

Road Allowance Interview, Simone Ross with Peter Ross

Conducted by Scott Duffee

Nov. 21, 2013

SD: This is Simone and Peter Ross on November 21st, 2013, for the road allowance project. What's the name of the community that you came from, Moon Hills, right?

SR: Yes, but they have a different name, I think they called it the (Inaudible) Hills? or something. I'm not sure. They changed the name, it's not Moon Hills, but that's all I know it by.

SD: Okay, where is that located?

SR: Where is that? That's not too far from Blaine Lake area and Leask. Well, I'll say it might have been 14 miles away from Moon Hills, and we lived there, in the community of Leask.

SD: Do you know if it was considered a road allowance community or a squatting community? Did they own their land?

SR: They owned land around Leask. In fact, our first school we went to was on Camille Dion's land. They built a school there. That's where I started school.

SD: Camille Dion?

SR: Yes, Camille Dion. Then later on, he stopped living on his land, where we were going to school, and then he and the teacher, who was his wife, moved to Big River.

SD: So, you were living on Camille Dion's land.

SR: That's right.

SD: Who were your parents and your grandparents?

SR: My parents? Martin and Caroline Lavallée.

SD: How about your grandparents?

SR: Gregory Arcand and Rosalie Laframboise.

SD: Did they always live in Moon Hills?

SR: No, they come from Fort Carlton, my mom was born there. And my grandparents, I believe were married in Duck Lake.

SD: What Métis families lived in that community? What were the names of other Métis families?

SR: Well, there was William Collin and his wife. In fact, she was a midwife for us when we were born. And that was William and Madeline Collin. They lived there, had a farm there, a homestead. They're long time gone.

SD: Any other Métis families that lived there?

SR: Well, Émile Arcand. My auntie was married to Émile Arcand, and she was an Arcand. That's my mom's sister.

SD: Did any non-Métis live there? Did any white people?

SR: There were some, I guess. I don't remember. There was lots of Ukrainians that lived around there. And my dad was a mechanic, and he would be working for them guys from morning till night. Fixing machines and making steam engines. And then we moved one year to Muskeg Lake for a short time, spent the winter there. It became the reserve now, Muskeg Lake. And my dad asked the chief if we could spend the winter there so he could work on machines, saw wood, make tractors and a steam engine for the Muskeg Lake church.

SD: So, he worked for the Indian people then?

SR: Well, there, we lived with some Métis families. There were some there. I believed they moved to (inaudible) to where they could put their kids through school.

SD: Did you live in any other communities growing up, any other road allowance communities?

SR: No, we moved from Leask, and we come to Meadow Lake in 1947. And then in '49, I made my first communion here and then my sisters started their Catechism in Muskeg Lake. The only church there was pretty close to where we lived in Leask, in the country, eh? And it was about five miles from the church in Leask. So, it was farther than walking down to Muskeg Lake. And mom liked to go to that church.

SD: So, you moved to Meadow Lake when you were 13, 14 or? How old were you when you moved here?

SR: Nine. Yes, nine. And the only way we travelled was with Camille Dion. We were working at this farmer's place. He was a farmer. My dad worked for him. With horses, we'd go from Leask to my grandfather's place. And my sister, Kathleen, she was the oldest one. She would hook up the horses because dad was away a lot. She fixed them.

SD: Did anyone in your community own their own land, from Moon Hills.

SR: Well, my sister and her husband, my oldest sister from the first family, her. She moved with her husband to Meadow Lake. They were living there, too. And then there was Joe Lavallée and his family. They moved to that place, Lavallée, for business. That's where they'd do registration for children and that sort of thing and baptism and stuff.

SD: Did your parents own their land in Moon Hills?

SR: Yes, they owned. They had a homestead there, too, my folks.

SD: What happened to it? Did they sell it or?

SR: I know my dad sold his farm. And I'm not sure about them. They must have sold it. That was a long time ago. That's my great-grandfather's brother.

SD: How did your family make a living out there? You said your dad was a mechanic, right?

SR: Well, my dad was the best mechanic in Saskatchewan. He wasn't known that much, but he sure did his job to get his kids a little bit of an education. I remember him coming with a little blackboard in Muskeg Lake when we lived there. Often, we'd

learn, put his hand over ours to write our name. That I remember. : I was about six or seven. My other sister was older because we couldn't get into any schools over there in Moon Hills.

SD: How did other people make a living? What kind of work did other people do in Moon Hills?

SR: They worked for farmers a lot, hard work, picking stone, and then it was really hard work for the farmers, too, the ones that had homesteads.

SD: Did they hunt or did they harvest plants of any sort?

SR: Well, we mostly hunted and fished and did farm work, because in Leask when we moved from our homestead to Leask, on this land, Dion land, we built a barn, a little house, but didn't want to live there. I got it on video my grandfather's place. The last time was about 10, 15 years ago.

SD: Did they hunt and fish all year round? What time of the year?

SR: What time of the year? Oh, I don't know, but I remember my dad coming in with a little deer on his back.

SD: What kind of medicines did people use back then?

SR: Well, there were a lot of herbs. They'd pick from leaves and stuff, they'd pick that. And they made their own soap to wash with and to wash clothes on the washboard. I did some of that too even though we moved here. We raised children and keep an eye on them.

SD: Do you remember what kind of herbs you used?

SR: To tell the truth, I met my nephew, that one down there, and his mother makes that soap. They use it for everything. I aim to get the recipe. Mom used that too. That's what they all had to do.

SD: They all made soap, but they used herbs too, right? You said they used herbs for medicine?

SR: Yes, but I can't remember. My grandmother used a lot of stuff to draw boils or something. You'd put a leaf on there and it'd come up.

SD: And that was your grandma?

SR: Yes, that was my grandma.

SD: Did she live with you guys out there?

SR: We used to go there. But we had our own place when mom moved to the homestead. They've all come, talking to me with their pictures here, and that's what I say. Fiftieth anniversary, three McKays and three Arcands. And to this day, there's an Arcand living there, down the hill, they say, where my auntie used to live, pretty steep hills. I remember going there a lot of times with a team of horses with my sister. And it was a sharp turn, with wagon boxes on top of the wheels.

SD: And what was your grandma's name again?

SR: Rosalie Laframboise. She married Gregory Arcand. Like I said, my auntie lived down there where there's an Arcand. They call him Larry Arcand. He lived right close, but I never was at that place. I think that's where my auntie used to live.

SD: Was there anyone in your family who did beadwork on moccasins or embroidery on moccasins or mitts?

SR: No, my mom hand sewed our clothes. I don't remember bead work. My grandma might have done that, but I just don't remember. It was just like a dream, but I remember my grandmother. It's how they cooked outside. We talked French a lot.

SD: Did anyone in your family speak Michif?

SR: Michif?

SD: Michif, yes?

SR: En français *Michif-français*?

PR: Half-Breed, half French.

SR: Yes, that's, that's how we talked. In fact, I didn't know a word in English when I started school.

SD: Do you speak Michif?

SR: Michif-français.

SD: Do you know any traditional Métis stories or songs?

PR: A song in French, Métis song, you know a Métis song?

SR: I don't feel like singing.

PR: She's embarrassed to sing lots of songs. Sing them that song, a little bit.

SR: (sings).

PR: She used to sing lots.

SR: My mother used to sing that. In fact, I think she sang that for our wedding in 1957, which took place in the old house. I got it up here somewhere. She sang that for our wedding, and she used to jig a lot. And she won prizes, long ago, coming from the old grandfather's place to go dancing, jigging.

SD: What kind of prizes did she win?

SR: I don't know; something anyway. One thing she did was hook her heel on her dress and then fall down. She danced jig for our wedding, too. That's Caroline Arcand.

SD: Do you know any other songs?

SR: Well, my half-brother used to sing a fun French song. My dad had four children with the first family: my brother Charlie, and Leena, Adrian, and one baby. Now he put that baby in a convent for a while. He wanted to go back and pick her up. But when he went back, the baby wasn't there. And we, us, with my brothers, we tried to find the baby, searching the name. Or sold her or something like that.

PR: Well, he had lost his wife, eh? That's why he put her, that baby in the convent.

SR: That was the first family, and in the second family, there were four of us. There are three of us left living now: one in Saskatoon. We never did find our half-sister. I was in Moose Jaw. I was working there with my cousin, Larivière from Prince Albert. Octave Larivière, that was the stopping place for everybody, a lot of Métis people would go there. And also, she was married to Larivière, and my grandmother was married to a Fiddler after, before that, of course. That's my dad's half-sister. They're there in the book here. We used to sing together with my brothers. They played guitar, they sang. My dad made his violin. I think he learned his trade, mechanic work in the army, the first war. He was into, for a while and he learned that mechanic trade. Then my brothers took that from my dad. They were mechanics, they liked cars. They worked for a lot of farmers.

SD: What are your best memories of living on the road allowance or in Moon Hills?

SR: My best memories were going to grandfather's place because in the morning, we'd go there on New Year's morning. My mom kneels down in front of her dad, and he would say in French, "(speaks French, 23:09). I thought I had to kneel down behind mom, but she's kneeling down in front of her dad. So, we did that. I kneeled down in front of my dad. And that's the benediction. This is what the Métis done.

SD: Do you have any bad memories from there that you would want to share?

SR: No, they're all good memories. They lived a clean life, my folks. I remember they worked hard. I guess not everyone did that.

PR: Her dad used to saw wood on the reserve I guess hey?

SR: I won't say anything.

SD: Don't want to tell that story?

SR: He used to come here lots, too, my dad. In fact, here, he found an iron.

PR: Yes, he used to be a mechanic and he'd fix a motor, and he had made kind of a valve, with a string down. It was dragging in the yard. I'd see it once in a while for I don't know how many years. Finally, I said there must be a reason why this keeps showing up like that. I picked it up. I made the cross, and I put it on his grave.

SR: He made the cement and put that cross on his grave.

PR: It's still there. Yes, it's funny how that went. A few times the kids would pick up some iron. We didn't need it and salvage it. And that one it kept showing up once in a while.

SD: How did your family celebrate Christmas or other holidays?

SR: Well, they'd do pretty well like what they'd do today. The kids get gifts. And then if you were a bad girl, you'd get some ashes in your sock. So, I got some ashes on top. And then, in the morning, after I'd gotten to sleep, there would be a doll there.

SD: How about New Year's Eve or Easter? What did you guys do for New Year's Eve?

SR: We were to my grandfather's place for New Year's morning. That's the first of January. It was always celebrated at my grandparent's place because my grandmother on my dad's side died the same time as my dad's first wife pretty well.

Then dad had to place four kids somewhere. My brother Adrian place was placed in Robert Boyer's home, and my sister was placed at the Delormes. That was my great-uncle. My grandmother, my dad's mother, was her brother. And so, they raised the oldest girl, Lena, there. And Charlie was not far away from my dad too much because he'd follow my dad quite a bit. And then Adrian was two years old when my dad remarried, the youngest one of the first family. And my mom took over. They're all close by, real close family. They came back every day. They came back to where ever we were. We lived in Meadow Lake for, well since '47. And my dad passed away in '54.

SD: How were Métis treated in your community?

SR: How are they treated in the community? Well, I don't know. I think fair enough.

SD: Did anyone treat you bad, like in a racist way?

SR: No, see they made a book here. Maybe you heard about them, Fiddlers, Morins? You heard about that and Lawrence Arnault? That's the guy who does something like what you're doing there. He's finding out about the Métis. Well, there's my nephew with his auntie. His mother was an Arnault, that Lawrence Arnault. And Cecile, that's my brother, Adrian's first girlfriend, and they had a child named Joe. There's Cecile Fiddler there. Adrian had a child, long before, they ever met.

PR: That's Cecile Fiddler's boy. That was him. And we just found that out a couple years ago.

SR: Yes, I think he was raised by his grandma, Melanie Fiddler. She was married to Max Fiddler. That was her dad. We named our grandson here after my dad, Martin. And his birthday is the same day as that of the nephew that I just met. What a coincidence! We met my nephew at the Cherry Grove chuckwagon races. I remember when my brother was going with his mother, I remember that. Maybe you heard about Rose Bishop? She was a Bishop, but now she remarried. Well, we were living right next door, from here to the fence in our little old house. They're still there. And they knew a lot. Her mother knew about herbs and making stuff, on the way that the Métis lived.

PR: You never run into Dan Ross in Saskatoon?

SD: No.

PR: I bet you he would know a lot, that Dan Ross. He used to be up in Green Lake. Now he's been living in Saskatoon. He's been sick for quite a while, and he's staying at this daughter's place.

SD: I'll look him up.

PR: Dan Ross, I'll bet he could tell you lots of things.

SD: Well, I'm learning lots today.

SR: What about, you knew some McKay there in Saskatoon?

SD: Not too many, no.

SR: There was one, Wendell McKay. ... What about Walter Church? They lived over there in the hills, too. Well, it was his mother that was living right down close to my grandfather, Gregory Arcand. And at weddings there, of course, I was a bridesmaid for everyone. Walter is my first cousin.

SD: And they lived in Moon Hills also?

SR: Yes, they lived in Moon Hills. Well, his mother and dad lived in Moon Hills. And then the dad passed away and then she remarried an Arcand, but she kept her name now because she was an Arcand.

PR: That's their brother. That's their wedding.

SR: Charlie, my brother

PR: Lots of times we'd have fun.

SR: My half-brother. They always said that we're getting closer related all the time. You don't want to go and investigate too much, because first thing you know you're related.

PR: Just like Edward King. We went over to his house,) and said we'd better quit, or you won't want to stay with your husband.

SD: When did people start to leave your community?

SR: Over there in Leask? Well, I think when the country schools were around Leask, they started to leave for better education. That's when I stayed at the neighbours in Leask, when mom was in the hospital. And they, the Pollards, had a farm in Leask, and they were farmers, and they left, too because the younger ones didn't have their education. They had to go to Leask School for that, which was quite a ways. Yes, they used to go to school with horses, toboggans, and buggies. In Leask, there were Codys, Pauls, Rangers, and Borrowes. They were our neighbours.

SD: Were those folks Métis as well?

SR: My folks, Métis?

SD: No, the people you just named.

SR: The names I've given you?

PR: Colins.

SR: Colins were Métis for sure. They lived around here.

PR: Pollards?

SR: Pollards, they're Spanish. I don't know exactly where they came from, but their farm was in Leask.

SD: Where did you say your parents and grandparents were from?

SR: My mother's parents were in the Moon Hills.

SD: Okay, but did they come from somewhere else?

SR: Well, like I said, they were married mostly in Duck Lake. And I have their marriage all into these books here. My mom and dad, not, well my grandparents. Charles Lavallée is the one I'm trying to find out. They had farm there in Fish Creek. My dad was living with his widowed mother. She was a Delorme. And then she remarried a

Fiddler. And he died, and I believe that he's buried there in Fish Creek. They married in Duck Lake.

SD: Okay, that's your parents?

SR: That's my grandparents. That's my dad, his folks and I never met them because my grandmother died in 1931. She had a big family with the second family, but I know most of them all too because I went there after.

SD: Were your family involved in the 1885 Resistance?

SR: In what?

SD: In Batoche, the war in Batoche.

SR: Well, my brother was born there in Batoche because my dad was married to a Branconier. They were married in Saskatoon or somewhere near there. And I got some uncles there and, my dad's in-laws.

SD: Was any of your family involved in the fighting in Batoche in 1885?

SR: Yes, they were involved there. There was my grandfather Arcand, my grandmother on her side of the family. Two sons and the dad were killed in Batoche.

SD: Oh wow, what were their names?

SR: Laframboise.

SD: So, there was a dad and two sons?

SR: Yes, it was Rosalie, her dad, Joseph Arcand. I showed you five men that were brothers, and I don't know if the other brothers were there, but on her side of the family, they fought there. I believe it might have happened around that time that my grandfather Charles Lavallée, nobody knew how he died around that time at the Rebellion in '85. Is it 1885?

SD: Did anyone in your family serve in the military?

SR: My dad was in the army, in the first war. I don't know if he went overseas, but that's where he learned his trade, to be a mechanic. And that's at the time where he got married, the first wife. In fact, they were in the army. My dad's, brother-in-law was in the army at the same time. I got that picture there.

SD: That was your dad's first wife?

SR: Yes, the first wife was Branconier, and her brother was in the army with my dad.

SD: Was anyone in your family involved in the Métis society, like in Métis government?

PR: I don't think so. You had nobody in your family involved with the Métis?

SR: No, I don't think there was anything like that going during the times you're talking about. I don't remember, except for my older generation telling us about the Rebellion, and that they fought there, their folks fought there.

PR: I never got anything from them, too, didn't get anything from there.

SR: Your grandfather was in there, too, hey? And these guys here, that's, his folks, are in there, the Parenteaus. That's his great-grandfather. There's Sansregret, Johnny Sansregret. That's his side of the family.

PR: This is a Parenteau here. He lived with us in Calgary. They come here after Calgary was over. Michael was a little boy that time. He lives in Saskatoon. He works at the casino.

SD: And who's that?

PR: Tommy Parenteau.

SD: Is he a brother?

PR: That's, a cousin.

SD: Your cousin or her?

PR: Yes, my cousin. We're not only related to that guy, but we're first cousins. That Parenteau used to be quite a guy. He was a singer. One time in the bar, they told him not to sing too loud because he'd get into a fight that poor guy. He said, "When I sing, I sing loud!"

SR: That was Octave Parenteau.

SD: Do you have anything else that you would like to share about from Moon Hills, where you grew up?

SR: Well, I'd like to go back there in the hills again to see who was living there now. I met some people there. My sister-in-law, her daughter is married Reg.

PR: Reg, that's Sandra's husband.

SR: Yes, that's who took me to Moon Hills. We couldn't find a place there because that's a very long time ago that we there and found a place because his folks lived nearby. They lived on a farm there. He used to ride there. My grandfathers rode through there. There were lakes all around that house. I got it on video. And did they eat ducks, ducks, ducks, ducks.

PR: Dan would know lots of these people here... Do you want that book?

SD: We've got it. Well good, thank you very much.

PR: Well, you better sing him another little song.

SD: Yes, boy if you could sing another song.

SR: I could talk all day and all night, but I don't want to sing anymore, like I used to sing with my brother.

PR: You got to sing him a little song now.

SD: If you could sing another little song that would be great.

SR: I got a cassette, I'll play that. I'll put in that cassette tape. I made one. I recorded myself along with my brother. He used to sing. He lived in the Yukon for a while. My mom and her second husband, Pierre (name inaudible), you might have heard that name? Well, that's my mom's second husband. They were married about a week before us.

PR: If you go to Regina, you'll probably find out lots.