Traditional Metis Foods and Food Preparation[1]

By Lawrence Barkwell, Audreen Hourie, Anne Acco and Leah Dorion

The Metis are noted for their love of laughter, food and dance. Somehow this afforded the balance necessary to their daily struggle of providing a living for the family. The main place of family activity was the kitchen. A hot bowl of Metis soup (Rubaboo), and a hot piece of Bannock (li galette) was always at the ready, along with a good cup of hot tea. Oven baked Bannock was a staple bread and eaten fresh, as food did not sit for long in a large Metis family. Extra wild meat was always shared in the community and borrowing of staple food products was a common practice. It is often said that the communal lifestyle of the Metis was disrupted by the introduction of electricity and freezers into the Metis communities. Hoarding of food was unnatural, not practical, and virtually unheard of. Visitors were always welcome and by adding a few more ingredients to the soup pot, the Metis were seldom without enough to go around.

Preparing a duck for duck soup at the Lafferty spring camp on the Mackenzie River near Fort Providence, Northwest Territories. Photograph by Leah Dorion.

During the hot summer months, cooking was moved outdoors. Most Metis families had a summer kitchen either in a separate building or they simply cooked on a stove that was

[1] This article is based upon Chapter 10 - Metis Foods and Food Preparation, from *Metis Legacy:Michif Heritage, Folklore and Culture* Volume 2, 2006: 120.

placed outdoors. It is a Metis custom that during the large holiday feasts an extra plate would be set at the table with the best of everything—foods, cutlery and dinnerware. After the meal the food was put into the fire for "those who went before us." Alternately, food was taken out and laid in a tree where it would be accessible to the spirits, yet safe from disturbance by animals and people.

It is another Metis custom that when a boy shoots his first animal or snares his first rabbit, his mother will make a feast with it and invited all the neighbours.

Metis soup recipes have survived throughout the centuries. Besides being a time-honoured comfort food for Metis families, Metis soup can heal, and prevent many illnesses by incorporating all kinds of nutritious foods in a single pot. Soup bones, fish, beans, barley, rice, peas, root vegetables, onions, tomatoes and macaroni are some of the ingredients used in Metis soups. Recipes were only for combinations, not measured amounts. The old sayings, "You are what you eat," and "Let food be your medicine, and medicine be your food," will bring to mind the Metis soup pot simmering on the stove.

In springtime it is traditional for the Metis to feast on muskrat as a way of cleansing the body, eating up to three meals a day of muskrat. The muskrat is considered to be the cleanest of all animals since he lives in water and eats the roots of plants, which grow in water. Most of the plants eaten by the muskrat are also commonly used Metis medicines such as Sweet Flag (Weecase).

Pemmican

Pemmican is a prepared preserved meat. The name comes from the Cree word *pimîhkân*, which itself is a derivative from the word *pimî*, "fat, or grease". Pemmican is high in protein, will last indefinitely, and is easy to carry. This was the food that allowed the voya-

geurs of the canoe and York Boat brigades to travel long distances without stopping to hunt. On the prairies where there was a shortage of fuel it had the advantage of using the sun to dry the meat. Pemmican because of its composition never froze solid and could be used all winter with ease. Thus, it was also the ideal food source for the winter traveler.

Pemmican can be made from the meat of many animals but the Metis were best known for making pemmican from buffalo meat. Metis women prepared pemmican by first cutting the meat into strips that they worked between their palms into long strips about a quarter inch thick. These strips were then hung on rows of wooden slats supported by tripods and dried in the sun. After a few days on the frames the meat was sufficiently dried. Choice pieces were rolled up and saved as beef jerky. The rest of the meat was laid out on a hide and pounded into a powder. Melted fat was then poured over the meat and then was worked with shovels into a uniform mass. The mixture was then poured into rawhide sacks known as “Taureaux” (bulls) of pemmican. When the fat was from the udder, the sacks were known as “Taureaux fins” (fine bulls). A mixture of meat with bone marrow instead of ordinary tallow was called “Taureaux grand”. Another mixture included dried fruits such as saskatoons, pears, chokecherries or cranberries. These sacks were called “Taureaux à grains” or berry bulls. These were particularly long lasting since the acid from the berries added to the preservative quality.

Stone hammer used to pound pemmican.

In 2002 Kathy Hodgson-Smith interviewed Agnes Carrière of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan for *New Breed Magazine* and Agnes described how she made Pemmican.

> "I would give anything to eat Pemmican today," Agnes begins, sharing her recipe. First you need to dry the moose meat by flattening it and drying it slowly over a low fire. Then you pound it to break it apart and put it in a clean canvas bag. She then recalled how her mother-in-law would chop the moose bones and drop them into a pot of boiling water, distilling the bone marrow, tallow and the milk white moose lard would float to the top of the broth. Once cooled, you could just scoop the moose lard from the mixture. You would then take the cooled moose lard and add it to the pounded moose meat, kneading it until it was all mixed together nicely, adding raisins for sweetness. You would keep the mixture aside for a while so that the moose lard could get hard again and then you cut it up into squares for later feasting.[2]

[2] Kathy Hodgson-Smith, "Agnes Carrière: A Metis Grandmother," *New Breed Magazine*, July/August 2002: 22-25.

Marty Foster reports on preparation of pemmican by the Metis in Montana:[3]

Women used chokecherries and Juneberries in their pemmican. Mary LaMare Johnson, who grew up early in the century near the Milk River town of Malta, Montana described her family's preparation of pemmican:

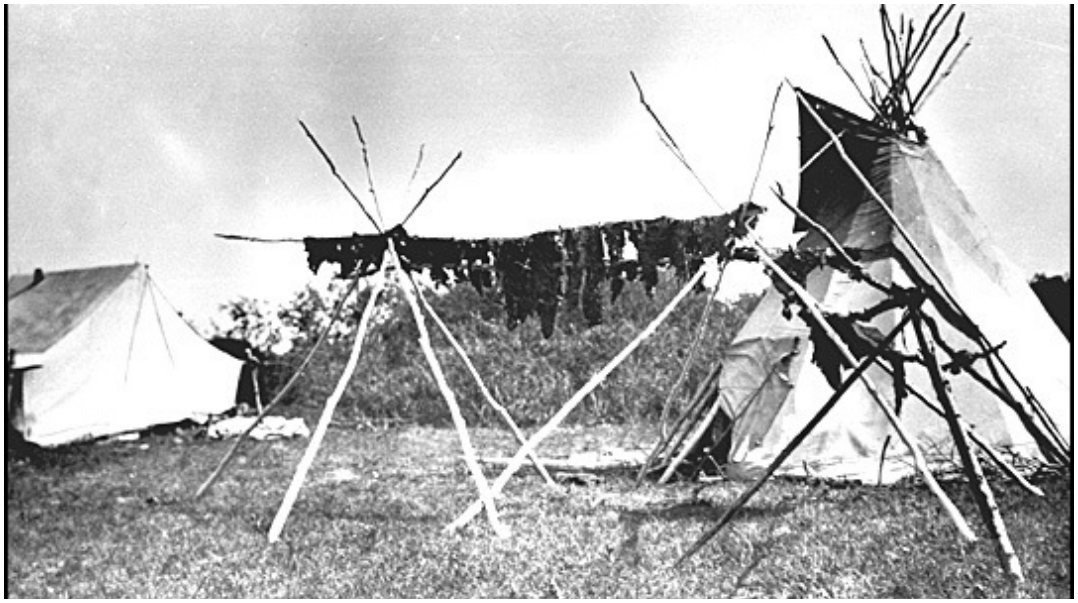
> [First drying the meat] When you first hung it to dry [you] then built a fire underneath the deal and let it smoke. The smoke kept the flies away from the meat. And we smoked it, not all the time it was drying, just for a while, and it'd take probably a couple of days to dry – just depends how thin you can slice it. [Metis women prided themselves on how thin – and quickly – they could slice meat. The thinness and length of the strips one was able to cut was a measure of skill and source of respect.]
>
> You mash up your dry meat real fine and then you mixed dry cherries [chokecherries] in there. You had to mash it together and put sugar in there—quite a bit of sugar, and you put melted shortening in it. Mix it real good and then you pound real good—pounded and let it set till it got real hard…. Then when it was ready to eat you just kind of broke it up in chunks.

Richot or *Richaud* was a form of pemmican made with oatmeal instead of berries. Raisins were important for making "nhoaa-ganak," a dried and pounded moosemeat mixed with salt, sugar, dark raisins and chokecherries. This was then pressed into cakes and bars.

In 1937, Joseph Lafromboise (b. 1859) of Neche, North Dakota gave the following account of making pemmican:

> Mr. LaFromboise made lots of Pemmican, he would slice the buffalo meat in thin slices and put it out to dry good, and after it was good and dry he would put it on a wire over a fire to cook a little, then he would put it on a buffalo hide and would pound it with clubs until it was good and fine, then he would take part of a buffalo hide and wet the hide and make a sack about the size of a 100lb. flour sack, then they would put this fine meat in the sack and pound it good to pack it, then they put in a little at a time and packed it , they they would pour in Buffalo tallow, then some more fine meat. When the sack was full they sewed it up with sinew. Then they would pack it in a Red River Cart with a buffalo hide stretched over the cart to keep the rain out. In this way it would keep for years. It was very good food. When they wanted to use some they would cut some off and put it in a pan with a little water and it made a great stew. He would take the buffalo bones and pound them very fine like flour and boil them and make buffalo butter, it was yellow just like butter from cows cream and it was very good.
> (Interviewed by Frank O'Leary, Pembina County Pioneers Project, 1937)

[3] Martha Harroun Foster, "We Know Who We Are: Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Metis Community." Ph. D. Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2000: 450, 513.



Drying meat, National Archives Canada, E.S. Curtis.

Pemmican was widely adopted as a high-energy food by Europeans involved in the fur trade and later by Arctic and Antarctic explorers, such as Robert Falcon Scott and Roald Amundson. North Pole explorer Robert Peary used pemmican on all three of his expedi-

tions, from 1886 to 1909, for both his men and his dogs. In his 1917 book *Secrets of Polar Travel*, he devoted several pages to the food, stating, "Too much cannot be said of the importance of pemmican to a polar expedition. It is an absolute *sine qua non*. Without it a sledge-party cannot compact its supplies within a limit of weight to make a serious polar journey successful."

Chokecherries

Chokecherries are called *Takwahiminana* by the Cree and Michif people. They call crushed or pounded chokecherries *Pa-kwa-mi-na-na.* Alternately the Metis refer to them as *lii grenn* or *lii siriz*.

Fresh chokecherries have a bitter and astringent taste; when dried the taste becomes sweeter. Native Americans preserved chokecherries for use in traditional foods such as pemmican also known by the Dakota as *wasna* and *wojapi* (chokecherry pudding).

As was noted above, Pemmican is ground dried meat mixed with tallow and dried, crushed chokecherries. The mixture is shaped into small patties or squares and allowed to harden. Metis and first Nations people used pemmican during a move to new hunting grounds; it was light weight, easy to carry, and a good source of protein for energy. Chokecherries have a pit in the center that contains a naturally occurring hydrocyanic acid (also called prussic acid, a weak acid smelling of almonds). The process of either boiling or drying will neutralize the acid to make the food safe to eat. Traditionally, chokecherries are preserved by sun-drying. When drying chokecherries, the whole fruit (pulp, skin and pit) is ground together. Patties are formed and set in the sun to dry; this process is dependent upon consecutive days of hot, windy weather.

Saskatoons

Saskatoon, Sugar Pear or Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*): This berry was called the Misaskatoomena by the Cree, and the Serviceberry by the English. The Metis call Saskatoons "*lii pwayr*" (in Michif) which comes from the French name *poirettes* and p*etites poires.*

The fruits of the Saskatoon are eaten fresh, canned or dried. The Metis, after gathering the berries, would spread them out on tarps or blankets to dry. If the blankets were to be left overnight, they would be elevated on stakes to protect the fruit from animals. Saskatoons would be pounded into died loaves of ten to fifteen pounds to be kept over winter.

The berries were often mixed with dry powdered meat to make pemmican. Sticks of the Saskatoon bush were barked and split, then boiled in sturgeon oil to keep the oil fresh during storage.

Saskatoons have a sweet nutty taste and the fruits have long been eaten by Canada's Aboriginal people, fresh or dried. They are well known as an ingredient in pemmican, a preparation of dried meat to which saskatoon berries are added as flavour and preservative. They are also often used in pies, jam, wine, cider and beer.

Blueberries

Blueberry (Vaccinium myrtilloides)

Blueberries were one of the most important Metis foods in yesteryear. They were eaten fresh, cooked with sugar or in bannock or canned. Traditionally, they were cooked in lard and allowed to solidify for long-term preservation. The dried berries were often added to pemmican. The dried leaves were also boiled to make a beverage. Eating blueberries is a good cure for acne. The stems were boiled to make a drink taken to prevent pregnancy. Blueberry soup (made with cornstarch and sugar) is given as the last course at traditional feasts. This is believed to help digestion.

Cranberries

There are two types of Cranberry, the High Bush Cranberry (lee pa binaw), and the Mooseberry (moosomina), the low bush cranberry which is also called a Moss Berry. In woodland areas, the high bush cranberries are usually more plentiful than the low bush and easy to reach along trails and riverbanks. High bush cranberries make an excellent jelly-jam. Low bush cranberries or "mushkegimina" have the added value of being available for picking in early spring when they sit just above the ice in an otherwise impassable bog or swamp.

High Bush Cranberries, (lee pa binaw):

Neepees are the name for the berries of the High Bush Cranberry. Nipi jam is the jam of these berries, typically made with the seeds left in (the terms come from "nipiminan" in Cree).

The Metis settlement of Pembina gets its name from the high bush cranberry (Viburnum trilobum). The spreading cranberry shrub grows three to ten feet in height. Its broad leaves are three lobed; its fruit is bright red and grows in clusters. The curvature of the fruit stem under the weight of the clusters looks somewhat like a bird's neck and this is said to have given rise to the name crane-berry, later shortened. Cranberries were crushed and dried and mixed with dried pounded meat to make pemmican. The bark of the cranberry is still harvested to manufacture a variety of medicines and drugs. The bark of the cranberry bush is also used as a component of Labrador tea. This bark in tea was used to prevent and heal infections of the bladder.

Mooseberry (Moosomina), the Low Bush Cranberry:

These berries (Viburnum edule) can be eaten fresh, but are usually used for jam because they are very sour. The twig tips are often chewed to relieve a sore throat and the open buds can be rubbed on lip sores to dry and heal them. The ripe fruits are boiled to make a cough medicine.

Marlene (Jobin) Lanz from the Metis Nation of Alberta tells of a cranberry harvesting device her father, Ambroise Jobin, used to make. He would take a can and remove the

ends. On one end of the can he would solder two or three-inch finishing nails around the rim pointing outwards. The tips of the nails were filed down and slightly turned upwards. A sugar sack was then attached to the other end of the can to hold the berries. The device was combed through the bushes, neatly removing the berries, which were caught in the sugar sack.

Metis Recipe: Cranberry Ketchup

- 14 cups wild cranberry pulp
- 1 qt. grated or chopped onion 8 cups sugar
- 2 cups vinegar
- 1 tbsp. allspice
- 1 tsp. tumeric
- 1 tsp. cloves
- 1⁄2tsp. ginger
- 1⁄2 tsp. red pepper

The mixture is boiled until thick and ketchup-like, then put in sealers.

Bannock (Galette):

Bannock, *li galette*: Baked bannock (*epangishimog pakwejigan*) is a staple food of the Metis. Bannock comes from the Gaelic or Celtic word for unleavened bread.[4]. This bread is made from flour, water and fat or lard. Frequently, it is leavened with a small amount of baking powder. It is cooked on a griddle, over an open fire on a stick, or in a frying pan tilted on edge beside the coals of the fire. Another variation was called "li beignes" or fried bread. "Makaminas" is bannock made with raisins (souminis-sak), currents (souminisis-sak) and wild berries. Bannock is always tilted on its side when taken out of the oven. This allows the moisture to get out as it cools.

Because bannock could be quickly prepared from readily available ingredients, and because these ingredients lasted a long time without spoiling, bannock became a staple of the voyageurs and European fur traders. The traditional way to prepare bannock was to mix the ingredients into a large round biscuit and bake in a frying pan or propped up against sticks by the campfire. The frying pan usually was tilted against a rock so that it slanted towards the fire for part of the baking.

[4] Bannock is a round flat unsweetened cake originating in Scotland, made from oatmeal or barley and baked on a griddle.

Metis making Bannock, la Galette, on sticks.

Basic Recipe:

Ingredients

3 cups of flour
1½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
¼ cup of fat (shortening or butter)
1¼ cups of warm water

Steps

- Mix all dry ingredients together
- Make a hole in the middle and add fat
- Pour water on top of the fat
- Blend mixture together with your hands
- Divide the dough into two balls
- Flatten each ball into 1cm thickness
- Punch holes in both with a fork
- Cook in well-greased frying pan for 20 minutes

Bannock a quick and simple tradition

BY AMY JO EHMAN, THE STAR PHOENIX JANUARY 26, 2014

Bannock is close to the heart of most every Métis and First Nations community in Saskatchewan, but its origins go back to old Scotland.

From the Gaelic word bhannag, bannock came to Canada in the 1600s with Scottish adventurers and fur traders. It was a quick, simple bread cooked over an open fire while canoeing western rivers or hanging out in fur trade posts. These Scotsmen took local wives, passing their love of bannock to the First Nations and Métis communities.

Bannock with raisins is called company bannock. AMY JO EHMAN PHOTO.
For The *Star Phoenix*

Today, bannock is rarely celebrated as a touchstone of Scottish heritage, but it is indispensable to Métis and First Nations culture, celebration and connection.

In Scotland, it was often made with oatmeal, but in Canada wheat flour became the norm. However, flour was heavy to carry in a canoe. Therefore, bannock was often a treat rather than a basic staple of the meal.

Outlying fur trade posts were expected to be self-sufficient in food, including flour. The first wheat field in what would become Saskatchewan was planted in 1754 by French fur traders at Forte a la Corne on the Saskatchewan River east of Prince Albert, now within the James Smith First Nation. No doubt, bannock was the outcome.

The basic ingredients were flour, water and shortening. With the advent of baking powder it was possible to make a lighter, fluffier bannock.

French-speaking Métis called it galet. According to this recipe from the Métis Cookbook, adding raisins makes it "company bannock."

Bannock – Le Galet
3 cups flour
2 tbsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup shortening (margarine, butter, lard)
1/2 cup raisins
1 cup plus 2 tbsp water

In a bowl, mix flour, baking powder, salt and sugar. Cut cold shortening into pieces. Work into the flour with a pastry blender and with your fingers until it resembles coarse sand. Mix in raisins. Make a well in the centre. Add water and stir together with a fork. With floured hands, work dough into a ball, knead a few times and press into a greased 10 in. (25 cm) cast iron frying pan. Bake at 400F for 30 minutes.

Bannock Recipe
By Linda St. Cyr
St. Norbert Parish, La Barrière Metis Council

4 ½ cups flour (extra ½ c. if needed)
2 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. salt
2 cups tepid water
1 cup melted lard

Place flour, baking powder and salt in a large bowl, mix. Make a hollow in the center of the flour mixture. Pour in the water and the melted lard. Mix with a fork until flour is mixed in. Do not mix too much. Knead on a floured surface until smooth. As fat cools the dough becomes somewhat waxy. Extra flour can be used when kneading. Divide the dough into 4 portions. Roll each to ¼ in. thickness, even the edges and place on a cookie sheet. Prick all over with a fork.

Bake at 375º until golden brown about 25-30 minutes.

Place bannock on its edge to cool and cover with a tea towel. This makes a comparatively soft bannock. If harder bannock is desired, roll very thin and bake in a slower oven. Raisins or blueberries may be added.

Breadroot Scurfpea (Psoralea esculenta):

This plant was more commonly known as Tipisin, Indian Breadroot, prairie potato or prairie turnip. The Metis called it “Li Naavoo de prayree”, “pomme blanche” or “pomme de prairie.” The plant has a purple flower and a white, starchy root. This plant was probably the most important wild food gathered on the prairies.

It grows in high places on the prairies and in open woodlands. By July or August, the leaves and stem break off and are blown away by the wind. They are dug just before the tops are gone. They were unearthed with a slender digging stick three or four feet long. These sticks were cut obliquely at the lower end to form a sharp edge, and the single plane surface sharpened to a point.

Tipisina bulbs were eaten raw, boiled whole in soups when fresh, or dried and later boiled or pounded into flour which could later be used as soup thickening.
Also known as “tipsin” or “Indian breadroot”, breadroot scurf pea usually begins to bloom on the Dakota and Canadian prairies during the first week in June. The plant can be found on plains and grassy hills from the Northwest Territories to Texas.
Breadroot scurf pea is a hairy perennial plant up to a foot tall. One to several stems arise at ground level from a thick brown root. Three to four inches below ground, the root forms a tuber-like body up to three inches long and an inch wide. Each leaf is divided into five leaflets. About 20-30 bluish-purple flowers are found in clusters about 2-4 inches long at the top of the plant. Legumes (pods) are flat and have a long slender tip.

Cattle do not have much effect on the abundance of breadroot scurf pea. The plant likes dry soil. The starchy, thickened roots of this plant were a staple in the diet of many Aboriginal North Americans, and were also eaten by the early voyagers as the “pomme de prairie” and later by many European immigrants. It has often been suggested that the plant be commercially grown.

Breadroot scurf pea is a member of the large and economically important bean family, which includes alfalfas, peas, clovers, peanuts and trees such as caragana and locust. The generic name Psoralea stems from the Greek psoraleos, "scabby," concerning the glandular dots or "scurf" on the leaves. The specific epithet esculenta means "edible" in botanical Latin. The renowned German botanist Frederick Pursh first described this species for

science in 1814. Pursh was the first to publish upon the many plants brought back from the western wilderness by Lewis and Clark.

Buffaloberries:

Buffaloberry (Shepherdia argentia) is also called the soapberry, bull-berry, rabbitberry, silverleaf, and crucifixion berry. The name originates from the use of the berries to accompany bison meat in preparing pemmican and from the fact that the bison themselves used the buffaloberry as a source of food and shelter

The buffaloberry was used by the Metis and other Native Americans and settlers as an accompaniment to buffalo meat; as a garnish for buffalo steaks or tongue called "griasse de boeuf" by the Metis. The silver buffaloberry (Shepherdia argentea) and the russet Buffaloberry (Shepherdia canadensis) are closely related to the silverberry or Wolfwillow, however they have thorns on the bushes whereas the silverberry does not. The silver buffaloberry also has a distinct sage coloration like the Wolfwillow. The silver buffaloberry makes the best jams and jellies. It is a deciduous shrub growing to 2–6 m tall. The leaves are arranged in opposite pairs (rarely alternately arranged), 2–6 cm long, oval with a rounded apex, green with a covering of fine silvery, silky hairs, more thickly silvery below than above. The flowers are pale yellow, with four sepals and no petals. The fruit is bright red and fleshy.

The red/orange fruits ripen in late July or August, the flavour of the fruit improves with the first frost, since the berries sweeten considerably at this time. It is very high in Vitamin C content. The seed is easily chewed and consumed with the fruit. The berries make

excellent jelly and are also used as a beverage. For a special treat the berries were often made into a foamy dessert much like whipped cream, often known as “Indian ice cream.” This was made from hot water, buffaloberries and sugar.

Lamb’s Quarters (Pig Weed Greens)

Pigweed or Lamb’s Quarters (*chenopodium album* and *amaranthus retroflexus*) is used by the Metis as a spinach substitute. The greens of the young plants are boiled and are said to taste better than spinach. The leaves are also mixed fresh with other vegetables to make a salad. This plant is eaten as a vegetable in different places of the world. The *chenopodium album* is commonly called White Goosefoot or Pigweed, whereas the *amaranthus retroflexus* is known as Redroot Pigweed. No species of genus *Amaranthus* are known to be poisonous. Red Rooted Pigweed was used for a multitude of food and medicinal purposes by many Native American groups.

Pick the leaves when they are nice and green, wash, place in a pan with water, salt and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, add water as necessary. It tastes just like spinach.

White Goosefoot

Rosehips

Rosehips, called lii bon tiiroozh by the Metis are eaten as a source of vitamin C, and as well as for infections, colds, sore throat, and generally, cleansing toxins from the body. Do not eat the seeds. The roots of the wild rose are used in a decoction for colds and fevers. Rose hips (without the seeds) are eaten fresh for their vitamins. The Nakoda call them the itchberry because they can make your bottom itch if you eat too many fresh rose hips.

Rubaboo

Rubaboo is a Metis stew made with rabbit, chicken or sage hen and a wide variety of vegetables. Some of the wild vegetables that were added are, onion, turnip, asparagus, parsley, sage, bull-rush root, cat-tail heads, dandelion root, wild parsnip (lii naavoo), wild carrot, mushrooms, pine nuts, daylily roots and wild rice. In the winter, dried onions or dried fruit would be added.

Rubaboo was a basic food consumed by the 'coureurs des bois,' 'voyageurs' and Métis people of North America. Traditionally it was made of peas or corn (or both) with grease (bear or pork) and a thickening agent (bread or flour) and Pemmican for the meat portion.

Fonseca[5] notes that first the kettle was brought to a boil, the pemmican bag was opened and a quantity was stirred into the boiling water. Flour and salt and whatever ingredients were on hand were added to make the "celebrated rubaboo." The thickened mixture was later re-served as "rowschow" (*re-chaud*).

Boulettes

[5] William G. Fonseca, "On the St. Paul Trail in the Sixties." *Manitoba Historical Society Transactions*, Series 1, No. 56, January 25, 1900.

Les boulettes are Metis meatballs. This traditional food is made from lean ground meat with flour, finely chopped onions and black pepper. The ingredients are mixed to form two to three inch meatballs. They are then rolled in flour and placed in boiling water with a teaspoon of salt and simmered gently for one hour to cook. Traditionally these were made from moose, elk and other meats.

Bullet soup a tasty Metis tradition

BY AMY JO EHMAN, THE STARPHOENIX FEBRUARY 3, 2014

Bullet soup is a tasty Metis tradition

Photograph by: Amy Jo Ehman , for *The Star Phoenix.*

In 1870, hundreds of French-speaking Métis packed their wagons and left Manitoba for open lands to the west. About 40 families established a village on the South Saskatchewan River, north of present day Saskatoon. They called it Petite Ville.

In summertime, most everyone left the village to hunt buffalo on the southern plains, drying the meat and making pemmican as they went. In winter, they came back to Petite Ville.

Excavations and history tell us something about what they ate, including buffalo, snowshoe hare, muskrat, ducks and grouse, along with wild berries and plants.

Houses had open fireplaces and chimneys made of mud and straw. They cooked in copper pots and ate tinned and packaged foodstuffs such as tea and fruit preserves from the Hudson Bay Company. Shards of delicate English china in blue and white patterns indicate a genteel touch in a rustic prairie home.

Meat was kept in ice pits outside the house (protected from animals) and other foods were stored in cellars under the floorboards.

I have not read evidence of gardens at Petite Ville, but it is recorded elsewhere that the Métis grew root vegetables such as potatoes and turnips. I can imagine the elders tending gardens while the others were away at the hunt.
Bullet Soup is a Metis tradition. The name comes from the French word boulettes, meaning meatballs.

This modernized version of Bullet Soup comes from Colleen Hamilton of CHEP Good Food Inc., who grew up in one of the original French Métis communities of Manitoba.

Bullet Soup

- 1/4 lb. lean ground beef
- 1/4 lb. lean ground pork
- 2 tbsp. grated onion
- 1-2 clove garlic,
- Finely chopped salt and pepper
- Dried rosemary and parsley
- Flour for dredging
- 1 diced onion
- 2 cups diced potatoes
- 1 cup chopped carrot
- 1 diced turnip
- 1 diced sweet potato
- 1/4 package whole wheat pasta

Mix beef, pork, grated onion, salt, pepper and herbs. Form into balls about the size of a jawbreaker. Dredge in flour. Cover with water and boil until cooked. Cool pot, refrigerate and when cold, skim the fat.

Reheat broth, adding more water to make a full pot. Add diced onion, potato, carrot, turnip and sweet potato and simmer until tender. Season broth with salt and pepper to your taste. Before serving, add the pasta and cook until done. Serve with bannock.

Hazelnuts

Hazelnut (Corylus cornuta): The Beaked Hazelnut or *lii paakaan* in Michif or *pakan* (from the Cree) can be eaten raw when fresh, or stored for winter use. The Metis also use hazelnuts to make a form of peanut butter. Nutella is the brand name for this commercial product. This pakan grows wild in along riverbound regions. No one who has to buy hazelnuts at the store can afford them these days whereas its value to Aboriginal communities was almost casual. Children have been known to eat an entire bush right out and unless there was another bush nearby, they often would have none left to take home.

The boiled bark makes a reddish brown dye. Small branches are placed around baby's necks on a sinew to prevent them from becoming ill during teething.

Western Hazelnut

Muskeg or Labrador Tea, (*Rhododendron groenlandicum*)

Labrador Tea, Muskeg Tea or Swamp Tea is also called Indian Tea, Hudson Bay Tea, James Bay Tea, and Marsh Tea. It is also called "Medicine Tea (tea michinn)" by the Metis. The aromatic shrub has alternating evergreen leaves with edges rolled under and rusty hair underneath. The white flowers have five separate petals. Labrador tea is common in muskeg, bogs and wet coniferous forests. The tea is commonly used to treat stomach flu, pneumonia and urination difficulties. A powder from the leaves mixed with lard is used to treat burns, scalds or eczema. Labrador tea is often splashed on the rocks during sweat lodge ceremonies to produce an aromatic smell and for its healing properties when the vapors are inhaled.

Labrador tea leaves are fragrant and have been historically used as a beverage and medicine by many Metis and First Nations groups such as the Ojibwa and Cree, the Quinault and Makah in western Washington, the Potawatomi in the Great Lakes region, and the

Iroquois in the Northeast. Metis and First Nations people in Canada also picked the leaves for medicine.

Labrador tea may be toxic in concentrated doses. It contains toxic alkaloids known to be poisonous to livestock, especially sheep.

The beverage was quickly adopted by Europeans because of its pleasant flavor, aroma and salutary health effects. It was used by many explorers, trappers, and early settlers. The Aboriginal people graciously taught them how to use it and thus it was called “Indian tea plant” by some non-Indians. The leaves were even used as a substitute for tea during the Revolutionary War. Today there is a demand for the plant’s essential oil for aroma-therapy and the plant is planted in gardens as an ornamental shrub.

Large quantities of leaves are picked in spring before flowering by some families while others pick them year round. The Cree and Ojibwa and Metis gather the leaves from spring to autumn for a beverage tea. The leaves are used either fresh or dried for future use. There were a number of ways to prepare tea, including adding a handful of leaves to boiling water and letting it simmer for several minutes or adding a handful of leaves to cold water, bringing it to a boil and simmering it for much longer. The Ojibwa, for example, tied fresh or dried leaves in a packet using a thin strip of basswood bark before placing in water to boil. The quantity is a large handful to a quart of water. It is drunk while hot and sweetened with maple sugar.

Wheat

Wheat was used to make a soup called meechim apoi or held over a frying pan until it popped thus making Kispisikunuk or wheat puffs.

Wild Mint:

Wild Mint, "li boum Ste. Anne", Wakaskwah: The whole plant was made into a mint tea taken as a blood remedy and used to treat fevers and stomach disorders and fever; also used for a sore back. It was considered a woman's medicine because it was used to prevent excessive bleeding and miscarriages.

Purple Bergamot:

Purple Bergamot, *Monarda fistulosa:* The leaves are used to make a peppery-tasting tea that was used to treat bloating and stomachache as well as bladder and blood problems. Boiled leaves were used to treat acne and fresh crushed leaves were applied to soothe insect bites. This plant is usually found in waste places and at the edge of poplar groves.

Fish in the Metis Diet and Culture[6]

Burbot, Mariah, Freshwater Cod: The Burbot (Lota lota), usually called a Mariah in Manitoba, is considered to be a delicacy by many Metis. Most Metis mothers would use the oil from its liver as a preventive medicine as one would use store-bought cod liver oil. Many Metis remember being doctored by Granny in the late fall and throughout the winter with cod liver oil, usually one tablespoon every Friday morning. It was customary to give Metis children a big feed of Mariah before the onset of winter. The Mariah is part of the cod family. It is considered a delicacy in Scandinavia as well. Because of its homely appearance and coloring in shades of brown on black, many in mainstream society deride the Mariah as a trash fish. Its oil is said to rival that of the saltwater cod. A favourite Metis dish was to fry the livers and eat as a spread on bannock. Some Metis used the skins of the Mariah for making moccasins.

Fish Liquor, Fish Milk or "Bouyon": Fish milk was a broth made from fish, usually mullets or silver bass. This is very nutritious and was used by the Metis for feeding infants. This was good for infants given the fact that Aboriginal people have difficulty digesting dairy products. This broth was made by boiling cubed or sliced fish with fresh greens, carrots, onions, potatoes, water and a little milk. The broth was then taken off and fed to babies. Another broth used for children who were lactose intolerant was "deer juice," a broth made from the juices from cooking deer meat.

Smoked Fish: Smokehouses are usually built of scrap lumber and measure about four by five feet on the sides and five feet in height. Often the smokehouse is lined on the outside with cardboard. Inside shelves are made either with chicken wire nailed to the sidewalls or with three-quarter inch round peeled sticks placed across to form racks. Smoked goldeye from the Winnipeg River are a delicacy known the world over. The Metis also smoke tullibee, white fish and mullet or suckers. Whereas goldeye are gutted and the fish is smoked whole, suckers are smoked with their heads cut off, backbone removed and the

[6] This section also contains excerpts from *Metis Legacy: Michif Heritage, Folklore and Culture* Volume 2, Chapter 10 - Metis Foods and Food Preparation, Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute and Pemmican Publications, 2006: 120-132.

two fillets left attached to the belly. This makes a square piece, which is then laid out on the chicken wire for smoking. A fire is made in the cut-off end of an oil barrel or an old washtub placed on the floor. A slow burning fire is made, usually from oak wood. The fish are turned regularly and it usually takes a full day to smoke them.

Sucker Balls: Sucker balls are made with sucker fish caught when they are running in the spring. Sucker balls are prepared by grinding up the fillets, adding onions, bread-crumbs and egg for binding then rolling into balls. When cooking, the balls are actually flattened into patties. Sometimes mashed potatoes are used to replace breadcrumbs.

Sucker Heads: Sucker heads (boiled) are considered to be a delicacy by Metis people. In the spring it is said to be a contest between the Metis and the bears to obtain these. When the suckers start running in the spring, both bears and Metis gather at the streams to catch suckers. The bear scoops the suckers out of the stream with his paw. He is very accurate and always lands them in the same place in a neat pile. He then proceeds to eat all the heads off the suckers. He leaves the carcasses for the ravens to have a little feed and will return later to eat the fish bodies.

Canning Suckers: The Metis would preserve suckers by canning the fillet whole with the bone in, the process renders the bones edible much like canned salmon.

Metis Pudding Recipes

Bread Pudding[7]:

The Metis never waste bread crusts or leftover bannock. This is mixed with milk, raisins, nutmeg, and vanilla and cooked into a bread pudding and is served with a sprinkling of sugar.

Baked Indian Pudding[8]:

- 1 cup cold milk
- 4 cups scalded milk
- 6 eggs
- 1 tsp. nutmeg
- 1 tsp. ginger
- 1 cup corn meal
- 1 cup powdered fruit sugar

Mix the corn meal with the cup of cold milk and stir into the hot milk. Add butter. Continue to stir until the mixture comes to a boil. Remove from heat.

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[7] From: Barkwell, L.J., L.M. Dorion and A. Hourie. *Metis Legacy, Volume Two: Michif Culture, Heritage and Folkways.* Saskatoon, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2007: p. 123.

[8] From: Nipawin Metis Local # 134, *Cookbook of Culture*, Nipawin, Saskatchewan: Author, 2004, p. 54.

Beat eggs until fluffy with the sugar, add nutmeg and ginger, then stir the whole mixture together. Pour into a buttered casserole dish. Bake at 400º F until light brown. Serve hot with a wine sauce.

Rice Pudding[9]:

- 18 cups water
- 5 cups long grain rice
- 1½ cups white sugar
- 6 – 8 tbsp. cinnamon
- 2 cups raisins

Bring the water to a boil for thirty minutes, turn down to medium heat for 10 minutes. Stir in raisins, white sugar and cinnamon. Can be served chilled or warm with milk or cream. (Recipe courtesy of Irene Dimick)

Pouchine au Sac—Pudding in a bag

This Metis pudding was also called "New Years Pudding" and "Son-of-a-bitch-in-a-sac". A Metis delicacy, it is made with finely-chopped beef suet, flour, milk, brown sugar, raisins and currents. It is made by placing the mixture in a 2.7 kg cotton bag to steam for 2 ½ to 3½ hours. It is then served with a sweet sauce.

Ingredients

1/2 a cup of beef suet, chopped fine and free from skin.
1/2 a cup of brown sugar
1 cup of raisins
1/2 a cup of currants
1 teaspoon of pastry spice
2 cups of flour
1/2 teaspoon of salt
4 teaspoons of b. powder
3/4 cup of milk
Mix all the dry ingredients together.
Add milk.
Pour mixture in a 5 lbs. Cotton bag or 2, 1 qt. sealers.
Fill jars half full.
Serve with sauce.

Sauce:
1/2 a cup of white sugar
1 tablespoon of cornstarch

[9] From The Metis Centre: NAHO. The Metis Cookbook and Guide to Healthy Living. Ottawa: Author, 2006: p. 64.

1 cup of boiling water
2 tablespoons of butter
1/2 a teaspoon of lemon extract
1/2 a teaspoon of vanilla.

Source:
Metis Resource Centre, Winnipeg.
http://www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34:rubaboo-recipe-corner&catid=5:rubaboo&Itemid=2

Metis Cooking on the Great Plains

In 1937, Joseph Lafromboise (b. 1859) of Neche, North Dakota gave the following account of cooking on the prairie:

When they were out on the prairie where they could not find fuel to cook with, they would gather buffalo heads and fill them with buffalo tallow, and get three sticks and tie them together and hang the pots on them to cook their meals. They would gather buffalo chips also to make fires.

(Interviewed by Frank O'Leary, Pembina County Pioneers Project, 1937)

Food Preservation

Keeping things cool to preserve them is a relatively new idea. Most things were cured with salt or sugar. Before food was readily frozen, it was generally preserved by pickling or drying out and smoking. There were other options for food preservation, underground as in a root cellar, or in water, as in a river or stream. Cellars and water of any kind tend to be cooler than the air temperature except in hard winter. Canning of meat, fish and fruits has long been a practice of the Metis.

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