

On November 20, 2021, Paul Chartrand had me at his home for the purpose of recording stories in his language, what we call “Michif-French,” but what he calls “Michif,” or the language of St. Laurent, Manitoba.

Paul expressed to me that he doesn’t see his language as a written language and isn’t sure he wants to write it down. He also stated that trying to translate it into another language literally or line-for-line wouldn’t quite work. What we agreed to do was to record Paul telling a few stories in his language, and then record him telling the same stories in English. This way, one can listen to Paul’s stories in English and then in Michif, to get an idea about what they are listening to. I hope that people who are interested in the Michif-French language will listen to these stories to get a sense about the sound, feel, and use of this language.

Some of Paul’s stories were largely told in English, with Michif mixed in. The way he tells his stories, and how he explains them, give us insight into the culture he comes from, its worldview, and what life was like for the Michif people of St. Laurent. The stories (or “lies” as Paul sometimes calls them!) of the great storyteller Cha-Bay, and the way Paul describes him indicates that storytellers were highly regarded individuals. The story of the Bailiff touches on the history of the area, when people from Brittany, France were imported by the church to this Michif community to try and influence them towards “proper Catholicism.” Cha-Bay’s story about the brush wolves and Paul’s own story about these animals are perhaps indicative of the closeness between the natural world and the Michif community.

Paul mentioned to me that in the future, he would very much like to record more stories, except with an audience of other speakers of his language, as that would be much more natural than having someone record him who doesn’t understand it.

A huge thanks to Paul Chartrand for taking the time to share his language, history, and culture.

Spenser Thibault