

Ann Ferguson Charter. (1946-2005)

Social Work professor Ann Charter (Medicine Wolf Woman) was the daughter of Rene Ferguson of Wakaw, Saskatchewan and Winifred Shaw of Surrey, England (a war bride). Her husband was Wes Charter, a Nakota, from Carry the Kettle First Nation.

Ann was born in 1946 at New Malden, Surrey. Her father joined the Canadian Armed Forces as a teenager at the start of World War II and he served in the Signal Corps. He returned to Wakaw in 1946. Winifred and Ann followed when Ann was three or four months old. When they arrived Rene was away and they found their dwelling was a shack, which had 14 people living in it. There was a lean-to on the back with an open fire pit where the family patriarch Mathias Parenteau (Petit Grand-Père) lived. The first thing the family did was to take them to Mathias. Winifred was shocked to meet this Indian looking man with his hair in long braids and a large knife at his side. He spoke Michif and did not understand English. Her first fear was that they would be killed and scalped by this Indian. The first meal she was served was corn on the cob and balogna; this was a great insult, because in England corncobs were used as cattle feed.

Rene Ferguson was the son of Joseph Ferguson (buried at Batoche) and Justine Parenteau. His maternal grandparents were Mathias Parenteau (b. Nov. 1, 1867) and his Sioux wife from the U.S.A. Ann does not recall her name as they always called her Kookum. Mathias was the son of Pierre Parenteau (b. 1843) and Helene Normand (b. 1842 at St. Norbert).

Ann Ferguson grew up speaking Michif Ann Ferguson grew up speaking the Michif language. She lost this language during the years she attended residential school at St. Louis, Saskatchewan. She said that she was shocked to learn she did not speak French when she was almost laughed out of the elementary school at Wakaw, Saskatchewan for speaking her Michif language.

Ann's great grandfather, Mathias Parenteau was Louis Riel's guide and cart driver during the 1885 Resistance. Later, he worked as a guide for Red River carts travelling from Fort Garry to the Battlefords and to Cumberland House. Ann's great-grandfathers, Leon Ferguson and Mathias Parenteau were both active during the 1885 Metis Resistance at Batoche.

Due to a lack of other employment Rene kept re-enlisting in the Canadian forces, as a result, Ann grew up at the bases of Rivers and Shilo in Manitoba. She recalls that

Ann Charter, at a bead work class taught by Jennine Krauchie, photo by Jacquie McLeod

her father was the first one in the family to own an automobile. After an 18-hour trip to Wakaw, Saskatchewan from Rivers,



Mathias asked how long it took them and when told said (doubtfully) “You must have a good team of horses!” When they took him for his first car ride he was at first scared, but then realized they really had covered the distance in 18 hours. He did not know where Rivers was but when they described the sand dunes and quicksand sinkholes he remembered the place from his carting days.

Ann recalls that no one would admit that they were Metis from Batoche because of the stigma that was still attached to this. When she was young the religious services at the grotto at Batoche were a front for the Metis to meet. The real Indian services were held back in the bush. They all feared the R.C.M.P.; her father told her that it was dangerous to go to Sun Dance ceremonies because the police would shoot you if they caught you. She was told of incidents of people being killed for this reason.

Ann was one of the first Metis to obtain a Social Work degree when she graduated from the University of Regina with a BSW in 1979. She had previously completed her BA at Regina in 1974. She worked as a Social Services worker first with the Regina Public School Board (1973-1977) then with the Saskatchewan Department of Social Services (1978-1979). She holds the distinction of being the first Metis social worker in Saskatchewan. She then went on to complete her M.Ed. at St. Francis-Xavier University in 1994. She began teaching at the University of Manitoba in 1983 and was the founding director of the University of Manitoba’s Northern Social Work Program in Thompson, Manitoba and also taught at the Winnipeg Education Centre satellite program. She was a Professor at the Fort Garry campus of the University of Manitoba until illness forced her to leave teaching. Ann is the co-author of *Aboriginal People and Social Work* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, Continuing Education, Distance Education, 1996.). She most recently co-authored, “Counselling Aboriginal Students: Bridging of Conflicting Worldviews.” This appeared in K.P. Binda and Sharlilyn Calliou’s book *Aboriginal Education in Canada: A Study in Decolonization* (Mississauga: Canadian Educator’s Press, 2001) and “An Aboriginal Worldview of Helping: Empowering Approaches” in the *Canadian Journal of Counselling /Revue canadienne de counseling* / 2001, Vol. 35:1, pp. 63-73. Ann was a traditional Metis woman whose spirit name was Medicine Wolf Woman. She was also a pipe carrier. She and husband Wes Charter had many custom adopted children and grandchildren. Their home was the Friday night practice location for the Birds Hill Sun Dance Drum Group. Ann was a consulting Elder for the *Metis Legacy* series of books. Ann died on March 1, 2005 in Winnipeg.



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