

Janice Acoose, Ph. D. (b. 1954, d. 2020)

Janice Acoose, the daughter of Fred Acoose and Harriet Beaudin, is an Anishinaabekwe-Métis-Nehiowé educator whose roots stem from the Sakimay (Saulteaux) First Nation and her mother's Ninankawe Marival Metis Community.¹ She was born in Broadview, Saskatchewan in 1954; she attended the Cowessess Indian Residential School in the early 1960's, and was raised culturally in both the Saulteaux and Metis cultures. She completed her BA Hon. and M.A. at the University of Saskatchewan and has now completed her Ph.D. at the same university. She is an Associate Professor in the English department at the First Nations University in Regina.

Her Michif-Chippewa (Plains Ojibwa, Saulteaux) ancestors were part of a hunting band that during the late 1700s and early 1800s ranged from the Hair (Pembina) Hills and the Assiniboine/Qu'Appelle River basins to hunt south-west of the Turtle Mountains along the big bend of the Souris River down through the Missouri River Grand Coteau. Her Desjarlais ancestors were established at Saulteaux Village on the Assiniboine River and assisted Father Antoine Belcourt to build his R.C. Mission there in 1833.²

In July of 1832 Father Belcourt selected a site for his mission along the Assiniboine River where a large number of Indians and Metis gathered in the spring. The mission was to be named under the protection of Saint Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles. Belcourt then returned in the spring of 1833 with Bishop Provencher's approval. He erected a chapel during the summer, but in September the site, sixty kilometers west of Red River was attacked by a group of Gros-Ventres Indians from the south. Bishop Provencher, concerned for the safety of the priest and the continued success of his work, had the mission re-located closer to St. Boniface.³

Acoose has written about her family background:⁴

Before settling at Marival, my mother's family came from the Red River area. Great-grandfather Jimmy (Jacques) Desjarlais⁵ - known to me as Mooshum

¹ Her father's mother was Madelaine O'Soup, the adopted daughter of Louis O'Soup, Chief of the Anishinaabe at O'Soup Reserve in Saskatchewan. Her paternal grandfather was Paul Acoose, from the Sakimay Reserve. Paul was the son of Samuel Acoose, an esteemed Buffalo Runner, and Samuel was descended from Quewich, who travelled with Chief Waywayseecapo.

² Two Desjarlais families assisted Father Belcourt. François Desjarlais, Janice Acoose's ancestor back five generations was one of the men who assisted Father Belcourt. He was born on 14 Oct 1768 in Riviere-du-Loup, P.Q. was a French Canadian married to a Metis woman, he worked on the R.C. Mission land as a hired hand. François married Francoise Roy. They had the following children: Francois Xavier Desjarlais, b. 1795, married Marie Otshikkan Outehique Bottineau. Francois then married Madeleine Roy. Their son Antoine, b. 1818, married Louise Richard. Louise was born 1826, the daughter of Francois Richard and Marguerite (Saulteaux). Their son, Bernard (b. 1851) married Marie Perreault dit Morin, (her grandmother was Marie Grant, Cuthbert Grant's sister) she was the daughter of Xavier Perreault dit Morin and Marie Bonneau and their son Jacques (b. 1879) is Acoose's great grandfather.

³ The exact location of the first mission, known as St. Paul des Saulteaux, is difficult to pinpoint. Two reliable sources locate it on the left bank of the Assiniboine, some eighty to ninety-five kilometres from St. Boniface. If measured in river distance, the site would have been situated somewhere near St. Eustache, but if measured as-the-crow-flies, it would have been located in the vicinity of Portage la Prairie.

⁴ Janice Acoose, "Knowing Relations is Knowing Oneself," *Windspeaker*, Vol. 11, No. 24, 1994: 4.

Jimmy - was born to Bernard Desjarlais⁵ and Marie Morin in 1879 at Red River in the St. Eustache Parish. When he came West, daughter of Philomene Pittwawedanepitt (Cree) and Dosithe Pelletier (Red River Metis). Mooshum Jimmy was a hunter and trapped and my Down-Koochum Marie Theresa a midwife with a phenomenal understanding of plants and medicinal herbs.

Their daughter, my maternal grandmother, Marie Philomene Desjarlais, married Fidele Beaudin, a young French orphan raised by the priests at the Lebret Boarding School. Although Fidele was born to culturally French parents, he assimilated to the ways of the Metis and thus when married, Fidele and Marie settled at Marival. My mother, Harriet (Beaudin) Acoose, who still proudly speaks Michief, grew up with 10 other siblings.

My deceased father, Fred Acoose, grew out of a very prominent and distinguished Saulteaux family known for their superhuman running abilities. Prior to the Treaties, my Great-Great Grandfather Quewich (or Rolling Thunder) travelled freely with Waywayseecapo's Band around the Great Lakes and through the Dakotas. According to oral history, both Quewich and his son Ekos (Flying Bird) were "empowered by the Creator with special powers to run."

Edo's son, my Mooshum Paul Acoose, was a world-champion runner who defeated Tom Longboat in the 1910 Redskin Running Championship of the World. Paul married Madeline O'Soup, a red-haired Irish orphan who was adopted by Chief O'Soup of the O'Soup Reserve (now known as the Cowessess.)

When my parents married at Crooked Lake in 1947, they brought with them the strengths, beliefs, values and traditions of both their cultures. As is our right as human beings, my five brothers and five sisters inherited both those cultures.

Ms. Acoose is a writer/scholar/producer who has utilized print, video, radio and television to enlighten mainstream society about the beauty, strength, and power of First Nations and Metis peoples. As a writer, she was Saskatchewan's first Native Affairs Columnist for the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*. In addition to the Saskatoon newspaper, she also regularly contributed to the *Regina Leader Post*, the *Prince Albert Herald*, *Aboriginal Voices*, *New Breed Magazine*, and *Windspeaker*.

She has also worked as a scriptwriter and co-producer for Katip Ayim Media Productions and CBC Radio. Acoose is interviewed in the 2006 National Film Board of Canada documentary *Finding Dawn*, about murdered and missing Aboriginal women in Canada.

Janice Acoose passed away in December 2020.

⁵ Jacques Desjarlais was born on August 27, 1879 at St. Eustache, the son of Bernard Desjarlais and Marie Perreault dit Morin.

⁶ Bernard Desjarlais, born 1851, was the son of Antoine Desjarlais and Louise Richard. A widower, he was first married to Rose Sayer (the daughter of the famous Guillaume Sayer of the 1849 Sayer Trial) and then married Marie Perrault dit Morin the daughter of Xavier Perrault dit Morin and Marie Bonneau.



Janice as a grad student in 1999.



Janice Acoose



Great-Great Grandfather, Quewich ("Roll of Thunder") in 1908,
PAM, Edmund Morris Collection 543
Quewich spoke fluent French, Saulteaux, Plains Cree and Michif.

The Janice Acoose reading list:

Acoose-Pelletier, Janice, "Crescent Lake Homecoming Celebrations." *New Breed Journal*, July-Aug. 1989: 10.

Acoose, Janice. "Family History." *New Breed Journal*. Vol. 22 (11), 1991: 18-19.

Acoose remembers her relatives, and living at her mother's Metis community at Marival and her father's home on Sakimay Reserve.

_____. "In Memory of Koochum Madeline O'Soup Acoose." *Canadian Women's Studies: Growing Into Age*, Vol. 12, 1992: 87-88.

_____. (Mishko-Kisikàwihkwè). "All My Relations." In Freda Ahenakew, Brenda Gardipy, and Barbara Lafond (Editors): *Native Voices*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1993: 150-151.

- _____. "Deconstructing Five Generations of White Christian Patriarchal Rule." In Linda Jaine (Editor): *Residential Schools: The Stolen Years*. Saskatoon: The University of Saskatchewan Press, 1993: 3-7.
- _____. "Knowing Relations is Knowing Oneself," *Windspeaker*, Vol. 11, No. 24, 1994: 4
- _____. "Post Halfbreed." *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature*. Jeannette Armstrong (Ed.). Penticton: Theytus Press, 1994: 28-44.
- _____. "A Revisiting of Maria Campbell's Halfbreed." *Looking at the Words of Our People*. Jeannette Armstrong (Ed.). Penticton: Theytus Press, 1994:138-150.
- _____, and Brenda Zeman. "Acoose: Man Standing Above Ground." *Voices of First Nations*. The Senior Issues Collection. Eds. Freda Ahenakew, Brenda Gardipy, and Barbara Lafond. Toronto: McGraw Hill-Ryerson, 1995: 112-124.
- _____. *Iskwewak – Kah' Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1995.

This book is an extension of her M.A. thesis with the same title and is her major written work to date. She argues that:

...canadian (sic) literature is an ideological instrument. As such, it promotes the cultures, philosophies, values, religion, politics, economics, and social organization of the white, european (sic), christian, canadian (sic) patriarchy, while at the same time it fosters cultural attitudes about Indigenous people that are based on unrealistic, derogatory, and stereotypic images (p. 34).

Acoose begins with a personal narrative and questions of identity, then deconstructs stereotypic images of Indigenous women. Chapter three demonstrates that these images have perpetuated racism and sexism fostering attitudes that encourage violence against indigenous women. In chapter four she examines how these images exist and are promoted in the writing of two of Canada's most influential writers, Margaret Laurence and William Patrick Kinsella. In chapter five she discusses Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* as a watershed in Canadian literature in terms of challenging existing stereotypes and by contextualizing writing for Indigenous people in a way that aids the decolonization process. The final chapter reviews the work of several contemporary Indigenous writers and the culturally diverse basis on which they write.

- _____. "In Memory of Kohkum Madeline." In Greg Young-Ing and Florence Belmore (Editors): *Gatherings, Vol. X, Fall 1999: The En'owkin Journal of First North American Peoples*. Penticton, British Columbia: Theytus Books, 1999: 283-284.

_____ “The Problem of ‘Searching’ For April Raintree.” In Beatrice Culleton Mosioner (Edited by Cheryl Suzack): *In Search of April Raintree: Critical Edition*. Winnipeg: Portage and Main Press, 1999: 227-236.

_____ and N. Beeds. “Cree-atively Speaking.” In D.H. Taylor (Ed.) *Me Funny*. Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, 2005: 83-97.

_____ “Paul Acoose” In *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 2005: 26.

_____ Lisa Brooks, Tol Foster, Leanne Howe, Daniel Heath Justice, Paul Carroll Morgan, Kimberly Roppolo, Cheryl Suzack, Christopher B. Teuton, Sean Teuton, Robert Warrior, and Craig S. Womack. *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collection*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008.

_____ “Honouring Ni’Wahkomakanak.” In Craig Womack, Daniel Heath Justice and Christopher Teuton (Eds.) *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collection*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008: 216-233.

_____ “Minjiimendaamowinon Anishinaabe: Reading and Righting All Our Relations in Written English.” University of Saskatchewan, Ph.D. thesis, 2011.

This thesis documents how Acoose’s Anishinaabe ancestors preserved Midewewin knowledge, ceremonies and beliefs through the colonial period on the plains of the Old Northwest.

Endnotes:

Jacques Desjarlais born 1879, Janice’s Great Grandfather, while living at Crooked Lake in Assiniboia District, NWT, made application for his Metis Scrip in 1900:

Desjarlais, Jacques; address: Crooked Lake; claim no. 798; born: September 1880 at Baie St. Paul; father: Bernard Desjarlais (Métis); mother: Marie Perreault (Métis)

RG15 , Interior , Series D-II-8-c , Volume 1344 , Reel C-14964

However, this application was turned down by the Northwest Scrip Commission because he was a “Manitoba Halfbreed”, see the letter below in the endnotes.

Antoine Desjarlais (born 1818), Janice’s Great-Great-Great Grandfather, did receive Metis Scrip when he applied on behalf of his wife Louise (Richard) see below.

DOMINION OF CANADA.

PROVINCE OF MANITOBA.

County of *Marquette*

Parish of *St. Paul*

of the Parish of

in the County of

Province,

Antoine Desjarlais

St. Paul

Marquette St in said

farmer.

being duly sworn, deposeth and saith;

That *Louise Desjarlais*, his late wife, died in the Parish of *St. Paul* in said Province, on the *15th* day of *July* 1879, as appears by a burial certificate now produced;

That the said late *Louise Desjarlais* died intestate,

leaving as sole heirs at law, ~~the present deponent and ten~~ children, viz:

1. *Antoine Desjarlais*
2. *Stanislas*
3. *Gregoire*
4. *Bernard*
5. *Baptiste*
6. *Charles*
7. *Euphrasine*
8. *Rosalie*
9. *Madeline*
10. *Josephite*

That the said deceased was a Half breed head of family and resided in the Province of Manitoba on the 15th July, 1879;

That as such Half breed ~~she~~ was entitled to receive a grant of one hundred and sixty acres of land, or to receive scrip for one hundred and sixty dollars, pursuant to the statute in that behalf;

That according to the law in force in Manitoba at the time of the decease of said *Louise Desjarlais* —

~~this deponent and said children claim to be entitled to said land or scrip, as joint heirs to said deceased, viz: the former, this deponent to one third and the latter, the said children to equal shares of the remaining two thirds;~~ *in equal shares*

That the said deceased never received, as an Indian, any annuity moneys, from the Dominion, nor has the present claim been preferred elsewhere.

And further deponent saith not, his present deposition being read and explained to him in his own language, he hath affixed his mark.

Antoine Desjarlais
Mark

Sworn before me at the Parish aforesaid
on this *thirtieth* day of *September* 1879.

M. J. P.

Commissioner.

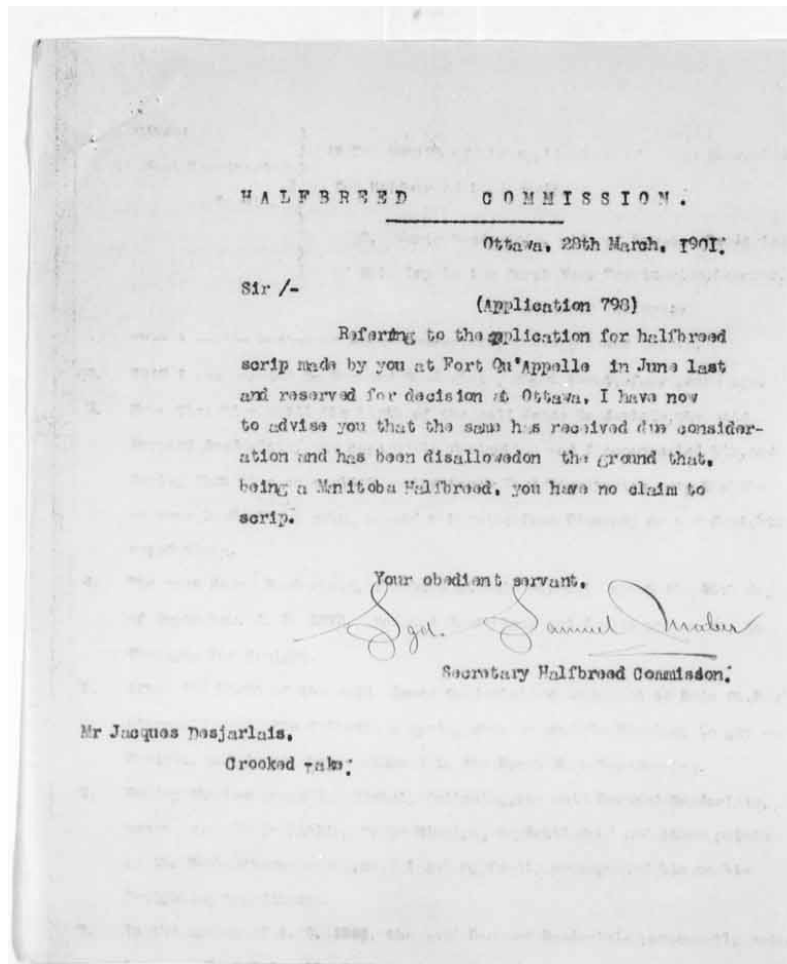
Offt. N° 2386.

Claim N° 1322.

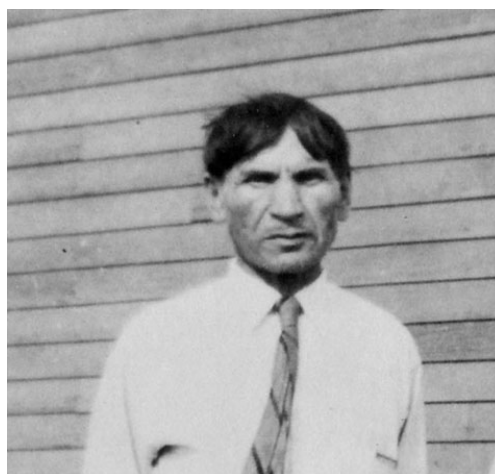
Scrip N° 9292 to 9301. # 160.00.

Scrip issued on 3rd July 1876.

12-4-86. J. A. C.



Letter to Jacques Desjarlais regarding Metis Scrip.



Grandfather: Paul Acoose (b. 1883)



Two Michifs: Louis O'Soup Cardinal (1835-1913) and Gambler Tanner.
Gambler was one of the Treaty Four negotiators in 1874
and eventually signed the adhesion to the Treaty.

Reference:

Barkwell, L.J., Leah Dorion and Darren Préfontaine. "Janice Acoose," in *Metis Legacy: A Metis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications and Louis Riel Institute, 2001: 274.

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