

Nap Johnson

Summary

Dr. Hoffman, he was here for nineteen years. He asked me to go to Regina to see Premier Thatcher about the Liberal member. He wanted cattle ranching around here, Ile a la Crosse, so people could get cattle cheap. Thatcher was a cattle rancher for many years. Why we went there was that Ile a la Crosse flooded. Thatcher said he'd come to Ile a la Crosse and look the land over. When he did come, he stopped at Green Lake. There was a fellow there by the name of Harry Gardiner and he'd worked as a cattle rancher hand for ten years. He told the Premier that he wanted to start up cattle ranching. Thatcher said he'd give Harry thirty head of cattle instead of ten head. Sell the calves every spring and then you pay up. Pay taxes on the land you got. Thatcher died that, that fall. Harry married a girl from Green Lake. Harry said three weeks after Thatcher died, the government started to tax him and he hadn't even started to make money. I borrowed money and got a grant. Before I got set up, I had to have lumber brought here from Meadow Lake and Maurice Grant (pilot) hauled it to Big Sandy close to Cree Lake. After all the expenses, I didn't make anything yet. The tax collectors started coming. I was born November 30th, 1915. I was born at Sucker Point across from Sandy Point. (Five miles east of Ile a la Crosse.) My wife, Margaret, she was born in Sandy Point. Her name was Margaret Kipling. For instance, Ice Fisheries started in 1914 and that was where I originated from. My mother married a guy by the name of Johnson. I was raised in Sucker Point and my mother was a treaty Indian. At that time, she belonged to the Patuanak band. We used to borrow a canoe to go to Patuanak to get her rations: about six pounds of salt pork, three balls of twine for netting, two hooks, twine for casting. When I was about eight, nine years old, I used to trap for weasels and minks. I couldn't open the traps. I had to put a little stick and I would kneel on it and I would pull the spring down. I worked for Baptiste Natomagan, (Modeste) Aubichon, Julian Aubichon and Apisis. These were four elders. My mother used to tell me that this was a good story to tell young people. We had to go in the bush to haul dry wood. There was no sweet saw at that time. I had to use a cross cut saw to cut wood. I'd cut wood for all those people. They had no old age pension at that time. My mom used to tell me, don't stand around expecting payment. They are poor, just like us. We had to get fish from the lake and in the winter time, I had to go in the bush to hunt chickens, etc. When I was twelve years old, I started to kill moose, then caribou, deer. I didn't get married until I was twenty-five years old. I was in the North all winter. When I'd come back, then the bush fires would start. We would go fire fighting from one fire to another. Pretty soon I was a fire boss. I remember one guy, Jean Baptiste Maurice, from Beauval. He was special constable. That spring I was trapping and he, my uncle, Abraham, he came for Easter and he brought me a letter from the people to be a special constable, but I have no education, but my mother used to say, "Let them do the talking."

This one guy, Jean Baptiste Natomagan, said my dad made a birch bark canoe. I came down the river and saw a mink in a trap. I took that mink, but I admonish myself. Why did I take that? I stole that mink. You know people were very honest in those days. They had a big warehouse in south end of Green Lake. They hauled freight there with oxen. In the summer time, people would have twenty-five foot long boats. They called it a scow, le bats. They used lumber and paper inside so it wouldn't leak, and logs about six, eight inches round. They flatten them at the end, about five feet and at the other end, there was an opening about a foot and a half so they could stand there and steer. It took them twelve days to get to south end of Green Lake (traveling on the Beaver River) and back here. Three dollars and fifty cents was all they were getting. They were getting fifty cents a skin, pelt. Those people had to paddle with those big oars. The river used to be high. When Johnny Montgrand died, I went to his wake. (Buffals) I saw an old man there and I asked him, why now the leaves are low and the rivers are dry. He said, "Look, you remember when the winters were seventy below, sixty, fifty?" Now it hardly gets to forty below zero. The ground used to freeze. When the snow melted, everything went (seeped) into the rivers and lakes. That's why the water (river) was high. I remember in 1932, twice that winter, we had seventy below zero. My grandfather's name was Baptiste Misponas. Nohkom, grandmother's name was Langier, but I don't know where she's from. Nocapan (great-grandmother) Marie LaPat. She's from Lac la Biche. That's where the bishop picked her up. She didn't have anybody to look after her. The nuns (sisters) took her to Winnipeg. Another one was Kezee, Marcel Kezee. They were the first to stay in Buffalo Narrows. Marcel married Charlotte. Charlotte was also from Lac la Biche. The bishop took them to Winnipeg. John Catfish married my grandmother, Marie La Pat. My grandfather, John Catfish, was a boxer. He paddled up this river with the York boats. You know those York boats, they'd leave here with six or seven men per boat. They had seven York boats. They'd paddle all the way to the Hudson Bay and then along the Bay until they came upon the Winnipeg River, Red River to go to Saskatoon to load up with freight. They returned the same route they came on and into the Churchill River to here. When they'd arrive back here, the leaves are already falling. (It's fall) They'd leave in May and arrive here in October. It took them all summer. I was the only one in the family. Harry Morin and I went hunting at the five mile portage. We killed a big bull moose and buck. It took two trips to haul the meat to the lake, which was five miles. We were packing. When I started this outfitting, one time this one guy brought seven tourists. We flew to Sinic Lake. We shot a moose in the bush about a mile in. Joe Misponas was guiding for free. The big boss there, he said these big guys here, farmer, will pack the meat. Your guys won't have to pack any. We skinned the moose. They cut a chunk of meat and skewered it on a stick. My kids could carry more than that. I took the hind quarter, the ribs and half the chest. I put it on my back. The other day, we had a prayer meeting. I read English and Cree. I am going to show you an amulet (medicine). A few years back, the Cree medicine people, they got bad spirits. They could kill somebody far away. There was one guy at Waterhen Lake, he was a bad medicine man.

He built a little teepee. He went in there. There were people who come from all over to see him. There was three guys from here, Antoine Maurice, Manuel Caisse, and Michel Caisse and another old guy from Beauval who went. This guy from Beauval, he had an amulet and he also had a rosary in his pocket. The medicine man went in the little teepee by himself and he had a little rattler. He rattle this thing three times and the spirit still didn't come, so he said, those three visitors from the North, one of them has an amulet. This prevented the bad spirits from coming. Every Easter morning you see a lot of people getting water in the lake and that's holy water. I have ten daughters and two boys, Lawrence and Norman. That's what these old people used to tell me. If you're honest, people will respect you and they hired me. I was with the LCA school board, special constable, natural resources, people elected me. Harry McDonald had two kids. He said I can get five kids from Ile a la Crosse and I'll have seven kids and I can get a certified teacher, because you're kimosom. Ambrose told the priest, Father Remy, too bad we can't get the kids to learn faster. So Father Remy holds a meeting. We used to have a member of parliament stay here, Marcian Marion. He used to buy fish. When Father Remy had the meeting, he said, we never get anything from the government. That's why we can't hire classified certified teachers. That's why the learning is slow, but now we're going to get money. That's why Harry McDonald started a school. Leon Belanger, Sister Therese, was in that school, also my wife now, Sakimes and me. That made five.