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LOUIS LALIBERTE

Mr. Laliberte is a resident of Beauval and was involved in the early establishment of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan and was president of the Beauval local.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Early meetings at which Metis Association was established.
- Conditions in the north and how the Metis Association has improved them.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Louis Laliberte is a resident of Beauval and was president of the first local of the Metis Society. He knew Malcolm and first met him in Saskatoon where the Liberal government held its meeting for Indian and Metis people. He tells of the meetings of the association and of Malcolm's role.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I am talking to Louis Laliberte of Beauval. Louis, you met Malcolm about 1964, eh?

Louis: I think it was 1964 or 1963, somewhere in around there.

Murray: Can you remember the circumstances when you met him? How did you meet him and what was going on then?

Louis: Not too much. But the reason I know him is I went to the meetings before that at Prince Albert, you know. That's where I met him. And Saskatoon too, at the Bessborough. The first time I meet him in Saskatoon in the Bessborough. That's the first time I ever talked to him.

Murray: What was that meeting?

Louis: The Metis Society.

Murray: That was the Metis Society meeting in Saskatoon, eh?

Louis: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Who had organized that meeting? Do you know who called that meeting?

Louis: Let's see, I think I made a mistake, I don't think this was a Metis Society meeting. Some kind of a meeting of...

Murray: Was that the one that Thatcher called between the Indian and Metis people?

Louis: I think so, yeah. Anyway, that's where I seen him, you know. He didn't really, he didn't start it. That wasn't his meeting. Not the Metis Society's neither I don't think. Anyway, that's where I met him and he started talking about his Metis society, how it started up, he said, and they started up at the Alberta. That was the first one and then he come up here and started organizing the people you know, around Prince Albert. That is all I can remember.

Murray: Right. What kinds of things did he say? Did he say why they needed a Metis Society? Did he talk about that at all?

Louis: Well, he said the Metis should organize people, you know. He said trying to get together to have a little more power for Metis societies for living. You know, and should figure this better living if we get together.

Murray: Make better conditions for Metis people, eh?

Louis: Better conditions yeah, if we get together and all the Metis get together and the treaties. What I understand.

Murray: Had he already started the Metis society when you first met him, do you think? Was there one going in Prince Albert?

Louis: Yeah, I think so, yeah. It's already - and he had a little office in Prince Albert. Later on, I think a year after or two, when I went to Prince Albert, he had a little office there on his own, start of the Metis Society's office. He was the first one. And his partner there, what is his name?

Murray: Not Jim Brady.

Louis: No. This one,...

Murray: Don Nielson.

Louis: Don Nielson, yeah. Him and Don Nielson, yeah.

Murray: So they were the two that sort of got it going, eh?

Louis: Yeah. And before that or the same year, they put up the meeting at Prince Albert. What do you call that hotel, the Prince Albert hotel there in the back of Prince Albert.

Murray: But it was in a hotel in Prince Albert, eh?

Louis: Yeah, a hotel in Prince Albert.

Murray: That was the same year as this meeting at the Bessborough, eh?

Louis: Yeah, I think so. The same year in the spring, towards spring. And they really bring up there then, you know, how this should start. And he got this Dr. Howard too. He bring that Dr. Howard in.

Murray: Howard Adams?

Louis: Yeah, Howard Adams. He bring that up. He got him to say something, you know.

Murray: Do you remember some of the things they said?

Louis: Dr. Howard?

Murray: Well, either Dr. Howard or...?

Louis: Not too much. Not too much.

Murray: They talked about organizing mostly, eh?

Louis: Organizing mostly. That's the thing, yeah.

Murray: Were there people at the meeting from lots of communities?

Louis: There was quite a few, yeah.

Murray: Do you remember some of the places that people came from?

Louis: Most of them Prince Albert and here. And, there was a lot of places.

Murray: Would there be anybody from Ile-a-la-Crosse?

Louis: I think so, yeah. I think Vital(?) was there.

Murray: And Green Lake?

Louis: Green Lake, yeah. And Canoe Narrows, there was quite a few.

Murray: So there was Canoe Narrows too, eh?

Louis: Yeah.

Murray: What about Buffalo? And La Loche?

Louis: I don't know.

Murray: Don't remember anybody from those places?

Louis: I don't remember. I don't remember anybody from that kind of places.

Murray: How did you find out about the meeting? It was in Prince Albert. Did someone phone you or write to you about the meeting in Prince Albert? Do you remember how you found out about it?

Louis: Yeah, I think this was already started, the Metis Society. That's how I know. They wrote me a letter here. There is a meeting in there if I am interested to go. That's how I find that out. Somebody wrote me a letter.

Murray: You don't remember who wrote the letter, eh?

Louis: No, no I don't remember.

Murray: Somebody from Prince Albert?

Louis: Yeah, from Prince Albert.

Murray: What was the plan at that meeting? What was supposed to happen after that meeting? Do you remember what the plan was?

Louis: No, I don't remember, no.

Murray: Did he want people to go back into their communities to start locals?

Louis: Yeah, yeah, that's right, yeah. Start locals, you know. Be just asking the people, you know, what the people could find out is better living the way it is now. What he's got to work on. If you have an idea what a person could find out how the people could make better living the way it is now, they say they have something to do to talk to the government. He was going to help the people, trying to bring up something for local...

Murray: So he wanted to sort of look to see where the problems were, is that it?

Louis: Yeah, it was just the problems, looking for what you got for problems. I know they've been after me, asking me well, "You must have problems," and all that, you know. But really, I don't know. Really, at that time, because I was working at the ferry here, you know, it was going alright and...

Murray: So you had a pretty good time then for yourself?

Louis: Time for myself. But I never know what the people wants really. A few years after, in Prince Albert again and

when I got back from Prince Albert, I started to go around our local people to talk to those should start up something you know. Start up something in Beauval. "It's a shame," I said, "that these young people just look through the window. Don't have bugger all to do, nothing to do, you know. Just on welfare. They should have something, sawmill or post camp, something like that. Let's ask for Metis Society and government, to ask the government, you know, trying to get something done."

Murray: This is what you were saying at that meeting, eh?

Louis: No, to the people, the local people here.

Murray: Oh the local people.

Louis: Yeah, the local people here. So I pick up Phillip Gauthier and Jules Roy and John Frazer, the greater men. There was nothing to do, just happened that time. I said, "Let's go to Prince Albert, see the government and get the Metis Society to talk for us and help us. That's what they are there for now, to start it up." So we did went down to Prince Albert. We did and start to organize, say what we should have something to do there. There is a lot of timbers in that country, in our county, should start up something, you know. It's a shame the way it is now, there is nothing to do, just trapping and fishing, it's not enough for all these people. Finally, they got it going, this post camp here. A few years after, about two, three years after then we got it open, we got the money.

Murray: So that worked.

Louis: It worked, yeah.

Murray: You put pressure on the government did you?

Louis: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: How did that work? Did you go to the Metis Society and tell them what you wanted and they put pressure on the government? Is that how it worked?

Louis: Yeah, yeah, that's right, yeah.

Murray: Did you speak to Malcolm that time?

Louis: Not really, not Malcolm. Jim did. Jim was on there, Jim Sinclair. He wasn't the president that time, but still, he was almost in the top.

Murray: He was the field worker.

Louis: He was the field worker, and here he's the one that do the talking, most. And I know him since... that's quite a few years since I know him.

Murray: What year was that that you went with those other men to Prince Albert? Do you remember?

Louis: That must be around 1967 or something like that when they first started, 1968 .

Murray: Yeah, because Malcolm died in 1967.

Louis: 1967, yeah.

Murray: In the winter, and he was in Calgary by then.

Louis: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I know at the time he was in some kind of wheelchair. He come into the meeting in a wheelchair.

Murray: In Prince Albert?

Louis: In Prince Albert, yeah.

Murray: Getting back to Beauval, do you remember the meetings? Were there meetings here that happened too in Beauval? Was there ever a local Metis Society here?

Louis: No, not too much, you know. But they picked me up for president here in Beauval that time when the Metis Society. And I have carried on, trying to put up the meetings a little, you know. Not too much but some, a little. And I took it out, the reports to Prince Albert Metis societies, whatever I get ahold of.

Murray: Right. How often did you have meetings in Beauval?

Louis: Oh, just the once a year or twice a year or something like that.

Murray: Not very often.

Louis: No, not very often.

Murray: How many people would come out to those meetings?

Louis: Oh, it's not too many, around ten or fifteen, you know. I remember 20, 25, you know, sometimes. Quite a few come out.

Murray: And what year was that? 1964 or 1965?

Louis: Something like that, yeah, 1965, yeah.

Murray: What kinds of things did you talk about when those meetings were held?

Louis: The only thing that's what I was always after, trying to do something for the people, you know.

Murray: Right.

Louis: Like the sawmill and really, that was the first time. I was really after them to have a sawmill here because we had a sawmill here a few years ago.

Murray: Before that like.

Louis: Before that, yeah. There was quite a few working in here. There was quite a few they do their living on that, you know.

Murray: And then the sawmill closed down?

Louis: The sawmill closed down, yeah. And the fish box, the box factory created. That's what we had. Sawmill was mostly box factory. Little fish boxes. We use a lot of fish boxes up this country, you know. They were all coming from Winnipeg that time.

Murray: So that was silly. You could make them here.

Louis: Yeah, that's what I said, you know. That's what I said. Should start up a sawmill here. Get the money from government and start up the sawmill and make our own boxes and sell boxes from here. Even so, they can sell lumber up north, you know, if we have enough sawmill. Well, finally somebody else took it over. Some other people took it over from here, you know, and I had nothing to do with them. And they started, the same money to come out.

Murray: They got government money?

Louis: Yeah, they started up a post camp. That was pretty

good, too. Pretty good when they start up the post camp. There is a lot of people working in there now.

Murray: The sawmill, is there still a sawmill?

Louis: No, it's not a sawmill. Just the post camp, yeah.

Murray: Just the post camp. What can you tell me about Malcolm and could you describe him a bit to me? What kind of man was he? You know, you only knew him a little bit I know, but what...?

Louis: Yeah, I know him a little bit, not too much. But he was pretty good anyway, trying to help people. That's all I know him. He tried to help. He would try to tell you how to start up things, you know, start up and how to talk to the people. He tried to explain everything, you know. What the person should start it and how to make a living. How to talk

to the government, how to work on the government and all that. We don't know too much of that in this country at that time, you know.

Murray: Right.

Louis: But he, that's all he explained.

Murray: He was trying to teach you things.

Louis: Yes, like teaching, yeah. He explained a lot of things, you know.

Murray: Was he critical of the government? Did he criticize the government a lot when he talked to you and other people?

Louis: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Can you remember anything he used to say to the government?

Louis: No, not too much. He was, all he was telling us there... He was a Liberal, I think. Let's see, no...

Murray: He was probably an NDP, eh?

Louis: NDP. He was an NDP, yeah. And Liberal got licked at that time and he got fired, what he was telling us. That's how he was in that job.

Murray: That's right.

Louis: And he started for the Metis societies. Turned around and started up on his own.

Murray: Did he ever talk about the NDP being good and the Liberals being bad? Did he ever say that at all?

Louis: No.

Murray: He never talked about that?

Louis: No.

Murray: He just talked about the Metis people organizing.

Louis: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: I'm trying to find out whether he talked very much about politics, the NDP politics or Liberal politics or whether he stuck just to Metis Society stuff.

Louis: No, I don't think, I never heard him say anything. He might but I doubt it and I don't know.

Murray: Never when you heard him talk?

Louis: No, no.

Murray: Do you think when he talked to people around here or in Prince Albert that they understood everything that he was saying or were there some people who didn't understand?

Louis: Some people did not understand, that's true, yeah. But there was an interpreter there. He explained some things, you know.

Murray: Did he speak Cree as well as English when he spoke to people?

Louis: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: I've heard some people say that he was maybe too aggressive and he came on really strong and maybe frightened people off a bit. Did you ever see that happen?

Louis: No, not when I was there, no.

Murray: So people understood what he was saying?

Louis: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Do you think that in those days, people were looking for that kind of leader, that they knew that things weren't so good and they wanted things to be better? Or was this a new thing for them, for someone like Malcolm to come and say, "Things can be better. You should fight for your rights." Was that new to people? That kind of talking?

Louis: Yeah, that kind of talking, yeah that's right. He was that alright, yeah.

Murray: Do you think people were ready for that sort of talk? They knew what he meant? Did they feel themselves, do you think, that their lives could be better or had they not thought

of that before?

Louis: No, could be some people but not too many, no.

Murray: Most people just took their lives for whatever they were and didn't think about making them better?

Louis: No, yeah, yeah, that's right.

Murray: I know that some people have said that Malcolm sometimes used big words and things like that, and if people didn't understand, then he got impatient. Did you ever see him get impatient with anyone?

Louis: Oh yeah, he'd do that but he would explain, too. He explained too. He talked just as much as we do, you know. He was talking Cree just as good as we do. If we don't understand, he knows right away, you know. If people don't understand, then he explained what this means in our words, like.

Murray: He was a popular man with the people, was he?

Louis: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Do you think a lot of people around Beauval still remember him?

Louis: I doubt it. Maybe another one. I doubt it because I think it was only one who knew him because he come into my place when he comes here. Because I know him. I met him in Prince Albert, that's the only thing.

Murray: That's why he stayed with you because he'd met you and...?

Louis: Yeah, that's right. Not just because he thinks more about me but only one who met him in Prince Albert. Nobody else knows him around town. I don't think so. They might. Because Jules Roy, he should know him too. He was with me that time once, I think.

Murray: Right.

Louis: And Emil Hanson, but he is not living now. He was with me to go and see him that once. Let's see. Emil Hanson and Louis Lafleur. Both of them is not living anymore. They died.

Murray: Right.

Louis: They passed away.

Murray: Jules Roy is still alive.

Louis: Jules Roy is still alive. And maybe Jack Wriggleton.

I'm not too sure, Jack Wriggleton, he was with us that time.

Murray: Is he still alive too?

Louis: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: What about...?

Louis: Phillip Gauthier, I don't know. I don't think he... he might. You can ask him but... he might know him, yeah.

Murray: What about Ralph? You have a brother, would he...?

Louis: Yeah, my brother Ralph, yeah.

Murray: He might have known him?

Louis: He might have known him, yeah. He might.

Murray: Did the Metis Society start to grow after that or did it sort of die down after Malcolm died? Can you remember that at all?

Louis: No. The Metis Society, they've built up quite a bit since. Well he was started, you know, but he didn't last very long. And Jim Sinclair, he took it over. Yeah, and he built up quite a lot since it started. You know, to protect the people you know, somebody behind us. Before that there wasn't hardly anybody behind us like, you know.

Murray: Right, before 1964.

Louis: Yeah, before 1964.

Murray: Can you ever remember any kind of organization at all before that? There was nothing before 1964?

Louis: There was nothing, no. Oh, it was tough in this country, you know, that time. You wouldn't believe, it was a lot of things. This is tough before, anybody behind us.

Murray: What kind of things were bad before that?

Louis: Well this is, treaty Indians, they got Indian Department behind them. And white people, they got government behind them. Metis and the halfbreeds, there is nobody behind them. That's what I mean.

Murray: Right.

Louis: And after this Metis Society got into this, well this is somebody behind us. It's sure changed since that time, you know. It helps. This few years ago, there was nothing to do here. There was a lot of older people, they can tell you. There was nothing to do. There was no work or anything. No welfare, nothing like that. Just trapping and fishing. And

this government, they used to close the rat season and beaver season in the spring. They said to try to bring them more. Well, they seen it was nothing to do. Nothing else to do.

Murray: The CCF government, eh?

Louis: No, that's the Liberal government.

Murray: That was 1964 then?

Louis: Before that.

Murray: Oh I see, before the CCF.

Louis: Yeah. Before the CCF. Liberal that time. And all they know. They come up here, one guy, forget his name, federal government. He come up here, you know, that's that time we had that bombing range money here. I had a little argument with him, you know. I said, "They don't give them anything for

the people in this country. They don't help them." He opened up his briefcase, and he showed me a letter that he give to missionaries over here, \$650 that time to help people. I damn near slapped him because he just give them that \$600 cheque. They don't help people.

Murray: He wouldn't give a Metis person that.

Louis: We cutting cord wood across here for the mission and that money, 100 cords, a dollar and half a cord. That's only \$150 spent there. And haying time in the summer, a dollar a day. I don't know what he spent. Where does the rest go? I told him about that. "Well, who in the hell will take the money," he said. "The only ones up here going to help people." Sure it's tough, I know. Because there was nothing in this country.

Murray: So people really needed the Metis Society?

Louis: They really needed the Metis Society, yeah.

Murray: And they knew that when they heard about...

Louis: Yeah, and the same thing with this post camp over here. Now DNS put up the post camp. Sure, DNS post camp. Now we had an argument with this, my local people here now. If it wasn't Metis Society, we wouldn't have anything in there. They don't believe that but I think that's true.

Murray: Well, it was only because of the pressure from the Metis Society...

Louis: You see, what he told me here. We had an argument here one time. "It was Metis Society. You wouldn't have that post camp." "Sure that DNS. We got the money from DNS," he said. "That's not Metis Society's. DNS gave us the money." Yes, but

DNS be around them, right behind them. See, there is a lot of things that way. There is a lot of things. If it wasn't Metis Society, nothing would be going.

Murray: They didn't give you the money but they put the pressure on the government.

Louis: Put pressure on the government, yeah. That's just how it works. The Metis Society hasn't got the money but they got the pressure to do it.

Murray: But not everybody sees that.

Louis: Nobody, you don't see that, yeah. Oh, there is a lot of people seeing it but not everybody.

Murray: How many do you think? A lot more people understand that or less?

Louis: Less.

Murray: More people think it's the NDP or the DNS.

Louis: Yeah, yeah, most of them.

Murray: How did most people feel about the Metis Society when it first started up?

Louis: There was a lot of them, they don't believe.

Murray: What did they think? What kind of things would they say about it?

Louis: Still they don't believe, some of them. Oh, the same thing that I heard some people said they are trying to get the money for the Metis Society. They take so darn long to start up something like, you know. Like rancher, meat ranchers and cattle ranchers like that, they are trying to get the money for Metis Society. It takes so long because they haven't got the money. They have to go to government first. Trying to get the money for the helping.

Murray: So they don't understand the Metis Society?

Louis: They don't understand that neither, you know. Oh, that argument, you know, a lot of times. But I'm on the side of the Metis Society, I know because I've been with them for so many years. It's all government so far, you know.

Murray: Yeah.

Louis: The same thing with that bombing range money. We had a meeting in Prince Albert. The government and the Metis Society asked me how this work with government money. Canoe Narrows,

the treaties, they got up to \$3000 of this bombing range over here, for a trapping area and fishing area. They are taking

that fishing area, trapping area. And we are getting \$1000, Metis. And treaties, they get \$3000 and we are getting at highest, \$1000. Some of them, they got \$200. And Jans Bay, just off Canoe Narrows, the highest, I think, \$250 they were getting, families. Most of them \$80, \$90, \$100.

Murray: That's for their trapping rights?

Louis: Yeah. The same rights, these treaties they got \$3000. These people, the same rights to go there, but you see, \$200 the highest, \$250 something like that.

Murray: For the same thing?

Louis: For the same thing. And the government asked me why they get so much less than these treaties. Because treaties, they got the federal government behind them. That Metis Society has nothing. And over here, you see, James Bay, "They got the highest," I said, "\$250 for the same thing." And we were getting \$1000 here for the same thing. They asked me, "Why you got \$1000 here and the highest \$250 here and \$3000 just in about the same place?" I said, "Treaties, they got their government behind them." And us over here in Beauval... Bill Sander, he's in Prince Albert. He was a dealer buying fish and fur and all that. He's got a store over here. That's his building still over here. He was doing the talking for the people. He was really fighting for the people, trying to get more money because he's got a store. That's the reason we got \$1000 each. And Jans Bay, nobody to say anything.

Murray: So they had no one to fight for them?

Louis: No one to fight for it. They only got \$250 the highest. Most of them... some \$60 for one payment.

Murray: Did that happen a lot in the north? People didn't know how to fight for themselves, is that right?

Louis: That's right. That's right. That's what I said. The Metis Society is good for the people now. They had somebody behind them.

Murray: Because it showed people how to fight for their rights.

Louis: Yeah, if it's that time Metis Society was with us, you could be same, each the same amount of money. I think it would.

Murray: But without that, the government would cheat you.

Louis: Yeah, yeah. It shows right there.

Murray: Right.

Louis: Why did they get the \$3000 them people, just a couple of miles away? Just a couple of miles away, the highest \$250.

Murray: Right.

Louis: For the same thing for these people. Supposed to have the same rights. You know, that's what I said. That shows the difference with the Metis Society started.

Murray: When the Metis Society started?

Louis: Yeah.

Murray: I'm going to ask you a few more questions about Malcolm. He was quite a strong speaker. Do you remember in meetings, do you think he dominated meetings? Did he let other people talk or did he do most of the talking?

Louis: Yeah, he did, yeah.

Murray: He let other people talk?

Louis: Oh yeah, yeah.

Murray: He asked other people, encouraged people to talk?

Louis: Yeah, he did, yeah. Well, Jim Sinclair, he was right with him that time.

Murray: He was with Malcolm, eh?

Louis: Yeah, he was right with him, yeah. Every meeting I went in anyway, already Jim Sinclair was there.

Murray: So Jim was working right from the beginning when Malcolm was there too, eh?

Louis: Yeah.

Murray: Had Malcolm already gotten sick then or was that before?

Louis: No, before. Yeah, oh yeah. I mean he was alright then the first time we had a meeting. The first time in Prince Albert at the Bessborough. It was all right then.

Murray: Did Malcolm ever talk about racism and discrimination against native people? Do you remember him ever talking about that?

Louis: No, no.

Murray: About people making bad comments about Indian people? Did he ever...?

Louis: No, no, never.

Murray: He didn't talk about that, eh?

Louis: Maybe, but I don't remember it ever.

Murray: Not when you were there?

Louis: No.

Murray: Did he ever talk to you about what was going on in other communities when he came to Beauval, other Metis Society locals?

Louis: Yeah, yeah, he asked who's here, who's coming in from local communities, and that's all he asked.

Murray: So he sort of tried to tell you what was going on.

Louis: Yeah, yeah, he tried to find out about all the communities. If you seen anybody from that community, he wanted them to say anything, you know. Get up and say something.

Murray: So he was always encouraging people to tell about their problems.

Louis: Yeah, and that sort of thing.

Murray: Do you think people understood that, that if they got together, they would be stronger?

Louis: Oh yeah, sure. Maybe not all of them but most of them.

Murray: The ones who didn't, why do you think they didn't? Were they frightened? Or were they ashamed of being native people? What were some of the reasons they might have not seen the Metis Society as good?

Louis: Well, some people they were fighting most of them. Most of them, they understand a different way, different things, different way. They say, "We've never seen that before, you know. This is the first time they start up." This was with the government. Before that there was nothing. When the government comes up here, he goes to the mission, talks to the priest. That's all. We didn't see nobody.

Murray: Right. So the Metis Society was the first organization you could talk to?

Louis: Yeah, yeah, sure.

Murray: Right. How many times did Malcolm come to Beauval? Do you remember?

Louis: I think twice.

Murray: Just twice, eh?

Louis: Yeah, just twice come up through here. He went to

Buffalo Narrows, somewheres up there, and he would stop in here, just stop on the way. I know I remember once he just stopped over here for lunch, to see me at the same time, you know, talk to me for a few minutes and away he'd go again.

Murray: Did he ever speak at a meeting here?

Louis: No. Not in Beauval, no.

Murray: The only meetings...

Louis: Not that I remember. Could be, but I don't think so.

Murray: So the only meetings that were in Beauval were just of local people?

Louis: The local, yeah. Just local.

Murray: Were you president of the local for a while?

Louis: Yeah, back then, yeah.

Murray: Those were in the early years, eh?

Louis: Yeah, yeah.

(End of Side A)

(End of Tape)

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