

Race, Class and Marginality
A Métis Settlement in the Manitoba Interlake,
1850-1914

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Graduate Studies,
University of Manitoba,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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July, 1990

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BY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how, since the 1850s, capitalist development in Manitoba's Interlake area and the interpretation of this region's history have been heavily influenced by a western racist ideology. This ideology, coupled with the other political-social-economic dynamics of capitalism, led to the development and maintenance of racially distinct marginal communities. Racism alone, however, was used to explain the existence of these communities in terms of a perceived racial difference that affected the residents' culture, world view, and work habits. The specific community examined is a Métis settlement on the southern shores of Lake Manitoba.

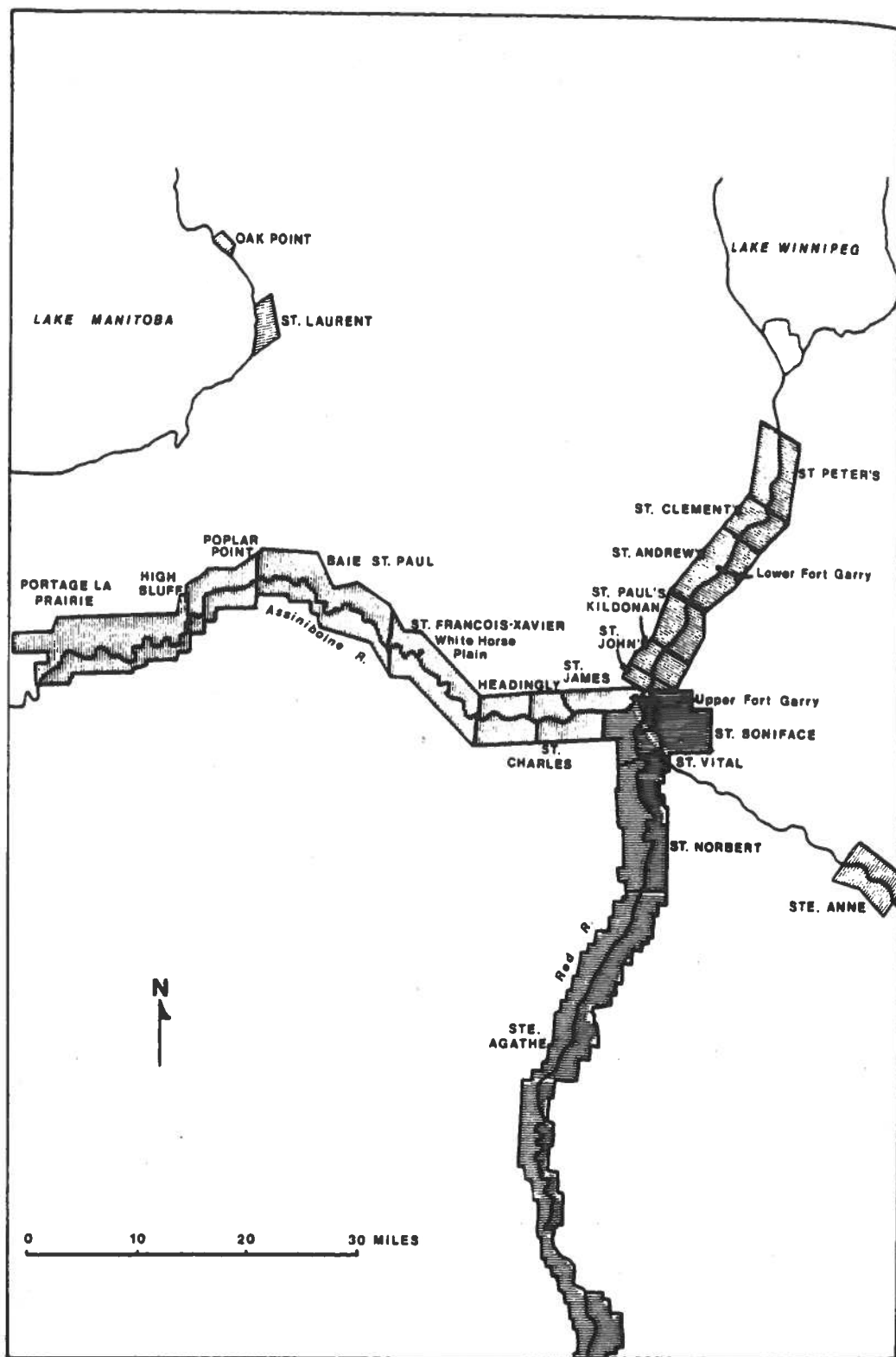
PREFACE

This dissertation examines how, since the 1850s, capitalist development on the shores of Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis, and the interpretation of this region's history, have been heavily influenced by a western racist ideology. A racist ideology coupled to the other political and socioeconomic dynamics of capitalism led to the development and maintenance of 'racially' distinct marginal communities. Racism alone, however, was used to explain the existence of these communities in terms of a perceived racial difference that affected the residents' culture, world view and work habits. The specific community examined below is a community of Métis that divided its time between two settlements; Saint-Laurent on the southern shore of Lake Manitoba, and Duck Bay on the shore of Lake Winnipegosis.

Based on archival materials and an extensive use of oral history a critical history of these Métis has been reconstructed for the years 1850 to 1914. An analysis of the history so reconstructed revealed that the penetration of new economic, social and ideological forces, from 1850 and especially after 1870, had a direct and, in some cases, terrible effect upon a portion of the population listed as "Métis" in the first general census of 1870. It is important to note that it was not a blanket effect. There was a differential reaction within the population to the impact of the new factors in their lives. In fact, several of the old lakeshore families prospered in the Canadian phase of the region's history. This simple and crucial fact has escaped the notice of

many researchers dealing with "Métis" history because they have failed to notice the evolution in the use of the term Métis between 1850 and 1914. At some point between 1850 and 1914 Métis became a derogatory term used to describe a person's marginalized socio-economic position in the Interlake area of Manitoba. Prior to 1850, the Métis label described people of dual cultural heritage who, by and large, supplied food staples and labour to the fur trade companies. Other socioeconomic strata of the Northwestern interior, such as traders or the newly emerging groups of farmers, initially appeared to have little or no objection to being labelled Métis, even though, by 1870, their ideology and lifestyle differed from the larger hunting and fishing segment of the population. Uneasiness with the label appeared in the 1880s when a substantial segment of the old lakeshore population became trapped in lives of poverty caused by a lack of land, a lack of access to capital and a lack of the knowledge necessary for the sedentary pursuits of farming and fishing. Families that had succeeded in achieving a relatively comfortable living, after 1880, began to distance themselves from their impoverished neighbours by asserting their French-Canadian background and rejecting the label Métis. In the dissertation below it is argued that the changes in the connotations evoked by the use of the Métis label can be traced back to changes in the economy of the regions and the impact of these changes upon the early inhabitants. Also of importance was the importation of a racist ideology having its roots in the development of both British and French capitalism. The imported racism provided a simple, apparently visual, explanatory framework for phenomena produced or rooted in complex changes in material forces.





The Red River Settlement, 1870. (Map by Victor Lytwyn.)

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Chapter 1 - Historiography

The existing body of work dealing with Métis history has not been based on concepts of class and class exploitation. Rather, the historiography is based on concepts of nationalism and national oppression or liberation. A nationalist paradigm limits the possibilities for explaining both the dynamics of internal socio-economic variations within the Métis population and the relations between the Métis population and the rest of society. The Métis nationalist model fails to explain the particular nature of the persistence and assimilation of various sections of the Métis population.

There are two caveats which should be acknowledged that complicate the answers to the key questions of who (or what) is a 'Métis' and how did such a Métis population emerge?¹ The first caveat stems from the fact that the term 'Métis' has increasingly come to be used in a larger sense. In North America the Métis are now regarded as all of the peoples with a mixed Indian and European heritage. Prior to the mid 1970s the word Métis was restricted to nineteenth and early twentieth century Red River and Prairie history. 'Métis' designated what was thought to be a clearly identifiable population whose existence was limited in both time and space. Over the last ten years the term has increasingly been used with little concern as to

¹ These caveats were first noted by J. Brown in "People of Myth, People of History: a Look at Recent Writing on the Métis," *Acadiensis* 17, (1987): 150-162.

whether the peoples so designated considered themselves to be somehow 'distinct' or 'apart' because of their lineages or by virtue of the distinctive features 'Métiness' had ascribed to their everyday life. The generalization of 'Métiness' as a descriptive category renders it useless as an analytical tool.

The second caveat is linked with the first. Given the loss of the pejorative connotations associated with 'Métiness' as perceived by those who are not Métis there is a corresponding growth in the numbers of those who are willing to describe themselves as Métis. There is a trend towards the discovery and valorization of a Métis connection in Manitoba families. More and more people are identifying themselves as Métis even though the term may have been avoided by the generations that preceded them. The new valorization of the history of Métis and the adoption of Métis history by a growing number of people may have positive results for the traditional and marginalized Métis population. Unfortunately the spontaneous growth of Métis numbers separate from the traditional Métis of the literature makes for unexpected and formidable obstacles in reconstructing the history of a Métis settlement and its patterns of assimilation through the use of oral history.²

One problem created by the recent phenomena noted above is that it is often unclear whether an author has taken note of, and dealt with, the possibilities of an

² How the challenge was met in this study will be dealt in the following chapter addressing issues of methodology.

existing non-Métis population of dual Indian and Euro-canadian ancestry. There are also historical distortions produced by the recent adoption of a Métis identity within a population and its projection back in time onto peoples for whom being Métis was of little or no relevance. Both these trends, the rejection of the term as a form of self-labelling and, conversely, the recent adoption of Métis as a term for self-identification, will be documented for the settlement of Saint-Laurent between 1850 and 1914.

The cautionary note sounded above tends to be relevant only to post 1975 works since prior to 1975 the vast majority of the studies on the Métis dealt with the French and Roman Catholic³ Red River Métis population or its Saskatchewan derivatives till 1885. The 19th century Red River population, by and large, accepted the term Métis as an accurate label for itself.

Seven overlapping approaches to the interpretation of Métis history can be distinguished in the literature. In rough chronological order of appearance in the literature these are: Fur Trade Political Economy, the savagery-civilization interpretations, the Nationalist school, the theory of miscegenation, the Biographical view, the dispersal school, and community studies. Each of these seven approaches is identified with a certain area of interest ('Riel', 'Rebellions', 'dispersal') and, usually, a

³ Though, as will be documented in the following chapters for the settlement of Saint-Laurent, perhaps the 'French Roman Catholic Red River Métis' label was cast much too far and wide even in the older studies.

specific interpretive style. Studies on fur trade society also contain material relevant to Métis history.

The political economy approach is contained in works such as those produced by Harold Innis⁴ and E.E. Rich⁵. Indians and Métis were portrayed essentially as two dimensional characters, interesting merely for the scope of their economic options and how they acted upon them. These classical Canadian historians presented the Métis as 20th century rational individuals, although primitive, in a manner similar to the individuals in Marshall Sahlins' Stone Age Economics.⁶ The impact of differing economic systems and ideologies upon their behaviour and world view was not evaluated.

Writers of the savagery-civilization approach also used the concept of primitiveness vis a vis the Métis. However they did not entertain the notion that the Métis were rational despite their primitiveness. Basing their analyses on the works of eye witnesses such as Alexander Begg,⁷ George Bryce,⁸ and R. G. MacBeth⁹ his-

⁴ Harold Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

⁵ E.E. Rich, The Fur trade and the Northwest to 1857 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1967).

⁶ Marshall Sahlins, Stone Age Economics (Hawthorne, N.Y.: Aldine de Gruyter, 1972).

⁷ Alexander Begg, History of the North West 3 vol. (Toronto: Rose and Company, 1894-95).

torians like George Stanley¹⁰ saw the Métis people coming into existence via biological miscegenation combined with the social clash of two rival fur trade companies and the specialized food needs of the fur trade. According to this approach the Métis were destroyed as civilization¹¹ installed itself in the Canadian West after 1870. It was an example of the oft repeated clash between primitive nomadic hunters and modern civilized peoples both dealing with the consequences of a receding frontier. The Métis disappearance after 1870 and 1885 was seen as the inevitable triumph of Anglo Saxon supremacy over primitive French speaking Catholics.

Scholars of the savagery-civilization paradigm did not examine internal variability within the "savage" population's economic pursuits, life styles, or ideologies. The tendency was always to regard the Métis as homogeneous within their imposed racial, ethnic, or national boundaries.¹² The possibility of any degree of assimilation of the Métis community into the larger intrusive society was inconceivable.

⁸ George Bryce, A Short History of the Canadian People (London:1887).

⁹ R. G. MacBeth, Making the Canadian West (Toronto: 1905).

¹⁰ George Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellion, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966).

¹¹ As defined by Stanley.

¹² A trend which, as will be discussed below, continues to this day.

A perception of near complete homogeneity and persistence is also apparent in the nationalist school of writings, where the working assumption was that one was dealing with a population of French Catholic origin and that the confrontations which arose, notably in 1870 and again in 1885, were merely extensions of Durham's 'two warring nations within one country'.¹³ Such writers did not perceive much variation in the response of the Métis population to outside pressure. Therefore they did not attempt to use other 'non-nationalistic' interpretations to explain, for example, the rebellions of 1870 and 1885.

A nationalist model is obvious in the works of Chester Martin¹⁴. He perceived les événements as an extension of the religious and racial conflict between Ontario and Québec which were further aggravated by the inherently violent nature of the Métis attributable to their partially Indian ancestry. True civilization in the interior had to await the inevitable departure of the coleric and unadaptive Métis in 1870 in response to the ever increasing pressures of an advancing capitalist society.

¹³ Paul G. Cornell et al., Canada, Unité et Diversité (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, et Winston ltd., 1971), 251.

¹⁴ Chester Martin "The Red River Settlement," in Canada and its Provinces, vol. 19 (Toronto 1914).

Chester Martin, "The First New Province of the Dominion," Canadian Historical Review (1920).

Another nationalist, A. H. de Tremaudan,¹⁵ wrote a history of the rebellions with the idée fixe of the innate importance of language and race. The importance of the Métis lay in their French and Roman Catholic roots, which were inadvertently also the source of their demise due to the ever increasing hostility of incoming orangistes. His opinion reflected and was informed by those of L'Union Nationale Métisse de Saint-Joseph the porte parole of Saint-Boniface's pre-1870 Métis elite who were increasingly allying and merging with the incoming French-Canadian migrants and the local clerical authorities. As Brown notes, de Tremaudan's view of the Métis was that:

If there is none more Catholic than a Métis there is none more French...In religion he is Catholic; in nationality he is French from head to toe...in mind, heart, word and deed.¹⁶

Yet another approach makes use of the concept of miscegenation to analyze and explain the history of the Métis in Canada. The miscegenation approach contains the work that put the Métis firmly on both historical and ethnographical maps: French ethnographer Marcel Giraud's massive Le Métis Canadien.¹⁷ Like de Tremaudan, Giraud saw the western Métis developing a sense of nationalism and a certain degree of cohesiveness that was partially informed by their French and

¹⁵ A. H. de Tremaudan, Histoire de la Nation Metisse de l'Ouest Canadien (Montréal: Editions Albert Levesque, 1935).

n.b. The manuscript was written, partly in California, during the 1920s.

¹⁶ Jennifer Brown, "People of Myth, People of History: A Look at Recent Writing on the Métis," Acadiensis 17, (1987): 152

¹⁷ Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1945).

Catholic heritage. But it was an imperfect coalescing of nationhood due to their partially native background.

In Le Métis Canadien, Giraud seems influenced in his historical interpretations by a Conte de Gobineau maxim, still occasionally heard in French-speaking milieus, which argues that the progeny of an inter-racial marriage will inherit the faults of both races and none of the positive qualities.¹⁸ Although Giraud described a slowly developing sense of peoplehood he argued that it never became clearly defined due to the lack of a well developed Métis cultural identity; 'principe culturel solide'.¹⁹ The Métis were perpetually torn between the differing cultures and ideologies of their dual ancestry. Despite the urgings of missionaries to settle down and adopt a peasant way of life, the Métis continually followed the path of least resistance and pursued a nomadic hunting lifestyle. The Métis rejection of the superior life style of the French Canadians led to their destruction, dispersal and, Giraud foresaw, eventual genocide. They were the victims of their genetic origins.

Giraud's theories on miscegenation have been discussed and refuted elsewhere.²⁰ What is of interest here is his perception of the internal workings of the

¹⁸ Michael D. Biddiss, "Gobineau and the Origins of European Racism," Race (January 1966): 259

¹⁹ Giraud, 1095.

²⁰ D.N. Sprague, Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1988), 1-17.

Métis population. Giraud compartmentalized the Métis into socio-economic classes but his analysis was not class based. Giraud's classes were simple categories distinguishing those who acted more as obedient Catholic 'whites' (the elites) from the restless nomadic 'Freemen' who were functionally indistinguishable from the Indians.²¹ Because of his miscegenation paradigm Giraud tends to ascribe to all Métis the same physical and mental characteristics due to their biological heritage. He does not analyze how differing class positions evolved and affected the Métis population or how class membership was causally related to behaviour, ideology, and reactions to a rapidly changing situation after 1869. Neither does he discuss the interplay between socio-economic position, the options for adaptive behaviour it allows, and the ideology that class membership (among other factors) produces.

A young Manitoba historian who had been disturbed by the explanatory framework of the 'civilization-savagery' dichotomy was W. L. Morton. In 1937 in an essay predating Giraud's monograph he generalized the condemnation of the primitive pre-1870 conditions at Red River. The fault for the generally backward situation found in the colony did not lie solely with the nomadic 'indianized' Métis.²²

²¹ For an interesting reinterpretation of 19th century 'Métis' history that sees the agrarian elements in the colony as being more backward and less developed as their bison hunting counterparts consult Gerard J. Ens, "Kinship, Ethnicity, Class and the Red River métis: The Parishes of St-Francois Xavier and St. Andrew" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1989).

²² W.L. Morton, "The Red River Parish," Manitoba Essays, ed. R.C. Lodge (Toronto, 1937), 3-22.

The primitive social and economic conditions prevalent in Red River were the result of an autocratic style of government that impeded the general development of society. The Métis also reacted to the fact that they were treated like chattel in the transaction between the Company and the Canadian Government. Les Evenements of 1870 could thus be viewed as a national uprising. The Métis nationalists were fighting with a dual purpose; to create representative institutions and to save their country from appropriation by a foreign power.²³

As D.N. Sprague has noted, Morton was left with the difficult task of explaining the massive Métis exodus out of Manitoba that followed the mise en vigueur of the Manitoba Act, a document purported to be a charter for national survival.²⁴ It was the scale of the migration which perplexed Morton. He had noted that there was quite a range of behaviour and occupations within the Métis population and that quite distinct Métis communities existed, communities that had been differently affected by economic development occurring from the 1830s and 1840s. Obviously some Métis would drift away avoiding the growing burdens and obligations of civilization but the scale of the exodus was inexplicable. The answers to the puzzle came with his reading of Giraud's Le Métis Canadien.

Morton realized that even those Métis who had progressed to the point where

²³ Sprague, 4-5.

²⁴ Sprague, 5.

they were planting potatoes and tending small gardens on their riverlots were not truly embarking on a transition to farming. They kept being distracted from agrarian civilization by hunting and voyaging activities that "bound them ineluctably to nomadism and to barbarism".²⁵ Like Giraud, therefore Morton was influenced by theories of miscegenation. The native background of the Métis acted as a major impediment to the attainment of truly civilized behaviour. Morton, perhaps after a rereading of de Tremaudan, now interpreted the rebellions as a reaction against the arrival of English-speaking protestant migrants from Ontario, and not as a democratic desire for recognition and change. He argued that a shift to an agrarian economy, initiated by French Catholic Québécois, would perhaps have been accepted by the Métis, but such a shift had not truly begun prior to 1870 and the arrival of hostile, farming WASPs from Ontario after 1870 provoked a large scale migration of the Métis westward.

Stanley, Martin, Giraud, and Morton all saw the post-1870 dispersal of the Métis from Manitoba as being rooted in general socio-economic backwardness. Because of their partially Indian heritage, not much helped by the French Canadian component, they were unable or unwilling as a group to adapt to a rapidly changing milieu. They left en masse in search of a receding fur trade frontier.

²⁵ Sprague, 6. Quoting from Morton's review essay of Le Métis Canadien printed in The Beaver (1950): 3-7.

The tendency to view the Métis as belonging to a socially and economically static racial grouping that is internally homogeneous plagues even works that purport to deal sympathetically with the Métis. Joseph Howard's pioneer work on the "clash of destinies between natural communities based on the fur trade and the new capitalism of railways, technology and high finance"²⁶ constantly refers to certain socio-economic groups (hunters, trappers, traders, financiers) as 'races' even though his romantic framework has no analytical requirement for such a concept. Race is simply an unquestioned 'given'; it is mere common sense that the actors playing out these scenes in the 1870s and 1880s were divided into 'races'. Although Howard does see the clash between a mercantilist (fur trade) society and an intruding capitalist one as fundamental, he constantly colors his analysis with racial overtones. Furthermore he does not analyze the variability of actions and responses within the clashing economies. In his introduction Howard's racial myopia is clearly revealed:

The native defenders of the West in this period where for the most part Sioux, Cree and Blackfeet Indians and their 'cousins', the Métis or 'half-breeds'. Their 'empire' was the great mid-continent buffalo ranges now designated as the Northern Great Plains; as the Indians doggedly retreated from it, the Métis and the Whites moved in. But the Métis inherited all of the Indians' problems while the whites gained strength and cunning. The Métis therefore were the worst sufferers, and this book concerns itself chiefly with their nation because their tragedy climaxed and epitomized the whole struggle of red man, or brown, against white.²⁷

²⁶ Joseph Howard, Strange Empire: Louis Riel and the first Métis People (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1952), 6.

²⁷ Howard, 16. (emphasis added)

Once the interpretation of racially based socio-economic decrepitude was an axiom of Canadian history, interest focused on the Métis' colorful leader during the two rebellions, Louis David Riel Jr. (and to a lesser extent on figures such as Gabriel Dumont). Authors such as Donald Creighton and Thomas Flanagan dealt with the history of the Métis via a study of their leader.²⁸ The fifth stream in Métis history is therefore a biographical one. The debate came to centre on whether Riel's intentions had been honorable or not and was therefore not a break from the 'savagery-civilization' or 'miscegenation' schools of thought. None of the basic assumptions guiding the interpretations changed. Curiosity still centred on the two rebellions and the authors still perceived the Métis as having been fairly dealt with by the Canadian government in 1870. The Métis had simply passed it over because of their inherent weakness in character and distaste for the sedentary life. These faults would precipitate a second unnecessary tragedy at Batoche, aggravated by Riel's political and material ambitions.²⁹ Though specific decisions or actions by the federal government may have been deplored by these historians they never questioned the good intentions and earnestness of John A. MacDonald and his cabinet. Also, and most pertinent to the current work, Flanagan and Creighton and their predecessors did not perceive much internal variability within the Métis

²⁸ Donald Creighton, John A. MacDonald (Toronto, 1955) vol. 2, The Old Chieftain.

Thomas Flanagan, Louis 'David' Riel: Prophet of the New World (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

²⁹ Sprague, 16-17.

population. Flanagan and Creighton noted the existence of a very small educated elite embodied by Riel but the masses seemed undifferentiated.

A sixth approach to Métis history emerged in the 1970s. The 'dispersal' school questioned the assumptions that informed previous works and attempted to establish objective material reasons for the displacement northwest of a majority of Métis. Central to the new line of research was the question of whether or not the Métis left Manitoba because of reasons innate to them or because of outside factors. Two very different scholars, D.N. Sprague and Gerhard Ens, addressed the question of whether "the opportunities the Métis allegedly ignored in Manitoba were genuine, or did dispossession precede migration".³⁰

D.N. Sprague has written prolifically in the last ten years on the question of the migration of the Métis from Manitoba in the early 1870s. As noted in the preface to his most recent book, Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885, the central purpose guiding his research has been to determine why the Red River Settlement, "one of the most persistent populations of North America from 1820 to 1869", apparently dispersed so completely in the post 1870 era.³¹ Sprague traces and analyses the series of amendments deliberately made to the Manitoba Act that increased the difficulties faced by the Métis in acquiring title to the lands either occupied by or

³⁰ Sprague, 17.

³¹ Sprague, vii.

promised to them. The purpose of these ultra vires amendments may have been, Sprague suggests, to open up prime Manitoba lands to eastern protestant settlers. For a critique of Sprague's work see the 1985 paper "The Dissolution of a Métis Community: Pointe a Grouette, 1860-1885".³²

Gerhard Ens also acknowledges the reality of a large scale rapid dispersal after 1870. His examination of the dispersal leads to a benign interpretation of both Government actions and Métis motives for leaving the province. In the two works he has produced to date on the dispersal³³ Ens argues that although a certain degree of government dispossession and Métis maladjustment may be documented in the period between 1870 and 1890, other more positive forces were motivating the Métis to depart from Manitoba. Ens argues that most Métis left the old Red River parishes, some as early as the 1850s, in response to new economic possibilities relating to the bison hunt. With the industrialization of eastern North America the market for bison robes, and the leather derived from them, had grown tremendously so that taking up farming even after 1870, was not a very lucrative option. It

³² Nicole St-Onge, "The Dissolution of a Métis Community: Pointe a Grouette, 1860-1885," Studies in Political Economy 18 (Autumn 1985): 149-171.

³³ Gerhard Ens, "Dispossession or Adaptation? Migration or Persistence of the Red River Métis, 1835-1890," Historical Papers 1988 Communications Historiques (Ottawa, 1989), 120-144.

Gerhard Ens, "Kinship, Ethnicity, Class and the Red River metis: The Parishes of St.François Xavier and St. Andrew's," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Alberta, 1989).

condemned one, until 1890, to mere subsistence. Many Métis simply opted to pursue a more remunerative occupation and followed the bison herds as they retreated west. They sold their claims and headed towards the Saskatchewan district. Ens goes on to argue that all those who made a formal request for land under the provisions of the Manitoba Act received it. However, many of the successful applicants still chose to head westward in the 1880s because of a desire for larger landholdings that would allow them to participate more fully in the nascent wheat economy.

Ens' 1989 Ph.D. dissertation is a well researched and thoroughly written work. Ens' essential argument is that, by and large, the federal government dealt fairly with the Métis on the question of land claims but many Métis were attracted by the lucrative bison robe trade which he argues was developing further west. In the 1880s the Manitoba Métis that had held back were induced to leave with the hopes of securing larger land holdings in Saskatchewan and Alberta thus participating more fully in the wheat economy.

Three criticisms of Ens' research and interpretations are made here. Ens, in his analysis of the patenting of Métis land, only deals with those who made a formal written claim. Only those who had made 'improvements' to their lots ever got that far in the process; there is evidence that much verbal discouragement was occurring. In Saint-Laurent only a small percentage of families ever reached that stage in the claims process. The majority, many of whom continued to live in the area well into

the twentieth century, were never in a position to fulfill the residency requirements demanded by the Manitoba Act amendments. Therefore there was an a priori discouragement to the filing of claims even before a single word could have been written. A second problem with Ens' research is his belief that the bison robe trade served as a magnet for the Manitoba Métis, especially after 1860 when the Métis also had to deal with the 'push' effect of growing religious and linguistic intolerance emanating from Ontario immigrants. Documentary sources discussed in Chapter 5, indicated that the bison hunt had ceased to be a factor in large population movements by 1874. Even before 1874, the hunt was not viewed as sufficient justification for permanent Métis relocation by the Oblate missionaries. Finally, Ens argues the Métis were attracted westward in the 1880s by the promise of new larger land holdings which is puzzling when one remembers that many of the Manitoba river lots were taken over by 'professional' French and English Canadian farmers; were they less enterprising than their Métis counterparts? Why were they settling for less?

On a more theoretical plane, one can critique Ens' use and manipulation of the concepts of class, ethnicity and kinship. In his introductory comments he states that these three concepts are employed.³⁴ But nowhere does he state clearly what explanatory weight he gives to each of the three concepts or how each of these factors relate to the other two within the explanatory construct. Are they of equal

³⁴ Ens, 9.

importance or does one or more factors arise from another? How does one determine when class, for example, is the determining factor as opposed to ethnicity or kinship?

With both Sprague and Ens, the emphasis lies with those who leave the province of Manitoba. Persistence, internal migration, and the whole process of post-1870 adaptation by the Métis within Manitoba³⁵ is not addressed. As will be demonstrated in the next several chapters the history of those who did not disperse is as important as the 'dispersal' for understanding the phenomenon of 'métiness'.

The seventh and final approach to Métis history, and one of particular relevance to the work being introduced here, is made up of studies that have examined post 1870 communities. These communities are perceived, using a plethora of definitions, to be partially or wholly 'Métis'. Using archival sources, oral history and traditional ethnographic field methods, researchers have attempted to understand with various degrees of success the emergence, histories, and internal/external dynamics of these communities. These are undertakings fraught with danger, as J.R. Miller notes, especially in relation to understanding the internal divisions within the

³⁵ This dissertation also deals extensively with an outpost of Saint-Laurent; Duck Bay on the shores of Lake Winnipegosis. The Métis of Saint-Laurent began relocating there permanently at the turn of the (20th) century. By that time this central lake was within the provincial boundaries.

population perceived as Métis.³⁶ One should be especially wary of how these authors define both community, community membership and métiness.

Few community studies have been made on settlements located in present day Manitoba; Ens' recent efforts have already been discussed and Guy Lavallée's traditional ethnography of Saint-Laurent will be addressed in the next chapter. Since historical processes and developments often transcend modern political boundaries, studies dealing with communities outside Manitoba are assessed here.

A pioneering community study was Diane Payment's M.A. dissertation on Batoche (Saskatchewan) researched in the late 1970s.³⁷ Based on both archival and published sources, together with an extensive use of oral history, the work attempts to give a 'life history' of the settlement of Batoche; its rise, apogee, and decline. Payment examines the relationship between the bison hunt, commerce and agriculture as they pertain to Batoche. She also tries to describe the interrelationships between the clergy, the local bourgeoisie, and the rest of the settlement's population. Payment's dissertation, along with a subsequent 1986 article,³⁸ is probably one of the best social histories on the post 1870 Métis so far written. There are some shortcom-

³⁶ J.R. Miller, "From Riel to the Métis," Canadian Historical Review LXIX (1988): 1-20.

³⁷ Published as Batoche (1870-1910) (Saint-Boniface: Les Editions du Blé, 1983).

³⁸ Diane Payment, "Batoche after 1885: A Society in Transition," in 1885 and After: Native Society in Transition, eds. F. Laurie Barron and James B. Waldram (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1986), 173-88.

ings. Payment's tendency to examine pre 1885 socioeconomic relationships along ethnic lines (Indians, Whites, Métis) does not allow the reader to clearly understand the formation of classes in the region, classes that she sees as existing by 1885. Furthermore, in the period of the second rebellion to 1910, class differentiation within the Batoche area are noted but they are examined largely on the political plane: how occupation relates to political behaviour and voting patterns.³⁹ How the existence of class affected interpersonal relationships and conflict in general within the community between 1870 and 1885 is not clearly analyzed.

Three articles based on more recent community studies are found in Peterson and Brown's The New Peoples. The authors examine communities in northeastern Ontario, Alberta and Montana. John S. Long's 'Treaty No. 9 and fur trade company families: Northeastern Ontario's halfbreeds, Indians, petitioners and métis'⁴⁰ deals with the dual descent population of the James Bay region. He discusses the péripéties of the James Bay 'halfbreed' in getting either treaty status or scrip. Long's study is interesting because nowhere does the reader get a sense that the dual descent population was evolving towards internal cohesiveness or solidarity. Their links to the Cree community were recent and close and discrimination meted against them was the same as that experienced by the Indian component of the community.

³⁹ Payment, 135-136.

⁴⁰ John S. Long, "Treaty no. 9 and fur trade company families," in The New Peoples, Being and Becoming Métis in North America, eds. J. Peterson and J. S. H. Brown (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985), 137-162.

Hardship and dispossession affected all those who had been closely linked to the fur trade economy; an economy in decline after 1900. According to J.S. Long seventy two percent of all HBC employees in the district were of 'mixed' ancestry in 1890.⁴¹ The decline in the fur economy would also adversely affect the 'Indian' component of the population. In fact distinguishing between the two groups may be somewhat artificial. Long notes that several 'halfbreed' families lived from trapping and that some native hunters had become full time HBC servants.⁴² Also, adhesion to treaty no. 9 was at least partially determined by whether or not the applicants had been living 'the indian way of life'⁴³ and not by ancestry. Long goes on to note that there existed differences within the halfbreed population as to the degree of assimilation (measured by the ability to read and write English)⁴⁴ occurring. Once again another study would perhaps have benefitted from a working assumption that stressed the existence of class as opposed to ethnic cleavages. Long's 'halfbreeds' were a fragmented varied group who appeared never to have experienced a sense of national identity.

Another study dealing with a 'Métis' community was undertaken by Trudy Nicks and Kenneth Morgan. They examined the small community of Grand Cache,

⁴¹ Long, 141.

⁴² Long, 144.

⁴³ Long, 148.

⁴⁴ Long, 147.

Alberta⁴⁵ and noted that a majority of the present day population are descendants of free Iroquois trappers who settled in the area in the early 19th century.⁴⁶ They go on to state that "the community is an indigenous development of subarctic west-central Alberta, with origins which were contemporary with, but quite independent of, the métis groups of Red River" adding the telltale comment that the local population's adoption of a 'Métis' identity dates only to the mid-1960s and the sudden appearance of industrial and urban developments. The Grand Cache inhabitants, like their more easterly counterparts, were not a homogeneous group. In the second half of the 19th century some of the more sedentary and agriculturally inclined of the Grand Cache population accepted treaty indian status (Treaty 6) while their more nomadic hunting and gathering counterparts preferred to take up the half breed scrip and the ready cash it provided.⁴⁷ Once again one wonders at the usefulness of a study examining a population whose boundaries are determined by its dual ancestorship when 'racial' background was obviously not a basis for self identity or collective actions and when socioeconomic differentiations existed within the population. How many families and individuals were left out of the Nicks and Morgan study because they did not have a 'mixed' ancestry even though they considered themselves as belonging fully to the community? Once again it could be

⁴⁵ Trudy Nicks and Kenneth Morgan, "Grand Cache: The historic development of an indigenous Alberta métis population," in The New People, Being and Becoming Métis in North America, eds. J. Peterson and J. S. H. Brown (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985), 163-184.

⁴⁶ Nicks and Morgan, 163.

⁴⁷ Nicks and Morgan, 176-177.

argued that an analysis based on an idea of importance of class (farmers vs hunters as opposed to 'indian/Cree' vs Métis/halfbreed) and the importance of class membership in the production of an ethnic identity would have produced a more complete picture of the history of the Grande Cache population.

A paper purporting to deal with a 'Métis' population is Verne Dusenberry's "The dispossessed Métis of Montana"⁴⁸ which discusses a segment of the 19th century population of the Turtle Mountain area refused an 'Indian' identity by U.S. federal authorities and forced to retain a 'Métis' one. The division was an arbitrary one with full brothers and sisters finding themselves on either side of the divide.⁴⁹ Refusal to be allowed treaty status resulted in impoverishment and marginalization for the Montana Métis. Today, they are regarded with scorn by both the 'White' and the treaty 'Indian' populations.

Dusenberry's study is a fascinating glimpse at the impact of an intrusive racist ideology on a resident population. Differences imposed by outsiders came to have a very real and disastrous impact. Upon reading the article questions remain as to

⁴⁸ Verne Dusemberly, "Waiting for a day that never comes: The dispossessed métis of Montana," in The New Peoples, Being and Becoming Métis in North America, eds. J. Peterson and J. S. H. Brown (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985), 119-138.

⁴⁹ There was a small group of Chippewa Indians living alongside the Pembina Métis but the two groups had frequently intermarried. A group of Canadian Métis trickled down south of the border after the troubles of 1870 and 1885 but they too had been largely absorbed by the local population.

why some people were deliberately left out; was it largely a matter of arbitrary decisions by a miserly minded government agent or were certain divisions, as yet unknown, existing in the pretreaty 'native' population?⁵⁰ Another question that comes to mind is how many of the descendants of the 'Métis' who were denied treaty status managed to merge with the mainstream 'White' population and, if this occurred, under what circumstances? Once again, the relevance of the importance of socioeconomic status (i.e. class) in determining identity should be clarified.

One last community study dealing with a population perceived to be 'Métis' will be briefly discussed. This work, Paul Driben's We are Métis: The Ethnography of a Halfbreed Community in Northern Alberta,⁵¹ is based on fieldwork completed in the late 1970s. As Brown notes in her review,⁵² Driben's working assumptions and research methodologies are startling to say the least. He states firmly in his introduction that he wished at all times to minimize what he calls 'research bias'. Then he proceeds to explain how he conducted formal exhaustive interviews only with male settlers who owned land. Such unrecognized class and gender bias in a work that purports to describe the history and current structure of a whole community by a late 20th century ethnographer is astounding to say the least.

⁵⁰ The U.S. Indian Agent had several 'native' advisors to help him determine who should be on the rolls and who should not.

⁵¹ Paul Driben, We Are Métis: The Ethnography of a Halfbreed Community in Northern Alberta, (New York: AMS Press, 1985).

⁵² Jennifer Brown, "People of Myth, People of History: A Look at Recent Writing on the Métis," Acadiensis 17, (1987): 150-162.

Another line of prairie history that is relevant to the study of the Métis, although only of peripheral, relevance to this study, contains the analyses made of the formation and persistence of the fur trade society in the 18th and 19th century western 'interior'. Authors such as J. Peterson, J. Brown, S. Van Kirk and to, a lesser extent, Ron Bourgeault, have attempted to elucidate the differing socioeconomic roles played by the plethora of 'ethnic' groups and (especially for Bourgeault) classes involved in the fur trade.

Jennifer Brown, in the book derived from her Ph.D. dissertation, Strangers in Blood,⁵³ examines the differing realities of childraising and childhood in the northwest within the Montréal based North West Company and the London based Hudson's Bay Company. For the period prior to 1870 she argues that understanding the formation and reproduction of families, which she sees as the basis for social organization will help to understand the functioning of the western and northwestern fur trade as a whole. In explaining differences in childrearing practices and male commitment to offspring she evokes ethnic differentiation between the English, Scottish and French Canadian components of the fur trade. Sylvia Van Kirk's book, Many Tender Ties⁵⁴, is more narrowly focused on the women involved in the fur trade and on the fate, matrimonial or otherwise, of the dual-heritage female offspring

⁵³ Jennifer S. H. Brown, Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980).

⁵⁴ Sylvia Van Kirk, 'Many tender ties': Women in the Fur Trade Society in Western Canada 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1980).

within fur trade society.

Both these works are interesting for they add to the discussion of 'Métis' history the variable of gender as well as ethnicity to help distinguish internal variations within the dual descent population, Brown's work is especially enlightening since her analysis indicates that being of dual descent was only one factor among many that influenced the destinies of individuals in the northwest; familial, career, and cultural orientations fluctuated wildly. Some fur trade offspring continued to be viewed and to view themselves as Indians; others, unable for various reasons to merge with the dominant Canadian or British elements, became 'Métis' or 'Halfbreed'. These last were perceived by Brown to be further divided along religious, linguistic and occupational lines. A third group of dual descent offspring would assimilate into the dominant Anglo-Saxon or Scottish culture.⁵⁵

Brown brings to the analysis of the phenomenon of métiness the argument that ethnicity, and the more nebulously defined concept of occupation, were important in creating variability within the northwest population. Van Kirk adds to the equation by arguing that gender and gender roles also contributed to differing life experiences within the northwest population. What is lacking in the analytical framework is a clearly defined concept of class. Did not class, defined as one's position within a particular mode of production and one's relationship to the means

⁵⁵ Brown, 216-220.

of production, have an impact on how one's life unfolded? Did a Métis population emerge in the northwest simply because some male progenitors were unwilling or unable to spend the necessary time and money on their progeny to ensure their 'passing' into the dominant society? Among these recalcitrant fathers were many of French Canadian descent. Was their reluctance due solely to their ethnocultural background or did their marginal and impoverished position within the fur trade have an impact on their ability 'to do right' by their children? Furthermore, should not the fur trade companies' desire for a stable and dependent population of bison hunters also be considered as a Métis producing factor? In short, was class position within the fur trade society of the interior a result of the ethnic identity of the actors (especially the parents) or, inversely, did class position produce or reinforce a certain ethnic identity? Again, as with Ens, there is no clear statement by Brown as to what explanatory weight should be given to the respective variable evoked (ethnicity, 'occupation', language, religion, ideology).

One attempt to ground fur trade history in a class based Marxist analysis was Ron Bourgeault's 1983 paper "Indian, Métis and the Fur Trade"⁵⁶ in which Bourgeault argues that class differences existed in the northwest but manifested themselves as racial differences. In his introduction Bourgeault states the purpose of his paper:

⁵⁶ Ron G. Bourgeault, "The Indian, the Métis and the Fur Trade; Class, Sexism and Racism in the transition from Communism to Capitalism," Studies in Political Economy (1983 Fall): 45-80.

The object of this paper is to argue that the fur trade of the Hudson Bay basin, in what is now northern Canada, initially transformed Indian labour into that of a peasantry caught in a web of feudal relations of production. This paper will also show the nature of Indian women's subjugation, a subjugation undertaken to establish the fur trade. Class, racial and sexist divisions came to be imposed upon the indigenous Indian population through colonial relations based upon a particular form of exploitation.⁵⁷

The objections⁵⁸ to Bourgeault are numerous and have come from both marxist and, not surprisingly, mainstream thinkers. From a Marxist point of view one can reproach Bourgeault for his mechanistic use of the concept of class. According to Marx, history unfolds through class struggle which is the motor of historical change. In Bourgeault's work the northwest population's day to day struggles to control and shape its destiny in response to the pressures brought to bear by fur trade companies is not examined; history unfolds because of the demands of abstract concepts and not from historical processes. For example, Bourgeault states that 'feudalistic relationships of production required the creation of servility within the peasantry'⁵⁹ or 'The creation of servility was necessary as a means of completing the destruction of independence derived from primitive communism' or again 'Merchant capital did not require that all production of goods be for exchange'. Still, Bourgeault's work does yield interesting insights. His general argument that 'race' or

⁵⁷ Bourgeault, 45.

⁵⁸ Mostly verbally expressed, as few authors discuss and/or evaluate Bourgeault in published form.

⁵⁹ Bourgeault, 53.

perhaps 'ethnicity' is more of a product of class position than had previously been thought has been echoed by an eminent scholar, Irene M. Spry, who argues, most recently in an article entitled "The Métis and Mixed Bloods in Rupert's Land before 1870,"⁶⁰ that the diversity or divergence found within the pre 1870 Red River community was not based on ethnicity but rather on economic pursuit.

The above summary review of the seven major fields in Métis history indicates that the history of the Métis has been characterized by a 'nationalist' approach. There is an, often unstated, assumption in these works that the explanation for the manner in which these groupings of 'Métis' have emerged, and the manner in which their histories have unfolded, is somehow linked to their having a 'dual' heritage. Such a duality is perceived variously in biological(racial) or cultural(ethnic) terms. Because of the assumed existence of an all-encompassing ethnic or 'racial' identity internal differences within populations and communities considered to be Métis are glossed over and perhaps artificial barriers between people perceived to be Métis and non-Métis ('Indian' or 'White') are erected. Internal class conflicts are not examined and the possibility of class based linkages between groups considered by researchers to be Métis, and the non-Métis population, are not addressed. Finally and most crucial is the possibility that the whole concept of 'métiness' may have a basis in the class position of certain individuals and families is not examined.

⁶⁰ Irene M. Spry, "The Métis and Mixed-Blood of Rupert's Land before 1870," eds. J. Peterson and J. S. Brown in The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1985) 95-118.

A second and related criticism can be made against these studies. There is the general tendency to impress theoretical constructs and divisions (i.e. 'Métis') on certain populations without either reference to the population's own perception of itself, or a rigorously defined theoretical framework. Even Ens, who clearly attempts to ground his work in theory, does not define the key assumptions ('family', 'class', 'ethnicity') of his research. It is the contention here that a successful analysis of phenomena as nebulous as 'Métiness' must articulate both the objective (actual relations) and subjective (self perceptions and perceptions by others) dynamics within an explanatory construct.

The use of a nationalist paradigm has allowed authors in seven strands of study to produce intriguing discussions of the mechanisms behind the development of an awareness of collective identity premised on a concept of dual 'racial' ancestorship. One cannot dispute that the rise of a nationalist ideology is probably the most obvious and spectacular line of defense used by geographically-specific heterogeneous populations subjected to the dislocation of their social and economic environments. And, as many writers have argued, large segments of the native population of North America were under considerable disruptive pressure in the 19th and 20th centuries. Documenting and explaining their collective responses certainly has brought a valuable contribution to our body of knowledge on the Métis. However one cannot help wondering what crucial aspects of Métis history will have to be reformulated after going beyond the limitations of the nationalist approach.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

The key contention presented here¹ is that Métis history needs to be reformulated. A new paradigm should be developed that does not see nationalism, premised on an ethnic or racial prise de conscience, as the crucial determinant of Métis history. As stated in chapter one the nationalist approach has difficulty dealing with the complex internal structures, tensions, and conflicts found among populations of dual descent. Also it does not adequately deal with the nature and complexity of the class-based articulation within and between core and peripheral populations of British North America and, subsequently, Canada.

Another problem encountered with the use of a nationalist paradigm to analyze Métis history is its difficulty in dealing with processes and patterns of assimilation. After 1870 a subsumation of nationalist fervour and a partial ethnic merging into the larger society did occur within the Métis community. The process of assimilation has been largely hidden in the historical literature by two factors; first, even in recent works, it is the outmigration of Métis from Manitoba that has captured the attention of researchers; second, the few studies of Manitoba's post 1870 Métis population largely use self-identification and identification by others² to determine who is or is not in the group studied. The identification based merely on

¹ First argued in N. St-Onge "Nationalist Perspectives; A Review Essay," Manitoba History (Autumn 1987): 37-39

² Without the addition of other, more objective, criteria!

perception is problematic since those who continued, or came, to be perceived as Métis after 1870 were a marginalized and destitute group. As Jean Lagassé notes in a late 1950s study, to be 'Métis' by the twentieth century meant more than simply to be a descendant of the 1870 Métis population:

There exists a certain way of life in Manitoba, which, in addition to physical characteristics, identifies one as Métis or Half-Breed. This way of life was described as "living in poor houses", "not living as a white person", "living like indians", "non conformance to the general requirements of this society", "performing menial tasks", "poor standards of living" to mention but a few criteria used by informants.³

Lagassé goes on to state that, with the use of such criteria, eighty percent of the people of Métis ancestry living in Manitoba were not included in his 1959 study.⁴ These were the 'Métis' who had integrated to the point of not being recognized by their neighbors (and often by themselves) as Métis. Large scale assimilation indicates two things. First, physical ('racial') characteristics are of secondary importance in the identification of a Manitoban Métis population and, second, assimilation is perhaps the process in the history of North America's Métis population which has to be documented, analyzed and explained by historians.

A nationalist paradigm simply does not equip researchers in Métis history with an understanding of the mechanisms by which some Métis integrated into the larger

³ Jean H. Lagassé, A Study of the Population of Indian Ancestry Living in Manitoba, vol. 1 (The Social and Economic Research Office, Dept of Agriculture and Immigration, Winnipeg, 1959), 57.

⁴ Lagassé, 60.

post 1870 capitalist society while others maintained their identification as 'Métis'. Others still, once perceived to be Métis, became identified in the early 1900s as 'Indians'. Assimilation is as important a phenomenon as nationalist or ethnic consciousness-raising. To understand the history of a population more fully, all variables must be examined. Ethnic valorization and nationalism are powerful ideological tools that subsume more constant antagonisms and incompatibilities in the face of collective oppression, but their existence⁵ should not blind the researcher to the possibilities of other perhaps more fundamental developments at work.

The underlying premise of this dissertation is that the natures of societies that have crystallized in peripheral areas of capitalism, such as the 19th and early 20th centuries of the British North American and Canadian interiors, were determined by the intrusion of new forces and relations of production (i.e., new economies), the formation of social classes, and the resulting class based conflict, than with nationalist distinctions originating from 'racial' and 'ethnic' factors. If the material forces of class and class conflict (as defined by Marx⁶) largely shape and transform societies one will find at least a partial class basis for the perceived racial and ethnic differences that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries in the northwestern interior of North America. In other words, if the Marxian premise is correct, one should be able to

⁵ Or the perception of their existence.

⁶ Tom Bottomore ed., A Dictionary of Marxist Thought (London: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983), 78-79.

demonstrate that those who have come to be defined as 'Métis' in the last 200 years are the product of their class position and their involvement in specific kinds of material production.⁷ The correlation between evolving class membership and ethnic identity will be mediated, but not determined, by other historical, cultural and ideological factors. Therefore, one should be able to document both the appearance and disappearance (or diminishing) of 'métiness' as individuals or families move in and out of a specific class(es).

The basic assumption on which the above stated premise rests is that race and ethnicity, and therefore the nationalism they can produce, are not immutable fundamental variables of social analysis. Rather they are social constructs used to explain day to day situations. The analytical task of a researcher examining a social group experiencing economic marginalization and social distinctiveness is to determine the primary causal factors producing the marginalization and, if possible, the forces inciting people to ascribe 'ethnic' or 'racial' explanations.

This study will examine the fragmentation along 'racial' or 'ethnic' lines that occurred on the shores of Lake Manitoba between 1850 and 1914 at a time when

⁷ This class-oriented approach to the problematic of the basis for Métis identity was inspired by a work written during W.W.II. It is Abram Leon's The Jewish Question, A Marxist Interpretation (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970). Leon was one of the many that perished at Auschwitz. As a leader of the Belgian underground, a revolutionary (Fourth International), and a Jew he was very much an enemy of the Nazis.

Canada was emerging and expanding into a fully fledged capitalist society. In those years 'racially' distinct, socially and economically marginalized communities developed. The research will focus upon the lakeshore settlement of Saint-Laurent (and its northern satellite 'colony' of Duck Bay on the shores of Lake Winnipegosis), where one such impoverished Métis community emerged.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the degree to which capitalist penetration of the Manitoba hinterland, first via the fur trade and then via the fishing and dairy economies, produced class-based differentiations which were subsequently explained, reinforced and justified by an intrusive and increasingly dominant ideology premised on a racist concept of humanity. In short this study examines class as a factor within the Métis population and within its history. The key to understanding the social dynamics in Manitoba's Interlake region is to grasp the contradictory effects of a racist ideology on the reproduction of evolving class relations. Both the formation of modern class structures and the manner in which the process was largely actualized with a racist ideology are examined. Their adverse effect on a significant minority of families that, in 1870, had declared themselves to be 'Métis' is assessed.

The methodology required to study an illiterate marginalized population cannot be the same as the methods used to study the highly visible and well documented elites that have been the standard fare of Canadian history. The documentary record of the Métis is a disparate and biased series of records, letters

and diaries written by missionaries, explorers, and governmental or company officials such as the surveyors and census takers as well as the infrequent entrefilet in provincial French newspapers. Still, such a dearth of sources should not disqualify research since the importance of a topic cannot be measured by the availability of data even though its viability by conventional methods might be in question. What follows is, first, a description of the nature, content, and limitations of the written sources which may be used partially to construct the critical narrative. Second, there is a discussion of an important source in the oral history of the people.

The key point that must be understood is that we have no written evidence as to how the Métis people living in Saint-Laurent between 1850 and 1914 perceived their situation. The only residents writing extensively⁸ in those years were the missionaries and, occasionally, the Breton colonists who arrived in the 1900s. Both saw the 'Métis' population through eurocentric eyes and quite freely admitted their lack of understanding of the older settlers' beliefs, attitudes and actions. Even the missionaries who had lived in the area for years and whose purpose it was to 'uplift' and transform the Métis into a docile literate peasantry admitted repeatedly their failure to comprehend the 'Métis' and ascribed incomprehensible behaviour to assumed effects of miscegenation.

Missionaries were not the only ones with such a racial bias. Explorers such as

⁸ Or even merely letters to relatives.

Henry Youle Hind, who travelled through the Lake Manitoba - Lake Winnipegosis area in the late 1850s, and former HBC employee Donald Gunn, who went through Saint-Laurent on an egging expedition for the Smithsonian Institute in 1868, had the same negative assessments of the Lake Manitoba population.⁹ Both blame the Métis' partially Indian heritage for what they perceived to be unacceptable lifestyles. As numerous excerpts of letters and diaries presented in subsequent chapters will show, these Europeans were quite open in their beliefs of the detrimental effects of what they perceived to be 'racial' mixture on offspring. Though the descriptions of events, actions and attitudes within the different segments of the population may be accepted, with some reservations, as essentially accurate, the explanations and interpretations cannot. Since they are colored by an intolerance based on perceived racial inferiority and actual economic marginalization.

Narratives written by missionaries and explorers are not the only source that

⁹ Hind, for example, dismissed the complaints of the Lake Winnipegosis saltmakers about the difficulty of securing firewood as "an objection of no moment, but characteristic of some of the people, who are generally unaccustomed to long-continued manual labour."

Henry Youle Hind, Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition to 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858 (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), 44.

Donald Gunn travelling through the area a decade later did not even recognise the residents of Saint-Laurent as 'Métis' or even 'halfbreed'; "The population...is composed of Indians, of half, three-quarter, and of seven-eighth Indians, with a very few aged French-Canadians."

Donald Gunn, 'Notes of an Egging expedition to Shoal Lake, West of Lake Winnipeg,' Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institutions for the year 1867 (Washington: Government printers, 1872): 431.

can be used by historians interested in the 'Métis'. The reconstruction of the history of Saint-Laurent is aided by resources in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba including collections held in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) and in Government documents.¹⁰ Most of the information derived from the HBCA holdings came from the correspondence books especially letters and reports written by Simpson. Unfortunately, the post journal for the Oak Point¹¹ was not located. Material dealing directly with the Red River colony contains occasional references to Saint-Laurent. One example is a census taken of the Lake Manitoba residents during the 1868 famine.

Amongst the information generated by Canadian government sources are census and land records. The most detailed of these documents are the River Lot Files¹² originating from the Dominion Lands Titles Office. Each folder (usually one per lot) contains: letters requesting patent to certain lots; surveyors' statements on evidence of occupancy, statutory declaration and affidavits by claimants and their witnesses to support the statement of evidence; relevant documents from registry offices; memoranda from the Commissioner of Dominion Lands; the homestead inspector or surveyor. Also, some of the files contain (very few for Saint-Laurent)

¹⁰ Two trips to the Public Archives of Canada (Ottawa) yielded little data.

¹¹ A small village a few miles away from Saint-Laurent also on the shores of Lake Manitoba.

¹² Lots for both the settlements of Saint-Laurent and Oak Point (both are located in the parish and subsequently the municipality of Saint-Laurent).

letters from parish priests or other dignitaries discussing certain land questions from credit companies, lawyers, speculators, etc. However, one has to be extremely cautious using such material; examining the river lot files (usually in conjunction with 1870, 1881 and 1891 census material) J.M. Richtik¹³ concluded that the parish of Saint-Laurent population was very small and stable. In fact the files (and the census) ignore the majority of the lake shore dwellers. Most of the families listed in the 1870 census (and several were missed by even that crucial document) were simply not in a position to make a claim for land in the early 1870s even though many had resided in the parish prior to annexation and continued to for years afterwards. In short, the land records give us information on the more agrarian settlers in the southern parishes (Saint-Boniface, Saint-François Xavier and Saint-Norbert), and the old trading elite; not the hunting-gathering-fishing population of Saint-Laurent.¹⁴ The hunting and gathering population rarely appears in censuses taken from 1870 on. At the time when the enumerators would visit Saint-Laurent, in early spring, these families would still be in their northern winter quarters in Duck Bay. By the time the census takers arrived at Lake Winnipegosis, usually in July or August, the hivernants would have returned to their southern abode.

An unusually rich government source on Saint-Laurent, the Municipal Tax

¹³ J.M. Richtik, "Historical Geography of the Interlake area of Manitoba from 1871 to 1921," (M.A. diss., University of Manitoba, 1964).

¹⁴ For more details see chapters 3 and 4 below.

Assessment Rolls, was unfortunately destroyed sometime prior to 1989 and after Richtik's fieldwork in the early 1960s. It is likely the Tax Assessment Rolls, along with most pre World War II municipal documents were burned. From the information found in Richtik's dissertation these Tax Assessment Rolls gave a break down of individual land holdings (whether worked or held by speculators). He gives aggregate figures at a municipal level for acreage farmed, numbers of cattle and other farm animals raised, house and barn sizes but no detailed breakdowns of these figures.

Indications of certain Saint-Laurent families' increasing well being and respectability can be found in Le Métis 'Chronique de paroisse' where events such as elections, social events, marriages and deaths are recorded. Another interesting source of information are the annual collections of mission reports published by the order of the Missionaries Oblats de Marie Immaculée ('Missions'). The earliest references to Lake Manitoba and to Saint-Laurent date from 1862. The difficulty with these accounts is, once again, the rigidly ethnocentric and racist approach used by the European missionaries to interpret events occurring in the parish and attached northern missions.

Few published works deal either directly or indirectly with Saint-Laurent. Only two, published fourteen years apart, deal directly with the parish. The first is a compilation of old newspaper articles, photographs, lay and clerical musings on the

founding of the parish along with a few pages of anecdotes taken from the parish codex historicus and the franciscan nuns convent diary.¹⁵ This order arrived in 1896 to take over teaching duties from the Oblate missionaries and one of the nuns wrote Renseignements sur Saint-Laurent Manitoba while the data contained in Renseignements is of little use since it does not cite most of its sources, it is nevertheless an interesting document which reflects how the 'French Canadian' and Breton elites view the history of the parish as essentially the mise en place of religious institutions.

The second published work dealing with Saint-Laurent is Guy Lavalée's M.A. dissertation, "The Métis People of Saint-Laurent an Introductory Ethnography." A traditional ethnography, it purports to describe key aspects of 'Métis' life in the ethnographic "present" (the last 50 years). Nowhere in Lavallée's work is there a clear definition of who or what, constitutes a 'Métis'. Métis are simply offspring of Native Indian women and Europeans who came into contact during the fur trade era.¹⁶ His working definition seems to emerge in the last chapter (6) where he discusses at great length the French dialect (and its numerous variations) 'michif'¹⁷ which is still spoken in the village by some of the village's older people. Lavallée's

¹⁵ Soeur Pauline Mercier, Renseignements sur Saint-Laurent Manitoba (Elie, MB.: Division Scolaire de la Prairie du Cheval Blanc, 1974).

¹⁶ Lavallée, ii.

¹⁷ For an example of 'Michif' consult John C. Crawford, ed. The Michif Dictionary, Turtle Mountain Chippewa Cree, (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publication Inc., 1983).

definition of 'Métis' ethnic identity seems to be based on both perceptual and linguistic traits. An approach which would automatically exclude from his community study those Saint-Laurent who have assimilated and no longer perceive themselves or their family as Métis.

Lavallée presents the parish as an organic whole. Internal variations¹⁸ within the population are not discussed and the existence of a large non-Métis contingent (perceived to be of 'Breton', 'French Canadian' or 'English' descent) is not addressed. Though he does maintain that there has been a tendency for the 'community' to become more 'Canadian' in the recent past he does not tie the process to any socioeconomic, class-based, realities. The loss of 'métiness' is a personal, reversible, decision no different from choosing or rejecting an Italian, Belgian or British identity. Lavallée does not perceive the shedding of a Métis identity by individuals or families as a deliberate attempt to become upwardly mobile and accepted. Lavallée's is a view of 'métiness' that denies negative connotations and separates the Métis from a difficult and divisive history.

Two other works deal peripherally with the settlement of Saint-Laurent. The first is the previously discussed work by Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien. Suffice it to say that Giraud saw the 'Métis' of Saint-Laurent, whom he visited during the

¹⁸ For example he does not discuss anywhere in his thesis the fringe settlement of 'Fort Rouge', an impoverished 'very Métis' section of Saint-Laurent which existed until the 1960s.

depression years of the late 1930s, as having reached an advanced state of degradation. He believed they justly deserved the scorn heaped on them by the Bretons and, to a lesser extent, the 'French Canadians'.¹⁹ The second work which mentions Saint-Laurent occasionally is James Richtik's M.A. thesis.²⁰

Richtik bases himself largely on municipal, provincial and federal government documents to reconstruct the history of Manitoba's Interlake region between 1871 and 1921.²¹ Saint-Laurent is situated in the southwestern corner of the Interlake. Richtik's work has been mentioned several times already. The descriptions and discussions of Saint-Laurent are quite detailed prior to 1891 but, with the growth of larger centers of commerce, industry, and agriculture Richtik's attention is diverted away from the shores of Lake Manitoba. Unfortunately, his use of official government documents automatically caused him to exclude the large segment of the population that did not own land, did not pay taxes and, as will be discussed in following chapters, were usually absent at the time of the census. The consequently misleading perception given by Richtik's study of the dwellers of Saint-Laurent is of a static, sedentary, small population of farmer-fishermen. As with most writers, he does not discuss differentiation within the settlement except in terms of 'ethnicity'.

¹⁹ Giraud, 1255-1257.

²⁰ James Morton Richtik, "A Historical Geography of the Interlake Area of Manitoba from 1871 to 1921," (M.A. diss. University of Manitoba, 1964).

²¹ The Interlake area of Manitoba refers to a region situated between 50° and 53° latitude with Lake Manitoba to the west and Lake Winnipeg to the east.

In an attempt to circumvent the shortcomings of the intrusive and racist bias in the documentary record, both primary and secondary, a two year effort was made to secure extensive and detailed interviews with the people or the descendants of people who, between 1850 and 1914, were considered to be 'Métis' in the two settlements of Saint-Laurent and Duck Bay (see map). A total of nineteen interviews were made by the author²² with residents or former residents of Saint-Laurent most of whom were well over the age of sixty and all of whom had (independently) traceable parents or grandparents who had declared themselves as 'Métis' in the 1870 census. These interviews were supplemented by thirty interviews conducted by anthropologist Guy Lavallée, also a native of Saint-Laurent, for the 1987 Mitchief Language Committee (MLC) project which also dealt with the settlement of Saint-Laurent. These last interviews confined themselves to people who freely admitted to being Métis or whom Lavallée perceived to be 'Métis'. There were two interviewees who had rather resounding objections to such labelling.²³ Such objections were not surprising since Lavallée was interested in writing an ethnography of the modern day Métis population and given the negative social consequences of métiness still held by some people. He automatically excluded all the people with 'Métis' (1870) ancestors whose parents or grand-parents had merged into the French Canadian or mainstream society. Data on the oral tradition that might have been kept in some of

²² Many other interviews were done by this researcher under the auspices of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba's 'Métis Oral History Project' of 1984 and 1985 but they dealt with 'Métis' originating from Lake Winnipeg and other points.

²³ To the great surprise of the interviewer.

these families about their cheminement in the last 100 or so years is therefore severely limited.

Capturing oral history and oral traditions raises its own set of methodological problems. Critics of the method usually focus on the fallibility of human memory and question the data's reliability and validity.²⁴ A facile dismissal of such criticism is to point to the bias of sources written by people foreign to the region and community - witnesses imbued with a strong sense of 'racial' superiority. But just as documentary sources of a suspect nature can be used with due circumspection, so to can the oral sources. This is certainly the case of Saint-Laurent. Validity and accuracy when dealing with oral history can be measured by the degree of consistency with a narrative when repeated several times by the same respondents over a period of time or when given by several different people within the community. In the last case however 'ethnic' or class bias must be looked for when examining variations in oral testimony.

The reliability of oral tradition is more difficult to ascertain. Oral tradition refers to unwritten knowledge passed verbally through successive generations. It therefore describes events 'not of living memory' but from the memories of people deceased at the time of the interview. Most researchers who have examined the

²⁴ Alice Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History," Today's Speech 22 (Winter 1974): 23-27.

question of factual reliability within the oral tradition were analyzing work from the African continent dealing with narratives referring to events centuries old.²⁵ Fortunately for the author the emphasis in the interviews was on the respondents' memories of their parents and grand parents and of any life stories these might have recounted. In other words stories of a personal nature from a fairly recent past narrated by people close to those questioned. The possibility of complete distortions is probably less than with stories of l'ancien temps.

With the information gleaned from many disparate sources, the major ones having been described above, an as accurate as possible critical narrative of the people of Saint-Laurent and Duck Bay has been constructed, adequate to test two hypotheses. First, that very early in the history of Saint-Laurent, class differentiation was occurring. Second, that class differentiation had an impact on the degree to which families and individuals assimilated into main stream society. A third hypothesis could have been tested if Richtik's documentary sources had been available. A breakdown at the household level of Richtik's fieldwork would have allowed the introduction of 'hard' data to find out if the whole process of 'whitening' (assimilation) was correlated with growing material wealth.

²⁵ Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition a Study in Historical Methodology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).

Chapter 3 - Saint-Laurent

By the late 1820s, semi permanent settlements were emerging in the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point areas of Lake Manitoba where winter fishing and trading with the fur-trappers could be carried out.¹ These communities were never self-sufficient. Their formation was a direct result of market demands for fish and other such staples. Also the southern shore of Lake Manitoba became the rallying points in spring and autumn for Métis involved either in the production of salt or in freighting and trading ventures on Lakes Manitoba and Winnipegosis. Most of the lake dwellers also combined such activities with buffalo hunting in the White Mud River district.

The first indications of relatively permanent dwellings being erected in the Saint-Laurent area date back to 1818 when it was determined that the settlement of Pembina was in American territory. The Hudson Bay Company officials and the Catholic clergy urged Métis families settled at Pembina to relocate north of the border. The majority of families that moved settled on the shores of the Assiniboine river at White Horse Plains. A few chose to settle at Fond du Lac

¹ Hudson Bay Company Archives (hereafter HBCA), Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), B.235/a/8 folio 14, page 24.

The Métis were doing a booming trade buying furs in the Lake Manitoba region and reselling them at 100% profit to the Company.



(Saint-Laurent) where good fishing could be had.² A few more families relocated there permanently when flooding of the Red River in 1826 forced a large number of Métis to winter at this fishing site. By the time a Catholic mission was founded in 1858 there were thirty to forty households residing intermittently at Fond du Lac.³ Interestingly, Giraud sees the majority of these Saint-Laurent Métis as of Freeman or Hommes Libres descent.⁴ That is, the Saint-Laurent dwellers were from a group of families that was at the margins of both the Red River Settlement and the Métis community, having resisted HBC Governor Simpson's post 1821 efforts to concentrate the part-time trapping population at Red River.

These south shore dwellers were located beside a key trading route ('trail') which followed a slight rise, at some distance from the lake, separating the old meadow land of the lake flat from the higher wooded land of the interior. The community was therefore located conveniently for fishing from the lake, haying in the meadows and for firewood and lumber from the forest. They were also in a strategic position for bartering and exchanging with the local HBC post (situated in Oak Point) or with people using the trail.⁵ Fond du Lac had a good natural harbour where barges

² A. Morice, History of the Catholic Church in Canada, 2 vols. (Toronto: The Mission Book Company, 1919) 118.

³ Nor'Wester, 28 April 1860.

⁴ Giraud, 1012-1028.

⁵ James M. Richtik, "A Historical Geography of the Interlake Area of Manitoba from 1871 to 1921," (M.A. diss., University of Manitoba, 1964), 19.

coming from the North could discharge their cargoes. It was the main transfer point between the lakes and the Red River settlement. The first families to settle (semi-permanently) in the area were at least as interested in trading as they were in fishing commercially:

The Métis who had wintered in the northern forests and marshes (fishing, hunting, salt-making and trading) in the Spring travelled down the lakes in boats, with their large families, ponies, carts and household belongings. On reaching the bottom of Lake Manitoba where Pangman and Sayers had their houses, they landed and tented for a while. They switched then to carts, traded their furs (and other goods) at Fort Garry and got provision for the hunt. After the hunt, they returned to Lake Manitoba and tented for two to four weeks. At times as many as fifty tents were pitched along the lakeshore. This was the time for socialization with feasts, dances, games and liquor.⁶

According to letters in the correspondence of Mgr Provencher, by the late 1820s a certain number of Métis were choosing not to hiverner au large (winter on the prairies) and hunt buffalo. A very few were involved in trapping but the remainder practiced ice fishing on lakes Manitoba and Winnipeg and at the Grande Fourche of the Red River (situated in American territory).⁷ In these places a

⁶ "Reminiscences of Father Bousquet" in Mercier, 54. Apparently, as parish priest in the 1930s, Bousquet interviewed village elders.

⁷ "Daily, families who have no other resources for obtaining their subsistence during winter, leave the settlement for Lake Manitoba, or the Grand Forks." PAM, HBCA, B235/a/9, Fort Garry Journal, page 13, 10 October 1827.

"Pendant ces années de détresse (1818-1825) toute la population vécut de la peche ou de la viande des buffles. Le froid de l'hiver nous donnait le moyen de la manger fraiche et en été seché au soleil ou au feu. Le sel qu'on fait dans le pays en était le seul assaisonnement."

Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), MG 17 A22 (F840), Association de la

plentiful supply of sturgeon, white fish and goldeye attracted a large population.⁸ These Métis would return to the Red River colony for a few days over Christmas to exchange their goods, renew social ties, and engage in some New Year's festivities. They combined fishing with some muskrat trapping in the Spring. Occasionally these fishing Métis bartered directly with the free traders, as in Saint-Laurent, rather than making the trek to the trading posts.

In the 1850s four key extended families, the Chartrands, Pangmans, Lavalles and Sayers, were residing in Saint-Laurent on a more or less permanent base. Other families also spent various amounts of times in the area. Fishing on the shores of Lake Manitoba was taken up quite frequently in the decades between 1820-1870 by non-fishermen who faced adversity in their own economic pursuits.⁹ For example, in 1847-1848 a drought destroyed most of the crops at Red River. In the years 1855-1857 the crops were rained out. Bison hunting would also fail, as in the years 1838, 1840, 1844, 1855 and 1867.¹⁰ The existence of plentiful hay pastures near Lake Manitoba also attracted people who could winter their animals while still engaging

Propagation de la Foi (Paris), 1 February 1836, "Notice sur la Mission de Saint-Boniface de la Rivière Rouge".

⁸ Giraud, 648.

⁹ "J'ai trouvé une occasion hier par John Cyr de venir dire la messe aux pêcheurs de St-Boniface et de St-Norbert. J'avais une respectable assistance au Saint Sacrifice ce matin et rien que du français!" Archives de l'Archevêché de Saint-Boniface (hereafter AASB), T5909-T5912, Lestanc a Taché, Vieille Pêche, 18 November 1868.

¹⁰ Giraud, 781.

in ice fishing. The growth in the importance of 'commercial' fishing tied to salt manufacturing, trading for some and trapping, hunting and gathering for others, is notable from the mid-century onward.

From the little information extant on the non-trading Métis devoted to the exploitation and exchange of fish, life was marked by seasonal displacement. When fishing failed in one area the people moved. In the middle years of the 19th century they did not appear to have had as permanent a home-base as the Métis, devoted to bison hunting, had at Saint-Norbert or Saint-François Xavier. As the fishing Métis' ties to mercantilism strengthened and production for exchange grew (as the demand for dried and frozen fish increased), a segment of the Lake Manitoba Métis settled more permanently in the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point areas. But, at least up to the 1870s, several of these fishing Métis families would occasionally spend part of the winter in the White Mud River valley (eastern slopes of Riding Mountain), much to the chagrin of the Catholic missionaries.¹¹ Yet the overall tendency for many seems to have been to gradually abandon the chase and to undertake ice-fishing on a larger scale. However, displacement along the edges of Lakes Manitoba and Winnipegosis

¹¹ "Il y a un troisieme hivernement a la Riviere Blanche et c'est de la que j'ai l'honneur d'écrire a votre Grâce ... Ici tous les chasseurs ne sont pas encore arrivé de la prairie; ils vont arriver demain ou apres demain et l'on pense que le camp comptera quarante maisons."

AASB, T11168-T11171, Lestanc à Taché, Riviere Blanche, 13 November 1872.

remained common well into the 20th century.¹²

Closely associated to fishing was the production of salt that developed, to a small degree, within the framework of the fur trade. A Catholic priest, G.A. Belcourt, wrote in 1839 of Métis families wintering on the shores of Lake Manitoba to exploit the salines, manufacturing salt for sale to the traders or directly to settlers in Red River.¹³ Métis families from the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point area seem to have been actively involved in salt manufacturing.¹⁴ Henry Youle Hind writes in his 1858 expedition notes:

We met here [Waterhen River], also, a freighter's boat, in the charge of a French half-breed, who, with his family, was returning from Salt Springs to Oak Point, with about twelve bushels of salt. We exchanged

¹² For example, according to his grand-son, Etienne Delaronde worked for years for the HBC hauling freight, mail and provisions on (his own?) barges. The route went from Winnipeg, Portage La Prairie, Delta, up to Lake Winnipegosis. Etienne Delaronde married Helen Monkman whom he had met while working on Lake Winnipeg. They first lived near Rabbit Point, west of Vogar, on the shores of Lake Manitoba. At a later date Etienne quit the HBC freighting business and started a ranch at 'Maryhill' west of Lundar (also near the lake). He eventually relocated his family, permanently, at Coteau de Roche a small settlement ('suburb') near Saint-Laurent and continued to ranch. In the 1870 census Etienne Delaronde, age 9, had been listed as residing with his family in Saint-Laurent. His parents were Etienne Laronde, a trader, and Julienne Carriere: son and grand-daughter of French-Canadian fur trade employees. This pattern of movement and relocation along the shores of Lake Manitoba (and Winnipegosis) seems common for a large segment of the Saint-Laurent population during the period examined. Michif Language Committee (hereafter MLC), tape 9, side 1, 8 September 1987.

¹³ Giraud, 832.

¹⁴ AASB, T5270-T5285, Simonet to Taché, 8 February 1868 (mentions Métis from Saint-Laurent 'hivernant a la Saline')

a little tea and tobacco for ducks and fish.¹⁵

The Saint-Laurent area appears to have been a key transit point in the commerce of salt. One salt producer and a notable of Oak Point was Paulet Chartrand (born at Duck River).¹⁶ According to Father Morice, Paulet was engaged in the manufacture of salt in 1861 when he killed a neighbor in self-defence. According to documents relating to the history of Saint-Laurent, local Métis were selling their salt in the late 1850s for \$2.50 per 60 lbs bag.¹⁷

A chapel was erected at Fond du Lac by a secular priest in 1858, but by 1860 the Oblate missionaries were fully in control of the mission. The Oblates were interested in the area because of the attraction it held for the Métis whom the Oblates wished to christianize or rechristianize. Métis involvement in the hunt, the exploitation of the salt springs and their trading activities forced them into a semi-nomadic life style yet they consistently came back to the mission area where good fishing grounds and

¹⁵ Henry Youle Hind, Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Sakatchewan Expedition of 1858, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), 41.

¹⁶ In the 1870 census he is listed as a half-breed but Morice labels him a Canadien (Quebecer) in his works. A.G. Morice, Dictionnaire des Canadiens et Métis Français de l'Ouest (Saint-Boniface, 1908).

¹⁷ Oblats de Marie Immaculée (OMI), Archives Deschatelet (AD) , L381 M27C 1858-1895, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent.

trading possibilities existed.¹⁸

There is no archival documentation to suggest that much agricultural activity occurred in the area prior to the early 1860s. As Sprenger notes, farming was barely a viable occupation (in terms of both output and market demands) in the heart of the colony, let alone in the interlake 'hinterland'.¹⁹

By 1854 there were four key extended families (one at least with ties to North Dakota) whose members lived either in Saint-Laurent or were settled around the Oak Point HBC post. In both Oak Point and Saint-Laurent there were other families, some important like the DeLaronde and the Monkman, but they were not as visible or as fully settled in the 1850s. The four key families were the above mentioned Pangman and Sayer as well as the Lavallée and the Chartrand families.

The earliest archival documentation listing the four extended families mentions first, Pierre Pangman (b. 1815) from Pembina who was married to Mary Short (b. 1820) of White Horse Plain.²⁰ He was the son of the Catholic Métis

¹⁸ OMI, AD, L381 M27C 1858-1895, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent.

¹⁹ Herman G. Sprenger, "An Analysis of Selected Aspects of Métis Society, 1810-1870," (M.A. diss., University of Manitoba, 1972).

²⁰ Most of the genealogical data is gleaned from 1) D.N. Sprague and R.P. Frye, The Genealogy of the First Metis Nation, 2) the Executive Relief Committee statistical summary (parish of Saint-Laurent), 3) the 1870 and 1891 censuses, 4) the river lot files, 5) the survey made of the parish of Saint-Laurent by the local priest (visite de paroisse) in 1910, 5) Oblate correspondence generally and finally 6) Oral

Pierre Pangman senior²¹ (b.1794) and 'Marguerite' or 'Angélique', a Saulteaux woman. Mary Short was the (probable) daughter of James Short, a Protestant Orkneyman married to Betsy Saulteaux listed in the censuses as an Indian. Pierre junior and Mary (Short) Pangman had eight children who lived to maturity and their (indirect) descendants still live in the area today. Though most members of the Pangman family had moved to Duck Bay by the 1860s, where they lived semi-permanently, every year they returned to Saint-Laurent. Pierre and Mary are listed in the 1870 census for the parish of Saint-Laurent. Two of Pierre Pangman junior's sisters, both born in Pembina, were also living in Saint-Laurent. Both married into the Chartrand family.²² The Oblates of the time note that the children of Pierre Pangman junior were Cree speaking.

Also residing in the area were eight brothers and sisters, children of Joseph Chartrand and a Saulteaux woman.²³ Oral tradition states that the Chartrand family

history notes. Original sources take precedence.

²¹ Pierre 'Bostonois' Pangman was the son of a North West Company bourgeois of German descent (same name) from Montreal who initially was active in the Mississippi fur trade but who eventually expanded his activities as far north as York Factory. Both father and son were active supporters of the NWC during its rivalry with the HBC. Pierre 'Bostonois' Pangman was a highly respected man among the bison hunting population.

²² Marguerite Pangman was married to Michel Chartrand and her sister, Marie, was married to his brother, Pierre.

²³ There is some discrepancy between the 1870 census, the Sprague-Frye genealogical reconstruction and a small published history of the parish on the first name of this ancestor ('Paul', 'Joseph', 'Ambroise'). Information from the 1870 census ('name of father'), was used in this work. Everyone agrees that his wife was native (not

originated from the 'north'. Certainly they had extensive ties in the Duck Bay area prior to 1850. As a group they were relatively affluent with only Isabelle Chartrand, married to Pierre Richard, appearing on the indigent list in 1868.²⁴ One of his eight children was Paulett Chartrand, the salt-maker. The habits and movements of some of the siblings illustrate well the closer identification of these 'lakeshore' Métis with the fur-trapping native population as opposed to the more settled Métis of Red River²⁵ and, as in the late 1850s, their very nebulous understanding of Catholic dogma and the sectarian Protestant-Catholic divisions. The parish chronicles recount an incident that occurred in 1858:

During the missionary's (Rev. Mr Gascon) sojourn here, the Michel Chartrand²⁶ already referred to arrived one afternoon from Fort Garry accompanied by two english Half Breed Protestants. The whole three were strongly under the influence of liquor and of course high minded "Touch me not". Chartrand approached the priest and said "Father I want you to baptize these two protestants [for] they are going off on a voyage of two years". The priest replied that he would not without first giving them the necessary instructions ... This did not at all please Monsieur Chartrand as he considered himself a big man and one that should not be refused under any circumstances. He then said to the priest in a most angry manner; at the same time swearing "get

Métis).

²⁴ PAM, MG2 B6 1868 Statistical Summary, Executive Relief Committee, District of Assiniboia (parish of Saint-Laurent).

²⁵ Though these 'lakeshore' or 'northern' Metis did some bison hunting in the Riding Mountain area (affluent of the White Mud River) there is no evidence to indicate their involvement in the large scale bison hunting expedition originating from Saint-Norbert or Saint-Francois Xavier. Their point de mire from an economic point was the north shore of Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis (Duck Bay).

²⁶ Michel Chartrand was one of the sons of Joseph Chartrand born in 1829. He was married to Marguerite, a daughter of Pierre Pangman, born in Pembina in 1832.

out of my house 'Passez a la porte' and leave from here".²⁷

This incident (among many other) illustrates how the traditional English-French and Catholic-Protestant divisions were not in force for the lake dwelling segment of the Métis population. Christian dogma in general did not have a strong hold on the lake dwellers.²⁸ For example, some members of the relatively wealthy,²⁹ well travelled Chartrand family led a lifestyle unusual, as far as the records show, for most Red River Métis (but perhaps not the 'Indian' trapping segment) which caused endless scandal and shock for the Oblate missionaries. Two brothers, the already mentioned Michel and his brother Baptiste, were both contributing to the maintenance of two wives. The first official wife was considered a Métis, the second, from the northern shore (or Lake Winnipegosis), was considered Indian. Baptiste Chartrand [Opishkwat] besides being married to Geneviève Robert

²⁷ OMI, AD, L381 M27C 1858-1895, Historical notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, pages 1-2.

²⁸ This would be a source of anxiety to the Clergy in the years to come:
Il me peine extrêmement d'être obligé de dire à votre grâce qu'il m'a été impossible de faire faire la première communion aux enfants ... Je ne saurais les admettre a une si sainte action avec de pareilles dispositions. Je ne puis pas me danner par vaine complaisance pour eux autres. Parmi les grandes personnes il n'y a guère plus de zèle pour s'approcher des sacrements.

AASB, T14639, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 26 July 1874.

²⁹ Michel Chartrand gave the priest \$50.00 towards the building of the chapel as a sign of repentance after the incident mentioned above. The fact that he was in a position to give such an amount indicates that the Chartrand family was probably involved in trading activities.

was having children with Mary Messiapet³⁰ an 'Indian' born at Duck River:

Je viens d'arriver à la Pointe de chêne sur la barge de Pierre [Chartrand]. Demain, si le temps le permet nous ferons voile vers la Baie des Canards ensemble sur la barge de Paulett [Chartrand]. Sur ces deux barges seulement, il y a neuf familles dont quatre n'avaient pas coutume d'hiverner à la Baie des Canards. Je viens de baptiser un enfant de Baptiste Chartrand...je l'ai trouvé dans sa tente avec ses deux femmes qu'il emmène à la Baie des Canards. [?] sa légitime consent quoique avec peine à le suivre encore une fois. Elle pense qu'il va renvoyer l'autre femme à la Baie des Canards.³¹

Baptiste's brother Michel [Otchakwe] also had two wives

in the 1860s:

Michel Chartrand était chez lui avec Marguerite et son autre. Il ma dit qu'il allait rejeter pour toujours sa Sauteuse. Hier il a rempli sa parole et je lui ai permis de venir à la Chapelle. Ce qui me fait craindre un peu c'est qu'il tient a voir de temps en temps le petit que cette misérable lui a donné ce printemps. Il ne consentira jamais dit-il a voir ses petits garçons parmi les sauvages, il se croit obligé de les surveiller de près.³²

These two excerpts illustrate well the fluid position of the 'salt-making, fishing,

³⁰ The Messiapet are listed in the 1870 census as an 'Indian' family residing in Oak Point. Mary's father, Joseph Messiapet, was born in Red Lake and her mother, Larose, was born at 'Fort du Fon[d]'.

³¹ AASB, T1659-T1662, Simonet à Taché, Pointe de Chêne, 26 September 1862.

It is possible that the Baptiste married to Mary Messiapet, according to the 1870 census, is Paulett Chartrand' son and the Baptiste Chartrand who was involved with both a Métis and an Indian woman (Paulett Chartrand's brother) had already moved permanently to the Duck Bay area by the year of the census. Genealogical complexities aside, the data indicates the continued close ties kept by these lakeshore Métis with the fur trapping population well into the second half of the nineteenth century. A trend not as evident in the more established Métis population living on the banks of the Red River.

³² AASB, T1566-T1567, Simonet à Taché, Lac Manitoba, 4 August 1862.

trading, hommes libres' segment of the descendants of native and French Canadian (or other) peoples in the North West. Their traditions and mores seem not to have been as clear cut as the St-Francois Xavier and the Saint-Norbert bison hunting and farming elements. None seem to have worked formally for the HBC prior to 1870. They were Cree speakers³³ but identified quite closely with the neighboring Saulteaux population. They continued (or rather replicated) the Great Lakes tradition of marrying into the local (in this case Saulteaux) tribes, with whom they were exchanging goods, while still maintaining a 'Métis' household. But, as the second excerpt indicates, they nevertheless considered themselves distinct from the native trappers to the point of refusing to let their children be raised by the 'Indian' wife's family.

The two Chartrand brothers, members of the Pangman family, along with other families mentioned by Father Simonet, seem to have been uncomfortable with the changes heralded by the Oblate fathers in the 1860s and 1870s and were retreating farther North to the Duck Bay area where they could pursue a more 'traditional', and lucrative, life. Perhaps it was not so much 'retreating' as following the receding frontier of a fur trade economy within which they were able to make a comfortable living. In any case, they continued to have close family and business contacts with

³³ AASB, T0864-T0867, Simonet à Taché, Pointe de Chêne, 26 September 1861. A l'aide du peu de Cri que j'ai appris cet été à St-Boniface, j'ai pu entendre les confessions de près de cinquante personnes dont deux ou trois seulement parlaient le français, un en anglais. J'ai fait tous les jours le cathéchisme et l'école en Cri.

the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point area,³⁴ including two other key families, the Lavallées and the Sayers.

Another extended family to take up residence at Fond du Lac prior to the arrival of the Oblates was that of Jean-Baptiste Lavallée (b.1795, Isle à la Crosse), the son of Ignace Lavallée (b.1760) a French Canadian or Great Lake Métis, and of Josephte Cree, listed in the census as an 'Indian'. Jean Baptiste's wife was Louise Ducharme (Métis, b. 1805, Fairford), daughter of Antoine Ducharme (b.1780) and 'Josephte' (b.1787, no data). They had six children who lived to maturity. During the 1867-68 famine the Lavallées were one of the extended families listed as 'non-indigent'³⁵ (they were in a position to plant 31 bushels of potatoes). Between Jean-Baptiste and the four adult there were 9 horses, 3 oxen, 6 cows and 7 calves.³⁶

One of the Lavallées, Antoine, seems to have married twice but whether this was a case of bigamy or serial monogamy is unclear. In the 1870 census he is listed as married to Isabelle Chaboyez (b. 1848, Lake Manitoba). Her parents were Louis

³⁴ Not all the Métis closely allied to the Saulteaux population moved North. Antoine Chartrand married to 'Frances' of Duck River was, among others, still listed as living in Oak Point in 1870.

³⁵ Data collected from PAM, Executive Relief Report, MG2 B6 1868, Saint-Laurent Parish.

³⁶ There is no direct information stating that the Lavallées were traders. In fact Oral tradition describes them as active fishermen and (post 1900) good dairy farmers. Unfortunately this data goes back only to the post-1880 period when trading opportunities had already begun to diminish seriously (and the market for fish to expand).

Chaboyez (b.1803) and Louise Chartrand.³⁷ His other wife was Josephte Ducharme (b.1841, 'Metis')³⁸ daughter of Louis Ducharme (an American Métis born in 1818 whose parents were Nicholas Ducharme and an 'Indian' woman named Charlotte) and Julia Deschamps born in 1823 (daughter of Joseph Deschamps and Marguerite Houle). Antoine Lavallée had one brother, André Lavallée, who was married to Eliza a sister of Isabelle Chaboyez. Another brother, Jean-Baptiste, was married to Suzette, a sister of Josephte Ducharme. Obviously the Lavallée, Chaboyez, and Ducharme families were closely connected, whatever the exact kinship ties.

The last of the four founding families of Saint-Laurent to be described here is that of Guillaume Sayer (son of William Sayer and Josephte Forbisher) and his wife Catherine Pangman.³⁹ Guillaume Sayer established himself in Saint-Laurent in the 1850s at a time when he was already a prominent trader in the Red River area.⁴⁰ He was active in the pelt trade on the shores of Lake Manitoba.⁴¹ His struggle with the company to continue his illicit fur trade on company territory

³⁷ Louise Chartrand was a sister to the previously mentioned Michel and Baptiste.

³⁸ By 1870 there was a Ducharme family residing in Saint-Laurent but the link-up to Josephte is not clear. This was the Family of J-Bte Ducharme and Catherine Allary.

³⁹ It is unclear if she is related to the other Pangman residing in Saint-Laurent though it does seem likely.

⁴⁰ Pauline Mercier, Saint-Laurent, Manitoba (Elie, Manitoba: Division Scolaire du Cheval Blanc, 1974), 17

⁴¹ Giraud, 920.

embodied Métis efforts to diversify their economic activities and reduce their dependence on the HBC. By 1870 Sayer and his four sons were no longer residing in the parish (or at least were not there at the time of the census). There was, however, a Sayer family residing in Oak Point. The elder Oak Point Sayer was Jean Baptiste Sayer, born in 1800 at Isle à la Crosse. He was married to 'Marie', or 'Marguerite', born in 1790 at Fort Francis and listed as an 'Indian'. Unfortunately the census does not identify Jean-Baptiste's father. His son was John Sayer, born in 1840 at Swan River and married to Suzanne Chartrand, born 1847 at Lake Manitoba and daughter of the salt-maker Paulett Chartrand. Their children are listed as having land claims in Saint-Laurent and Oak Point (behind the river lots), as did the Lavallée and some of the Chartrand offsprings. The relationship of the Oak Point family to that of Guillaume Sayer is unknown.

The exact points of origin for these four extended families, the Pangmans, Chartrands, Lavallées and Sayers cannot be fully ascertained. Through the genealogies only the Pangman family had demonstrable ties to the Dakotas. However, according to religious sources recounting folklore, all the early families to settle in Saint-Laurent had come up from Pembina after it fell into American hands. They first settled in Baie Saint-Paul, were flooded out, and eventually relocated in the Fond du lac area, in 1821. Some caution about the validity of local folklore should be exercised since the same folklore states that the Chartrands were a family from the 'North', presumably Duck Bay. The birthplaces of the family elders (such

as Isle à la Crosse) indicate that the North West is a more likely point of origin for some of the families, although the Dakotas may well have been used as a wintering place prior to relocation on Lake Manitoba.

The composition and activities of the four 'founding' extended families of the Saint-Laurent (Oak Point) area are interesting. None of the four elders or their sons seem to have worked (for wages) for the HBC between 1821-1870. Their activities appear to have been confined to commodity production or independent trading (perhaps also freighting with the Chartrand barges). Some (documented) individuals such as Guillaume Sayer and Paulett and Michel Chartrand were quite successful. Their ties to the native fur-trapping element were extremely close. The HBC had been concerned for many years about these Lake Manitoba peddlars' trading activities.⁴² Some of the lakeshore Métis seem to have been in a position to engage in trading year-round.⁴³ From letters written by the missionaries one gets the impression that the common language spoken was Cree⁴⁴ with *Saulteaux* added when sons (or husbands) married into the tribe.⁴⁵ Yet a certain differentiation

⁴² HBCA, PAM, B.235/a/8 folio 14, January 1827.

⁴³ "Nos traiteurs partent et sont remplacés par les pêcheurs qui viennent tous les jours".
AASB, T5832-T5834, Simonet à Taché, Lac Manitoba, 20 September 1868.

⁴⁴ Their Cree may have been some form of Cree-mitchief simply not recognized as such by the missionaries used to Red River Mitchief. The Métisses, especially, did not quickly pick up French; 'Bien des femmes surtout ne parlent que le sauvage'.
AASB, P3862-P3866, Provencher à Proulx, 5 June 1842.

⁴⁵ Jerome Lavallée, a retired farmer-fisherman-trapper of Saint-Laurent, stated in an interview with the author in 1984 that his grand-father, Michel Lavallée, spoke only Cree and *Saulteaux* ('but he understood French'). Jerome's father, Joseph

between the two groups (the Cree-métis that began arriving in the 1820s and the lakeshore Saulteaux) was maintained.⁴⁶ Nevertheless these lakeshore Métis, compared to the Red River Métis who were developing increasingly distinct dialects, customs and traditions, appeared to be more comfortable speaking a native language and residing near an 'Indian' population. According to ecclesiastical sources, the lakeshore Métis retained only a nominal knowledge of (and identification with) their French Canadian forefathers' Catholicism.⁴⁷ Yet, they were desirous to see their

(Michel) Lavallée, spoke Cree, Saulteaux and French 'fluently'. Jérôme speaks Cree, Saulteaux, French and English. He notes that his wife, Florence Lafrenière, is (métis) cree and she refuses to speak Saulteaux (which Jérôme defines as 'his' language) because she pronounces the words 'all crooked' and the interviewee laughs at her! Michel Lavallée's (the grand-father) parents were the above mentioned Jean Baptiste Lavallée and Louise Ducharme.

Also, Marie Louise [Lavallée] Walstrom, born in Saint-Laurent in 1905, commented in an 1984 interview with the author that her parents, Baptiste Lavallée of Saint-Laurent and Catherine Chartrand of Clarkleigh, spoke 'Saulteaux and French all mixed up'. Her paternal grand-parents were André Lavallée and 'Lissa' [Eliza] Chaboyer, and maternal grand-parents were Michel Chartrand and Marguerite Pangman. This statement would seem to conflict with comments found in the missionary letters on the 'Cree' spoken by the 'Métis'. Perhaps what she describes as 'French' is the michif Cree alluded to by the Oblates. Or else, by the turn of the century, several 'Metis' families were speaking Saulteaux as oppose to their old Cree Dialect.

⁴⁶ That distinct 'Métis' and 'Native' groups reproduced themselves does not mean that individuals were not 'passing' and merging with the other group. It is interesting to note that, by the 1870 census, only four Metis living in Saint-Laurent had 'official' wives that were listed as being Indian. Either the native wives (official or unofficial) were staying up north and the official Métis household resided at the mission or the former 'Indians' were declaring themselves to be 'Métis'. The first seems more likely since for the next 50 years the Oblates would speak with dismay of Métis going North and continuing to cause 'scandal' (in their eyes only it would seem).

⁴⁷ Neither the Interlake Cree-Metis or the Saulteaux were highly regarded by the priest. There are many negative references to the lake Manitoba Saulteaux found in missionary correspondence: "Vraiment ces sauteux sont une race maudite de Dieu,

children (both from their Métis and Indian wives) learn new ways:

J'ai trouvé à la Baie des Canards tous les Métis et sauvages qui ont contumes d'hiverner et quelques autres qui passent ordinairement l'hiver sur la montagne ... Tout le monde à la Baie des Canards s'est approché des sacrements excepté les scandaleux que vous connaissez et qui font mon désespoir. Chose étrange, ils sont les plus desireux à faire instruire leurs enfants!^{48 49}

Having some contact with the Red River settlement and the HBC through their trading activities it is possible that the lakeshore trading Métis were aware of

il me faut la foi pour dire qu'il sont faits à l'image de Dieu et capables de prendre place dans le ciel."

AASB, GLP327, Bermond a Faraud, Fond du lac, 10 May 1850.

Letters lamenting the lakeshore Metis lack of religious concern abound in the Religious Archives. See for example:

AASB, T5832-T5834, Simonet a Taché, Lac Manitoba, 20 September 1868.

⁴⁸ AASB, T5270-T5285, Simonet à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 8 February 1868.

⁴⁹ Duck Bay was the earliest Roman Catholic effort at establishing an at least nominally permanent mission in the Lake Winnipegosis region. In 1838, the priest Father Belcourt was attempting to settle the neighboring Saulteaux in this Bay (with mixed results). Duck Bay had always been a traditional fall gathering place and the nearby salt springs were a further asset. With the years, more and more Métis families were wintering here (as the buffalo disappeared from 'la montagne'[the upper White Mud river area]). In the late summer of 1858 Hind visited the area and found 40 to 50 'halfbreed' Indians living there. This would seem to indicate that the original Saulteaux and Cree evangelized by Darveau and Belcourt had been absorbed or replaced by Metis who were living a life similar to that of the fur trapping segment of the population since Hind said these people grew only a few potatoes because their fish and game provided such abundant food. Métis traders and salt makers following a well established circuit would also have had no time or need for gardening. In the winter of 1868, according to Father Simonet, there were 22 'Catholic' families wintering in the Duck Bay-'Les Salines' area not counting 'les traiteurs ou autres hivernants qui viennent de la Rivière Rouge ou de la Prairie du Cheval Blanc'.

AASB, T5270-T5285, Simonet à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 8 February 1868.

For more details consult: Martha McCarthy, Pre-1870 Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba (Winnipeg MB: Historical Resources Branch Report, 1987).

the drastic changes looming on the horizon. Members of the Chartrand clan, for example, made a point of maintaining friendly relations with the priest whatever the nature of their marital activities in the northern part of the lake; during the 1868 famine Paulett and Antoine Chartrand sold to Mgr Taché 1000 white fish when they could probably have received a better price from other elements of the Red River Settlement population.⁵⁰

Two other families were settling into the area in the late 1850s and the 1860s. These are the extended families of John Monkman and the children of Louis DeLaronde. The Monkmans were heavily involved in the manufacture of salt on lake Winnipegosis. They had close ties with the HBC and during Les Événements at least one member of the family actively supported the Canadian Party and tried to instigate 'Indians' to revolt against what Riel called the 'old settlements', i.e., the Métis communities.⁵¹

⁵⁰ AASB, T5942-T5945, Simonet à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 29 October 1868.

⁵¹ Their father, who continued his father's salt making plant at Salt Springs on Lake Winnipegosis, helped Dr J.C. Schultz escape to Ontario in 1870 and tried to 'agitate' certain elements against the Métis. In a letter discussing the amnesty question written on 20 February 1875, Louis Riel jr noted:

En même temps que des Ontariens commettaient ces actes d'agression violente dans le Fort Garry où ils étaient nos prisonniers de guerre, les sauvages du pays se trouvaient dans une grande agitation. Qui est-ce qui les agitait? Entr'autres un nommé Monkman, comme Scott à la solde du colonel Dennis, et qui avait reçu de cet agent du gouvernement canadien la mission de soulever les sauvages contre les anciens colons dont les établissements étaient ainsi exposés à des massacres barbares.

The Delaronde are also an intriguing case. Like the Chartrands they seem to have been actively involved in freighting and trading with the native population. The scale of their operations was impressive; in their winter camps they employed several hired hands (as opposed to family members). Also, unlike the four 'old' families, they appear to have maintained ties with the HBC. In February 1868 Father Simonet visited their winter camp:

Le 27 je suis parti de la Baie des Canards en compagnie de quatre traiteurs qui eurent la complaisance de me prêter deux chiens pour remplacer ceux des miens qui étaient hors de service...Nous arrivâmes la même journée à la Rivière Poule d'Eau chez les Laronde qui me reçurent avec leur bienveillance ordinaire. Les Catholiques engagés à ces messieurs et à la Compagnie vinrent se confesser dans la soirée. Le lendemain Etienne Laronde eut la charité de me mener jusqu'à la Rivière aux grues en allant voir les sauvages.⁵²

Louis DeLaronde was a French Canadian married to a Métisse Madeleine Boucher (of 'Métis' parents). All their children listed in the 1870 Saint-Laurent census were born in the Red River settlement. Comments in the Oblate correspondence give the impression that the children had received varying amounts of education at Saint-Boniface Catholic schools. Though actively engaged in trading, their ties to the local Saulteaux population were not as direct as those of the four founding families. None appear to have cohabitated with or married 'native' women, and missionaries make no mention of 'improper' behavior in their winter camps prior to 1870. Their daily spoken language was French as opposed to the Cree dialect used

⁵² AASB, T5942-T5945, Simonet à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 29 October 1868.

by the other families. Interestingly, the DeLarondes' relations to the Chartrand extended family seem to have been uneasy so that they were allied with the Monkman family, at least in the tension with the Chartrands. This tension predated the 1861 death of John Monkman who was killed by Paulett Chartrand during a drunken dispute.⁵³ This tension could have stemmed partly from a growing competition over a slowly shrinking trading and freighting market.

The origins, composition and behavior of the Delaronde are indicative of the type of families that would be heading north in the difficult decade of 1865-1875. The Chaboyez, Daigneault, and Goulet families coming up from the Red River and Saint-François Xavier parish were (or had been) more settled, endogamous (in the sense of not marrying into the fur-trapping 'Indian' segment of the population), more religiously docile and, with the decline of the bison hunt, more interested in agriculture. They appear not to have had the freighting and trading entrepreneurship of the earlier families and consequently had little to fall back on when the 1868 famine hit. Several of their names appear on the indigent list prepared by the local Saint-Laurent priest, Father Camper. Families that were moving northward to the Saint-Laurent area in the 1860s and 1870s were interested in commercial fishing combined with some gardening and cattle raising (and bison hunting as long as it lasted). Their economic activities linked more closely to the southern part of the lake

⁵³ AASB, T1566-T1567, Simonet à Taché, Lac Manitoba, 4 August 1862.

and they never established the close ties with the 'Indian' fur trappers⁵⁴ enjoyed by the longer settled families.⁵⁵

The essential differences between the Freeman, the traders and the Métis from the southern parishes were not 'biological'; they were not simply questions of race. Most of these people had both Native and Voyageur (or Orkneyman) ancestors. What distinguished and fragmented this population were differing economic activities and relations with Church and Company authorities. For example, the trading and fishing segments led different lifestyles. Distinctions were also imposed from above as illustrated by the already mentioned accident involving Chartrand and his Protestant friends. Oblate missionaries, imbued with a western European racist ideology, perpetuated a process of racialization by emphasizing further distinctions along religious and linguistic lines and interpreting them in racial terms. Missionary letters are filled with such interpretations. During the worst of the famine of 1867-68,⁵⁶ the local Oblate, Father Simonet, apparently unaware of the effects of starvation, explained the 'Métis' lack of interest in doing corvée work for the mission

⁵⁴ Fur trappers who, in Duck Bay, probably by the 1860-1870s had as 'mixed' a background as many of the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point dwellers.

⁵⁵ Though some members of these families in the 20th century were involved in muskrat hunting as far North as Le Pas this did not seem to necessitate close ties with the local 'Indian' population.

⁵⁶ PAM, MG2 B6 1868, Statistical Summary, Executive Relief Committee, District of Assiniboia (parish of Saint-Laurent).

as resulting from their inherently 'indolent' character and their laziness.⁵⁷ The resident priest for the parish of Sainte-Claire⁵⁸, assessing the economic prospects of his parish argued that even though the local 'Métis' were reasonably well off:

Quand au Métis qui composent en grande partie ma paroisse, à part de respectable exceptions, ils sont une bande de dégénérés, de jouisseurs...La chose capitale pour l'avenir de Sainte-Claire est de remplacer en grande partie les Métis par des familles Canadiennes-françaises, autrement nous aurons le même résultat qu'à Saint-Laurent.⁵⁹

In other words, poverty, marginalization and even cultural traditions were the result of an unchangeable biologically inherited predisposition. The plight of the Métis was not even partly the result of a shrinking fur trade staple producing economy.

Whatever the merits of the ecclesiastical assessment of 'Métis' character, the hunting and fishing Métis were experiencing severe stress and dislocation in the 1860s and 1870s because of the decline of the fur trade centered on Red River coupled with the decimation of the bison herds. The devastating famine of 1868, that saw the combined failure of the bison hunt, the fishing industry, and farming, followed by the transfer of power from the HBC to the Canadian Government in

⁵⁷ AASB, T5832-T5834, Simonet à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 20 September 1868.

⁵⁸ A settlement on the western slopes of Duck Mountain also composed of non-Red River Settlement (i.e. 'Freeman') Métis who, according to oral history, came up from Pembina and the Dakotas.

⁵⁹ OMI, AD, L1074 M27L, Paroisse de Sainte Claire.

1870 , would have long term adverse effect on Saint-Laurent's poorer families.⁶⁰

The Oak Point and Saint-Laurent area did not present a very encouraging view at the beginning of the famine in the summer of 1867 for outsiders passing through the area. The 'run-down' collection of tents and houses⁶¹ set up in a haphazard fashion did not inspire confidence. There were no real roads, no fences, and precious few gardens; in short, very little of the things commonly associated with small peasant settlements such as in other areas of rural Canada or Europe. In fact, Donald Gunn, passing through on an egging expedition in 1867, did not even recognize these people

⁶⁰ It is possible the famine did not have an immediate detrimental effect on trading and freighting families such as the Delarondes and the Chartrands. Goods still had to be moved along the lake, the market for salt was constant, and some fur animals were being caught. It is only when the trappers experienced difficulty finding food for themselves and the traders had none to exchange that business suffered.

⁶¹ Most of the affluent members of the community (Chartrand, Delaronde, Monkman, etc.) would be wintering on Lake Winnipegosis busy with trading, salt making, trapping, and fishing. Log houses would have been built there rather than at Saint-Laurent and Oak Point.

as being of the same stock as the Red River Settlement Métis:

In this region there are at present three small villages; one at Oak Point, containing 10 to 15 dwellings, called houses of the most primitive kind; another at what is called the Bay [Saint-Laurent] consisting of seven or eight houses, and favored as the residence of the Catholic priest. A third village is rising two or three miles to the south of the latter [Isle de Pierre-the future Saint-Ambroise]. The population of these villages is composed of Indians, of half, three-quarter, and of seven-eighth Indians, with a very few aged French-Canadians.⁶²

Because of their dwellings, general aspects, and apparent life style Gunn labelled the inhabitants he saw as 'Indians' but, as is obvious from his description of their seasonal activities, that he was seeing only one segment of the local population. The primary reason for his disapproval

⁶² Gunn, Donald. "Notes of an Egging expedition to Shoal Lake, West of Lake Winnipeg," Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution for the Year 1867. (Washington: Government printers, 1872).



Provincial Archives of Manitoba

was that these people did not farm.⁶³ The poor soil, the distance from market, the repeated recent crop failures and, most important, the existence of viable lucrative alternatives tied to the fur trade economy did not count in his equation:

These people are like the fowl of heaven; they neither sow nor reap, nor do they even as far as I have been able to see, plant potatoes. They possess a few cattle and horses; the latter roam through the wood summer and winter, living independent of their masters' care. The finest hay grows within a few yards of their houses, yet I have been informed that many of these people are so indolent as to allow their animals to die in winter from starvation. There are two or three exception to the above rule.⁶⁴

Gunn goes on to describe the seasonal activities of the lakeshore inhabitants. In early Spring they would catch fish which swarmed into the many little creeks flowing into the lake from the East. By May these easily caught fish would have returned to the lake, and the 'Indians', as he calls them, would shoot ducks and geese (just returning from migration to the South) until the birds left the area in late May. Thereafter, their main food source would be muskrats and birds eggs until July. Then the lakeshore dwellers would find subsistence very difficult "unless possessed of a means to enable them to draw on the settlement for flour" (such as the exchange of pelts, salt, smoked/dried fish). In October the whitefish came near the shore for spawning, "and those who command a little industry and plenty of nets will be able to lay in a good stock for winter use."⁶⁵ ⁶⁶

⁶³ Also one of the principle source of criticism for the missionaries.

⁶⁴ Gunn, 431.

⁶⁵ Gunn, 431 (emphasis added).

The people described by the egg collector were obviously from the non trading and salt making segment of the Lake Manitoba population (minus the "two or three exceptions") and were enduring an unusually difficult year. Gunn makes no mention of bison-hunting activities which remained important up to the early 1870s (except for the disastrous years of 1867-1868). Also, he makes no mention of winter ice-fishing which was still being pursued by some people at wintering camps on a commercial scale during those difficult years.⁶⁷ Finally, he does not mention the traders and their followers who were present mostly at Oak Point but also at Saint-Laurent

⁶⁶ Interestingly Gunn is only describing food gathering activities carried out by men (except perhaps the egg collecting). This 'man the hunter' syndrome would be common amongst anthropologists of the first half of the 20th century. Surely Métis women were also active in the search for food. Their descendants, as was discovered in the course of interviewing, are still knowledgeable about edible berries, roots, mushrooms.

In fact, according to Gunn these Metis women could willingly and expertly step into what would be considered by 19th century Europeans a man's role. In one specific case Gunn talks of a woman coming back from commercial dealings in the settlement:

Here we overtook our companions of last night, and a heroic dame from Oak Point, who left her home a few days before for Red River, and was now on her way back with two cart load of pine boards and planks. She has a considerable portion of white blood, yet exhibits all the hardiness of the squaw, and can, with wonderful dexterity, avail herself of all the resources of the forest and the lake.

The qualification 'plenty of nets' is also interesting. Materials for nets had to be bought and represented a capital outlay. Not all the 'Métis' would have been in a position (this of all years) to come up with the necessary cash or items of trade.

⁶⁷ AASB, T5942-T5945, Simonet à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 29 October 1868.

until at least 1872⁶⁸ and who were not considered indigent by the 1868 Relief Committee.

Gunn may be describing two groups of people: first the displaced, impoverished Métis from Saint-François Xavier and the Red River parishes who were retreating to the lake shore in the hopes of finding a livelihood in fishing and, second, the elusive 'Freeman' Métis who usually just passed through Saint-Laurent and Oak Point on the way to trading their furs at the Forks (and to the bison hunt) in Spring and on their return trips to their wintering camps in autumn. With the complete failure of the fishing season added to the crop failure and poor returns in the bison hunts, Métis coming up from the southern parishes may well have been living an uncharacteristically hand to mouth existence in 1867 and 1868. The others, Freeman Métis, led a life similar to that of the Saulteaux trapping segment and perhaps, to an outsider, would have appeared as one and the same.⁶⁹ The fact that a long time resident of the Red River Settlement with a Métis wife would label both these groups of Métis as 'Indian' points once again to these people's fluid socio-economic position especially in times of stress.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Many of these people may have decided to spend a complete year (as opposed to a winter) on Lake Winnipegosis with their kin waiting out the calamities that were befalling the more southerly area.

⁶⁹ As mentioned before, it is quite possible that individuals were merging with one or the other group during those difficult years.

⁷⁰ J.M. Richtik in his "Historical Geography of the Interlake Area of Manitoba from 1871 to 1921," M.A. diss., University of Manitoba, 1964) uses Gunn's comments to argue that the Lake Manitoba Métis had become 'very sedentary' and also that they were living at a subsistence level. These are erroneous conclusions for a significant proportion of the Lake Manitoba Metis. Missionary letters mention, well

The impact of the famine was not uniform throughout the Saint-Laurent Oak Point population. As mentioned above, many of those who were listed as non-indigent were from the trading and salt making segment.⁷¹ The statistical summary produced by the Executive Relief Committee indicates that 17 out of 36 households (47%) were in need of immediate relief. Several names from the founding families are missing, perhaps indicating that many households were trying their luck in other parts of the lake. Also many of the less prominent (and more transient) Lake Manitoba Métis, those Giraud labels "Freemen", counted on fishing and bison hunting to feed their families and produce an exchangeable commodity. They could not afford to spend a season in an area where returns were so disappointing. Furthermore, Freeman Métis, unlike perhaps Métis of the more settled parishes,

into the 20th century, established seasonal patterns of migration (Saint-Laurent, Duck Bay, White Mud River, Poste Manitoba and, later on, trapping at Le Pas and fishing on Great Slave Lake). It is possible there was a slight trend towards leaving Métis wives and children back at La Mission, but in the 1860s, most families followed their men North even when northern wives existed. To describe this population as functioning on a subsistence level is also, by and large, inaccurate. It was certainly inaccurate for the four (founding) families (and the Delarondes and Monkmans) who owned barges, engaged in trading and production for exchange, and hired employees. Even the Métis/Indian trappers and fishermen were producing as much for exchange as for consumption and in good years, fetched a good price for their wares in the H.B.C. post or the Red River Settlement. People whose means of existence force them into regular displacements do not acquire many material possessions but the appearance of marginality especially in difficult years should not be equated with a subsistence level existence.

⁷¹ Pierre Pangman was listed as indigent in 1868. This is surprising since he was one of the earliest established traders in the Saint-Laurent area and he had extensive kin ties in Duck Bay. Old age may have been a factor. Unfortunately there is not much data on this family either from written sources or from Oral History. There are members of the Pangman family living in the Camperville-Duck Bay area to this day.

would have known of other areas of the lakes where fish catches might be more plentiful.

For many Métis arriving from the southern settlements, Saint-Laurent and Oak Point seem to have been the farthest North they were willing to go. Unfortunately, they did not find much relief:

Outre mes gens, ceux de la Rivière Rouge et surtout ceux de la Prairie de Cheval Blanc sont venus tous les jours me demander quelque service. Et aujourd'hui j'ai la douleur de les renvoyer sans autre soulagement que des paroles de compassion. Or l'hiver n'est pas encore commencé. La pêche, qui a commencé plus tôt que de coutume et avec une bonne apparence de réussite, est a peu pres nulle pour une bonne partie, bien médiocre pour la plupart.⁷²

The southern migrants were also faced with a second locust devastation in Saint-Laurent and "not a vegetable was to be had in the mission". According to information gleaned from the missionary correspondence, these new residents joined with their neighbours in pursuing non-farming, staple producing activities:

Bien des gens de la Prairie du Cheval Blanc [Saint-François Xavier] viennent s'établir ici ... Ici comme à la Rivière Rouge les sauterelles mangent tout. Le poisson est notre seule ressource.⁷³

Interestingly, as southern Métis (former full-time bison hunters and farmers)

⁷² AASB, T5942-T5945, Simonet à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 29 October 1968.

⁷³ AASB, T5942-T5945, Simonet à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 29 October 1968.

were moving towards the Saint-Laurent mission, many of the old Lake Manitoba settlers were leaving. In previous years, some traders following the retreating 'fur' frontier had established themselves in Duck Bay. In 1868-69 the traders were joined by Metis fishermen looking for more plentiful fish stocks. Fishing in the northern part of Lake Manitoba and in Lake Winnipegosis does not appear to have failed as greatly as in the Saint-Laurent - Oak Point area.⁷⁴

Dans les circonstances actuelles, la population de la Baie des Canards ne peut que s'accroître. Déjà elle s'accroît. Quelques [nouvelles] familles veulent s'y établir. Un plus grand nombre y auraient hiverné, s'ils avaient trouvé de la place dans les barges. Je connais plusieurs personnes qui iraient à la Baie des Canards s'il y avait un prêtre résident.⁷⁵

The years 1869-1870 were no better for the southern part of the lake. The chronicles note that in 1869 the grasshoppers came again to Saint-Laurent and Oak Point. The Codex Historicus states that 'black' flour was selling for \$7.00 a 100lb bag, 'sometimes \$10.00', obviously considered an exorbitant price by the author. It is therefore not surprising that the starving segment of the population took action:

In March 1870 during the Riel Rebellion the Half-Breeds took possession of the H.B.Co. post at Oak Point and killed some eight to ten head of cattle, distributed the beef among themselves as well as some dry goods taken from the store. Mr Deschambault⁷⁶ who was

⁷⁴ The summer of 1868 was not a good fishing or hunting season even on Lake Winnipegosis. In the month of June the religious chronicles note the people were reduced to eating dried jackfish 'hard as shingles' at Salt Springs.

⁷⁵ AASB, T5499-T5502, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 23 April 1968.

⁷⁶ Probably the son of French Canadian Ile a la Crosse post master G. Deschambault and his 'Métis' wife Isabelle Hamelin.

then in charge made no resistance but handed over the keys and he then left and took up lodging in a neighbouring house. The Half-Breed treated him very kindly and furnished him with fresh meat and other necessities.⁷⁷

Father Camper returning from mission work on March 17th was not pleased with the seizure. He wrote to Louis Riel for instructions who, (apparently) much dismayed, ordered the return of the store and goods to the man in charge: "Nos gens se sont conformés immédiatement et sans réplique aux ordres de Monsieur le Président; la force d'un gouvernement pour bien des gens a souvent plus d'efficacité que la voix de la conscience".⁷⁸

The people involved in the seizure were not the Lake Manitoba traders or the Métis salt-fish-pelt commodity producers⁷⁹ who were still wintering on Lake Winnipegosis in the month of March. They would not have arrived at La Mission till the end of May.⁸⁰ Those implicated were the Métis who had been coming up from the more southerly settlements to flee the famine. The crops had failed once more the previous summer, fishing had been poor in the autumn and spring,⁸¹ also, the

⁷⁷ OMI, AD, L381 M27C 1858-1895, Historical notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent.

⁷⁸ AASB, T7270, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 5 April 1869.

⁷⁹ One of these northern non-trading families were the 'Guiboche' who wintered in 1869 with the 'Parisien' at La Saline. One of their descendants in a taped interview noted that she had been told the Guiboche came from the northern end of the lake.

⁸⁰ 'Les hivernants du coté de la Baie des Canards commencent a arriver.'
AASB, T7477, Camper à Taché, Lac Manitoba, 23 May 1870.

⁸¹ 'La pêche manque encore ce printemps comme a l'automne dernier'.
AASB, T7477, Camper à Taché, Lake Manitoba, 23 May 1870.

fact that they took cattle would indicate the bison hunt had failed. That they were from the Red River area would explain the speed of their obedience to Riel's orders. He was a familiar figure to them and his family was well respected. Nothing was found in the historical documents to indicate the 'old' lakeshore families were actively sympathetic to his cause.

Things would not improve for the 'new' settlers from the southern parishes. In fact the seizure brought only fleeting relief for the desperate families. Commenting on the months following the March take over, Brother Mulvihill O.M.I. states:

After March [came a] time of hunger. There was no flour to be found just dried jackfish. A métis, François Bonneau⁸² was suffering from extreme want and poverty. He once had been a buffalo hunter. [Bonneau tells the chronicler] 'I have eaten nothing in the last 3 days save and except "des petites poires qui me donnent la chiche, mon corps est toujours lâche et je suis bien faible"'. Bonneau had been one of the bravest [hunters] on the plain.⁸³

Nevertheless the displaced Métis families remained in the Saint-Laurent area. They gave up their bison hunting activities and switched over to commercial fishing even though it would be an unprofitable enterprise in the southern end of the lake

⁸² François Bonneau was a Roman Catholic Métis born in 1794. The Bonneau family, according to the censuses appear to have resided largely in the Saint-François Xavier and Baie Saint-Paul areas. His wife was Marie Favel (b.1795) the daughter of Humphrey Favel (son of a senior H.B.C. official) and Jenny an Indian woman. Giraud in his work identifies Humphrey Favel a Freeman Metis.

⁸³ OMI, AD, L381 M27c 1858-1895 Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent.

for at least one more season.⁸⁴ It would be years before any serious attempts at commercial farming would again be tried.⁸⁵ Yet these southern Métis and the freemen and trading Métis hedged their bets, putting up fences and attempting to plant some sort of garden in the summer of 1871 as they waited for the land surveyors to come:

Les gens se remuent en plein pour semer. Plusieurs charroyent des perches en masse. Je ne doute pas que ce soit la Montagne qui enfante une souris; cependant il y en a quelques uns qui sèmeront certainement dix, quinze et même vingt barils de patates, c'est toujours un commencement.⁸⁶

The derogatory aside is not surprising coming as it does from a missionary with a farming background looking at the activities of 'half-breeds', most of whom had never farmed on a large scale. Also, as usual, farming would conflict with other more lucrative business such as in this case fishing: "Les gens ne paraissent pas très enthousiasmés pour faire un grand effort d'agriculture, la pêche a bonne apparence, voilà le point de mir [sic] de toutes leurs pensées"⁸⁷. Yet several Métis had a good idea of the potential value of land. Some (unnamed) were marking out claims in

⁸⁴ AASB, T8170-T8173, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 24 November 1870.

⁸⁵ 'Viendra alors le temps des semences Monseigneur, compter sur nos gens ce serait nous [condamner] a jeuner l'année qui vient.'
AASB, T8602-T8604, Camper a Taché, Saint-Laurent, 28 March 1871.

⁸⁶ AASB, T8663, Proulx à Taché, Bout du Lac, 15 April 1871. (Emphasis added).

⁸⁷ AASB, T9332-35, Proulx à Taché, Bout du lac, 12 September 1871.

February of 1872⁸⁸ of which the government surveyor, William Wagner, arriving at the lakeshore in the Spring of 1872 took no account.⁸⁹

By the early years of the 1870s, the Métis of Saint-Laurent and Oak Point had experienced years of economic difficulty and social upheavals as a result of the effects of natural calamities, an economy in transition (the faltering of the bison hunt) and political turmoil. In the Spring of 1872 the Métis were faced with the further challenge of securing claim to lands they occupied. Not all the inhabitants of the Saint-Laurent area fared equally well in this legal process. Occupations that they had been engaged in and the lifestyle that they had led in the years leading up to the survey would influence the outcome. As will be documented in the next chapter, Métis traders, hunter-fishermen and farmer-fishermen differed in their ability to meet the ever increasing demands made by the Dominion Lands Branch.

⁸⁸ AASB, T9973-76, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 15 February 1872.

⁸⁹ PAM, RG 17 C1 #258, Saint-Laurent, May 7 to May 13, 1872.

Chapter 4 - Adapting to a New Order

William Wagner, Dominion Land Surveyor, surveyed the settlement of Oak Point between April 29 and May 6 of 1872. He then moved down to Saint-Laurent and worked there between May 7 and May 13. He was unimpressed with the inhabitants of both settlements and scoffed at some of their land claims. At Oak Point he described the inhabitants as "mostly either traders (furs, etc.) or their followers and fishermen". He noted that with the exception of a few fenced-in patches of land on which potatoes and like vegetables were growing, no agricultural business had been carried out. He did add that the land was mostly covered with scrubby Oak and a few poplars "and with exception of interspersing meadows or hay ground very stony and gravelly and therefore holds out little inducement for farming".¹

Wagner thought that the claims put forth by the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point Métis (who had forced him to hire a local interpreter who could speak both English and their "Indian brogue") were "somewhat extravagant". But his assessment was based on the little use they seemed to have for their land and their general lifestyle not because of their 'mixed' background. Although he was amused by their use of the term 'white' to define themselves, he was also quite concerned because during the survey, and for some time prior, the Métis had been trying to persuade those they considered to be 'Indian' to leave the area:

¹ PAM, RG 17 C1 #257, Saint-Laurent, April 29 to May 6 1872.

It appears to me as where all Halfbreeds up here are of the opinion that a full-bred indian had no right to hold any property amongst whites, if I may call the settlers at Oak Point by that name... but where this presumption erroneous I beg to draw your attention to the two Indians [having] houses [in the settlement]. There are other houses owned by Indians close to the road and southerly to the former. It is true the houses are unoccupied at present but I fear that their neighbours have impressed on these poor men the idea that they could not hold property. I should not have dwelt upon their subject to such an extent had I not seen during the last winter that Indians settled outside the reserves were told to leave and build upon the reserve.²

Such an attitude is doubly surprising when we consider the individuals involved. Several of the Chartrand clan were implicated in the affair even though, for example, Paulet Chartrand's mother had been labelled 'Indian' by religious authorities and his son, Antoine, actually had an official Indian wife living with him at the time of the 1870 census. Most if not all of the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point residents had mothers, wives, mothers-in-law or grand-mothers who were or had been labelled 'Indian' by HBC or ecclesiastical authorities or by the 1870 census takers. The fact of their own partially native ancestry did nothing to soften the attitudes of the inhabitants of Saint-Laurent. Several explanations come to mind. It is possible that the old Lake Manitoba Métis residents, with close ties to the Saulteaux populations, were reacting to the opinions of the recently arrived Saint-François Xavier and Red River Settlement Métis who had not in the recent past been closely allied to 'Indians'. Or, perhaps, the old Freeman and trading Lake Manitoba Metis

² PAM, RG 17 C1 #257, Oak Point, April 29 to May 13.

families were perpetuating the already discussed distinction between themselves and the Saulteaux of Lake Winnipegosis. Trading and even marital alliances were somehow distinct from general cohabitation. Finally, it is possible that the Métis saw the land claims as a manner of creating a 'Métis' reserve using their own definition of "métis" as, perhaps, 'Cree speaker from elsewhere' since for many non-trading lakeshore Métis in the 1860s and 1870s their lifestyle was by and large indistinguishable from that of the Saulteaux Indians. The problem is we do not know if all segments of the 'Métis' population approved of the 'Indian' displacement or if it was mainly instigated by the trading or Red River families. From the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point reserve all those perceived to be non-Métis were to be excluded.³

However, the argument that the Saint-Laurent area Métis wished to create an all-Metis reserve is not very convincing. They were letting a Scotsman, Alexander Begg, make a land claim on lot two of Oak Point. Another possible explanation for the apparent antipathy towards the local Saulteaux residents may have been pure jealousy. These 'Indians' were not necessarily the impoverished fringe dwellers in the lakeshore settlements. Gunn would encounter such an 'Indian' family from Oak Point during his 1867 egging expedition:

While here [Shoal lake] we were joined by an indian, his squaw and their son. These people had been to the settlement with their spring trade. They had two carts and were taking back in exchange for their furs, flour, clothing, and ammunition. This Indian resides in a house in Oak Point, and is reputed the best hunter in the district, which fact

³ Le Métis, 8 June 1871, page 2.

accounts satisfactorily for his comparative wealth.⁴

All that can be ascertained is that the number of people regarded as 'Indian' abruptly diminished in the decade that followed.

Wagner's opinion of the Saint-Laurent 'French Halfbreeds' is not much more favorable.⁵ As mentioned above, he surveyed the land in early May prior to the general arrival of the traders and northern hivernants.⁶ There were only twenty-five settlers residing at the mission whom Wagner describes as hunters or fishermen.⁷

⁴ Gunn, 427.

⁵ There may have been ulterior motives to Wagner's low opinion of the Métis: Monsieur l'arpenteur Wagner veut définitivement s'établir au lac, ou au moins y passer l'hiver avec toute sa famille (...) Si je me trompe l'idée serait de détacher d'éloigner les métis bien loin, et y attirer des étrangers. La place a l'air de lui plaire beaucoup.
AASB, T10993-T1110, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 1 October 1872.

Or again:

Faites donc venir des catholiques des autres pays, me disait-il [Wagner] il y a quelque temps et laissez ces métis gagner le large et s'en aller dans le nord.
AASB, T11517, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 12 January 1873.

⁶ Many possible reasons exist to explain the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point Metis traders and hivernants' usually late arrival (aside from break-up!). For example, they may have been waiting for an opportunity to trade with the Porcupine Hills 'indians':

Les sauvages de la Montagne [Porcupine Hills] viennent faire le sucre tous les printemps près de la rivière Cygne puis ils vont au fort de Mr McBeath jusqu'au départ des barges [of the lake Manitoba Métis].

AASB, T6462, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 7 April 1869.

⁷ I assume he is counting heads of family. Unfortunately no mention is made of women and children.

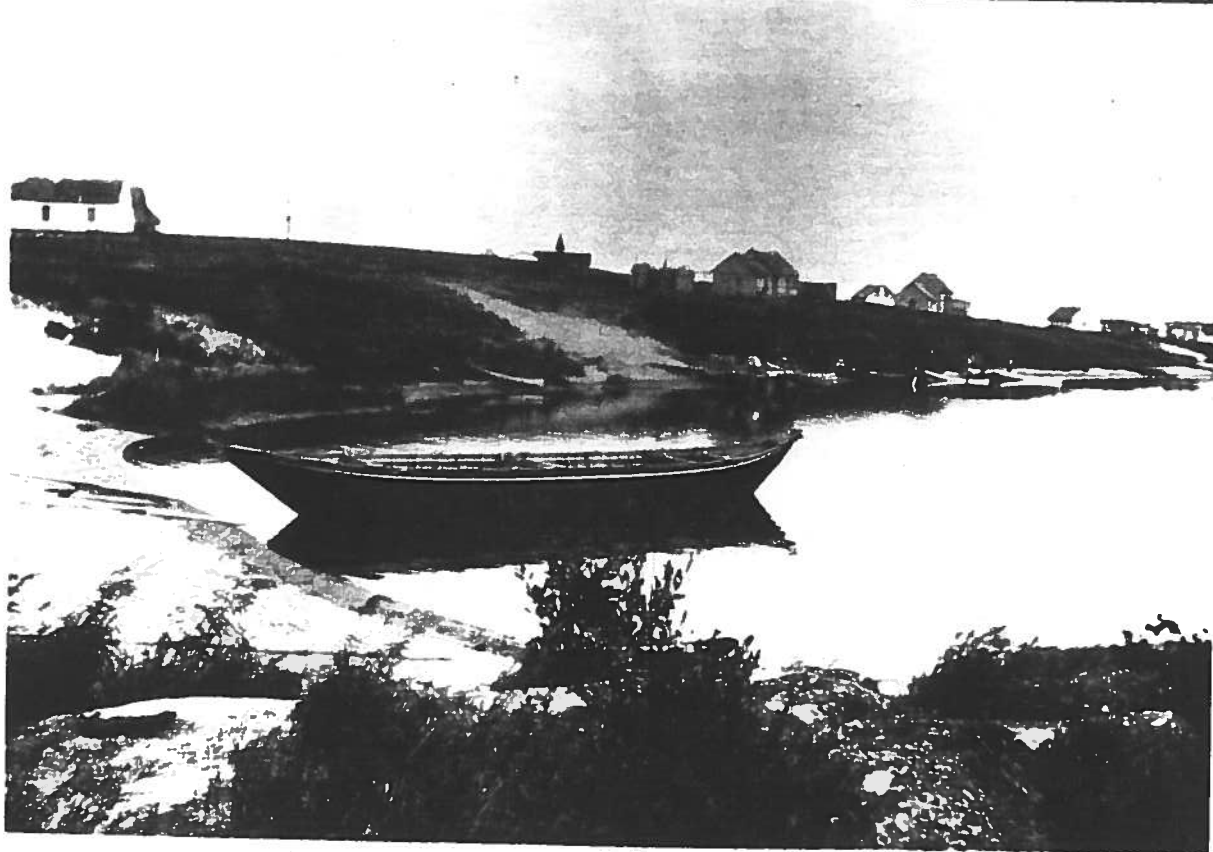
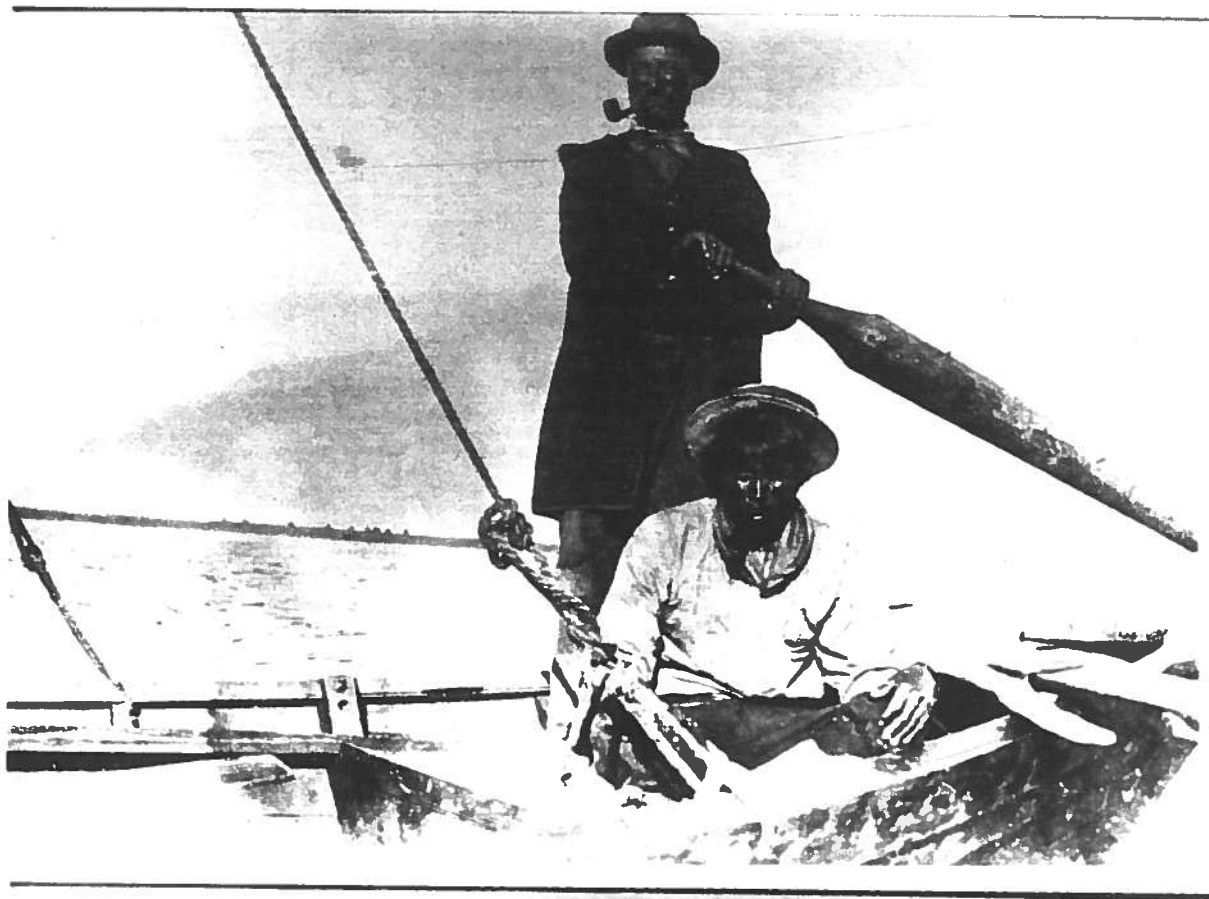
He noted only a few potato patches in the settlement and criticized the Métis settlers for not being agriculturally active,

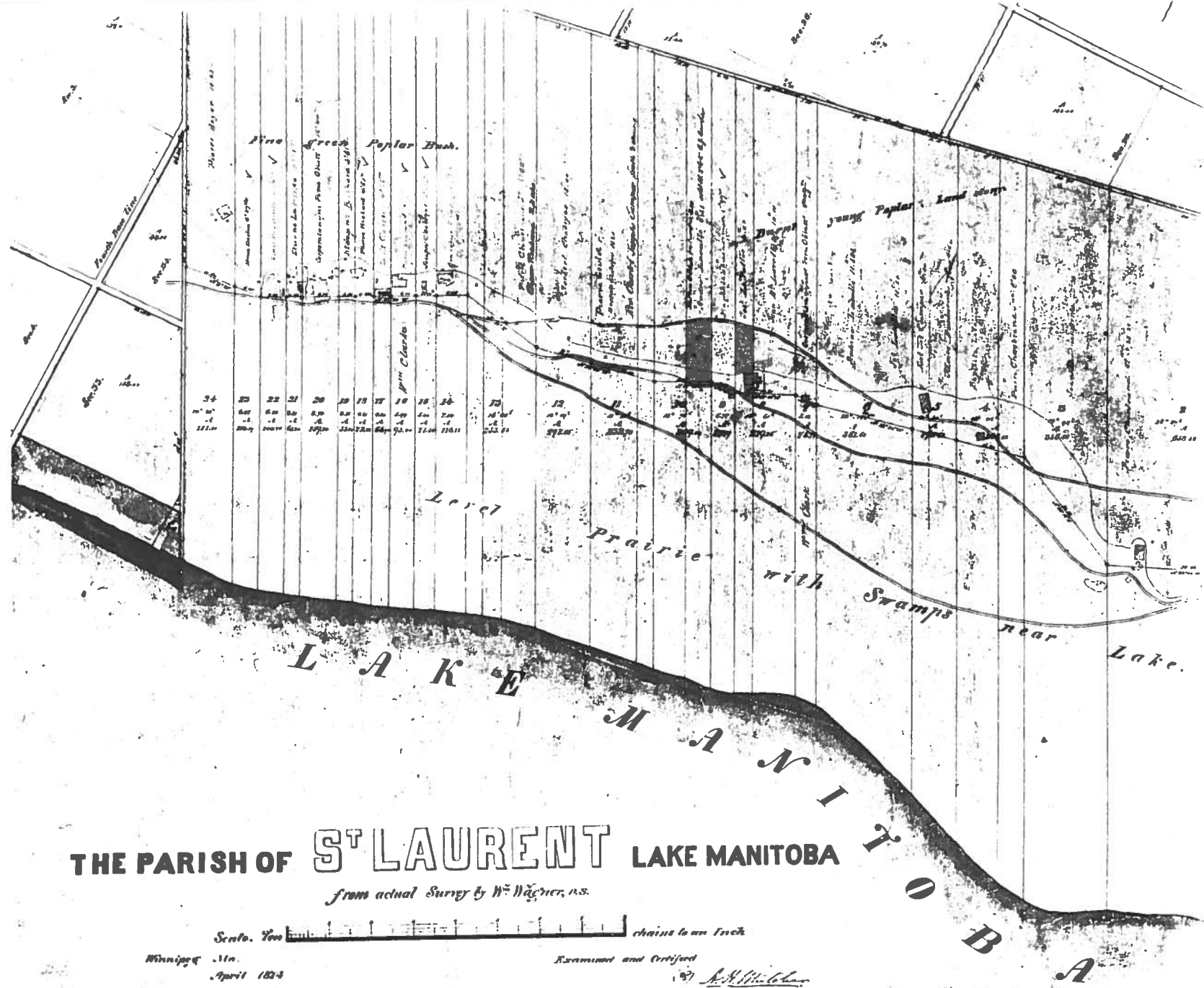
"With the exception of a few potato patches nothing showed to signs of agriculture although the ground is well adapted for the culture of all cereals... I allude to it only for the purpose of showing the Dept what use of land is made here, and yet every one of these people expecting to have four miles back from the Lake".⁸

⁸ PAM, RG17 C1 #258, Saint-Laurent, April 29 to May 6, 1872.



Provincial Archives of Manitoba





PLAN OF THE SETTLEMENT OF OAK POINT LAKE MANITOBA

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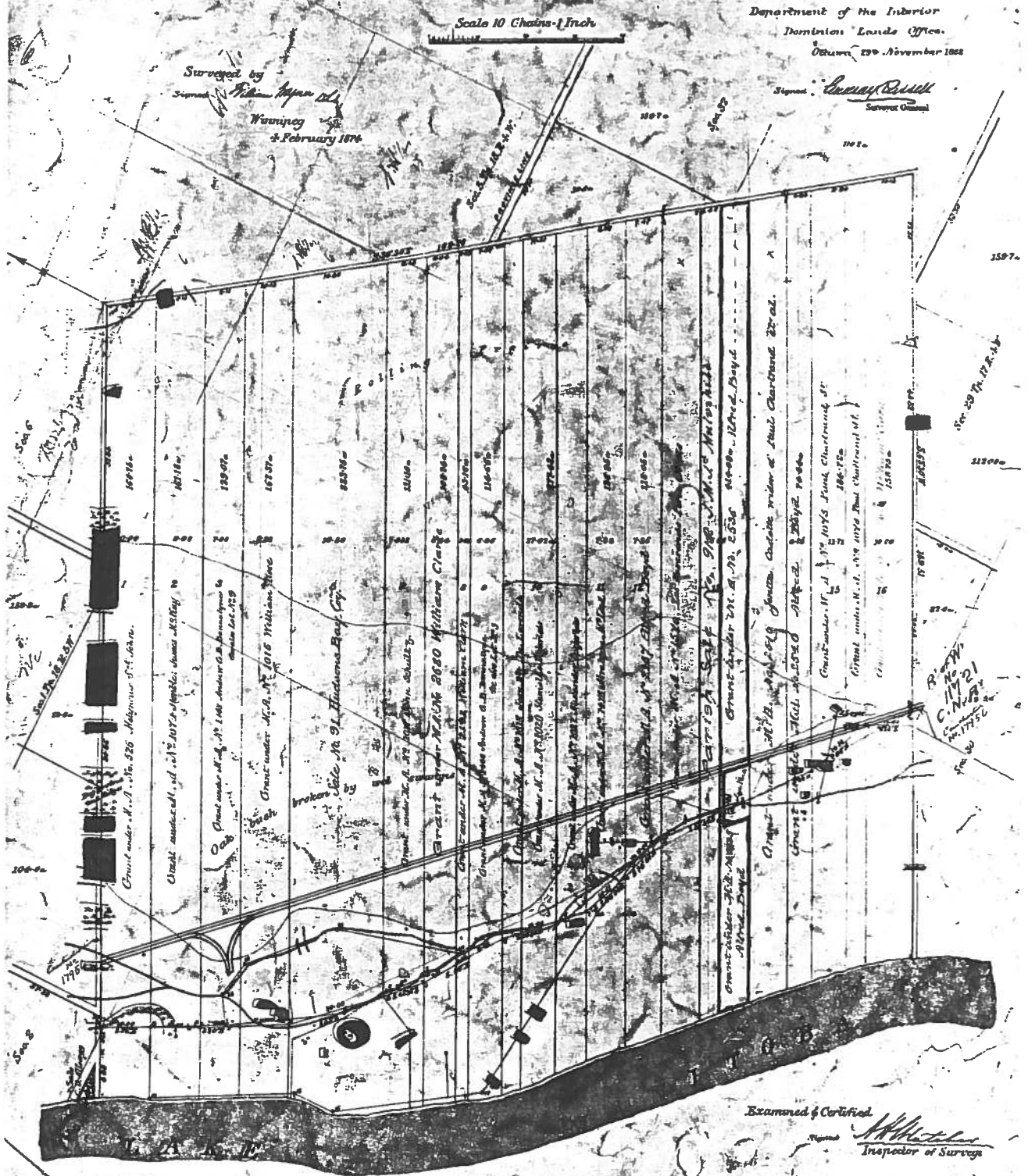
Scale 10 Chains = 1 Inch

Department of the Interior
Dominion Lands Office.

Ottawa 29th November 1888

Surveyed by
Signed *William H. H. H.*
Winnipeg
4 February 1874

Signed *Henry B. B.*
Surveyor General



Neither was Wagner very sympathetic to the trading and commodity-producing families who had to regularly displace themselves to the northern lakes. Even notables like Michel Chartrand were not treated with much sympathy. The surveyor noted that the claimant to lot 1, Michel Chartrand, only had an old house (no improvement) on his land and, being a trader at Dog Lake and Waterhen River, he only came down 'on visits' during the summer season. Obviously, from the tone of the report, Wagner did not feel an old house and yearly visits entitled Chartrand to a land grant.

According to the 1870 census⁹ there were 41 heads of family living in the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point area.¹⁰ The total population at the time of the survey counting women, children and adult dependents, was approximately 300 people. Twenty-four of these heads of family, having fourteen different surnames, were 'Lakeshore' or 'northern Métis'. They came from outside the Red River area.¹¹ These surnames include the four founding clans and ten other families that had been dwelling at least part of the year in Saint-Laurent since the early 1860s. The ten 'freemen' families may have been present prior to 1860, but lack of archival evidence makes their presence impossible to detect. Two of the freemen families, the

⁹ PAM, MG2 B3 M158, District of Assiniboia, Lake Manitoba.

¹⁰ These are male heads of family. Widows and their dependent seem to have usually been attached to a related male head of family. Single adult men were also not counted as heads of family.

¹¹ In this study the term Red River settlement includes the parish of Saint-Francois Xavier and the surrounding White Horse Plains.

Missiapits and the Aignases, were listed as being of 'Indian' descent in the census. Seventeen other Métis heads of family, having 10 different surnames, declared their place of birth to be the Red River Settlement or White Horse Plains. At least five of the southern families had been in the Saint-Laurent area since the 1868-69 famine years.

Initially the population of Lake Manitoba attempted to claim a large track of land collectively, to be set aside as a Métis Reserve, including river lots and land situated behind the lots. All the Métis parishes claimed tracts of land in 1870-71, publishing a statement of occupation and a description of the claim in the local paper Le Métis.¹² The first attempt to secure land in Saint-Laurent was made under the leadership of Louis Delaronde of the Saint-Boniface trading family. In the following year, 1872, the surveyor William Wagner came up to the lake to delineate the river lots and register land claims. After 1872, efforts to secure letters patent seem to have been made on an individual rather than a collective basis.

Wagner surveyed a total of forty river lots in the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point area. In Spring, 1872, he registered 26 claims made by resident Métis heads of household. It is interesting to note who was present that Spring to make land claims. Two of the area's founding families, the Pangmans and the Sayers, who were possibly the earliest families to settle there, were completely unrepresented. The Lavallées

¹² Le Métis, Vol. 1, no 2, 8 June 1871, "Saint-Laurent, Chronique de paroisse."

claimed only 3 river lots in the mission area. The Chartrand family, with some key members missing, made at most only four claims in the Saint-Laurent-Oak Point area. It should be noted that four related Chartrand families were living on a single river lot in Oak Point. They had erected houses and stables on the lot, and some of the members were obviously residing in Oak Point year round, but they did not seem to see the land in terms of its potential for farm use. Except for the Lavallées these early families appear not to have been at all eager to secure large tracts of land. They needed a pied-a-terre for their summer activities, and not much more. Pierre Chartrand, for example, ran a store on his lot (lot 2 in Saint-Laurent) and did not engage in any farming activities. Four Freeman Lake Manitoba families are listed as laying claims to river lots. The Ducharmes (originally from Pembina) claimed two lots, the Desjarlais one, the Richards (children of HBC interpreter and long-time resident of the lake, François Richard) claimed one. Finally, Abraham Mcleod of Duck River claimed one lot in Oak Point.

The remainder of the lots claimed were occupied by southern Métis families originating from Saint-François Xavier and the Red River Settlement. The largest family bloc of claims was made by the Chaboyers¹³ who claimed six river lots. The fact that they were present in early spring indicates that they were active in commercial fishing at the south end of the lake rather than trading up North. As a

¹³ Prior to 1870 the Chaboyers left their Saint Francois Xavier home every year to engage in trading and fishing at Fond du lac. However, they did not relocate permanently in Saint-Laurent till the 1867-68 famine.

former Saint-François Xavier family, the Chaboyers obviously had some appreciation of the potential value of land. Several other lots were claimed by families who had come up during the hard years of the previous decade such as the claimants of Saint-Laurent, lots 17 and 24, Louis Carriere, of the Red River Settlement, and Pierre Boyer, of White Horse Plains. The old Saint-Boniface family, the Delarondes,¹⁴ would claim a total of four lots. On one of them, Oak Point lot 19, Paul Delaronde was running a small store and saloon much to the scandal of the Catholic Church in Manitoba.¹⁵ By the 1874 re-survey they had only one lot in Oak Point (lot 10) but were still retaining their two lots at the more southerly Saint-Laurent agglomeration. One Métis notable from Red River, James McKay, would make a claim on river lot 2 in Oak Point and finally another (northern) Métis, William Rose, from Moose Factory, would claim lot 4.

Not all of the claims would be successful and more than one Métis family would lose courage and sell, or be swindled of their claims before the patent came through.¹⁶ But already in the initial claim process a pattern was emerging. Only twelve surnames (extended families) are found amongst the claimants. Five are from

¹⁴ In the archival records this family's name is capitalized in a variety of ways (Delaronde, DeLaronde, DelaRonde, de la Ronde, etc).

¹⁵ Le Métis, vol 2, no 30, 22 February 1873.

¹⁶ The claim process in St-Laurent-Oak Point was quite tortuous. The land was resurveyed in 1874 causing several disputes and in the course of the second land survey several lots previously declared occupied were listed as vacant and vice versa. This served to bury the process even further in a legal quagmire.

Red River - Saint-François Xavier settlements. These southerners would claim 13, a majority, of the lots. The seven old lake Manitoba families would claim only twelve lots, seven of which would be claimed by the old trading Chartrand and the Lavallée families. As noted above, one lot would be claimed by an outsider Métis of Moose Factory whose status in the community is unclear. Already, in the formative years of the province of Manitoba, the old 'northern' families, especially the freemen Métis, were at a comparative disadvantage.¹⁷

Twenty-one households listed in the 1870 census do not even figure in the initial 1872 land claim survey. The absence of some of these families could perhaps be explained by Saint-François Xavier families drifting back to their old abodes to the south after the famine years were over and the political turmoil had subsided. However, based on a comparison of the 1870 Lake Manitoba census with table 5 'recognition of riverlot occupants by the government of Canada' in Sprague and Frye, this does not appear to have been the case. Few of these southern Métis households would lay claim to land elsewhere in the province. Three northern Métis heads of families, Louis Ducharme (lot 7), Bte Lavallée (lot 8) and Bte Ducharme (lot 9) contested the initial land survey and made land claims in Saint-Laurent. Louis Ducharme and Baptiste Lavallée were successful. The remainder of both the early lakeshore Métis and the Red River and Saint-François Xavier Métis listed as

¹⁷ The 'Indian' families noted by Wagner appear not to have been permitted by the Métis to make a claim.

residing in the parish of Saint-Laurent in 1870 appear not to have made land claims anywhere in the province of Manitoba. Yet the parish records continue to mention many of these Métis who had not made land claims in the years immediately following 1870. Probably they simply built their homes or tented on relatives' property, crown land or vacant land held by speculators in the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point area.¹⁸ What is interesting is that by the 1880s family names of individuals who had been listed in the Saint-Laurent 1870 census were found on lists of people living in Duck Bay, Sandy Bay and Ebb and Flow areas. Some Métis, especially those men and women linked to the Freeman and trading families, were associating themselves more closely with the northern 'Indian' population.¹⁹

¹⁸ Several of the strictly hunting and gathering segment returned seasonally or even remained in the area year round after the transfer. In 1875 the Oblates note that during a retreat:

The Fathers did not at all expect such crowds of people at the retreat, especially as these poor people have to subsist from day to day by the chase [they came because] They like Father Lacombe because of his knowledge of the Cree language.

OMI, AD, L381 M271C, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, 1858-1895.

¹⁹ In 1945 there was an investigation of the condition of the 'halfbreed' population of Manitoba. In Duck Bay (and Camperville) the residents' names were listed in a census. Those from the Duck Bay-Camperville areas differed completely from those of the Pine Creek Indian Reserve and included many familiar names; Campbell, Chartrand, Delaronde, Lavallée, Pangman and Richard...all of which had been pre-1870 residents of Lake Manitoba. Other names: Flamand, Genaille, Guiboche, Klyne, Lafrenière are listed. Perhaps some of these are from the early hivernants families (Guiboche, for one) who divided their time between fishing, trapping on Lake Winnipegosis and bison hunting in the south-west and simply were never around at census time.

PAM, RG 17 B1 Box 90, Natural Resources D.M.'s Files (Preliminary Report for Pine Creek and Duck Bay) 1945.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the timing of the 1872 survey (early spring) was crucial. For several of the families who spent their summers in the Oak Point and Saint-Laurent area the hivernage period of the year was simply not over. In the months of April and May they would still be in their northern encampments surrounded by ice and snow. Furthermore, the vast majority of these families would not have met the occupancy criteria established in the early 1870s in a series of amendments made to the Manitoba Act. Métis had to show improvements; house, stables, gardens. Many Lake Manitoba families, even if they considered the south shore their 'home', would have spent their time there in a tent and their subsistence activities would have seriously constrained any attempt at farming. Even if they had spent their summers on a specific parcel of land for several years in a row they could not claim continuous occupancy and therefore proprietorship.

In fact, in the spring of 1872, there were more heads of household in Saint-Laurent per se than just the 18 who laid claim to parcels of land. Wagner counted 25 heads of families in Saint-Laurent between May 7-13 so at least seven non-hivernant families were simply not considered for a claim. Lack of interest on the part of some Métis to register a claim is one possible explanation but another might be that some of these people were the 'Freeman' Métis who had opted to winter in the south but who were nevertheless living a hunting and gathering life similar to that of the 'Indian' segment of the lake shore population. They were simply not in a position to lay claim to land in 1872 or again in 1874.

Another problem faced by the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point Métis in the Spring of 1872 was their late start in house building. Many of the families, even the more affluent, appear to have switched from a tent to a house only after 1870. The lack of tangible improvements affected both the freemen and the trading elites. William Wagner, the surveyor, notes in his survey book for Saint-Laurent:

You will find 4 more settlers inscribed on the place. Abraham McLeod, Louis Chartrand, Antoine Chartrand, Baptiste Chartrand, who have only very lately begun their building and therefore will not come under the Manitoba Act.²⁰

Nevertheless of the 18 lots claimed by Metis heads of Families in Saint-Laurent per se in 1872 fourteen were at least partially patented to the original claimant. This is a much higher success rate than one encounters in the more southerly parishes. The land claim process in Oak Point seems to have taken a different turn. Few if any Métis ever came to own land in Oak Point. None of the original claimants owned land there by 1900. Though the possibility exists of some families having 'passed' it would seem the Oak Point Métis (the land owning ones in any case) were completely displaced by immigrants.

Landowners or not, a majority of the families listed in the 1870 census had representatives in the Saint-Laurent area who, between 1870 and 1881, were slowly giving up their bison hunting and salt making activities and focusing their attention on commercial fishing coupled with dairy farming, trapping, wild produce harvesting,

²⁰ PAM, RG 17, C1#258 1872.

occasional winter freighting on the lakes and, after the turn of the century, farm labour. Dairy farming would become a viable alternative for some of the Saint-Laurent families who had been successful in securing letters patent and who had managed somehow to secure sufficient capital, expertise, and markets to bring the land into production. Whatever their subsistence activities the majority of pre-1870 families, whether Northern trading and Freeman families or those having come from the southern parishes, continued to reside in the Saint-Laurent area. Other families, listed as Métis in 1870, continued to come and settle in the area attracted by the fishing and good pasture land. The numbers of families in Saint-Laurent increased by 81 between 1870 and 1893.²¹

The various segments of the Saint-Laurent population listed as 'Métis' in 1870 did not all fare well in the decade following the creation of Manitoba. A primary source of information for the period (1870-1881), the Oblate Chronicles, exhibits a curiously contradictory way of thinking, criticizing some of the Métis families for their lack of responsibility toward land ownership while, in the next paragraph, acknowledging their severe, crippling poverty, which would greatly impede any attempt at improving their land and would make the selling of scrips or sections a frequent necessity. Commenting on the land speculators that were operating in the area, Brother Mulvihill states:

Few if any of the Half-Breeds availed themselves of this good occasion

²¹ OMI, AD, L381 M27C 1, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, page 57.

to procure and secure additional property, no, but they sold their 'script' to speculators and land grabbers for what ever they could get for it. This script was sold for 35 cents on the dollar...The Half-Breeds of this parish as well as other parishes not only sold their script but also the 240 acre lot which each obtained...not one of them owns a 240 acre lot just now in 1895 at least in this parish.²²

Despite chronic material difficulties a majority of the Saint-Laurent population were trying to adapt themselves to changing circumstances; some, however, much to the irritation of the Oblate fathers, seemed to be continuing their apparently nomadic lifestyle:

La population de Saint-Laurent est composée presque exclusivement de Métis qui habitent les bords du lac. Ils se sont bâti des maisons aux environs de la mission et cultivent chacun un petit morceau de terre. Anciens chasseurs de la forêt, ils gardent encore leurs vieilles habitudes et passent plusieurs semaines a poursuivre le gibier. Il y en a un certain nombre qui ne s'éloignent jamais de la mission et qui vivent du produit de leur jardin et de la pêche, que le voisinage du lac leur permet toujours d'exercer...Encore que la langue française soit généralement comprise par la population du lac, cependant les Pères prêchent assez souvent en sauteux.²³

After 1870 the Oblate missionaries displayed great energy attempting to homogenize,

²² OMI, AD, L381 M27C 1858-1895, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, page 30.

The scripts Father Mulvihill is alluding to were those given to Métis heads of family. The 240 acre lots refer to the allotments reserved for Métis who were minors in 1870. In the two parishes studied by this researcher (Sainte-Agathe and Saint-Laurent) no children ever actually came into possession of their 240 acres.

²³ Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, Rome, Maison Générale, 1878, This excerpt is from a letter written by Father Lacombe to the Father General on 24 December 1877.

sedentarize and agriculturize²⁴ the adult population²⁵ and transform their children into good Catholic francophones.²⁶ The prognosis for both endeavors was not encouraging. Priests continually complained about how the majority of Lake Manitoba Métis lacked interest for farming²⁷ and were 'fascinated' with fishing and wintering in the North; both tended to conflict with agricultural pursuits.²⁸

²⁴ They did not approve really of either the nomadic or trading elements in Saint-Laurent. What they dreamed of was a peasant population engaged in mixed farming with winter fishing as a sideline.

²⁵ Even when pursuing traditional commodity production endeavors life remained precarious on the south shore; "En ce moment le poisson est bien rare au lac. Plusieurs sont partis pour la Rivière du Chien ou ils pechent sous la glace". AASB, T8170-8173, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 24 November 1870.

²⁶ In the early years of the mission secular education was not a high priority for the missionaries partly because of a lack of manpower; 'Pour faire l'école à quelques enfants qui ne parlent ni ne comprennent le français pour la plupart; il faudrait sacrifier le soin des âmes'.

N.B. this passage is tantalizing as it indicates, once again, the lack of knowledge of french by the Lake Manitoba Métis-a group that has historically been labelled as 'french' Métis. Passages like these, and information extracted during Oral History interviews, point to the fact that (some form of) saulteaux or cree were the languages commonly used in the homes.

AASB, T9067-T9073, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 14 July 1871.

²⁷ AASB, T10349, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 14 May 1872.

²⁸ Pierre Chartrand part demain pour aller
faire la chasse du coté de la rivière Poule
d'Eau. Il y aurait dit-on du pelu dans ces
parages ... à la Rivière du Cygne, les gens
prennent bien du poisson blanc sous la glace. Quelques-uns des habitants
de Saint-Laurent
et de la Pointe des Chênes ont pris cette
direction. D'autres même sont allés faire la
pêche au Poste Manitoba.

AASB, T16419, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 12 September 1875.

What is not known, and may have made a difference, was if women were actively involved in farm work. They certainly were at a later date. In fact one key factor in

The missionaries' attempt to instill good 'Catholic' behavior in the local population was also not encountering much success. Basic religious practices, such as baptizing dying infants, were not actively²⁹ observed even in reasonably well-to-do families:

Quelque temps avant mon voyage a Saint-Boniface, a la Pointe des Chênes, ils avaient laissé mourir un enfant sans baptême, l'enfant de Baptiste Chartrand et de Marie Mezieprit.³⁰

Even the more educated families originating from the Red River Settlement, such as the Delarondes who had been held in high esteem by the clergy prior to 1870, began coming into conflict with the missionaries. The major point of contention appear to have been marital arrangements:

Dans ma dernière lettre, je vous disais un mot de la pauvre Sophie Morin, femme de William Linkster. D'après tout ce que j'ai pu voir et juger par moi-même, voici l'histoire. William cède sa femme à Paul Delaronde qui est parti avec elle dans la prairie ou pour quelque endroit dans le Nord. William, dit-on, s'en va prendre une autre à la Baie des Canards.³¹

The religious and secular educations of children were also not progressing as the missionaries had hoped. Saint-Laurent appears to have set up some sort of formal

whether or not a family succeeded as dairy farmers was the degree of participation in farm chores of the women. If the wife could keep the farm going while the husband kept cash coming in with his fishing and trapping their chances of achieving relative affluence and eventual 'passing' were greater.

²⁹ One case of infanticide is even discussed in the ecclesiastical correspondence.

³⁰ AASB, T11246-T11249, Saint-Laurent, Camper à Taché, 1 December 1872.

³¹ AASB, T14595-T14598, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 19 July, see also AASB, T15254-T15257, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 28 December 1874.

school, as opposed to the priest occasionally teaching a class early in 1871. At some point in 1871 as many as fifty children were attending classes. The school commissioners were from the old trading element of the community Louis de Laronde, Paul Chartrand and Joseph Lavallée. These traders appear to have sincerely wished to see their children educated. Despite the cooperative effort to mold the next generation, 'problems' that had always plagued the missionaries persisted:

La difficulté capitale contre laquelle viennent souvent se briser, ici comme dans quelques autres localités, tout zèle et bonne volonté des maîtres, consiste dans la langue. Le Cris et le Sauteux est parlé en famille, et l'enfant apprend en a l'école une langue quasi nouvelle qu'il oublie presque une fois entre chez lui. La langue en effet entre pour beaucoup dans les habitudes et le genre d'idées d'un peuple. Or le Cris et le Sauteux est essentiellement la langue de la vie nomade du bois et de la prairie.³²

The Church in general had an ambivalent attitude towards most of the Lake Manitoba residents. Though the clergy obviously did not approve of many of these Métis' 'nomadic' non-agrarian activities they counted on them for a steady supply of fish to comply with the numerous meatless days found in the Catholic calendar. For example in 1873 the Saint-laurent fishermen supplied the convent and the archbishop's

³² Le Métis, Vol 1 no 2, 8 juin 1871, "Rapport du Surintendant de l'instruction publique pour les Ecoles Catholiques de la Province du Manitoba (Saint-Laurent).

Whether this refusal to learn a new or 'foreign' language might be a form of passive resistance learned by children from their 'Freemen' parents is unclear.

house with over 2,000 whitefish.³³

The growing presence, increased activity and pervasive ideological bias of a Catholic clergy, along with the emergence of an increasingly capitalistic economy, would further divide and diversify the population of the Saint-Laurent area. In the crucial years between 1870 and 1881 some families once labelled Métis would begin the lengthy process of merging either into the 'white' dominant society or into the northern 'Indian' treaty population. Such divergent identities would largely be a result of current political and economic constraints but would also be informed by past lifestyles and, perhaps, personal preferences. Chapter five will discuss the emergence of clear-cut class divisions that caused, or reinforced, changing ethnic identities.

³³ AASB, FD1387-FD1390, Camper à Forget-Despatis, Saint-Laurent, 11 December 1873.

Chapter 5 - The Crucial First Decade

After 1870 divisions existing within the Lake Manitoba population continued to grow and new splits appeared. The differing habits of the residents were increasingly interpreted within a racist paradigm. The Oblates, like the above mentioned priest of Abbeville, 'whitened' those of their charges who were turning to more sedentary, approved, pursuits. A typical example are Abraham and Cécile (Larivière) McLeod. Though Abraham McLeod was a northern Métis born at Duck River, he and his Athabaskan Métis wife seem to have made a concerted effort to conform themselves to the priests' wishes. They had laid claim to a river lot in Oak Point and seem to have lived there for the greater part of the year. The Oblates mention them several times in their correspondence in glowing terms for their: "bonne conduite et bons offices".¹ At the death of Cécile Larivière, Brother Mulvihill gave her his highest accolade: "It may be added that Mrs. McLeod had been both tall and strong and good looking and resembled a French Canadian rather than a half-breed. She spoke french, english, cree and sauteux".²

But were the Métis who continued in their seasonal migratory moves unwilling or unable to adapt themselves? The correspondence of Fathers Camper, Lestanc and McCarthy would seem to suggest a third alternative. Traders and their families were

¹ AASB, (T10993), Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 1 October 1872.

² OMI, AD, L381 M27C 1858-1895, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, page 57. Cécile Larivière seems to have been the daughter of a French Canadian born in Red River Settlement who apparently had three wives.

still going up to Duck Bay to winter but more and more Métis not involved in dairy farming were heading au large to engage in large scale commercial fishing activities. It was the emergence of new economic opportunities and not simply a reluctance to change that was anchoring many Métis in their 'nomadism'.³ Fishing on whatever scale, was an activity practiced by all Lake Manitoba residents whether traders, aspiring farmers or hunter-gatherers. In the 1870s several of the northern Métis residents, especially those with no claim to a river lot, seem to have been willing to go quite far afield in search of a catch on a network of lakes with which they were familiar.

Based on comments made in the Oblate correspondence there seems to have been a fairly set pattern to the post 1870 seasonal peregrinations made by the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point inhabitants. According to Father Camper, all able bodied men left the settlement in August for Manitoba House (Poste Manitoba) on the northern part of the lake. It is unclear if they were fishing, trapping, or trading. They would return to spend the better part of September in Saint-Laurent and Oak Point. In October, 'many' would depart again, some to winter in Duck Bay, others to engage in autumn fishing "un peu au-deça du poste Manitoba".⁴ As the excerpt below indicates,

³ 'Nomadism' is not the best of terms to describe their cycle of displacements since it suggests in common parlance aimless displacements and wanderings. These Métis were following a fairly set seasonal circuit (Saint-Laurent to Duck Bay and return for the most part) within a clearly defined geographical area. These people simply had winter and summer residences.

⁴ AASB, T10826, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent,

25 August 1872.

the pre-1870 practice of the free traders leaving their Métis wives behind and wintering in the North with an 'Indian' wife persisted. The fact that the people involved are from the extended French-speaking Delaronde family, highly regarded by the Oblates in the 1850-1860s, points to the usefulness of two wives for Métis involved in the native trade:

La mort de Julie Morin [Morelle] femme de Louison Delaronde. Elle laisse après elle bien de pauvres petits enfants, et entre autre deux petites besonnes qu'elle a nourrie pendant un an ... Louison n'est pas encore revenu de son hivernement. Il ne connaît pas encore le coup terrible qui vient de le frapper. Pauvre Louison! Il a besoin que le bon Dieu lui fasse pitié à lui aussi. Puisse cette épreuve lui toucher le coeur et le ramener à son devoir.⁵

This practice of dual marital arrangements was also taken up by fishermen spending several month in fishing camps on Lake Winnipegosis in the 1870s.

The October leave-taking by the Lake Winnipegosis and Duck Bay hivernants seems to have been quite a tumultuous affair for Saint-Laurent and Oak Point. It was a time of wedding and rejoicing, much to the chagrin of the ecclesiastical authorities:

Hier, Isaie Pritchard, fils du défunt François Pritchard⁶, a pris pour épouse Julie Boucher fille du vieux Paul Boucher dit Lamalice. A cette occasion et comme préparatif de départ pour l'hivernement, quelques'uns ont voulu faire des libations en l'honneur de Bachus ... j'ai eu le triste avantage de voir de mes propres yeux non pas des sans culottes, mais des sans-chemises.⁷

⁵ AASB, T15978-T15981, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 31 May 1875.

⁶ Prichard also appears as 'Ressard' and 'Richard'. François Richard was a French Canadian H.B.C. interpreter married to a Saulteaux women named Marguerite.

⁷ AASB, T10993, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 1 October 1872.

In November another Saint-Laurent and Oak Point contingent of Métis would leave once again to fish and trap in the Cygne River⁸ and farther up the lake.⁹ The autumn fishing catch could be quite substantial since in November 1873 the Saint-Laurent fishermen were supplying the Archdiocese and convents with 2,000 white fish. The following year they supplied 1,800 fish to the religious authorities at the price of 3 (big) fish for one shilling.¹⁰ Not all autumn and winter fishing would be so successful. If the fishermen were unable to catch enough to sell they would have difficulty buying food (especially flour) for themselves and their families. Of course the poor catch would most affect those who kept no animals and did no gardening. These Freeman Métis were subsistence fishermen.

As the following excerpts indicate, a majority of families on the south shores of Lake Manitoba in the 1870s still fell into the Freeman category. They did not engage in any form of gardening and husbandry. Métis who did some gardening and raised a few cattle were in a different position because rather than buying all of their supplies from merchants they could subsist at least partially on surpluses they might produce. Also, they had an alternate source of income if fish yields or prices were poor. However, in the 1870s, farming was still an occupation that brought uncertain

⁸ It is difficult to believe 'Rivière du Cygne' refers to the actual Swan River situated 80 km west of Duck Bay overland. They are more likely referring to what was once called Swan Creek which flows into Lake Manitoba 30 km north of Saint-Laurent.

⁹ AASB, T11117-T11122, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 6 November 1872.

¹⁰ AASB, T15145, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 3 December 1873.

returns. Farmers periodically lost crops through frost, locusts or drought and would be forced, along with the full time fishermen, to take up a hunting and gathering existence:

Je ne pense pas qu'aucun habitant du lac fasse aucune demande au Comité de Secours. C'est sans doute le meilleur parti. Ils peuvent facilement sans passer. Habitué maintenant à la farine, ils trouvent dur de ne pas en avoir. Mais les petits brochets et les lièvres, sans donner grande force laissent vivre et empêchent de mourir.¹¹

Over the winter several Saint-Laurent and Oak Point heads of families would be actively ice fishing, some going as far north as Dog river:

Pierre Chartrand part demain pour aller faire la chasse du côté de la Rivière Poule d'Eau. Il y aurait dit-on bien du pelu dans les parages. Plus loin que la Pointe de Chênes à la Rivière du Cygne, les gens prennent bien du poisson blanc sous la glace. Quelques uns des habitants de Saint-Laurent ont pris cette direction. D'autres sont allés faire la pêche au Poste Manitoba. Aussi aujourd'hui il y avait peu d'hommes à la messe.¹²

Spring would be a time for duck and muskrat hunting in the marshes that surrounded the mission. Again some would venture a bit further to Delta Marsh and the Shoal Lakes ('Lac Plat').¹³ The more settled families would plant small gardens

¹¹ AASB, T16944, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 23 January 1876.

¹² AASB, T16422, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 12 September 1875. This passage is interesting since it indicates that outside of the Duck Bay hivernants and traders the Saint-Laurent men were leaving their families behind at the mission--labor power for day to day care of any livestock they might have.

¹³ AASB, T21750-T21753, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 28 April 1879.

and potato patches. Grasshoppers and frost were frequent calamities.¹⁴ Several of the summer months were spent haying by the families who had livestock. As previously noted, Saint-Laurent was known for its natural hay lands.

These were the general economic activities in and around the shores of Lake Manitoba during the 1870s. But not all the Métis families were leading similar lifestyles. Four major groups were coalescing around social-economic distinctions first noted in the 1850s and 1860.¹⁵ The first group, much approved by the clergy, was composed of Métis families who seemed determined to hang on to their land claims and to occupy their river lots on a year round basis.¹⁶ The Chaboyers, the Ducharmes, the Boyers, some members of the Lavallée and Chartrand clans and the Macleods of Oak Point, though continuing their trading and fishing activities around the lake, were spending more time in the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point area.

The second group was composed of the free traders. The Pangmans and Sayers no longer appear to have been involved in the Lake Manitoba trade network, at least they were no longer based in the south end of the lake, but members of the

¹⁴ AASB, T16419-T16422, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 26 September 1875.

¹⁵ Some of these distinctions predate the 1850s such as those existing between the trading and hunting-gathering elements of the population.

¹⁶ This does not mean the head of the family would not go off for periods of time to hunt or fish but the family stayed home.

Delaronde,¹⁷ some members of the Chartrand and the Lavallée and perhaps the Monkman families were and would continue trading in the 1880s. For example, in January of 1885 William Chartrand, 'merchant', accompanied by his wife Sophie Genaille, would serve as witness to a baptismal ceremony in Duck Bay.¹⁸ His cousin, Michel Chartrand, was a clerk for the Hudson Bay Company in the same area.¹⁹ Another Michel Chartrand was trading in the Waterhen area for George Fisher.²⁰ These traders would continue their annual excursions north, sometimes taking with them their 'Métis' families²¹ or sometimes leaving them behind to rendez-vous with their 'Indian' families.²²

¹⁷ It is not clear to what degree the Delaronde were still involved in the fur trade by the 1870s. Father Camper when giving accounts of his trips to Lake Winnipegosis does not mention them except once, in 1876, to comment that St-Math Paul, Joseph Nepinak and their respective families were camping in the old wintering place of Paul and Etienne Laronde at Salt Point (lake Winnipegosis). AASB, T17239-T17252, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 1 April 1876.

¹⁸ Parish of Saint-Laurent, 'Registre destiné à l'enregistrement des Actes de Baptêmes, Mariages et Sépultures de la Paroisse de Saint-Laurent dans le conté de Marquette Est', 1885

¹⁹ This is the first of only two indications that some members of this family ever worked for the HBC.

²⁰ AASB, T17239-T17252, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 1 April 1876.

²¹ As previously mentioned sometimes both the 'Indian' and the 'Métis' wives (and their respective children) were together in the winter encampments. How the women and children really felt about this arrangement is unknown. The priests were certainly scandalized.

²² The priests' attitude was hardening towards this situation in the 1870s. From being 'son autre femme' or 'sa seconde femme' these northern women were now designated as 'sa concubine' and when offspring were baptized they were listed as illegitimate, given their mother's last name and, increasingly, the father's name was not even listed in the parish registry. The lists of witnesses and god-parents can

The third group were the hunting and gathering nomadic Métis many of whom went up in the traders' barges every autumn (whole families) to winter on Lake Winnipegosis. They were Métis who pursued what could be called a more 'traditional' or 'Indian' lifestyle. But even these Freeman were fragmented into different groups. In the 1870s several families were choosing not to winter on the lakeshore but rather in the Riding Mountain area on the banks of the White Mud River just as they had occasionally done in the past before the difficult 1860s. Bison and other large animals would be in plentiful supply till about 1874 when, according to Father Lestanc O.M.I., after two years of frenetic killing and "gaspillage insensé d'animaux et de viande",²³ hunger struck.²⁴

It is clear some of these Riding Mountain hivernants families were from the Lake Manitoba-Winnipegosis area²⁵ but others were Freeman from the Dakotas and farther west such as the families of Antoine Gladu, James Whiteford, André Salomon,

sometimes give a clue to whose family these children were related to but the tracing of the northern families becomes increasingly difficult, especially since the priests increasingly refer to second wives as 'that/those' women rarely mentioning a first name and practically never a second (family) name.

²³ The Métis were no longer killing solely for meat and marrow; a lucrative market for bison robes was developing. The thick leather was used to make straps for industrial machinery. In their own way both the Métis and the bison contributed to the Industrial Revolution on the North American continent.

²⁴ AASB, T11168-T11171, Lestanc à Taché, Rivière Blanche, 25 February 1873.

²⁵ AASB, T11382-T11389, Camper à Taché, 26 December 1872.

Gabriel Azur.²⁶ Some would come to settle 'permanently' in the mid 1870s in the Saint-Laurent area at the invitation of Father Camper.²⁷ One such extended family was the Desjarlais. They had, for several years, made occasional visits to the mission area prior to 1870 but their focus of activity had very much been the Prairies (bison hunting) prior to 1870. Only one Desjarlais, Stanislav married to Julie Chartrand, would make a claim to an Oak Point river lot in 1872. Though several Desjarlais would eventually settle permanently in the Lake Winnipegosis area, a branch would move to Saint-Laurent and pursue a hunting and gathering life. Antoine Desjarlais arrived in La Mission sometime in the 1870s, married Marie the daughter of Joseph and Josephte (Cadotte) Chartrand, and he and his son Joseph lived out their lives as hunters and guides well into the 20th century.²⁸

A fourth group that emerged after 1870 was composed of Métis families choosing to reside permanently in Duck Bay and the surrounding Indian treaty lands and identifying more and more with the surrounding Saulteaux population. There are tenuous indications that some of these families had initially resided on Lake Winnipegosis before coming to Saint-Laurent²⁹ but for the majority of the hunting and trading families the Duck Bay area was home for only part of the year (winter). After

²⁶ AASB, T11168-T11171, Lestanc à Taché, Rivière Blanche, 13 November 1872.

²⁷ AASB, T12250-T12259, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 29 June 1873.

²⁸ For a fascinating glimpse at this segment of the population listen to PAM, Métis Oral History Project (hereafter MOHP) 1984, C342, C343, C344.

²⁹ Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface, (hereafter LCSB), vol 5, 1906, page 194.

1870, Missionary correspondence mentions Métis families who spent all their time in the north.³⁰ In the 1870s, Father Simonet was speaking with dismay of French Métis on the southern shores of Lake Winnipegosis who were becoming 'Indianized':

La seule chose qui fait peine, c'est de constater que les petits enfants des vieux Canadiens dont les parents portent encore des noms français comme le chef Mousseau [Morrisseau] les conseillers Levasseurs et Antoine Beaulieu a Sandy Bay, les Genaille, Richard Ledoux de la Rivière aux Epinettes, ne parlent pas français. Et pourtant les parents ne parlent quère que le sauvage et ne comprennent que très peu d'anglais.³¹

While the local population was being sorted out, the religious authority structure in the area was organizing and affirming itself. In 1873 a full sized church replaced the small chapel built in 1857. At least four Oblate fathers and brothers were residing in the monastery parsonage looking after the 'welfare' of the Lake Manitoba residents. In 1875 a sturdier school building was erected near the church and the

³⁰ The general life styles, habits and world view of these people make one think of the descriptions given by Slabodin of the Mackenzie District Métis rather than the typical Red River Metis. Please consult: Richard Slobodin, Métis of the Mackenzie District, (Ottawa: Resource Centre for Anthropological Research, St. Paul University, 1966).

³¹ LCSB, vol 5, 1906, page 194. This trend probably started in the late 1860s, please refer to; AASB, T5499-T5502, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 23 April 1868.

Of course a majority of the families in Saint-Laurent were more comfortable speaking Saulteaux or Cree as oppose to French in the 1870s but, as previously argued, they still maintained a distinction between themselves and those they considered to be 'Indian'. Assimilation appears to have occurred in the North except in places like Duck Bay where the Métis migration, post-1870, was significant and where the hivernants resided yearly in quite large numbers up till the 1890s. Even today residents of Duck Bay and Camperville consider themselves to be 'distinct' from the reserve dwellers.

priests began a long term campaign aimed at convincing parents to send their children to school - a school directly controlled by church authorities. By 1881 these same authorities were firmly in control of both the spiritual and the temporal matters of the area as one of their own, brother Mulvihill, was appointed as the first administrator of the newly created municipality of Saint-Laurent.³² The visibility and power of the Oblates in the area is truly startling to late 20th century researchers. In 1887 Mgr Taché would proudly describe the temporal aspects of the mission of Saint-Laurent as follows:

Ils [Oblates] possèdent 3,500 acres (ou 1,400 arpents) de terres estimés modestement par eux à 22,000 francs. Les constructions diverses ont au moins la valeur qu'ils leur attribuent, c'est à dire 34,000 francs, et leur magnifique troupeau de bétail de choix ferait honneur aux écuries d'un prince, quoi qu'il ne soit évalué par les propriétaires que de 6,000 à 7,000 francs.³³

By 1881, the year of the second federal census, the inhabitants of the southern shores of Lake Manitoba were becoming further integrated into the provincial, national and international economies. Outside observers to the area in the 1880s stated that the residents of Oak Point and Saint-Laurent still lived mostly by fishing and hunting.³⁴ In a sense this is true. The northern salt works had been closed and

³² This municipality included the settlements of Saint-Laurent and Oak Point and all the land to the east that had been given out in halfbreed scrip (townships 16-17). Its boundaries were increased between 1881 and 1891. Outside the two settlements the municipality was almost completely unoccupied, as most of the scrip belonged to speculators.

³³ Missions des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1887, pages 150-151.

³⁴ North-West Free Press, 23 November 1881, page 3.

the fur trade was declining in importance thus limiting the opportunities and options open to the trading element, but data collected by the Department of Agriculture indicates that, despite what outsiders thought, the inhabitants of Saint-Laurent and Oak Point were embarking on a slow transition to cattle raising and mixed farming. In 1881 there were still only 34 acres under cultivation in all the municipality but enumerators counted 146 cattle (including oxen), 30 pigs, 49 horses and one sheep.³⁵ In the next two years the numbers would grow to 50 acres cultivated, 150 cattle, 22 pigs, 63 horses, but no sheep.³⁶

It was hoped by the author that the 1881 census would indicate in what major endeavor each family occupied itself in the early 1880s. However, the vast majority of heads of families listed for Saint-Laurent were simply labelled 'hunters'; few traders and farmers were enumerated. Equally startling, a majority of the Métis listed as living in the Lake Winnipegosis - Duck Bay area declared themselves to be farmers. Fishing is simply not mentioned. However, this apparently contradictory evidence does not

³⁵ Numbers of farming animals would fluctuate wildly from year to year and from season to season depending on the amount and quality of hay available, the success of winter fishing (no need to slaughter extra animals for food), the prices given for fur, seneca root, etc.

³⁶ Manitoba, Department of Agriculture, Report of the Department of Agriculture and Statistics for the Province of Manitoba, 1880, page 88; 1882, page 62. Saint-Laurent Municipality, Tax Assessment Roll 1883, quoted in Richtik, page 50. Unfortunately most pre-WWII documents have disappeared from the municipal offices of Saint-Laurent in the interval between 1964 and 1989. Presumably, they were burned by municipal employees (they admit to having done so with other documents). Efforts at locating the Tax Rolls through conversations with Dr Richtik, Municipal Affairs (Wnp) and research at the PAM proved fruitless.

necessarily refute claims of growing economic diversification within the Saint-Laurent Oak Point population. The key variable was the season at which time the censuses were taken in Saint-Laurent and on Lake Winnipegosis. The Saint-Laurent census was taken in May-June 1881, a time of year when several heads of household would engage in duck hunting in nearby marshes independent of their other activities. The southern half of Lake Winnipegosis was canvased between July and October of 1881 when many of the year-round residents would be engaged in haying for the livestock (mostly horses). It would seem that most respondents simply listed as occupation the current activity which they were actively engaged at the time of the census. For example, Joseph Chaboyer and his wife, Nancy Bonneau, were registered twice; once in Saint-Laurent, where he is listed as being a hunter, and again, later, in the Duck Bay area where he is designated as being a farmer.

The people who spent significant time on the shores of Lake Winnipegosis would be, as noted above, busy in late summer cutting wild hay for their animals, and perhaps tending small gardens and potato patches. Such activities may have sufficed for the census-taker to list them as 'farmers'. So far from any substantial markets it is unlikely any of these people would be involved in commercial agriculture. Farming was already a difficult endeavor for people located in Saint-Laurent, 150 km to the south.

It should be noted that the census-takers probably missed several Saint-Laurent families who were still in their winter quarters on Lake Winnipegosis in May and June

of 1881.³⁷ Travelling was extremely difficult and dangerous in the Spring because of ice break up on the lakes. These hivernants would again be missed by the census takers who arrived in Duck Bay in July because, by that time, the hivernants Métis would have travelled by barge to their summer headquarters in Saint-Laurent.³⁸

Still, not quite all the Saint-Laurent residents listed in the census declared themselves to be 'hunters' in the spring of 1881, and the exceptions are interesting. From the Chartrand clan only one member declared himself a farmer: Pierre Chartrand, claimant to lot 2 in Saint-Laurent, and the sole owner of a store in La mission in 1872.³⁹ Michel Chartrand jr. (son of Michel and Marguerite [Pangman] Chartrand) listed trading as his occupation. In the late 1870s he had been managing a Hudson's Bay Company store in the parish of Saint-Laurent.⁴⁰ All the other Chartrand men (seven in total) declared hunting to be their occupation. Even important men such as the freighter-trader Baptiste Chartrand, husband of the 'Indian' Mary Messiapet, stated his occupation as hunting.⁴¹ The five Lavallée men interviewed by

³⁷ PAM, 1881 Census, C13283-186-L (Marquette, Woodlands, Municipality of Saint-Laurent).

³⁸ PAM, 1881 Census, C13284-186-5 (extensions) D (Northeast-Lake Winnipegosis).
The last day for the lake Winnipegosis was October 3 1881. This is still quite early for the hivernants to make their way to Duck Bay.

³⁹ PAM, RG17, C1#258, May 7-13, 1872 (Wagner's field notebook for Saint-Laurent).

⁴⁰ Mercier, 42.

⁴¹ His first official wife, Geneviève Robert, was no longer mentioned by this time.

the census takers all declared themselves to be hunters. The emphasis on hunting is quite startling since the Lavallées were one of the Lake Manitoba trading families that took an early interest in farming and, during the famine year of 1868, had collectively planted 31 bushels of potatoes. Even Baptiste Lavallée jr., who alone planted 21 bushels of potatoes (1 1/3 acres sown)⁴² in 1868 was listed a hunter in the census of 1881. Pierre Pangman, the grand-son of a prominent N.W.C. bourgeois, and son of a notable Métis Freeman-trader was simply listed as a 'hunter' in the census of 1881. Yet he was one of the earliest inhabitants in the area and, in the 1850s, the Pangmans along with the Sayers were the only two families who had built wood houses in the area. Pierre Pangman's son Michel was listed as a laborer. The Ducharmes, a Freeman family originating from the Dakotas, initially made two land claims in 1872 and had five heads of household living in the Saint-Laurent Oak Point area in 1881. Moise Ducharme, who in 1872, was co-listed as an occupant (lot 5) by surveyor William Wagner, was described as a carpenter. His brother Jean Baptiste Ducharme who, according to the HBC register, lived on lot 9 was described as a farmer. Louis Ducharme, claimant to lot 7 (which eventually was sold to the Oblate Fathers) was described as a cartmaker. The last two Ducharmes, Jacques and Jean, are listed as hunters. It is interesting, for the Ducharme family at least, that heads of families listed as 'hunters' are their two youngest adult male heads of households.⁴³ The Richard

⁴² The figure of 1 1/3 acres was provided by University of Manitoba's Department of Agriculture 'hotline'.

⁴³ Guy Lavallée, in his ethnography on Saint-Laurent comments that it was common for newlyweds to live with either the groom or brides's parents till one or

Freemen family also had five heads of households residing in Saint-Laurent in 1881. Pierre Richard was listed as a carpenter along with three others of his relatives. Perhaps they had been involved in a building project at the time of the census. The fifth, listed as a hunter, was Pierre Richard, the son of Margaret [Saulteaux] and Francois Richard, who were the original claimants to lot 19 of Saint-Laurent. In fact, it was the now widowed Marguaret Richard who was listed as the head of the household (no profession listed). All seven Desjarlais male heads of family listed in the 1881 census were described as hunters.

The work description of the families having come up from the southern Métis parishes emphasized hunting to a lesser degree. Of the five Chaboyer heads of family listed in 1881 two claimed to be farmers.⁴⁴ A third Pierre Chaboyer declared himself to be a trader. The last two, Norbert and Joseph, claimants to lots 12 and 15 (Saint-Laurent) were listed as hunters. The Chaboyer were a Saint-Francois Xavier family that made periodic trading trips to the shores of Lake Manitoba in the early 1860s prior to the definitive move by several of its members in 1867-68. The trader Pierre

two children had been born. This would have allowed for a certain amount of work specialization within the household economy. However it is difficult to determine if this residency pattern is only a 20th century phenomenon or if it was the custom among 19th century Lake Manitoba Métis.

Guy Lavallée, "The Métis People of St. Laurent. Manitoba; an Introductory Ethnography," (M.A. Diss., Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia), 63-64.

⁴⁴ As stated previously, the Chaboyers claimed the greatest number of riverlots in 1872 (6).

Chaboyer, and his wife Philomene de Montigny, had a child baptized in Saint-Laurent in the Spring of 1864, a time of the year when the hunting and gathering elements would have been camping at the mission. The same year, Joseph Chaboyer and Nancy Bonneau also had their child baptized at the Saint Laurent mission (time of year uncertain). According to an affidavit in the Saint-Laurent river lot files, though living most of the year in Saint-Francois-Xavier, Joseph and Nancy Chaboyer had been coming seasonally to a specific location (lot 15) in the Saint-Laurent mission.⁴⁵ For a man listed as non-indigent in 1868, having a house, barn and at least 1/3 acre in crop in 1870, whose lot was patented in his name in 1876, to be listed as a hunter in 1881 gives weight to the argument that many Lake shore residents stated their occupation as the activity in which they were engaged on the day the census was taken, and not necessarily what one would consider as their major subsistence activity.

A new family from the southern parish of Saint-Francois Xavier to appear on the census of 1881 was that of the blacksmith, Pierre Boyer. They successfully claimed lot 24 in Saint-Laurent. Though missed in the 1870 census they probably came up during the 1868 famine.⁴⁶

In 1881 there were only two representatives of the Delaronde trading family left

⁴⁵ P.A.M., RG17 D2, river lot files (lot 15), Parish of Saint-Laurent

⁴⁶ Pierre Boyer's grand-son stated in an interview taped in 1987, that his family came up during "la grande misère".
MLC, 1987, tape 9, sides 1 and 2.

in Saint-Laurent. The first Delaronde head of family is described as a farmer, and the other as a livestock raiser. The Goulet family had two representatives at the mission, one who declared himself to be a farmer and one a hunter. The Nabase (dit Lecris) family, originally from Red River, had only one representative in Saint-Laurent and Oak Point in 1881, James, described as a hunter. Finally, the aging Louis Carriere, husband of Julie Marchand, the successful claimant of lot 17 in Saint-Laurent, was listed as a blacksmith in 1881.

A 'new' family of unknown origin to appear on the 1881 census are the Guiboche. They eventually became quite numerous in the Saint-Laurent Oak Point area. In 1881 Edouard Guiboche, husband of a woman named Larose (Rosella?), is listed as a hunter. Edouard Guiboche may have been the son or grand son of the Louis Guiboche, a Métis trader and freighter, mentioned by Marcel Giraud.⁴⁷ A respondent born in 1909 noted that she remembered the 'old' Guiboche family members as Saulteaux speakers and that someone had told her that the Guiboche family originally had come down from the 'north'.⁴⁸ Other families listed in the 1870 census appear not to have been present in the Spring of 1881.

Given the apparent problem with how the respondents perceived the occupation

⁴⁷ Giraud, 752.

⁴⁸ MLC, 1987, Tapes no. 14-15, Tape 15 side 2.

question; that is, they seem to have thought that it meant what they were doing at the moment the information was being taken down; not much information on the changing and diverging economic pursuits within the Métis population can be extracted from the 1881 census. There does seem to be a slightly greater tendency for the heads of family originating from the southern parishes to declare themselves farmers but, because so many families are missing from the census, this cannot be stated with certainty.

Not surprisingly, five Chartrand men and their families are listed as residing on the shores of Lake Winnipegosis in 1881. This important trading family always had close business and family ties with the Duck Bay area. Some of its members had opted, prior to 1870, to reside there more or less permanently. For example, though listed in the 1870 census as residents of Saint-Laurent, and making a claim on lot 1 in 1872, Michel and Marguerite (Pangman) Chartrand had built a house in Duck Bay in 1858.⁴⁹ In the summer of 1881 they were residing in Duck Bay and Michel Chartrand declared himself to be a farmer. Three other Chartrands, polled in Duck Bay in the summer of 1881, Baptiste, Pierre and William, also declared themselves to be farmers. Only the youngest Chartrand head of family, residing in Duck Bay, declared himself a hunter.

Of the families originating from Red River that were listed by the census taker

⁴⁹ Mercier, 10.

as residing in Duck Bay the most prominent were the Delarondes. Given their extensive contacts with the area through trading activities over the previous three decades one would expect that some of their members would be spending the summer on Lake Winnipegosis. One Delaronde head of family is listed as a farmer, the second as a freighter, the third as a laborer. The fourth Delaronde listed in the 1881 Lake Winnipegosis census is listed as an 'Indian' hunter (as opposed to 'French' hunter). It is impossible to know if being 'Indian' or 'French' was a self perception on the part of the respondent or the opinion of the census taker. Since the 1881 census does not give the names of the fathers of the heads of family it is impossible to know how closely related the 'Indian' hunter Pierre Delaronde was to the Red River Delarondes.

Two Duck Bay Chaboyer heads of family gave farming as their occupation. One Desjarlais head of family was residing in Duck Bay in 1881. He is Joseph Desjarlais, married to a 'Sioux' woman who, interestingly enough, is described as a hunter-farmer by the census taker. The Richard and the Sayers families each have one farming head of family dwelling on the shores of Lake Winnipegosis. The three Monkman (old salt making family) adult men listed at Duck Bay in 1881 are described as as hunter-farmers. Two Ducharmes are also listed as hunter-farmers. Interestingly, no Pangman head of family is listed for the Duck Bay area even though we know from other sources that some of their members had been residing there since the late 1850s.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Mercier, 13.

As previously suggested, the 1881 census is problematic. Many families that we know from sources such as the ecclesiastical correspondence and the parish and missions register to be residing in either Duck Bay or Saint-Laurent in 1881, were missed by the census takers. Also, the work description of the people polled makes little sense; why would so many adult men be listed as farmers in Duck Bay while the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point area bristled with hunters? As mentioned above, the time of the survey and how people perceived the questions are two possible explanations for the anomalies. One observation that can be drawn from the survey is that it was mostly the old Lake Manitoba and the trading oriented Delaronde families that were spending that summer on Lake Winnipegosis. Except for some members of the Chaboyer family⁵¹ the post 1867-68 Red River and Saint-Francois Xavier contingent seem to have been settling down in Saint-Laurent, an indication of their greater interest in pursuing an agrarian life style (despite their being labelled 'hunters' by the census-takers).

The period between the censuses of 1881 and of 1891 was a period of rapid social change and increasing economic and ideological pressures for the Métis of

⁵¹ Since the Chaboyers had been involved in some sort of trading activity in the 1860s at La mission it is not really surprising they would extend northward after their permanent move to Saint-Laurent in 1867-68. In the 1870s and 80s the fur trade frontiers was receding northward and hunting and gathering Metis were no longer passing through Saint-Laurent on their way to bison hunting grounds. Fur trade peddlers would have to make their way north. The Chaboyer listed in the summer of 1881 as being a trader in Saint-Laurent may have been more interested in the buying and selling of dried fish rather than pelts.

Saint-Laurent and Oak Point. Prior to 1881 all the families that had settled in the region, even if they differed in material wealth and occupational pursuits, considered themselves to be 'Métis' however the term might be defined. After 1881, moneyed settlers began arriving in Saint-Laurent and Oak Point who did not perceive themselves as Métis, who were unsympathetic to traditional hunting and gathering pursuits, and who were imbued with the late nineteenth century views on 'racial' miscegenation. In the consequential decade of 1881-1891 a marginalized and destitute 'Métis' subclass would develop.

Chapter 6 - Des 'Etranges' arrivent¹

Between 1881 and 1891 the Métis of Saint-Laurent and Oak Point faced further changes in their economy and society. The lakeshore residents continued to experience the economic restructuring that had begun with the arrival of Métis families from the southern parishes in the late 1860s. The southern Métis were interested in commercial fishing and dairy farming and continued, between 1881 and 1891, to secure their holdings and to expand their farming and fishing activities. But, starting in the 1881 to 1891 decade, both groups of Métis, the more settled southerners and the old Lake Manitoba Freeman and trading families, were faced with the arrival of Catholic French-speaking farming families bringing prejudices mirroring those of the Oblates.

The Métis population increased steadily in the Oak Point Saint-Laurent area between 1881-1891. The 1881 census listed approximately 390 'French' men, women and children born in the North West Territories or Manitoba as residing in the Woodlands electoral district, most, presumably concentrated in the two settlements. The 1886 census shows 414 Métis (no Indians) living in townships 16 and 17 west of Shoal Lake which include the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point area. Métis families were also starting to settle a bit further north in their old fishing and hunting grounds at Swan Creek (Rivière du Cigne). At the time of the 1886 census there were 130 settled at Swan Creek making a combined total of 544 Métis inhabiting the south-east

¹ 'Etranges' (as oppose to 'étrangers') was the term used by the local Saint-Laurent inhabitants to designate the newly arrived immigrants.

shores of Lake Manitoba.² To this in situ population were added a few French Catholic families (totalling about 37 people)³ recruited directly from Québec or from the French Canadian migrant population who had left Québec to work in the Massachussets textile mills earlier in the century. Surprisingly, there also came to the Saint-Laurent area, between 1881 and 1891, several titled families from France who sought to escape political upheaval and to seek lucrative investment opportunities.

The Duc de Blacas arrived in Saint-Laurent in the spring of 1882. According to the parish's Codex Historicus, de Blacas bought one thousand acres between Saint-Laurent and Oak Point:"the greater part of which belonged to Halfbreed minor children who could not give a clear title for about a year, hence he got a big reduction in price."⁴ After building a stone house of 'manorial' appearance the Duke hired a Québécois, Ovide Lacoursiere, to manage his interests.⁵ Lacoursière arrived at the farm with a herd of quality milk cows purchased in the east and all the equipment necessary to install a cheese making factory. By 1891 the French duke had 180 animals

² It should always be kept in mind that any number of Metis families who viewed this area as their home base might be missing from a particular census. Many continued the habit of going north to hunt, fish, trade, or visit at different times of the year.

³ AASB, T23847-T234849, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 17 May 1880.

⁴ OMI, AD, L381 M27C 1, 1858-1895, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, page 71.

⁵ Donatien Frémont, Les Francais dans l'ouest Canadien, Vol. 1 (Saint-Boniface: Editions du Blé, 1980), 11.

on his land, which had increased to two and one half sections.⁶

In Autumn of 1882 a compatriot of the duke, the conte de Simencourt, purchased near the duke's property a large tract of land he called the 'ranch de Lisbyville'.⁷ Some details on the commercial activities of this count are known. By 1885 the count had assembled a herd of 130 cattle and was involved in the large scale production of butter.⁸ He also had 200 sheep 'de bonne race'. In the summer of 1885 de Simencourt would cut 5,000 tons of hay to feed his livestock over winter. Simoncourt also rented a stall in the public market of Winnipeg and the quantity of meat that he sold there would cause a temporary slump in prices in the largest city in the prairies.⁹ The count and his family would stay in the Saint-Laurent area running their meat and cheese operation till the mid-1890s.

Less is known about the Duke de Blacas' economic endeavors. However, by 1883, his métayer Lacoursière had successfully launched his cheese making operation (the first such commercial enterprise in the area). In 1884 Lacoursière was announcing

⁶ Saint-Laurent municipality, Tax Assessment Rolls 1891 quoted in Richtik, 1964.

⁷ Le Métis, vol 13, no. 13, 15 November 1883, page 3.

⁸ Le Métis, vol 12, no. 20, 26 February 1885, page 12.

⁹ The Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, mention that, in 1881, a public highway was built crossing the municipality going from Oak Point to Winnipeg. This would have been an improvement over the old fur-trade cart trail which existed previously allowing for the easier shipment of goods and livestock. OMI, AD, L381 M27C 1, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, page 48.

his willingness to buy up all the surplus milk and cream in Saint-Laurent.¹⁰ The cheese factory was surely a boost for the local families interested in dairy farming. This factory would be in operation till 1891 when the Duke, having made a very lucrative marriage, opted to return permanently to France.

A third nobleman, the Conte de Leusse, would also run a cheese making operation for a short time in the 1890s. His presence would be beneficial even to the non-farming Métis:

Monsieur le conte de Leusse fait une grande charité à tous nos enfants d'école. Il leur donne et leur donnera pendant tout l'hiver le repas du midi, une bonne soupe chaude, du biscuit, de la viande, des pommes de terre. C'est intéressant voir tous ces marmots fricoter et se régaler comme jamais de leur vie. Le résultat désiré est obtenu. L'assistance est plus régulière.¹¹

De Leusse's operations would eventually be taken over by a Québécois, Edmond Trudel, who would continue the cheese and butter factory with milk supplied by neighboring farmers.

Finally, a fourth French family, the Viel, without title but with the necessary capital, would settle permanently in Saint-Laurent and also run a dairy farm and cheese factory. All these cheese and butter making operations provided outlets for the dairy oriented Métis who themselves did not have sufficient land or capital to mount

¹⁰ Frémont, 1.

¹¹ AASB, T46275, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 10 January 1892.

similar operations.¹²

The 1880s were a decade when the Métis involved in dairying were further integrated into the provincial economy.¹³ They were now assured a steady market for their milk and cream at the local cheese and butter factories;

Monsieur Sigfroid Lachance doit ouvrir une fromagerie ce printemps; ce sera la seconde que nous ayons [in Saint-Laurent]. M. Lachance a quarante vaches à lait qui lui appartiennent, sans compter que plusieurs de ses voisins doivent envoyer le lait de leurs vaches à sa fromagerie.¹⁴

Prior to the rise of the local cheese and butter factories farmers had had to make their own butter, cut it into pound prints,¹⁵ sell all they could locally, and haul the rest to Winnipeg at their own expense. Before the completion of the new highway in 1881 this could be a long and arduous journey along the old ox-cart fur trade trail. The Métis dairy farming families were encouraged in their endeavors by church authorities and by 1887 Father Camper was noting in a letter to Mgr Taché that the children of the farming families should probably be listed as 'white' in the baptismal

¹² Pervasive illiteracy within the Métis adult population also may have been an obstacle in mounting a successful business.

¹³ "The general dependence on cattle is not surprising, for the municipality was too far from the railway for convenient shipment of grain, and it had abundant grass lands for grazing and hay production and soils ill suited to grain growing. Animal and animal product were the only source of farm income; crops were grown for farm use." Richtik, 121.

¹⁴ Le Métis, vol 18, no 23, 28 mars 1889, page 3.

¹⁵ Wood molds that contained approximately one pound of butter.

records.¹⁶

Between 1881 and 1891, many members of the Lake Manitoba population, pursued a life of hunting, gathering and fishing to the great dismay of the Oblates. The Conte Louis de Turenne, passing through the mission in 1881, was struck by the number of hunting and gathering families:

La mission de Saint-Laurent n'a pas plus de 400 habitants tous métis français et saulsteaux vivant du produit de leur chasse et leur pêche. Malgré leurs efforts, les missionnaires n'ont pu arriver à les décider à cultiver le sol pourtant très fertile ... Généralement les métis sont doux et paisibles, facile à instruire. Les familles sont très nombreuses ... Malheureusement, il est presque impossible d'empêcher qu'ils emploient entre eux autre chose que le saulsteaux et ils arrivent rarement à parler facilement une autre langue.¹⁷

Many reasons may have prompted Métis families to continue in what were perceived by outsiders as 'traditional' pursuits. Saint-Laurent was the buying and shipping point for all fish caught in Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis because of its southerly location on the lake and its proximity to a good highway to Winnipeg.¹⁸ Also, the Saint-Laurent area continued to be an important fishing center in its own right:

Il y a sur les bords du lac une centaine de pêcheurs qui sont à l'oeuvre depuis l'automne dernier et qui obtiennent de bons gages pour leur travail. On paie d'un à deux sous la livre pour le brochet livré sur glace. Le poisson est ensuite transporté à Reaburn et expédié de là aux États-

¹⁶ AASB, T35087-T35088, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 9 January 1887.

¹⁷ Les Missions Oblates de Marie Immaculée, (1881), 349.

¹⁸ "Un parti nous a quitté avec 14 chevaux. Ils se rend à Fairford à 130 miles d'ici pour acheter du poisson." Le Métis, vol 13 no.9, 13 December 1889, page 3.

Unis où il est en grande demande.¹⁹

From Saint-Laurent, fish would be sent overland to Winnipeg where freight trains would transport it to various markets:²⁰

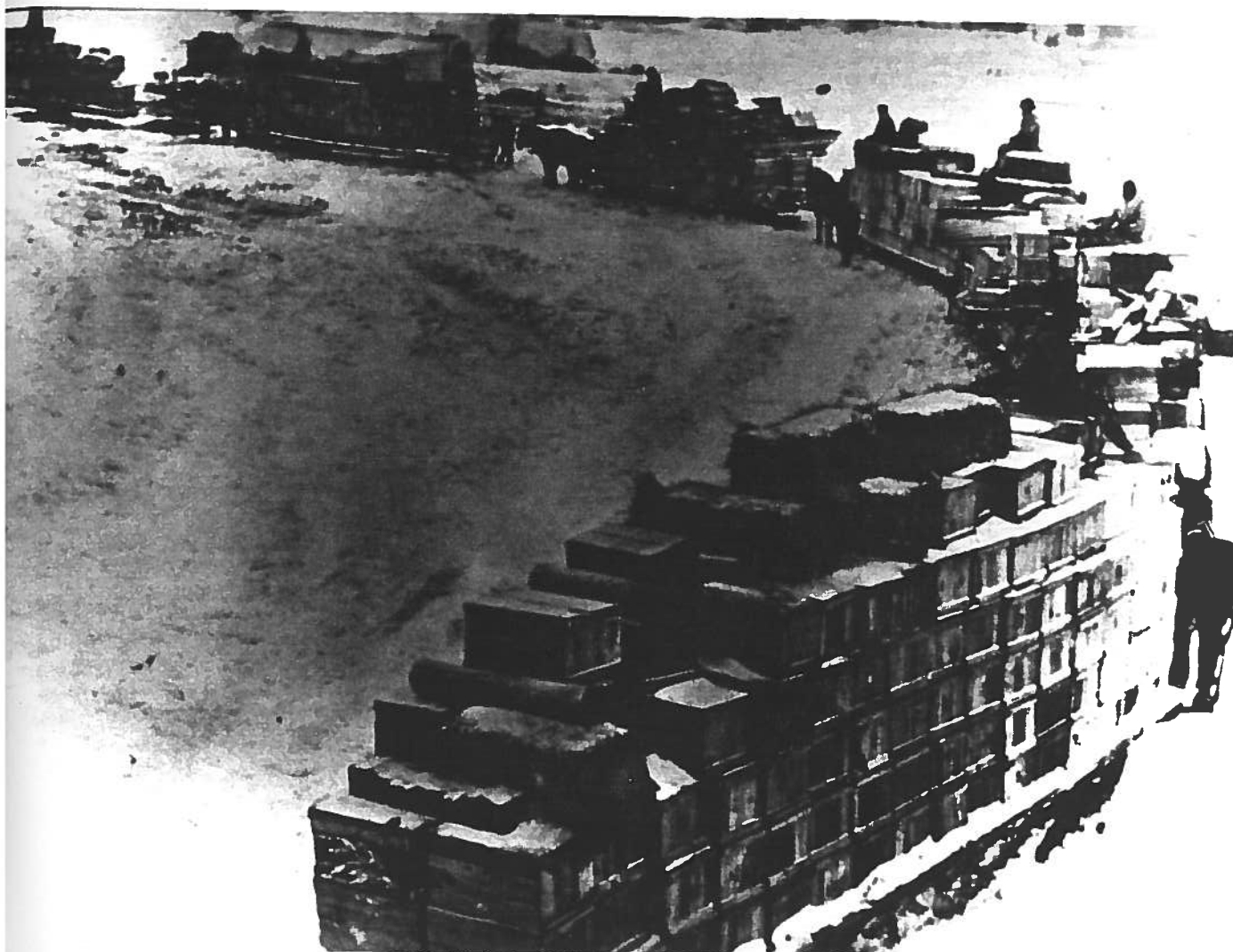
Le commerce de poisson augmente continuellement ici, un de nos marchands vient de recevoir l'ordre d'en envoyer trois chars à Chicago le plus tôt possible. Depuis le commencement de l'hiver l'on en a déjà envoyé 15 chars de la partie sud du lac. La petite rivière [Swan Creek] nous fait l'effet d'un marché tant sont nombreux les camps de pêcheurs qui accourent de tous les cotés.²¹

As stated in the previous chapter, most families living in Saint-Laurent were involved in fishing to some degree. The crucial point was the relation between fishing and other economic pursuits. Members of several families (Chaboyer,

¹⁹ Le Métis, vol 12, no 20, 26 February 1885, page 3.

²⁰ Le Métis, vol 12, no. 13, 17 January 1883, page 3.

²¹ Le Métis, vol 13, no.21, 13 March 1884, page 4.



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Carrière, Delaronde) combined fishing with animal husbandry while others, the majority, continued hunting and gathering. Many reasons can explain the persistence of pre-1870 economic pursuits: the most obvious reason was the lack of capital and land necessary for building a dairy herd. But not all the reasons were negative; trapping as well as hunting and gathering could still have been occasionally lucrative. In the spring of 1881 (at the time of the census), for example, the price for muskrat pelts was at an all time high:²²

Plusieurs familles sont même parties armes et baggages, hommes, femmes, enfants.²³ C'est une véritable richesse, année d'abondance pour nos pauvre gens. Si du moins ils savaient en profiter, s'ils pensaient à l'avenir et s'achetaient des instruments aratoires etc. afin de devenir plus tard des Habitants.²⁴

A priest's disapproval of the hunting and gathering Métis' reluctance to buy agricultural implements is surprising since he had noted that most of the Métis had no title to the land that they lived on. Also, however lucrative trapping and fishing activities could be in some years, the returns were usually only enough to meet ordinary living expenses and avoid debt:

Mort aux rats! Eh! qu'il s'en tue de ces rats et cependant pas encore assez pour payer toute les dettes! Règle générale tous les printemps un bon nombre sont en peine. On a beau les avertir de prendre garde ...²⁵

²² Explaining why so many families are absent from the census list!

²³ Obviously the farming families would not be able to displace themselves in such a manner.

²⁴ AASB, T52856-T52863, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 18 April 1881.

²⁵ AASB, T52856-T52863, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 18 April 1881.

Also, the Freeman Métis' hunting activities continued to interfere with any attempts at gardening and crop growing. In the autumn of 1882, Father Camper, in one of his frequent letters to Mgr Taché, noted that while the missionaries and some 'worthy' families were busy harvesting potatoes and working their fields 'others' were engaged in a 'war to death' against ducks. Hundreds, apparently, were being shot daily.²⁶ Moose hunting also seemed to be an important autumnal activity in the region till the 1890s.²⁷

Some new activities were opening up for the non-farming Métis. In the summer of 1881 Camper noted that some of the 'restless' Métis were working for wages constructing the

²⁶ AASB, T27159-T27161, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 30 October 1882.

²⁷ Le Métis, vol 15, no. 51, 6 October 1887, page 3.



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railway in the Poplar Point area.²⁸ In addition, missionary letters became increasingly filled with concerns about these Métis losing their souls while working for Protestant farmers:

[Religious] indifference due to contact of men and boys amongst a protestant population during the 3 months of the year when they go off to work the harvest at least to Portage la Prairie, Stonewall and elsewhere. Even whole families at times go and camp in the vicinity of these little towns where women and children remain while the men be far away at work in the fields or elsewhere. At times women and children hire to work or such in the towns.²⁹

The missionaries' disapproval of non-farming families translated into active efforts to recruit 'white' French Catholic settlers and to relocate the hunting and gathering element to the north (away from Protestant influence). Upon the arrival of the Duc de Blacas, Father Camper would comment that he had been praying not for nobility but for good examples for the local population³⁰ like the Catholic Habitants.³¹

Clearly the missionaries did not think that all the Saint-Laurent and Oak Point residents would benefit from contact with the incoming farming settlers. The missionaries were frankly hostile and held little hope of turning the Freeman and

²⁸ AASB, T25659-T25662, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 28 June 1881.

²⁹ OMI, AD, L381 M27C 2, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, 1896-1899.

³⁰ AASB, T52856-T52863, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 18 April 1881.

³¹ AASB, T26637-T26639, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 9 May 1882.

other hunting and gathering Métis into peasants. As early as the spring of 1880 Father Camper was asking Mgr Taché if he could permanently relocate himself to the shores of Lake Winnipegosis on the Indian reserve of Pine River and not the old Métis settlement of Duck Bay, "Je ne parle pas des vieux habitants de Saint-Laurent, on sait depuis longtemps ce qu'ils valent".³² All the disturbances occurring in the parish³³ or the mission areas were blamed on these 'fringe' Métis. The tone of the written condemnations could be quite virulent:

Les pauvres métis de la Baie des Canards se montrent et se montreront toujours ce qu'ils sont. Je les ai [?] fortement pour leur négligence et leur paresse. Quelles tristes gens! Les quelques sauvages qui demeurent encore au milieu d'eux souffrent de leur position et soupirent après le jour ou ils pourront s'éloigner.³⁴

or again:

Aux quatre coins de la paroisse il y a des personnes scandaleuses, femmes et filles perdues, qui font l'oeuvre du démon et perdent les âmes. Elles sont vendues presque toutes d'ailleurs...Et toute cette mauvaise graine est du métis et du sauvage.³⁵

It was the Freeman Métis of Saint-Laurent and Oak Point that Father Camper wished to see relocated in the North. In 1883, in a letter addressed to the Inspector of Indian Agencies, E. McColl, Camper urged the government to establish a reserve

³² AASB, T23618-T23625, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 8 April 1880.

³³ During the 1880s most Métis seem to have left Oak Point. There is no data to suggest that any of the Métis in Oak Point received patent for the land they occupied. In 1882 Camper would comment; "Deux familles, Johny Loyer et Antoine Desjarlais viennent s'établir à la mission...il ne reste plus grand monde à la Pointe des Chênes." AASB, T26708-T26711, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 2 June 1882.

³⁴ AASB, T29065-T29074, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 4 April 1884.

³⁵ AASB, T30386-T30389, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 10 December 1884.

at Pine River (Lake Winnipegosis) arguing that many Saint-Laurent families would then be inclined to relocate in that area.³⁶ He elaborated his proposal in a letter to Mgr Taché in which he extolled the benefits of a reserve at Pine River because both the Indian population of Lake Winnipegosis and the 'free'³⁷ Métis population coming up from Lake Manitoba could organize and settle there.³⁸ His plans appear to have been successful since, by 1901, Métis families having relocated near the Pine Creek reserve were petitioning the government to allow them to 'enter into treaty'. According to Camper they were willing to abandon their Métis scrips in exchange for treaty rights.³⁹

Between 1881 and 1891, the old Lake Manitoba trading families were also facing changes and constraints. Those individuals who had opted to continue in commerce were faced with increased competition in Saint-Laurent from itinerant merchants.⁴⁰ Even the northern trade was not secure; by the end of the 1880s steam

³⁶ AASB, T28514-T28519, Camper à McColl, Saint-Laurent, 29 December 1883.

³⁷ Probably a reference to the old Hommes Libres designation for the hunting and gathering Métis population who had not resided in the Red River Settlement prior to 1870.

³⁸ AASB, T28592-T28595, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 2 January 1884.

³⁹ AASB, L46101-L46102, Camper à Langevin, Saint-Laurent, 8 February 1901.

⁴⁰ 'M. Hanover de Winnipeg est venu faire sa deuxième moisson de pelleteries. Quoique le produit de cette année sous ce rapport soit inférieur à celui des années passées les marchands se déclarent assez satisfait'. Le Métis, vol 20, no.19, 18 February 1891, page 3.

boats had made their appearance on Lake Manitoba⁴¹ and were taking over some of the freighting business. Rival Winnipeg-based companies could now move large amounts of trade goods north, faster and cheaper, than their lakeshore competitors. In the coming years some of these Métis traders would opt for a life based on farming and fishing, others would relocate north,⁴² and a third group would continue to buy and sell either as independent traders or in the employ of Winnipeg merchants.

The 1891 census⁴³ indicates how the Saint-Laurent population was restructuring near the turn of the century. However, it should be noted that all the caveats and cautions applicable to the interpretation of the 1881 census apply to that of 1891. It is still unclear how respondents perceived the questions put to them, especially the crucial matter of 'occupation'. Also, the census takers went through the parish of Saint-Laurent during a time when some hivernants had not yet returned; between April 6 and May 30, 1891, Others may have been absent due to egg gathering⁴⁴ or muskrat hunting.⁴⁵ A final problem with both the 1881 and 1891 federal census is the quality of the microfilms. These manuscript sources were

⁴¹ Canada, Parliament, 'Report of the Department of Indian Affairs', Sessional Papers, 1893, Paper no. 14, page 56.

⁴² One such freighter is Jean Delaronde [John Laronde]. After the mid 1880s his name is no longer mentioned in the ecclesiastical correspondence.

⁴³ The last fully detailed census opened to research.

⁴⁴ Donald Gunn, "Notes on an egging expedition to Shoal Lake," Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1868.

⁴⁵ AASB, T27159-T27161, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 30 October 1882.

microfilmed and then destroyed. The quality of the negatives is poor and several names on the list are simply illegible.

In 1891, in the expanded municipality of Saint-Laurent there were approximately 600 'Métis' and 'French Canadians'. Most still lived in log houses on the crowded lake lot settlements of Saint-Laurent and Oak Point. Both linear settlements were the most densely populated settlements in the whole Interlake.⁴⁶ By 1885 the missionary correspondence was noting the arrival of Québécois, Irish and Métis migrants to the Saint-Laurent area. The Métis migrants appear for the most part to have come from the more southerly parishes. Many relatively well-to-do Métis families were leaving the parishes of Saint-Boniface, Saint-Norbert⁴⁷, Saint-François Xavier and Sainte-Agathe⁴⁸ in despair of ever getting their letters patent to the land they occupied. A few other families, that were also relocating in Saint-Laurent, came from the Lake Winnipegosis area.

Of the old Saint-Laurent trading families the Pangmans and the Sayers were faring the least well in 1891 on the south shores of Lake Manitoba. Only one Pangman was residing in the Saint-Laurent area in 1891. This was Catherine Pangman, a 65 year

⁴⁶ Richtik, 93.

⁴⁷ P.R. Mailhot, "Ritchot's Resistance; Abbé Noel Joseph Ritchot and the Creation and Transformation of Manitoba," (Ph.D diss., University of Manitoba, 1988), 238-254.

⁴⁸ N. St-Onge, "Métis and Merchant Capital in Red River, the Dissolution of Pointe à Grouette 1860-1885," (M.A. diss., University of Manitoba, 1983), 125-128.

old illiterate widow. The 1881 census had listed two Pangman heads of family, a hunter and a laborer. It is possible that both were simply still in their winter quarters in 1891, hunting and fishing; or, they had permanently relocated to the North. The importance of the Pangman family in the parish had been declining since the late 1860s and early 1870s. The focus of their social and economic activities had increasingly been the Duck Bay area.⁴⁹ The Sayers did not appear at all in the 1891 census. The Sayer family name is not mentioned anywhere in the archival record after the early 1870s.

The third earliest family to be found in Saint-Laurent had been the Chartrand clan. Of the nine adult heads of family(all male) listed in 1881, only four are present in the 1891 parish of Saint-Laurent census. Michel Chartrand, who in 1881 had declared his occupation to be trading, was now listed as a farmer. Pierre Chartrand, a farmer and storekeeper highly regarded by the Oblates, had died by 1891⁵⁰ but his wife, Eliza, headed a household in 1891 composed of herself, three children, and two (Delaronde) boarders. Paul Chartrand, husband of Marguerite Millet, was listed as a hunter-fisherman as he had been in 1891. Antoine Chartrand, husband of the 'Indian' Françoise, was still described in this census as a hunter-fisherman.

⁴⁹ Mercier, 13.

⁵⁰ "Le jeune Pierre Chartrand est mort vendredi matin entre 4 et 5 heures ... Vous ne saurez croire tout le vide que cette mort fait dans notre pauvre petite paroisse. Il avait affaire avec tout le monde et faisait vivre et soulageait tant de monde." AASB, T34641-T34644, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 31 October 1886.

Three new Chartrand households are listed in 1891. Napoleon Chartrand was a school teacher. Baptiste Chartrand jr. states his occupation as farm laborer and Magloire Chartrand was a hunter-fisherman. An indication of the unreliability of the census taken in early spring is the absence of Pierre and Marie [Pangman] Chartrand who were listed in the 1870 and 1881 census and who had been in the area since the late 1850s. They were still residents of Saint-Laurent because, in October 1896, Father Camper mentioned them in a letter to Mgr Langevin describing the preparation surrounding their golden wedding anniversary.⁵¹ In this letter Camper describes Pierre and Marie Chartrand as Saint-Laurent's most venerable couple. He goes on to comment, with some degree of satisfaction, that the Chartrand "clan" seemed to be dissolving in Saint-Laurent. This would be consistent with the diminution of Chartrand heads of family in Saint-Laurent between 1881 and 1891 and the declining importance of independent fur traders on the south shores of Lake Manitoba.⁵²

In sharp contrast to the Chartrands, all the Lavallées listed in 1881 are present in the 1891 census. In 1881, all five heads of household had declared themselves to be hunters. In 1891, Andre Lavallée (whose lot 10 had been patented to the Oblates) declares himself to be a farm laborer. Antoine, husband of Isabelle Chaboyer, continues to list hunting as his occupation. Old Baptiste Lavallée, husband to Louise Ducharme, is also a hunter as is Joseph, husband of Angélique Campbell and partial

⁵¹ AASB, L6336-L6340, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 19 October 1896.

⁵² The 1891 census for the Duck Bay area was not found.

owner of lot 6. Michel and Eliza Lavallée are now a hunting and fishing family. A sixth Lavallée household, Baptiste jr. and his wife Suzanne, who were mentioned in the relief lists (non-indigent) and in 1870 but not in 1881, resurface in 1891. Baptiste jr. declared himself to be an illiterate hunter. Four new Lavallée heads of household, young men between the ages of 22 and 31, also declared themselves to be hunters. A fifth stated he was a hunter-fisherman.

The four original families of Fond du Lac were not faring well in 1891. The Lavallées and the Chartrands continue to have several representatives in Saint-Laurent but only two, Michel and Napoleon Chartrand, appear to have integrated into 'non-traditional' occupations, one as a farmer and the other as a teacher. Again, however, a note of caution must be voiced as to how the respondents perceived the 'occupation' question.⁵³ This is also true for the other 'early' families of Lake Manitoba.

The other known 'early' families of Lake Manitoba were, first the Ducharmes, who in 1891, had seven heads of family listed. Three had appeared in the 1881 census; the most prominent, J. Bte Ducharme, the patentee for lots 3 and 9, is once again listed as a 'farmer'. Jean and Jacques Ducharme are listed again as hunters but, in 1891, they also declared themselves to be fishermen. The four other Ducharme

⁵³ It is in this context that an analysis of the 1883, 1891, 1902 Saint-Laurent Tax Assessment Rolls would have been valuable. They would have given a household by household breakdown of the acreage owned, acreage cultivated, Buildings, size of livestock herd, etc.. Unfortunately, between 1964 and 1989 these documents disappeared from the Saint-Laurent municipal offices.

heads of family, whose ages vary from 25 to 50 years old, all declare themselves to be hunters and fishermen except for Maurice Ducharme who was an unemployed carpenter. None of the Ducharmes listed in the Duck Bay area for 1881 are found in Saint-Laurent in the spring of 1891.

All five of the Richard heads of family, listed in 1881, were also found in the 1891 census. Four declared themselves to be carpenters in 1881 and two, Francois and Pierre, had declared the same occupation in 1891. The third, Isaie, claimed in 1891 to be a hunter. The fourth Richard family, Pierre and Isabelle [Chartrand] Ducharme, patentees of lot 18, were not listed as a hunting and fishing family.⁵⁴ By 1891 Pierre Ducharme was 74 years old and probably unable to do strenuous carpentry work. The widow, Margaret [Saulteaux] Richard, was listed as still residing in her Saint-Laurent home in 1891, but her son Pierre the hunter, was not in Saint-Laurent that spring. Five other Richard heads of family, between 28 and 42 years of age, were listed in 1891. Three are noted as illiterate farm laborers and the other two as hunter-fishermen. There was one Richard family listed for Duck Bay in 1881, but the lack of a legible first name makes correlation impossible.

Only four Desjarlais heads of family were be found in both the 1881 and the 1891

⁵⁴ In Sprague and Frye's tables Pierre Richard is listed as a Red River Métis but in the 1870 census he is listed as being born in Oak Point and his wife declares her place of birth as being Duck River.

census out of the seven listed in 1881. All four had been listed as hunters in 1881. In 1891, Stanislaw Desjarlais, original claimant of lot 10 in Oak Point, was listed as a farmer living in the La Mission area. Louis Desjarlais was dead by 1891 and his wife Julia Chartrand was listed as head of family but no occupation is given. Antoine and Marie [Chartrand] Desjarlais were a farm labouring family. Louis Desjarlais was a hunter-fisherman. No new Desjarlais family head was listed. The Desjarlais were a family that, right up to World War II, pursued a life of hunting and gathering coupled with occasional guiding work. It is quite likely that, in the spring of 1891, most of the able bodied Desjarlais men and their families were away hunting.

If the families who settled in Saint-Laurent from 1867 on are examined, the extended family who had made the most land claims were the White Horse Plains (Saint-François Xavier) Chaboyers. Four of the five Chaboyers listed in 1881 were also present in 1891. Pierre Chaboyer, husband of Philomène de Montigny and successful claimant to lot 16 (Saint-Laurent), had been listed as a trader in 1881. Ten years later he was a farmer. This was one of the families highly regarded by the clergy and upon his death in May 1891 Father Camper would remark to Mgr Taché that,

"Il y a une quinzaine de jours mourrait à Saint-Laurent un de nos anciens et bons paroissiens Pierre Chaboyer, époux de Philomène de Montigny".⁵⁵

Ambroise Chaboyer, patentee to lot 14, a farmer in 1881, was in 1891 described as a fisherman-hunter. Norbert Chaboyer, proprietor of lot 12, was described as a hunter

⁵⁵ AASB, T44726-T44728, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 5 May 1891.

in 1881 and as a hunter-fisherman in 1891. Baptiste Chaboyer, a farmer in 1881, had sold his claim to Father Camper in the 1880s⁵⁶ and was not listed in the 1891 census. Joseph Chaboyer and his wife, Nancy Bonneau, listed in 1870 in Saint-Laurent and in 1881 in Duck Bay, were a hunting and fishing family residing once again in the parish of Saint-Laurent in 1891. The appearance and disappearance of heads of family's names from the various censuses is not a surprising pattern. Some of the Chaboyer households, such as Antoine et Marie Chaboyer, not listed in 1870 or 1881 but found in the 1868 and 1891 lists frequently wintered away from the parish in the northern fishing camps, this, despite their obvious concern for ownership of land. On May 1, 1882 Camper remarked in his letter to the Bishop:

Rien de nouveau sinon la mort de la femme d'Antoine Chaboyer. Ella a eu les sacrements... La Bonne Providence arrange toujours toutes les choses pour le mieux. Les années précédentes cette famille se trouvait au loin.⁵⁷

Two other Chaboyer households would be listed in the 1891 census; one was headed by a hunter-fisherman and the second by a farm laborer.

The old Saint-Boniface trading family, the Delarondes, still had only two heads of family listed in the 1891 census for Saint-Laurent and they were not the same

⁵⁶ Father Camper received a patent for a portion of that lot on December 2, 1881.

PAM, RG17 D2, Parish River Lot Files, Parish of Saint-Laurent (information found in file discussing lot 10).

⁵⁷ AASB, T26633-T26634, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 1 May 1882.

names found in the 1881 census. Interestingly, the Etienne Delaronde Jr. listed as a farmer in Saint-Laurent in 1891 was residing with his Lake Winnipeg wife at Duck Bay at the time of the 1881 census. He was listed as a laborer in the earlier census. According to his grand-son, Etienne Delaronde Jr. worked for several years on barges hauling freight for the Hudson's Bay Company on Lakes Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Winnipegosis. After leaving the freighting business he operated a ranch at Mary Hill, west of Lundar.⁵⁸

Eventually, by 1891, Etienne Delaronde Jr. moved to an area situated 10 kms east of the actual Saint-Laurent river lots commonly called 'Coteau de roche'. There he acquired some Aberdeen Angus 'direct from Scotland' and started farming in earnest.⁵⁹ Alexandre, the other Delaronde, living in Saint-Laurent, was a law student, son of Etienne Jr., and a protégé of the Saint-Laurent clergy. Father Camper writes of him: "De son côté, le jeune Alexandre Delaronde continue à être bon garçon et se prépare avec ardeur pour entrer au collège et faire honneur au lac Manitoba".⁶⁰

The blacksmith Louis and his wife Julie [Marchand] Carrière, patent holders of lot 17, were not listed in the 1891 census. This is not surprising since they were nearly seventy in 1881. Louis and Julie Carrière were the in-laws of Etienne Delaronde Sr.

⁵⁸ Richtik, 51, notes, without giving his source, that there were cattle feeding stations in the Mary Hill in the 1870s.

⁵⁹ MLC, 1987, Tape no 9, side 1.

⁶⁰ AASB, T52856-T52863, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 18 April 1881.

Salomon and Marie [MacMillan] Carrière are listed as a farming family in 1891. They were not listed in the 1870 or 1881 censuses for Saint-Laurent. Their exact relation to the above mentioned Carrière is unknown.

Pierre Boyer, the successful claimant to lot 24 (patented in 1878), had died by 1891. His widow, with the help of her three sons, still occupied and worked the family property. Elzear and Alexandre Boyer are listed as literate farmers. The older son, Damase, is listed as a literate farmer and wage earner. All three sons and their parents had come up from Saint-François-Xavier during the 1868 famine.

The Boyers are a good example of a family establishing a degree of economic affluence and becoming 'white'. One of the sons of Elzear Boyer, when interviewed in 1987, stated categorically that his father and paternal grand-parents were French Canadians born in Chicoutimi, Québec. His mother was Marie-Anne Delaronde, the daughter of well to do Etienne Delaronde Jr.. In fact, the narrator's paternal grand-parents, Pierre and Geneviève [Martin] Boyer, had declared themselves to be Métis in the 1870 census. Pierre Boyer's ancestry is uncertain. Genevieve Martin's father had been a French Canadian, Abraham Martin, married to a N.W.T. Métis woman, Euphresine Gariépy. However, Elzear Boyer's son, in the course of the interview, stated that he 'still' did not admit to being Métis though he noted that his mother's family had been 'pretty mixed'. In the course of the interview, the respondent's wife added that the 'old grand-mother', Marie-Anne Delaronde, had not wanted her

children to mix with those she considered to be Métis and that the 'very Métis' families of Fort Rouge would not have considered the Boyers to be 'Métis'.⁶¹

The only Goulet family listed in 1891 was that of Pierre Goulet. He was an illiterate hunter and fisherman. His grand-daughter, in a 1987 interview, stated that Pierre Goulet and his wife spoke Cree and Saulteaux to each other. Pierre Goulet's wife, Rosalie Goulet, made mittens and moccasins out of moose skins.⁶²

The Nabase dit Lecris⁶³ had 3 heads of family listed in 1891. None was the hunting head of family James Nabase, the husband of Sazanne Hallet, listed in 1881 in Saint-Laurent. Louis and Marie [Harriot] Nabase, listed in the 1870 census, appear once more in 1891. Louis Nabase declared himself to be a literate farmer. One of his sons, Pierre, worked as a farm labourer and the other, Roger, worked as a hunter and fisherman.

Aside from the families whose members had moved into Saint-Laurent prior to 1870 or during the decade immediately following Manitoba's creation, other Métis families were congregating at Saint-Laurent in the 1880s and early 1890s. Many bought land from the older residents or took up homesteading in nearby areas such as the

⁶¹ MLC, 1987, Tape 9, side 2.

⁶² MLC, 1987, tape no 37, side 1.

⁶³ The origins of this family are nebulous.

previously mentioned Coteau de roche. Some families came from the northern part of the lake and from Lake Winnipegosis. For example, Charles and Caroline Monkman, who were listed in 1881 as farming on the shores of Lake Winnipegosis, were in the Saint-Laurent area in 1891. There was also the family of John and Mary Campbell who arrived from Manitoba House in the early 1880s.⁶⁴ Both Charles Monkman and John Campbell were listed as farmers in 1891. A third family, Alfred and Angélique [Chartrand] Klyne may have also come from Lake Winnipegosis.⁶⁵ Alfred Klyne listed his occupation as carpentry.⁶⁶ It should be noted that the immigrants from the north were the minority of the immigrants to the area.

The majority of new families came from the more southerly settlements.⁶⁷ There was Eugene and Sarah Allard from Saint-François Xavier who were described as farmers residing in Saint-Laurent in 1891. Baptiste and Margurite Beauchamp, also from Saint-François Xavier, were farmers in the parish in 1891. Two Couët brothers,

⁶⁴ "Un des Campbell du Poste Manitoba veut s'établir à la mission avec toute la famille. Il a quatre enfants. Il est arrivé ces jours derniers avec armes et baggages." AASB, T23618-T23625, Saint-Laurent, Camper à Taché, 8 April 1880.

⁶⁵ MLC, 1987, Tape 3, side 1.

⁶⁶ Alfred Klyne's 1891 statement that he is a carpenter was confirmed by a daughter in the course of an Oral History interview. MLC, 1987, tape no 4, side 1.

⁶⁷ Of course we only know of families who were physically present to be counted up in the spring of 1891. From the correspondence of the Oblates it is evident there were hunting and gathering families, some most probably from the north, who were residing for various parts of the year in Saint-Laurent. The previously mentioned fringe settlement of Fort Rouge was peopled by them. Most of these people would still in their wintering camps or away muskrat hunting in April-May of 1891.

Daniel and Alexandre, along with their wives and children also settled to farm in Saint-Laurent. Alexandre Coutu would eventually own a hotel in Saint-Laurent. Another Métis from a prominent Red River family, Joseph Hamelin, would settle in Saint-Laurent with his wife Julia Laurence. He dealt in groceries and hardware and ran a store⁶⁸ with the help of his son Joseph. This Joseph Hamelin would in 1894 marry a woman, Antoinette Lachance, of Québécois parents.⁶⁹ Another newcomer, Baptiste Lagimodière, declared himself to be a farmer in 1891. Finally, Didgime Larence lists his occupation as farm laborer in 1891.

A new Métis family to come up from the southern parishes was that of Charles Lambert with his wife, Marie Laurence. She was the sister of Julia Laurence, wife of merchant Joseph Hamelin. Charles Lambert was listed in 1891 as a farm laborer but, according to his grand-daughter (interviewed in 1984), by the time she was a young child in the first decade of this century he owned 7 or 8 milk cows. By the second decade of the twentieth century he was shipping his cream by train⁷⁰ to Winnipeg.⁷¹ This was a family that, by 1910, appeared to have successfully 'passed' and integrated into the farming element of Lake Manitoba. Charles' son, Arcade, husband of Catherine Lavallée, had approximately 22 milkcows and they farmed 62 acres. His

⁶⁸ Le Métis, vol 21, no 1, 14 October 1891, page 3.

⁶⁹ Le Métis, vol. 23, no. 25, 29 March 1894, page 3.

⁷⁰ A Winnipeg to Oak Point line was completed in 1904. Mercier, 15 (English text).

⁷¹ MLC, 1987, tape no 7, side 1.

children (boys and girls) all went to school for several years. Charles Lambert's granddaughter, in the 1984 interview, stated categorically that she was not Métis and did not want to be identified as such, "c'est pas beau être Métis".⁷² This even though she noted that her Lavallée grand-parents had spoken Saulteaux with greater facility than French: "tous des parleurs de saulteaux les Lavallée". She added that her [Lavallée] mother never spoke a word of Saulteaux to the children and that the Lamberts had no relatives in Saint-Laurent's fringe settlement of Fort Rouge.

If we assume the data in the 1891 census to be largely correct a trend can be detected. The early Lake Manitoba families, those who had settled the area prior to 1868, even if they held patent to a piece of land, were still actively pursuing the same activities they had prior to 1870: hunting, trapping, fishing, and to a certain extent, trading. This group is probably much larger than indicated by the census since the hivernant category is missing.⁷³ If we look at the returns for families arriving at Saint-Laurent after 1868 (post famine), and especially after 1880, they show an increasing concern for farming or wage labor and commercial activities. Of course there are exceptions, the majority of the lakeshore population would engage in fishing and some

⁷² PAM, MOHP, 1984, C346.

⁷³ This fact complicates any attempt to evaluate the importance of trading as an economic activity for Saint-Laurent. The 1891 census takers began their work on 6 april, 1891. At that time the lake would still be frozen solid. Traders working in the north would still be, like the hivernants, in their winter quarters. On april 25 1906 Brother Mulvihill made the comment that "The ice on the lake broke up today and is now moving...this is the earliest in 30 years!"

hunting, whatever their origins. The variation between the different Métis groups (the 'founding families', those arriving in the late 1860s, fleeing the famine, and those arriving after 1870)⁷⁴ is what they perceived as their own perception of their primary economic activity. The post 1880 families⁷⁵ were certainly agriculturally minded (coupled to fishing) and they had enough capital to buy sections of river lots or land held by speculators in nearby sections.⁷⁶ It would have been interesting to find the receipt books from the different butter and cheese factories to see who was in a position to sell cream and in what quantity. One suspects that the majority of cream would have been from families of the post 1870 migration, with the previously noted exceptions. Again what should be emphasized is the absence of a large contingent of hivernants in all the census discussed.

⁷⁴ The correlation between date of arrival and socio-economic position is only partial. Some pre 1870 individuals, such as Michel Chartrand or Pierre Chaboyer, became and remained quite successful. Also there are indications that Fort Rouge inhabitants trickled in (and out) well into the 20th century. But, as a group, those families arriving after (circa) 1880 who are found in the census are by far the most "successful".

⁷⁵ One should keep in mind that some of these southern 'farming' families may have been in Saint-Laurent for just a season. Camper in a letter written in 1891, noted: "En 1890 le nombre de communions pascales pour Saint-Laurent a été beaucoup plus considerable que de coutume a cause des hivernants venus de différentes paroisses."

AASB, T44726-T44728, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 5 May 1891.

One of the reasons these people wintered in the area was to cash in on high fish prices; 'la petite rivière nous fait l'effet d'un marché dans sont nombreux les camps de pêcheurs qui accourent de tous les cotés".

Le Métis, vol 13, no 21, 13 March 1884, page 3.

⁷⁶ Richtik makes the comment that as late as 1883 land outside the riverlots was still largely in the hands of speculators. He bases his observation on data contained in the tax assessment rolls for 1883.

Between 1891 and 1914, the pressures brought to bear on the lakeshore Métis population would increase. Incoming Breton migrants, with their negative perception of 'traditional' North West lifestyles, and a changing economic climate, would further fragment the old Saint-Laurent population. Divergent groups would emerge between 1891 and 1914, but, contrary to popular perception, they would have a class rather than an ethnic basis. Many families who, in 1914, were labelled 'French Canadian' or 'Indian' had, thirty years before, been labelled Métis. In the next chapter the bifurcating processes of persistence or assimilation, and the forces that produced them, will be examined for the 1891 to 1914 years.

Chapter 7 - The Fragmentation of a 'Métis Community'

Between 1891 and the turn of the century the population of Saint-Laurent rose officially from about 600 to 769 (623 described as 'Métis', 49 as 'French', 88 as 'English', and 2 as 'others').¹ At first glance the increase appears to have been largely natural.² No large influx of migrants is noted in the clerical correspondence. The economic pursuits of the Saint-Laurent residents continued to be based on a combination of traditional lake shore activities (hunting and fishing) and farming pursuits. The overall number of full-time hunter-fishermen may have declined slightly in those years as a new fish house was erected just south of Saint-Laurent in the municipality of Posen and several families who depended on fishing for a living relocated there.³ Some may also have relocated permanently in the Rivière du Cygne area or the Narrows as fish buyers became more and more willing to go where people were fishing. The importance of agriculture in the municipality of Saint-Laurent increased slightly between 1891 and 1901:

Saint-Laurent municipality Some agricultural statistics for 1901*

Township	Acres cultivated	Horses	Cattle	Sheep	Pigs
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¹ Canada, Bureau of Statistics, Census of Canada, volume 1.

² Only aggregate numbers are, as yet, available from the 1901 census. It is possible that the increase may be partly due to the census having been taken at a time when the hivernants were in the parish. Or, as with all the previous censuses, the numbers may be artificially low because of hivernant absences.

³ Madeleine L. Proctor, Woodland Echoes (Steinbach, Derksen Printers, 1960), 140.

16-2W	—	26	200	2	16
16-4W	—	23	135	8	45
Saint-Laurent	381	155	458	10	76
17-4W	84	192	129	19	15
Oak Point	45	36	135	8	11

* Saint-Laurent Municipality, Tax Assessment Roll: 1921.⁴

In fact the number of cattle may have been greater in the mid 1890s than in either 1891 or 1901. In the spring of 1895, for example, Le Métis noted that,

M. le conte de Leusse établit une fromagerie qui commencera à fonctionner dans les premiers jours de mai. Déjà M. F. Rey en montait une avec plein succès. Pour mémoire je cite celle de M. Trudel, connue depuis quelques années et fort appréciée. M. E. Trudel dirigera celle de M. le conte de Leusse. Une autre encore doit s'organiser pour le commencement de la saison chez Mme Viel.⁵

Six weeks later Le Métis would add that "M.M. Coutu établissent une fromagerie; ce qui portent à six le nombre des établissements [à Saint-Laurent]".⁶ The Coutu family is the only case of a 'Métis' family (post-1880) having the capital to start such an enterprise. By the turn of the century the ever growing railway system had resulted in the consolidation of cheese and butter factories in larger centers, such as Winnipeg, and the closing down of many small rural factories.

In 1901 Saint-Laurent was still experiencing the economic restructuring that had

⁴ Richtik, 170. (table 14)

⁵ Le Métis, vol 24, no 17, 13 mars 1895, page 3.

⁶ Le Métis, vol 24, no 23, 24 April 1895, page 3.

resulted, since the 1860s, in growing socio-economic and 'racial' fragmentation.⁷ Saint-Laurent's economic development, based as it was on the production of staples such as fish, cream, and furs, in many ways strongly resembled that of the more northern communities on Lake Winnipegosis with which it still had familial and business ties.⁸ The village was linked to an international market through its production of pelts and fish. Unlike the northern settlements, it was also tied to the provincial economy through the selling of cream to local cheese or butter factories or directly to Winnipeg.⁹ It was this agricultural 'provincial' link which was crucial in crystallizing socio-economic differences in Saint-Laurent.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the Saint-Laurent 'farming' segment was composed largely of representatives of two of the four founding clans, members of families fleeing the 1867-1868 famine, most of the families arriving to Saint-Laurent from the more southerly parishes in the 1880s and 1890s, and a few moneyed European and Québécois families. Beginning in 1906 the farming and fishing families would be augmented by the arrival of French immigrants brought in directly from Brittany to farm and fish in Saint-Laurent. To the large French contingent can be added a few French Canadian families brought in by Father Peran of the Oblates

⁷ One should remember that, even prior to 1860, there already existed in Fond du Lac two distinct socio-economic groups: the four trading clans and the hunting and gathering families.

⁸ PAM, MOHP, 1984, C341, C352, C349, C357.

⁹ PAM, MOHP, 1984, C353.

in an effort to "whiten", "frenchify", and settle Saint-Laurent so as to turn it into a fully agricultural settlement more in keeping with the clergy's idea of a proper Catholic parish.¹⁰ By the end of the nineteenth century it was the declared intention of the Oblate order, working in the vicariate of Saint-Boniface, to encourage French Canadian or French European migration into Manitoba in the hopes of establishing a firm rural Catholic bastion. Not much hope was placed on the success of sedentarizing Manitoba's 'Métis' and Indian population. The explanation for the perceived lack of success in the Oblates' effort at Native farming was considered to be clearly biological:

L'oeuvre des Missions sauvages est très belle, mais, après tout, l'avenir n'est point à ces races affaiblies, il appartient aux races européennes, qui s'établissent partout dans nos plaines fertiles. Il n'est pas moins glorieux et méritoire de fonder des royaumes nouveaux et d'établir, sur des bases solides le royaume de Jesus Christ dans le nouveau monde.¹¹

About 150 Bretons (men, women and children) settled in Saint-Laurent. The writers of the time noted that the immigrants all came with some capital and none chose to try their hand at homesteading, preferring instead to purchase land which suited them: "aucun ne prit de homestead; tous préfèrent acheter des terrains à leur goût et être de suite entièrement maître chez eux."¹² Most had been farmers in their

¹⁰ OMI, AD, L111 M27C, Rapport du Vicaire des Missions de Saint-Boniface, 1893, page 9.

Missions Oblates de Marie Immaculée, (Rome: Maison Générale, 1898): 281; (1907): 327-329.

¹¹ Missions des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1927, page 341.

¹² LCSB, vol. 10, no 5, 1 March 1911, page 64.

homeland and in Saint-Laurent they concentrated their efforts on gardening, dairy farming and, eventually with great success, ice fishing. Some Bretons also undertook commercial and wage labor activities. For example, two Breton heads of family bought a haypress in 1911 and the following year were successfully buying up local hay and selling it at a profit to more southerly farmers. Another specialized in the clearing of forested areas for farming: "[il] trouve que cela paie largement, d'autant plus que ce travail extra n'empêche pas sa femme et ses enfants de faire marcher la ferme."¹³ Many younger sons would work for wages on neighboring farms during the summer months. They would return in autumn to Saint-Laurent where their summer wages would be invested in the family farm, a tradition that did not seem prevalent among the Métis population. By 1911 all the Breton senior heads of family were proprietors of fairly well equipped farms: "bien montée et d'une importance proportionnelle aux fonds dont ils disposaient à leur arrivée".¹⁴

While Saint-Laurent was experiencing an influx of 'moneyed' settlers many of the old settlers of Oak Point were leaving that small settlement¹⁵ to be replaced by Icelandic fishermen.¹⁶ The arrival of European settlers and their apparent success

¹³ LCSB, vol 10, no. 5, 1 March 1911, pages 64-66.

¹⁴ LCSB, vol. 10, no. 5, 1 March 1911, pages 64-66.

¹⁵ There is no clear indication that they ever received letters patent to their river lots.

¹⁶ Saint-Laurent Municipality, Tax Assessment Roll 1911, quoted in Richtik, 201.

hardened the attitude of lay and church authorities¹⁷ towards the hunting and gathering element of the population. In published and private correspondence writers began to refer to the hunting and gathering group as 'Indians' perhaps increasingly unwilling to accept that people with French Catholic ancestors would lead such a life and be so reluctant to speak any other language but Cree or Saulteaux. As early as 1896 Father Camper would write to Mgr Langevin making no mention of 'Métis':

Le catéchisme de la première communion à commencé cette semaine. C'est une besogne d'un mois ou d'un mois et demi. Le père Gascon et le père Dorais l'ont entrepris. Le premier ce charge des Français, le second des Anglais et des Sautaux.¹⁸

In a letter published in 1907, Father L. Gladu, O.M.I., would describe Saint-Laurent's population in the following startling terms: "La paroisse de Saint-Laurent est composée de quatre populations de langues diverses: des Bretons, des Canadiens français, des Irlandais, et des sauvages Sautaux".¹⁹

The clerical distancing from, and disapproval of, old Métis families who did not conform to western (European) ideas of proper behavior was shared by the recent French Canadian and Breton immigrants:

Il est logique que cet état de décomposition se traduise par l'isolement d'une grande partie de la société métisse dans les provinces de l'Ouest. On ne saurait attendre d'éléments réduits à ce degré de déchéance qu'ils obtiennent, du moins en nombre appréciable, un droit d'accès à

¹⁷ Lay and church authorities were by and large the same group. One had to be a 'good' catholic to a municipal councillor or a school trustee.

¹⁸ AASB, L5140-L5143, Camper à Langevin, Saint-Laurent, 21 May 1896.

¹⁹ Missions des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1907, 326.

la société blanche. Ou bien, lorsque les unions s'accomplissent, elles risquent fort de se faire entre éléments de même niveau, et de demeurer sans profit pour les métis. L'isolement se manifeste déjà dans les groupes que nous avons observés autour des lacs Winnipeg et Manitoba, dont la décadence est pourtant moins prononcée. A Saint-Laurent, Français et Canadien s'unissent dans un égal mépris du groupe de couleur. Leur hostilité s'y exprime en parole malveillantes, presque haineuses, surtout de la part des familles françaises récemment introduites par les Pères Oblats: la conduite de celles-ci, faite de travail et d'abnégation, ne saurait s'harmoniser avec les habitudes de vie des Métis....Et il existe nous l'avons vu, parmi les Métis des familles assez évoluées pour ne pas encourir sans injustice, l'hostilité systématique des Blancs. Mais les alliances qui s'opèrent entre les uns et les autres sont mal vues de ces derniers. Non seulement, elles ne dissipent points leurs préventions, mais elles paraissent les aggraver. C'est précisément des Canadiens dont les familles comptent une ou plusieurs unions de cette nature qu'émanent les critiques les plus sévères, comme s'ils éprouvent une vive humiliation d'avoir à admettre parmi eux des représentants de ce groupe inférieur.²⁰

By 1910 the 'farming' segment of Saint-Laurent was composed largely of recently arrived French immigrants but it also included families of 'Métis' descent that had successfully integrated into the agrarian economy.²¹ They, unlike families more fully tied to an international economy by their greater dependence on fishing and trapping, were always assured of a steady market for their products between 1881 and

²⁰ Giraud, 1271-1272. (emphasis added)

²¹ In 1984 an interviewee, when asked to list the big farmers of her youth (1920s) listed along with typically breton names, the Chartrand, Lavallée, Carrière, and the Gaudry families.

The Gaudry are a Métis family originating from Lorette, Manitoba. They seem to have moved to the Saint-Laurent area after 1891. Andre Gaudry Sr. had a farm 5 miles south of the Church in the early 1900s and, according to a daughter-in-law, had 'lots' of cows and horses.

1919.²² During depression periods such as the mid-1890s, and just prior to W.W. I, dairy farmers did suffer a decline in their incomes but the downward trend was not as pronounced as that experienced by other primary producers.²³

Between 1900 and 1945, most residents of Saint-Laurent fished commercially to some degree. The arrival of the railway in 1904 tied producers more fully to international markets, especially Chicago.²⁴ The link to international capitalism was a mixed blessing since, by pushing up demand and production, it threatened to deplete fish stocks. As early as 1884 Father Camper expressed concern at the poor catches fishermen were getting. He feared some families might be facing famine (being unable to get supplies and credit at a store): "La pêche avec la chasse aux lièvres sont à peu près leurs seuls moyens de vivre dans l'hiver ces dernières années".²⁵ Again, in 1890, the Department of Indian affairs had noted:

"The lower portion of Lake Winnipeg and portions of Lake Manitoba have ceased to be good fishing grounds after having been operated upon by large fishing establishments for a comparatively short period of time".²⁶

²² F.H. Leacy, ed. Historical Statistics of Canada, 2nd ed. (Statistics Canada, 1983), section M.

²³ After 1911 most rural cheese factories closed down as cream could be shipped directly to Winnipeg and processed there more cheaply. Saint-Laurent farmers could count on a daily freight train to carry their goods south.

²⁴ This connection with Chicago had begun in the 1880s. Le Métis, vol 13, no. 21, 13 March 1884.

²⁵ AASB, T30260-T30263, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 12 November 1884.

²⁶ Rothney, 153.

This last comment also reveals the direct competition individual farmers were facing from large companies. Independent fishermen in Saint-Laurent had difficulty absorbing the loss of property and lives that occurred frequently through storms and treacherous ice conditions. For example, one respondent related to the Chartrand clan noted how, in one stormy night, he lost his whole 'outfit' of 102 nets. He had gone out too early in the season to lay his nets and, as a result of a wind storm, the ice had broken up on the lake. He had acquired the initial capital necessary to purchase his fishing equipment by working for a Breton farmer cutting hay for \$15 a month. This fisherman had no land to fall back on.²⁷

The problems plaguing small Saint-Laurent fishing families between 1900 and 1945 were similar to those faced by independent farmers the world over. Hundreds of commodity producers sold to a handful of companies that often cooperated and reinvested most of the profits outside of the Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis regions. As the Rothney-Watson report notes:

Only 4 frozen fish companies (largely controlled by American capital) operated in Manitoba and by the 1930s they were cooperating to reduce competition. The individual producers were largely helpless in advocating for better prices and efforts at organizing largely failed due to difficulties of sustaining collective mass solidarity within the confines of a capitalist market...and no permanent and mutual group spirit emerges from an organization based on motives of diversity, individualism and self-interest.²⁸

²⁷ PAM, MOHP, 1984, C349.

²⁸ Russ Rothney and Steve Watson, A Brief Economic History of Northern Manitoba, (Northern Planning Exercise, July 1975), 41.

Intensified competition during favorable market periods and cyclical slumps in prices due to an unstable international economy, meant a precarious existence for those of the Saint-Laurent fishermen who were heavily dependent on food staples that had to be purchased with cash or credit at a store. An example of fluctuating prices is the 1914-1915 slump in demand. By early February prices were cut by 50% from the previous winter and by the end of the month buyers had stopped buying altogether.²⁹ This spelled disaster for fishermen who had gone into debt to get onto the ice. Prices would continue to fluctuate after World War I. For example, by 1920-21 the prices given for fish were the highest in living memory ³⁰ and most fishermen were able to clear a profit, making the 'Métis' villagers' continued reluctance to pay church dues a mystery to the religious authorities. Prosperity was not to last. In the 1930s, prices once again plummeted:

Market conditions have changed considerably in the last few years and what was once an extensive and favorable market cannot now absorb present production at any price and indeed can only take care of a fraction of the whole production at any price which will net the fishermen even a small profit.³¹

Fishermen were faced with seasonal debts (getting outfitted, credit during a bad year, unexpected low prices) that often left little room for capital accumulation.³²

²⁹ R. Rothney and S. Watson, 57.

³⁰ OMI, AD, L381 M27R9, Historical Notes, Parish of Saint-Laurent, page 58.

³¹ R. Rothney and S. Watson, 46.

³² R. Rothney and S. Watson, 46.

Moreover, though prices tended to rise there is little evidence that fishermen's buying power increased proportionately. Profits did not 'trickle' down to primary producers.³³ For some of the more common species of fish, such as whitefish, prices offered to the fishermen would remain at a static low for decades.³⁴

As previously stated, Saint-Laurent fishermen never really formed a distinct socio-economic (or 'racial') grouping. Farmers, hunters and gatherers, and trappers all participated in the winter fishing industry. What distinguished the participants from each other was the importance of fishing in the family budget, the scale on which it was undertaken, and the other staple producing activities linked to it. The families considered 'white', that is families that had attained a certain degree of material well being and social acceptability, were combining fishing with dairy farming.³⁵ The revenues derived from these activities must have been considerable since the Church authorities in 1905 expected them to pay the greatest amount of tithes, \$10 a year. Only 35 families out of a total of nearly 200 were considered well-to-do by the Oblates.³⁶

³³ Lagassé, vol. 3, pages 67-70.

³⁴ F.H.Leacy (1983) section N.

³⁵ PAM, MOHP, 1984, C353.

³⁶ AD, OMI, L381 M27R 9, pages 2-4. In this document the poor segment of the population is labelled 'Métis' but the writer is quick to point out that there are families of Métis descent who are now 'good' families fully capable of meeting these higher financial obligations.



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These farmer-fisherman families could put up to 200 nets under the ice and their 'outfits' were comprised of at least one team of horses (later bombardiers) and some hired hands. If the season was good they were able to clear a substantial profit, and reinvest in other activities.³⁷ If the catch, or the market, was poor they could count on income from cream or hay sales to recoup their losses, honor their debts (at least partially), and pay their Freeman Metis hired hands. Produce from their gardens and their cattle lessened their dependence on merchants for basic food stuffs. Though there were differences in herd size, numbers of fish nets put out, degree of land and capital controlled and, last but not least, level of help (financial or other) received from religious authorities,³⁸ all could weather several bad fishing seasons without being beggared.

At the other end of the socio-economic scale were the 'Fort-Rouge' residents, most of whom also engaged in fishing. As stated in chapter three, Fort Rouge was an impoverished fringe area of Saint-Laurent situated, literally, on the other side of the train tracks from the main mission area and containing, at its most populous, perhaps 100 households. Several of the heads of family listed as hunters in 1881 and 1891 resided there. Several older Manitoba villages had such small communities on their outskirts. These seem to have been given distinct names to emphasize their

³⁷ AD, OMI, L381 M27R 9, pages 2-4.

³⁸ PAM, MOHP, 1984, C351-2, C356, C360. For a contrasting view on the clergy listen to C342-344.

separateness.³⁹ Respondents defined Fort Rouge as somehow more traditional. The fishing-farming respondents, in the course of interviews, considered the Fort Rouge residents to be 'closer' in appearance and custom to the Indians. Most, during the first half of the 20th century, still spoke Cree or Saulteaux to each other and the women still wore the traditional black shawl and smoked corn pipes.⁴⁰ Though the origins of Fort Rouge are nebulous, indications are that it was populated at least partly by descendants of the families listed as indigent in the 1867-1868 famine, and partly by hunting and gathering families who had moved into the settlement in the 1880s and 1890s. After 1880 very little homestead land was available and, unlike families coming from the older southern Métis parishes, they did not have had the capital necessary to buy land outright. Some of these Fort Rouge families would have managed to acquire a few cattle which they pastured on 'unoccupied' land. According to an old Fort Rouge respondent, cattle could make life quite a bit easier for hunting and fishing families.⁴¹ By the early 20th century property owners were beginning to fence their property and the hay lands behind the riverlots were being homesteaded or claimed and bought for private use. Prior to the fencing, haying appears to have been done largely on a first come first served basis. One respondent explained how he had built up a 'ranch' where only the house was fenced in. The cattle roamed free. When land began to be fenced in he realized that even if he sold all his herd (74 head) he

³⁹ Lagassé, vol. 1, 72.

⁴⁰ PAM, MOHP, 1984, C342-3, C351-2, C357, C363, C364.

⁴¹ MLC, 1987, tapes no. 24 and 25.

would still not have enough capital to acquire sufficient property for a viable farming operation.⁴²

Well-to-do residents of Saint-Laurent thought of Fort Rouge as a tough place, had few social contacts with its inhabitants and denied having relatives there.⁴³ In the clergy's eyes, the Fort Rouge Métis had serious problems when it came to religious or moral obligations and duties.⁴⁴ Oblates would deplore their 'savage' mentality, their reluctance to obey directives given at the pulpit and their tight-fistedness when it came to paying church dues.⁴⁵ At the turn of the century the resident priest repeated a frequent complaint:

Il y en a toujours qui se plaignent. Ils peuvent tout dépenser pour satisfaire leur vanité, leur orgueil, leur passion, leurs désirs dérèglés, pour les plaisirs, pour la boissons, etc...et ils n'ont que des murmures et des plaintes à faire entendre quand on leur demande quelque chose pour le Bon Dieu!⁴⁶

In their defence, the impoverished villagers could point to the Oblates' prize winning dairy herd, large land holdings, stone buildings and query the necessity for more tithes? Outside funds had established the church's presence in Saint-Laurent and

⁴² MLC, 1987, tape no 35, side 1.

⁴³ PAM, MOHP, 1984, Interviews C342-3, C351-2, C357, C363, C364.

⁴⁴ Missions des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1920, page 273.

⁴⁵ OMI, AD, L381 M27R9.

⁴⁶ OMI, AD, L381 M27R9.

therefore the Oblates should look elsewhere for money.

What really distinguished Fort Rouge residents from other villagers (aside from their being labelled 'Métis') was the serious poverty that often resulted in hunger.⁴⁷ The Fort Rouge Métis did not own land, did not have the money to build up a dairy farm, could not (because of the seasonal demands of their subsistence activities) plant large gardens and were even more sensitive to the vagaries of an international economy than their more established and sedentary neighbors.⁴⁸ Interview data indicates that the activities open to the Fort Rouge settlers condemned them to a life of poverty. In winter they fished on a small scale with the help of dogs and sleighs on the edge of the lakes, and rarely put out more than 20 or 25 nets. What was left after family (and dog) needs were met was sold to the fish companies. However, since prices were usually quite low, large quantities had to be harvested for profits to be made. Presumably, in a good year, some money could be made since these fishermen had little overhead cost.⁴⁹ However a series of bad years could be disastrous and, as Lagassé points out, alternative sources of income came into direct conflict with home

⁴⁷ PAM, MOHP, 1984, C351-2. For an interesting if clearly biased description of typical Fort Rouge habitants read the Mission des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1901, pages 85-98.

⁴⁸ Walter Hlady commented in a draft version of vol.3 of the Lagasse report that 'metis' attitudes toward gardening were conditioned by their subsistence activities: 'For many the necessity to go out harvesting the seneca root, fishing, cutting pulpwood and taking casual employment, all of which usually meant leaving the home community for extended periods, was a valid reason for not gardening.'

⁴⁹ For an interesting discussion on fish prices for the lake Winnipeg fishermen see interview PAM, MOHP, 1985, C383.

gardening, which could have lessened their dependence on store bought foodstuffs. All in all the above indicates the existence of the Fort Rouge settlers as a separate economic group at the lowest end of the scale.

Besides fishing, the Fort Rouge Métis engaged in trapping, berry picking, seneca root digging, and frog



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harvesting coupled to some form of seasonal wage labor.⁵⁰ There are indications that having few earthly possessions could have been an advantage in years of hardship. One respondent explained that during a difficult period four (unnamed) Saint-Laurent men left almost unnoticed to fish on Great Slave Lake (N.W.T.) for a few seasons.⁵¹ Some Fort Rouge hunting and gathering families were quite willing to relocate themselves for years in an effort to improve returns from their labor. One respondent, born in 1909, remembered her family leaving Saint-Laurent for bush country north of Wabowden and The Pas so that her father could hunt, trap and work as a freighter. In the summer they went up to Nelson House to fish for sturgeon. Activities such as muskrat hunting could be profitable endeavors in years when catches were plentiful and the price was good: "Une seule maison de commerce ici (Saint-Laurent) a expédié 20,000 peaux de rat musqués!".⁵² Eventually, the family returned to Saint-Laurent in the 1920s when several of the children were of school age.

⁵⁰ PAM, MOHP, 1984-85, C357, C363, C385.

⁵¹ Great Slave Lake remains the site of the largest commercial fishing enterprise in the Mackenzie district and the only one heavily involving Métis. Many are what anthropologist Richard Slabodin defines as (inaccurately I believe) 'Red River' Metis: A broad category taking in families that trace their roots to the pre1870 fur trade era. Many went up at the turn of the century and later from the northern prairies where they already had engaged in commercial fishing. Métis from almost every western province are represented among those holding commercial fishing licenses at Hay River. To this day commercial fishing is a major occupation of 'Red River' Métis not only at Great Slave Lake but also at the older established fisheries in Saskatchewan and Alberta, at Lesser Slave, Athabasca, Wollaston, and Reindeer Lakes. Richard Slabodin, "Subarctic Métis," Subarctic, Handbook of North American Indians series, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981, 368-69.

⁵² Le Métis, vol. 22, no. 32, 1893, page 3.

Other non-Fort Rouge villagers also participated from time to time in such endeavors but viewed them as sources of supplementary income to be undertaken when time permitted.⁵³ For the Fort Rouge Métis revenues generated by these occupations were crucial to their material well being. A decline in the supply of any one of them could easily spell increased and noticeable material hardship. The precariousness of their livelihood was further determined by the prices for these goods (furs, berries, roots) which fluctuated wildly; frequently, events which adversely affected fishing often had an impact on the prices of these commodities. For example in 1914-1915 Inspector Jackson wrote:

The price of fur has been very low this season--muskrats about 10 cents each; and to show what a drag [sic] in the market furs are one reliable indian informed me that he took some muskrat skins into the H.B.C.'s store and they refused to buy at any price.⁵⁴

1914 coincided with a downward trend in fish prices and the income generated by berry picking or seneca root harvesting could not be increased sufficiently to compensate for loss of revenue in other sectors.⁵⁵ These were also times when the fishermen-farmers with large outfits would be cutting back on their labor needs, trying to weather the 'down' years. The Fort Rouge 'Métis', neither fully staple producers nor fully wage laborers, suffered the most when an economic slump affecting both spheres occurred. Even in good years they were never in a position to improve their material

⁵³ PAM, MOHP, 1984-85, (description of father's occupation).

⁵⁴ Rothney and Watson, 57.

⁵⁵ Lagassé, vol 3, 77-86.

conditions sufficiently to change their ethnic status, that is, to become French Canadians.

Chapter 8 - "C'est pas beau être Métis"¹

At some point between 1850 and 1914, 'Métis' became a derogatory term. It was used to describe a person's marginalized socio-economic position on the shores of Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis. Prior to 1850, 'Métis' described people of dual cultural heritage who, by and large, supplied food staples (pemmican, fish, salt) to the fur trade companies and who were, occasionally, a source of cheap labor, first for the North West Company and, after 1821, for the Hudson's Bay Company. Other socio-economic strata of the North-western interior that evolved after 1821, petty traders and eventually farmers, initially appeared to have little or no objections to being labelled Métis even though, by 1870, their ideology and world view differed quite markedly from the larger hunting and fishing segment. Initial uneasiness with the concept of 'Métiness' appeared on the shores of the two lakes in the 1880s. By 1880 a substantial segment of the old lakeshore families were trapped in lives of poverty and recurrent hunger, caused by lack of land, little or no access to capital and none of knowledge necessary for a transition to a farming and fishing lifestyle. Families who had succeeded in achieving a relatively comfortable living, after 1880, began distancing themselves from their impoverished neighbours and relatives by emphasizing their French Canadian background and rejecting the label 'Métis'. As the Delaronde-Boyer example illustrates, some respondents flatly rejected the idea that they, their parents or their grand-parents were Métis. They would readily agree that they had a 'pretty mixed' background but state categorically that they were not 'Métis'. The Delaronde-

¹ Quoted above.

Boyer comment that the old grand-mother, Marie-Anne Delaronde, would not allow her children to play with those she considered to be 'Métis' strengthens the argument that by 1910, the parameters of being Métis were defined culturally and economically rather than because of ancestry.

This dissertation explores to what degree a Marxist analysis, emphasizing the importance of material forces and the emergence of class and class conflict in the second half of the 19th century, can contribute to a better understanding of 'Métis' history on the shores of Lakes Manitoba and Winnipegosis. Several quite serious caveats apply to the data. There is a dearth in archival materials available for the Saint-Laurent region. There are no pre-World War II Tax Assessment Rolls extant. Finally, there are all of the problems inherent upon a reliance upon oral history as a source of data. Despite these caveats some conclusions may be drawn with a degree of confidence.

The penetration of new economic, social and ideological influences in the Saint-Laurent area after 1870 did have a direct and in some cases terrible effect on a portion of the population listed as 'Métis' in the first general census of the region. But what is important to note is that it was not a blanket effect; not all of the old families were adversely affected. As discussed in the previous chapters, many of the old Red River families (especially those arriving to Saint-Laurent after 1880) and some of the 'northern' Métis families prospered in the Canadian phase of this region's history. The

simple, crucial and contradictory facts of persistence and assimilation escaped the notice of many researchers dealing with 'Métis' history because they failed to notice the evolution in the use of the term between 1870 and 1914. It has been argued here that the change in nuances of meaning underlying the term 'Métis' can be traced to changes in the economy of the region and the varied impact of these changes upon different groups within the early population. Also of importance was the importation of a racist ideology having its roots in the development of both British and French capitalism.² Racist precepts provided a simple visual explanatory framework for phenomena actually produced or rooted in complex changes in material forces.

In 1850 the lakeshore dwellers could already be grouped in three socio-economic strata. First, there were the much

² Robert Miles, "Class, Race and Ethnicity: A Critique of Cox's Theory," Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 3, no. 2 (April 1980).



discussed Cree and French (Mitchif) speaking petty trading families who made a living buying pelts, pemmican and salt from the other two groups for resale to the large fur companies. Second, there was the large, nebulous and elusive group labelled as Freeman Métis who lived a life of hunting, fishing and small scale trading and trapping. The Freeman were a group who migrated along the Duck Bay, Saint-Laurent, au large (White Mud River effluent) circuit. Their cultural, ideological, and political ties to the Red River Métis population (even its bison hunting segment) appear to have been quite weak. The Freeman Métis spoke Cree and Saulteaux with equal ease but not French. Finally, the longest residing settlers in the area, were the Saulteaux Indians, who dwelt largely in the northern end of Lake Manitoba and on the shores of Lake Winnipegosis, gaining their livelihood through hunting and trapping.

It is difficult to know how the trading families considered the Freeman prior to the 1870s. The traders certainly appear to have had little or no objection to being labelled 'Métis' alongside Freeman. However, their insistence upon placing distinctions between themselves and the Indian segment of the population could be quite virulent. Though their trading activities led them to marital alliances (though rarely formal or long term) with the Saulteaux they were adamant in maintaining a distinction to the point of refusing to let their children be raised by their Saulteaux relatives. Also, in the early 1870s, trading Métis appear to have forced families they considered to be 'Indian' out of the Saint-Laurent Oak Point area. Clearly, the traders considered the 'Indian' segment of the population to be lower than themselves on the socio-economic

scale in use at the time. The Indians were a group with whom one had business and marital ties but with whom one did not cohabit or merge. This distancing was not due to the mere fact that the Indian were Saulteaux as opposed to Cree speakers (i.e. different 'ethnic' groups) since people of French Canadian, Scottish, and Irish descent had little or no difficulty in merging with the trading elite.

How the Freeman reacted to the Métis-Saulteaux distinction is unclear. Since they spent more time with the Saulteaux in the Duck Bay area than with the Traders at Fond du Lac one could conclude that distinctions were not as rigidly maintained. Certainly the Saint-Laurent marriage registers for the northern missions note the marriages of several Métis men and women with recently baptized people having Saulteaux names. Unlike the majority of the trading element, the Freeman appear to have been willing to have their marriages to 'Indians' regularized: perhaps because they viewed these to be of a long term nature. Certainly, the Oblates never mention one of these Freeman having simultaneously a 'real' Métis wife and an 'Indian' concubine.

In the three decades following the annexation of Manitoba to Canada the social structure of the Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis population changed radically. Unlike the situation in the older and more southerly parishes a key element of change was not so much the large scale arrival of out of province migrants but rather a gradual change in the area's economy coupled with the arrival of Métis families from

the Red River area. The initial wave came in 1868-69 during a famine year. These were families that, though destitute, had some knowledge of agrarian pursuits and an awareness of the potential value of landed property. They, along with some members of the old trading families, laid claim to individual river lots in 1872 and again in 1874. The Freeman Métis did not. It is difficult to determine the reasons for the abstention. Lack of interest in, or comprehension of private property may be part of the reason but a less subjective explanation is their absence in the spring of 1872 when the Wagner survey was made. Most would still have been in their wintering site of Duck Bay. A second explanation would be their inability to fulfill the residency requirements: a problem also plaguing several traders. Many Métis Freeman and traders had never erected permanent dwellings at Fond du Lac even though they considered the area their home base. The Freeman lived in Saint-Laurent between May and October when wooden structures were superfluous.

Why so few individuals from the trading families filed a written claim to land is more problematic.³ They were certainly aware, from their frequent visits to the Red River Settlement and the preaching of the Oblates, that changes were pending after 1870. As with the Freeman, inability to meet the list of settlement duties ('improvements') and simple hivernage absences were part of the problem. It is crucial to remember that for the trading families well into the 1880s there was a viable, even

³ They may have gone to lay a claim to their land at the Dominion Land Office and been verbally dissuaded to do so (due to a lack of 'improvements').

lucrative, alternative to farming. It is fairly obvious from Wagner's residency maps that these families saw a river lot as a pied-a-terre, a place to build a house, to have a small store or to run a saloon, but not as a place to farm or ranch on any scale. They made a comfortable living trading and freighting and it is probable that they simply misjudged the rapidity with which the farming-fishing economy would displace the fur trade on the south shores of Lake Manitoba and the scale at which the large fur and fish companies would monopolize commerce and trading along the full length of both lakes. It was not ignorance or unwillingness to change that eventually led many of the children of the original trading families to a life of poverty after 1880, but rather a collective error in judgement.

The Métis families who chose a life of farming coupled with fishing prior to the 1880s may have gained the approval of the clergy but they condemned themselves to several years of struggle and hardship. The clergy's letters are filled with concerned remarks about early frosts, locusts, lack of markets and difficulties in transporting cheese and butter over oxcart trails. Cash income was derived largely from ice fishing, just as for the Freeman. The key difference between the two groups was that the farmers were able to retain a measure of independence vis-a-vis the merchants because they did not depend on them for basic foodstuffs. As the priests noted, all the lakeshore dwellers had become dependent upon flour, pork, lard, butter, canned goods, all of which the Freeman would have to buy whether the fishing was remunerative or not. The farming element could produce at least part of their own foodstuffs

and sell off their farming surpluses to obtain other 'needed' goods such as tea. The Freeman, on the other hand, were completely dependent upon the merchants and this again, the priests noted disapprovingly, led to a perpetual cycle of debt and the frequent threat of famine.

The apparent rejection by the Freeman Métis of the Habitant lifestyle coupled to their social habits of public drinking and partying combined with their disregard for church authorities, led to their social marginalization; first by the church authorities and then by the 'respectable' fishing and farming families. Oblates increasingly refer to the two groups as 'good' and 'bad' Métis families, with the traders holding an ambiguous in-between position, until January 1887, when Father Camper made the conscious decision to refer to baptized babies of 'good' families as 'white'.⁴

Among the families that were becoming 'white' in the 1880s was a large contingent of old Manitoba families that had originated mainly in the southern parishes. It has been well documented that a significant number of Métis who had attempted to stay, claim their lands, and farm after 1870 began to leave their farms in the 1880s. They appear to have become disheartened by the actions of speculators, the slowness of the government in dealing with their claims, and perhaps the attitudes of newcomers. Not all headed west, several families came to Saint-Laurent. They seem to have arrived there with some small measure of capital since the majority bought

⁴ AASB, T35087-T35088 Passim, Camper à Taché, Saint-Laurent, 9 January 1887.

land outright from speculators or Métis or they successfully homesteaded. Their arrival immediately precedes the improvement in road transportation, the expansion of the railway in the area, and the opening of local outlets (cheese and butter factories) for dairy products. Although not necessarily causally related to the appearance of the new immigrants, the development of the region's infrastructure assured them a measure of material success in their new home.

It was usually the Red River families who, from 1880 to 1914, increased the social, economic and even physical distance (with the creation of Fort Rouge) between themselves and their hunting and gathering brethren. These Red River families, along with the clergy, out of province migrants and some of the older local well-to-do families, began to redefine what 'Métis' meant. Though several aged respondents from Saint-Laurent readily admitted to having Indian ancestors they vehemently denied being 'Métis' - they honestly believe themselves to be French Canadians. To be Métis was to be poor, to live in a run down shack in Fort Rouge and to cling to pre 1870 customs of dress, language, social and economic values. To be 'Métis' was to be disrespectful of the clergy, indifferent to Catholic dogma and unaware of the value of education. But, most important, to be 'Métis' in Saint-Laurent in 1914 meant not to own land or livestock and not to be at least a part-time a farmer.

In all fairness, differences between the Fort Rouge and farming 'Métis' may have had roots in pre1870 attitudes. It is possible the trading families of Fond du Lac

had felt some difference between themselves and their lakeshores hunting and gathering counterparts prior to 1870. Certainly the more established Red River and Saint-François Xavier families coming up in 1868 and later would have perceived differences between themselves and the Freeman Métis. The Red River families did not have any close ties to the Lake Winnipegosis and Lake Manitoba Saulteaux, were more knowledgeable of farming, and were less able to seasonally move to Duck Bay or elsewhere. As they themselves noted they were not 'as Indian' as Freeman Métis. In fact, the late-comers were so un-'Indian' there are indications that the Freeman did not even consider them to be 'Métis'. Yet, when one looks at the genealogies of all of the pre-1890 Saint-Laurent families they are nearly identical - 'French Canadian' father or grand-father and 'Indian' mother or grand-mother. The only genealogical difference was a slightly greater propensity for Freeman Métis to have official 'Indian' wives in the 1870s and 1880s. The key variable which determined who became French Canadian and who remained 'Métis' was the ability, in the decade 1870 to 1880, to acquire and exploit land; in short, the new definition of Métis implied a failed integration into the provincial dairy economy.

Who remained 'Métis' after 1880 in the Lake Winnipegosis and Lake Manitoba region? By and large, the initial core was composed of the Freeman who had lived a life of fishing and gathering along the shores of Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis with occasional forays into the White Mud River district for bison or moose hunting. Independent, apparently with little or no direct ties to the Red River Settle-

ment or the Hudson's Bay Company (either for commercial or wage labor) they appear to have identified closely with the local Saulteaux population. Certainly, they married into this tribe (unlike most of the traders, these were long term marital arrangements) and, as frequently noted by the clergy, they spoke Saulteaux with much greater ease than French, if they knew the latter at all. As discussed previously the majority of the Freeman were never in a position to lay claim to river lots, because they were absent at the times of the surveys and censuses and because they never made European improvements (house, barn, fence) to parcels of lands they probably considered to be their own. Clerical correspondence noted the arrival of other such families who lived day to day throughout the 1870s as bison returns dwindled to nothing and small scale fishing became the only viable alternative for those without capital. Geographically and socially segregated, these 'Métis' families continued to produce a variety of goods specifically for exchange: primarily frozen fish but also seneca root, pelts, berries and other 'forests' and 'wild' products. From the merchants, the hunting and gathering Métis received basic food stuff, clothes, and the tools necessary to pursue their 'trade'. Such exchanges were never favorable enough for these 'Métis' to get out of debt and to begin to accumulate the capital, land, livestock and equipment necessary for farming and large scale ice fishing. These Métis hunting, gathering, and fishing families worked year round, but their economic pursuits did not enable them to participate in the provincial dairy-farm economy except as poorly paid seasonal laborers. Such economic activities also assured these Métis a position of marginality in the international fishing economy. In some cases economic and social

marginality translated into a retreat northward and, sometimes, a total merging with the Indian population by the acquisition of treaty status.

Trapped in social, economic, and geographical isolation the Fort Rouge 'Métis' maintained their pre 1870 customs, habits, worldview and traditions. Farming families that aspired to becoming French Canadian consciously suppressed these traits and hid them from their children. Most farming respondents noted that even though their parents and grand-parents had known an 'Indian' language they were careful not to speak it to their children and grand-children. The Fort Rouge 'Métis' certainly had no such compulsions as late as the 1920s. In the years following the turn of the century, poverty in Fort Rouge maintained social, cultural and linguistic traits that differed more and more from the norm found in the farming element of Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis. These traits, and their origins in a dual heritage and fur trade economy, began to be seen as the explanation for, as opposed to the result of, a marginalized existence. This belief, which was held by the less marginalized Saint-Laurent inhabitants, conveniently ignored the fact that surprising numbers of 'French Canadian' and 'Breton' farming families in the Saint-Laurent area had ancestors who, prior to 1870, considered themselves 'Métis'. 'Métis' had ceased being a label and had become a class.

The dynamics of expanding capitalism, coupled to an intrusive European racist ideology, produced a marginalized class on the shores of Lake Manitoba and Lake

Winnipegosis. Many farmer colonies had such staple-producing reserve labor forces prior to W. W. I. Most individuals did not engage in staple production by choice and, in Manitoba, when industrial jobs became available there was a distinct tendency to abandon seasonal work in favor of employment which produced more predictable returns.⁵ In Saint-Laurent, as in most of the interlake region, this class became viewed as racially or ethnically distinct because of a series of specific socioeconomic and historical circumstances which affected relations of production and reinforced an emerging racist ideology. Slight phenotypical variations were negatively evaluated and the evaluation (for Manitoba Métis in 20% of the cases) reinforced the very real impact of chronic material hardship. It became part of society's common sense that "most poor people in the area were native, and that most natives were poor." To this day, the authorities, the public, and even the people affected, think in terms of Indian and Métis problems, or of injustices done to Natives, and posit solutions with ethnic boundaries in mind, not realizing that they are buying into an ever-evolving racist paradigm. Such a paradigm displaces critical analysis away from class-based issues and obscures the capitalist process of differentiating society between the haves and have-nots. This process occurs not merely in the sense of capital versus the proletariat but also of capital versus a marginalized, staple-producing, reserve labor force.

⁵ Lagassé, 77.



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