

Rose Fleury. (b. 1927)

By Shirley Delorme Russell

Metis Elder Rose Fleury has worked for decades to preserve Metis history and culture. She is the Elder for Parks Canada, Batoche Historic Site. Rose is a storyteller, genealogist and historian. She is multilingual speaking Michif-Cree, Cree, French and English.



Rose Fleury, Caron Home Opening, Back to Batoche, 2007. Photo by David Morin, GDI.

Rose's mother, Élise (Paul) Lafond was born on July 10, 1914 and was an only child. This meant that Rose had no cousins or aunts and uncles on her mother's side. Paul is the last name of Elise's biological father (her parents were not married) and Lafond is the last name of the father who raised Elise and married Elise's mother. The Pauls come from the North Country, which is this side of Park Valley (speaking from Batoche). It has a big river and it is full of trees and lakes. Her maternal grandparents built a home on the road allowance northwest side of Duck Lake. Their neighbours were the Smiths and the Parenteaus. Rose was raised by her maternal grandparents and describes them as nomads, she recalls that they would pack up the rig and camp out in the bush, hunting deer, fishing, berry picking, Seneca root digging... always on the road. Her grandfather was a horse trader, hunter and also worked on a mink ranch. Rose describes her great grandmother as Cree, 'like the Trottiers' mostly speaking Cree and French. Her grandmother was a medicine woman and midwife. On her father's side she is related to Resistance participants Philippe and Pierre Gariépy.

Rose's husband, Ernest Fleury proposed to Rose when she was 14 years old in 1941, but Rose made him wait. She went to work in fish camp for three years beginning that year. Rose did not want to be a young bride and repeat her mother's pattern. Rose's mom was 12 when Rose was born and her father was 18. Her parents were not married. Later on however, Rose's mother did get married, but not to Rose's father, to his brother. Rose's uncle was now her stepfather.

Rose's parents were not equals in their marriage; Rose's father abused her mother and drank. When Rose got married, she set out the rules for their marriage, one which included no drinking. Rose's husband appreciated that rule for he only drank three times during their 63 year marriage.

As a youngster Rose attended the sisters of the Presentation of Mary convent school. She learned to write English, French and Cree syllabics. They weren't taught Cree in school, Rose learned Cree from the hymnbooks in church. She quit school in 1941 then she worked in a northern fish camp but went back to school in 1967. She was involved in the Metis women's Association and completed her grade 12 at Prince Albert in a Metis Society program. She then became a social worker and with a better paying job was able to buy two lots at Duck Lake and She and her husband built their home there. Later after an illness she took drafting training by correspondence (International Correspondence School). As a result she was able to sell house plans to Pine Grove Industries. She also worked for the provision board of the Metis Society. In duck Lake Rose was involved in the revival of Metis culture and was the force behind the establishment of a Metis Museum and genealogy centre in Duck Lake.

Rose was the subject of a documentary film *Sur les Traces de Riel* produced in 2003 by Sylvie Van Brabant of Les Productions du Rapide-Blanc of Montreal; it focuses on Rose's inspiring life story. Rose also assisted Parks Canada historian Diane Payment (now retired) with her community history of the Metis community of Batoche *The Free People – Li Gens Libres* (University of Calgary Press, 2009). She told Diane: "Everything I know I learned from my grandmother." She told her that kokum Élise Paul (née Trottier) had taught her the Cree, Michif-Cree and French languages and told her many stories about her past life at the old Metis settlement south-east of Saskatoon at Prairie Ronde. Mémère Paul was strict but strong and supportive. She instilled the values of courage, enterprise and self-reliance in her granddaughters. Élise Paul was paralyzed in one leg and had difficulty walking. However, she tanned hides for moccasins and beaded clothing. Rose would accompany her grandmother when she worked as a midwife and together would gather medicinal herbs. Her grandmother was also a Metis nationalist, following in the tradition of her grandfather Charles Trottier who was a Metis leader in the fighting during the 1885 Northwest Resistance.(Payment 2009: 253-255)

References:

Personal communication, interview at Batoche Historic Site, November 15, 2009.

Brenda Arnault, GDI interview transcripts March 14, 1984.

Diane Payment, *The Free People – Li Gens Libres*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009.