know right? I don't know who the rest are. Some may have been Métis or some may have been Indian right?

BB: I think what we are trying to accomplish from these questions to see how the Métis were involved in these areas, you know what I mean, like, how were they involved with the North West Mounted Police.

CT: I know Louis was instrumental when he was ... Sitting Bull came up from the Dakotas there and came up here and settled near the Fort Walsh area that Louis was one of the interpreters that went and spoke with Sitting Bull. Him and one other scout went and spoke with Sitting Bull and Major/Mr. Walsh.

BB: Question #15, are there any historically or culturally significant landscapes or historical sites within Fort Walsh, which you as a Métis person consider being important?

CT: Well I think the Fort is, as for anything else around there, I'm not 100% certain, like I said my grandmother didn't speak a lot about the different things.

BB: You're not familiar with the landscape as some other people right?

CT: Exactly, yes.

BB: Question #16, was your family involved in the 1885 resistance at or near Fort Walsh? If not, were they involved elsewhere?

CT: Yes, there was actually if you know of the 1885 rebellion, with the Métis and stuff ... is that the one you are asking about? The Red River Rebellion?

BB: That one was in 69-70, this one was in 1885 at Batoche.

CT: That I don't know. No.

BB: If you have family history about the resistance in Red River, we would like to hear that too.

CT: Well in the Red River, I know that when Dumont went after that Smith, you know that nephew was bringing the papers to the Government of Manitoba and he got stopped and he was going to be hung by a trader by Riel and Dumont? The Leveille brothers were the ones that protected him and so ... I don't know if I have that article here or not. I don't have that article here, but I know they protected Smith when he was transporting them papers, and I know they ended up having to hand over a rifle to Riel as an apology.

BB: Question #17 might not apply, but I'll ask. What happened to your family after the 1885 Resistance?

CT: That I don't know, honestly.

BB: We ask this question primarily because after the rebellion or resistance with Riel at Batoche, a lot of things were different for Métis people, because of racism and what not. It was such a big event and it shaped people's attitudes about the Métis, so some people experienced racism or hardships because of that event, so that's why we're asking people. That is fine if you do not have anything.

Question #18, has your family been in the area for a long time? How did they make a living? Do you know how your ancestors made a living in the region?

CT: Well, I know Gabriel, he freighted supplies from the railways of Swift Current army camps, that was around the time of the 1885 rebellion, grandpa carried cables at the Saskatchewan River Landing, and then he ended up working for ranchers and stuff as well in Saskatchewan

BB: And for your family in general, have they stayed in the southwest part of the region?

CT: Primarily, yes. We're all pretty much in southern Alberta to southern Saskatchewan, like Saskatoon, Swift Current, that's kind of where my family is at in Maple Creek and that whole area.

BB: Okay. And you had said earlier that one of the things you noticed about is that they hunted game to make a living back then, right?

CT: Yes. Grandpa hunted buffalo, like he has a story he told the people in the interview with the RCMP in the, I think, early sixties, when he did the interview, he remembers hunting buffalo as a child, and as far as you could see was, it looked like burnt grass, but it was buffalo, from what it looks like. They were moving and then there were no more buffalo.

BB: Okay, thank you. Question #19, what sort of relationship did the Métis have with the Mounted Police at Fort Walsh?

CT: I think it depends on if you were a criminal then you probably wouldn't have a very good relationship, like for my family they would have had a very good relationship with them at Fort Walsh. They worked for them. The only reason why they quit in the end was because there wasn't enough money for them to live off of because they kept making it less and less money, so it wasn't worth while working for them anymore.

BB: Okay, thank you. Moving on to question #20, did any of your ancestors work for the Mounted Police at the Mounted Police Post at Fort Walsh, if so can you tell us something about them?

CT: I think I've already covered that.

BB: Yeah, I think we already covered that. We could probably move on. Question #21, Do you know if any of your ancestors took Métis scrip at Fort Walsh? Did they take it anywhere else?

CT: I know that right in where most of them lived in that Fort Walsh area, into Manitoba, near Fort Garry, That's kind of where the scrips were. I know some of them took Scrip.

BB: Okay, and that was in more or less Manitoba area you were saying?

CT: Manitoba and into Saskatchewan. Kind of both, just depends on where they lived. I know Nancy Gunn, hers is in Saskatchewan, and some of the others looked like, in the ancestors tree, that I've located, were kinda of in the Manitoba area.

BB: Okay, do you know where it was in Saskatchewan by any chance?

CT: I'd have to find that scrip. Nancy Leveille took hers in Swift Current, Pierre Leveille took his in Saint Francis Xavier Parish, that actually I think is in Quebec. Julie Lavelle took hers in Saint Francis Xavier church, so that's in Manitoba, another Pierre Leveille took his in the same place, is where they took their scrips. I can't remember if Saint Francis Xavier was in Manitoba or if it was in Ontario. I can't remember.

BB: I think Saint Francis Xavier was in a settlement within Red River, because Red River at the time, it wasn't one large city, there were several different settlements, and if I remember correctly, Saint Francis Xavier was one of those settlements, so it would have been within the Red River area. Okay, well thank you. Moving on to question #22, how can Parks Canada make Fort Walsh more inviting to Métis Visitors? How might Parks Canada include more information on Métis history, of these areas?

CT: I think doing what you guys are doing, like interviewing the Métis families and getting as much information, basically the Parks have gone on the NWMP documents and set them up that way, but the more you know about the families that were there and a part of that stuff, the more can make it right?

BB: Exactly. So you think that keep interviewing consultations is really important, right?

CT: Exactly. Yes.

BB: Okay, thank you. Question #23, Are there specific people or community groups that you could recommend Parks Canada can contact to improve their interpretation of Métis history and culture at Fort Walsh?

CT: I think that they should get a hold of the Métis Society and speak with them, because they have people that can do all of the chanting and do all of the drumming and all that culture stuff that has kind of been lost through generations by being embarrassed. I know my Grandmother never spoke of it, a lot of the stuff they may have been growing up with as Tradition, it got lost as they grew up, right?

BB: Absolutely. Okay, thank you. Question #24 and #25, more or less pertains to the Grasslands National Park area, I'm skipping these last two questions because they don't involve the people in your area as much. You're family history doesn't probably relate to them as much. So, I think we're just going to skip these two questions, and that will conclude the questions part of the interview. I'll just give you one last opportunity to add any additional comments you might feel like you want to add that you might have not been able to say during the interview.

CT: I've been researching my family tree and I'm finding things here and there. The thing I didn't realize was that my family was involved the Rebellion that Louis Riel led, as much as they were. Like, I said earlier, Louis Riel threatened to, it was actually Richard Hardesty that they threatened, and because Riel caught Donald Smith's papers to Mr. Macavish, and was my, Pierre Leveille and his brother who were the ones that were protecting him and made the other guys go away. Through things that I've gotten, and things that I've read they were giving a gun to Louis Leveille and stuff like that. And I know that stuff in Maple Creek, they have a Red River Cart that was built by Gabriel Leveille, grandpa, my great-grandpa and stuff like that.

BB: Oh, really? Well, okay, thank you. Is there anything else or is that all?

CT: I think that's about it. Much of the other stuff I don't have much stuff on them, you know? Like I said, I've been doing a few things here and there to try and track things down and learn more, but it's one of those things that you learn more everyday as you talk to more and more people about different things, so.

BB: Absolutely. Okay well thank you Carmen for doing this interview. I appreciate everything and you taking the time out of your day to do this, thank you for the interview.