

Kiya Waneekah: (Don't Forget)

by

Dennis Davey

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss how I planned to implement an Insurgent Research methodology articulated by Métis scholar, Adam Gaudry in his article “Insurgent Research.”¹ I organized my historic Métis community using an insurgent research model as methodology along with storytelling, community meetings and ‘kitchen table’ discussions to challenge the narrative set in motion by the justice system for San Clara and Boggy Creek Manitoba. I briefly discuss a 2011 court decision, R v Langan, that denied the traditional and re-emergent identity of San Clara. I implemented a community-based co-researcher model grounded in a culture of mutual respect and relationship building. I include scholarly writings that recommend recording local histories and community and family relationships. I received several gifts and I discuss the meaningful experiences found in this culture of gift giving. I relate how I mobilized the community, the stories people shared and the lessons I learned as an inside researcher. My community co-researchers have expanded to included thirty-eight people who have signed consent forms and together we plan to ‘push back’ against the injustice of denying our historic status as a traditional community. We will conclude this research project by submitting a written document of our local history, and cultural activities and establish our heritage in the literature as a historic Métis community in Manitoba.

¹ Adam Gaudry, “Insurgent Research,” Wicazo SA Review, Spring 2011: *Project MUSE: Today’s Research. Tomorrow’s Inspiration*. Accessed 17 September 2016, <https://adamgaudry.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/gaudry-insurgent-research-wicazo-sa-26-11.pdf>

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Most importantly, I am sustained by the support of the San Clara and Boggy Creek community and others with historic ties here, who, generously gifted their traditional knowledge and ideas through social media, family and community meetings. These collective efforts enabled this community research to happen. I value all thirty-nine co-researchers (and counting) who took the risk and trusted me that our story is important and that it should be told. The storytellers from this Métis community are my extended family and friends and they share their worldview and hospitality as I am invited into their homes to record, photograph and listen to their stories of survival, community and family life. Lastly, to my family in British Columbia who generously share my time to allow me to study and undertake this research project in Manitoba, thank you. I appreciate your patience and understanding.

Introduction

Kiya Waneekeh: Don't Forget Who You Are

San Clara is a Métis community located 465 kilometers northwest of the Red River Valley in rural Manitoba situated on the south west boundary of the Duck Mountain. In 2012, Lawrence Barkwell et al, former editor of the Louis Riel Institute (LRI) compiled a comprehensive list of historic Métis communities in Manitoba. However, San Clara and Boggy Creek were not on this list.² Yet an article written by Jean Lagasse and published by the Manitoba Historical Society, in 1957, reported 950 Métis living in this area.³ These ambiguities in the literature were complicated further by a 2011 Saskatchewan Provincial Court case in which a local resident using a historic rights defense, was found guilty of angling without a licence. This situation has created further confusion about the village and who lives here. To add to the complexity of these discordant views the families buried in Ste. Claire Cemetery located in San Clara also have ancestors buried in St. Francois Xavier and St. Boniface, Manitoba. Rather than undermine our status as a historic Métis community, it is my view that these cemeteries unite our historic family bonds and link these communities together.

I am a third-generation Métis of Irish-French-Cree descent raised in this area beginning with the arrival of my father's grandparents Antoine and Elisé Bouvier in 1903. My maternal family, beginning with my great-grandparents, J.B. and Adeline Bouvier arrived with their children from St. Francois Xavier, Manitoba and via Labret, Saskatchewan. Demase and Adelaide

² Lawrence Barkwell, Leah Dorian and Darren Préfontaine, *The Metis Homeland: Its Settlements and Communities*. (Winnipeg: Louis Riel Institute, 2016), accessed 11 August 2016, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/db/11956>

³ Jean Lagasse, "The Métis in Manitoba," *Manitoba Historical Society Transactions* (1958-59), 3rd ser. <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/metis.shtml>

Carriere eventually settled in San Clara. My paternal great-grandparents (Davey) arrived from Southern Manitoba via Quebec and (Bouvier) St. John's near Belcourt, North Dakota around the same time in the first decade of the twentieth century. My great grandparents were among the first generation here after many Métis families re-emerged in this region as homesteaders along with British, German and East-European settlers. As children, we moved many times in and around San Clara and Boggy Creek, except in 1960 to 1963 we lived on a farm near Kelwood, Manitoba.

In Kelwood, the old three-room house (likely the original house) behind the barn on my Aunt Louella and Uncle Jeff's property was home while Dad searched for work up North. During these years, my parent's large and young family expanded again with the birth of twins in 1961, bringing our family size to nine children under the age of ten years old. Soon after the sudden death of one of the twins my parents returned to the village and four more siblings arrived in the years that followed. My parents reared their remaining twelve children as landless villagers living on seasonal work Dad could find as a truck driver, bush worker and in his earlier days as farm labour. Eventually, when I was about six years old until I was about twelve, we settled into a house in San Clara that sat on the north edge of the village. This timeframe was the longest period we lived in one place during my childhood. In the mid 1970s my parents settled in Leaf Rapids, Manitoba where they established a permanent home. They, had a decent, steady, income to raise the remaining children at home and plan for their retirement which included purchasing a small home in Togo, Saskatchewan for cash. A proud moment after years of hard work and non-permanent residences.

The house in San Clara I was raised in was purchased and moved there, from another location a few kilometers north and several years earlier, by my Dad's eldest sister, Auntie Clara. The living room and the two small bedrooms sat unsecured on the basement foundation. The kitchen portion of the house, which we never used, sat on logs several yards away from the rest of the house. There was a McCreary wood burning kitchen stove and a thirty-five-gallon water barrel that anchored one corner of the main room where all the family' activities took place. This included the occasional parties with plenty of dancing and singing with friends and relatives, especially when Dad and other men who worked away returned home between being laid-off from one seasonal occupation such as roadwork in the summer months and preparing for the next, usually bush work during the winter. All the laundry, bathing and washing floors among other things were reliant on that barrel being full of water. A full barrel of water lasted a week or two. In the winter time, it was much easier to keep it full with snow which was readily available. It was cold and heavy work but much easier to find than water in the summer time. During the summer months, when there wasn't enough rain we relied on slough water to get by. As the summer heat dried up nearby sloughs we would have to go further afield and wade deeper into the water to try and get the cleanest water. Pail by pail we filled the barrel until the next time Mom washed clothes and it was drained again.

Although we had power as most others in the village did there was no refrigerator or indoor plumbing. Mom never complained about not having a kitchen, running water or indoor plumbing as I recall, but she never trusted that the house would not be blown off its foundation. With any hint of a severe thunderstorm rolling in, while Dad was away, she would hustle all of us into the basement. She lived in fear the house would be blown off its foundation by the winds

that brought the thunder storms over the village. It got to be routine, day or night, if she found a storm threatening, we would end up in the basement. She would pace nervously in front of the window, usually with a baby in her arms, until she determined the winds were strong enough that it was time to head downstairs. This meant exiting, with the older kids helping the younger ones, out the front door to go down into the basement. We were usually huddled together in the dark listening to or sharing stories, or rummaging around looking for something to do as we waited out the storm. My older brothers finally got to the age as young teenagers where they refused to come downstairs.

On one occasion, during an afternoon storm, Mom decided we needed to make a hastily retreat to the basement. Once the storm was over, my brother, Edward came home after waiting it out at his friend's place. When he arrived home, the house was unusually quiet so he called out to us. When Mom called back up to him from the basement, he teased her for being so nervous. She recently recalled, that after years of intergenerational fear of prairie thunderstorms embodied in watching her grandfather light candles and pray for their safety, my brother's bravery seemed to put her at ease, and we spent less time in the basement after that storm.

Next door, on our left lived Charlie Vermeylen, his parents and other siblings and beyond their place and the next block, was the village center. Directly behind us, was the cemetery and further north and across the road to the west stretched out grain fields interspersed with small thickets of bush and willows. There was a path in front of our house that went south, past Vermeylen's toward the village stores and onto Main Street. It took less than five minutes to walk to the store but most of us could make it home in under three minutes if we had to.

Particularly, if we were in trouble for being late, or it was dark and spooky outside as there were no street lights at our end of the village, and especially if we were hungry which we usually were.

My paternal grandmother, Vitaline (Bouvier) Davey arrived with her parents Antoine and Elisé (Martin) Davey in the area in 1903, from St. John's, North Dakota when she was a year old. They arrived after six weeks of travelling northwards with their wagons and animals along with several of her older siblings while their eldest sister, Genevieve Charbonneau married and remained in North Dakota. My Grandpa Davey's family, (including his sickly father James, who returned to southern Manitoba shortly after making the journey north died in St. Boniface hospital) arrived to homestead in 1911. They came from St. Eustache, along with his brothers and their parents, James and Edwidge (Godin) Davey. Prior to that, Edwidge and James Davey migrated from St. Phillippe de la Prairie, about 30 kilometers south of Montreal, Quebec to Manitoba on the promise of land. The Davey family's Canadian identity began with Mark Davey and Catherine Kelly who emigrated from Sligo, Ireland (1842 and 1844 respectively) and were married in Montreal in 1850.⁴ In the first decades of the 20th century members of the Davey family travelled between Boggy Creek, Manitoba and Montreal, Quebec where family relationships were maintained until my great-grandmother returned to Montreal for the last time in 1934, and unexpectedly died there. Still, others returned to Quebec to live permanently.

I left San Clara when I was 16 years old, in 1972, to find employment. I returned as often as possible to visit family and relatives over the years since then. In 1975, my parents uprooted my younger siblings again and moved 900 kilometers north, to Leaf Rapids, Manitoba for work. This time they lived and worked there for approximately 15 years and returned to San Clara

⁴ Census of Canada, 1901, [personal family information accessed via Ancestry.ca](#)

annually to spend holidays with family and friends. Eventually, they retired from Leaf Rapids and returned to the San Clara area, and lived in the nearby community of Togo, until my dad died in 2012. My Mother now resides in Roblin, but continues to practise her faith, with her family and friends and attends various functions with the San Clara community. In 2013, I began to investigate the history of San Clara and discovered there were court cases impacting residents and stories told about this area that led to confusion from outsiders about who we were. In 2015, I returned to the community as a graduate student, to see if there was any interest in mobilizing the remaining community members to co-research the community and our cultural identity.

In the intervening years between 1972 and the present, I worked as an advocate and educator for children and families while living in British Columbia. This community-based work history facilitated my transition into community research. My interest in researching San Clara began several years earlier after I discovered a specific court case from 2011, which challenged my perception of who we are. The judge's ruling in this case determined San Clara was a "modern Métis community" and was not a "historic" nor a "re-emergent" settlement.⁵ I took exception to this decision, because having grown up in San Clara, I felt the Judge did not accurately reflect the historic identity of the village and demonstrated a lack of understanding of who we were/are as a community. In other words, his decision threatened our historic narrative as we understood it.

Growing up in the 1960's nobody paid much attention to our Métis identity including my own clan in our relatively isolated village of San Clara in mid-western Manitoba. The Métis 'struggles' were seldom mentioned in school even though many of the students were Métis descendants of the 1869, Red River Resistance and 1885, Battle of Batoche. Collectively, our parents and

⁵⁵ R v. Langan. Retrieved: 16-05-2016. <http://canlii.ca/t/fn6gh>

grandparents lived and died alongside their families and friends for over two and a half centuries in southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan and North Dakota. As evidenced by our genealogies these locations include St. Boniface, St Francis Xavier, Belcourt, St. John's, and Pembina, North Dakota as well as several borderland communities such as Willow Bunch and Wood Mountain prior to settling in Treaty Four territory after the turn of the 20th century.⁶

After the diaspora in the late 19th century I suggest many families returned here to the distant Duck Mountain where San Clara and Boggy Creek are located near the Shell River. The Shell River, a tributary of the upper Assiniboine River, is located near the Saskatchewan border. The Assiniboine River flows to "the Forks" in Winnipeg after winding its way through central Manitoba, west of the escarpment, eventually giving way to the boreal forest that surrounds Duck Mountain. San Clara and Boggy Creek lay at the south-western foot of this forested region. It seemed many people came back here to forget who they were, seldom spoke of why they left their old communities and mentioned little of their previous lives. I became curious about their journey. How did they know about this region? What brought them here? Did they follow the old Pelly Trail that began at Fort Ellice in southern Manitoba and ran northwards to Fort Pelly? Guided by insurgent research, traditional knowledge and family histories I embarked on this journey to explore the history, culture and community life in San Clara and Boggy Creek.

Insurgent Response

As I learned how to respond to the confusion about our historic community I became interested in insurgent research. I discovered this approach articulated by scholar Adam Gaudry,

⁶ Book #3339: Ancestors of Dennis H. Davey (Winnipeg: Metis Culture and Heritage Resource Centre, Inc., 2014)

in his article “Insurgent Research.”⁷ Gaudry writes that traditional academic research is an “extractive process” especially in Indigenous communities.⁸ Gaudry suggests that contemporary researchers often take information from marginalized communities and present it to distant parties such as universities or governments and in our case, the justice system. According to Gaudry, insurgent research is a methodology that focuses on keeping the residents and the community central in the research project. Insurgent research, as Gaudry describes, includes listening to and sharing research outcomes with the community as a priority in this paradigm. Included in this methodology, the research process itself is about moving the well-being of the community forward. Insurgent researchers share a worldview that “Indigenous knowledge is a self-validating system.”⁹ This validation is central to understanding oral histories, divergent creation stories, ways of knowing and understanding the environment.

Methodology in insurgent research requires the researcher to assume an integral role in the community at the grassroots level and move beyond superficial relationships to confirm solidarity and respect while upholding the voice of the people. This grassroots involvement is necessary to express community values and beliefs, customs and culture as they exist and to buttress them from reinterpretation through the lens of an extractive researcher. In other words, to transcend the platitudes that shape the researcher - subject dichotomy and “a way of speaking to people directly.”¹⁰

⁷ Adam Gaudry, “Insurgent Research,” *Wicazo SA Review*, Spring 2011: *Project MUSE: Today’s Research. Tomorrow’s Inspiration*. Accessed 17 September 2016, <https://adamgaudry.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/gaudry-insurgent-research-wicazo-sa-26-11.pdf>

⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

Insurgent researchers distinguish themselves by prioritizing their responsibilities to the community first and the academy secondly. They do this to ensure community voices are in control of the research and it respects the reciprocal relationships they share. Insurgent research upholds indigenous knowledge and community values as action oriented goals take shape.

Gaudry acknowledges the concept of “insurgent research” is similar to Jeff Corntassel’s concept of “insurgent education.”¹¹ Corntassel (Cherokee Nation) is Associate Professor of Science and the Indigenous Governance Programs at the University of Victoria. Essentially Corntassel’s main construct in his research is that it is imperative to educate Indigenous people about their histories and culture so that they can educate others.

In addition, I am also using a community-based co-researcher model often recommended by scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith to decolonize Métis identity and assimilation.¹² Tuhiwai Smith is a leading theorist on decolonization, a professor of Education and a leading Maori scholar whose own research is a primary influence on Gaudry’s more recent work. Tuhiwai Smith also addresses why informed consent is necessary. She notes informed consent is an antidote to “...research abuses with marginalized and vulnerable populations...”¹³ She advises, “For researchers working with ‘human subjects or participants’ the terms ‘marginalized and vulnerable peoples’ appear in the literature in relation to research ethics.”¹⁴ Tuhiwai Smith highlights, “Research begins as a social, intellectual and imaginative activity.”¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., 135.

¹² Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed., (London, UK: Zed Books, 2012), 145.

¹³ Ibid., 206.

¹⁴ Ibid., 207.

¹⁵ Ibid., 202.

I chose these research methodologies to ‘talk back’ to the Saskatchewan Provincial Court judge who determined Métis families in the San Clara/Boggy Creek region had congregated around European homesteaders only after they established the community. Judge Green sided with the crown and concluded that San Clara took on a Métis character after 1904, when many Métis families with similar names arrived here from other places.

Gaudry’s concern for the people in these communities who are the subjects of extraction research is that they are rarely the primary audience when their information is disseminated. He states, “This type of research functions on an *extraction methodology*” and suggests the “*context, values and on-the-ground-struggles*”,¹⁶ integral to the people and communities are often missed as researchers engage in this model of research. He suggests researchers are often unwilling to acknowledge community participants who provide insight or information that they gain because of their research and even fewer are willing to acknowledge their responsibilities to the communities they research. His response to extraction research is insurgent research.

Insurgent research is based on action research with the aim of creating “space” to make real change in the lives of community residents. For example, Gaudry states, “Insurgent research, then, often possesses a powerful capacity to critique and undermine colonialism by deconstructing its misleading and disingenuous claims, but it is nonetheless a predominantly creative undertaking.”¹⁷ Gaudry writes, “Being oriented toward action is what ultimately defines insurgent research; it is a component often overlooked in other research approaches.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Gaudry, “Insurgent Research,” 113.

¹⁷ Ibid., 124.

¹⁸ Ibid., 125.

He reminds us, “There is a well-developed body of Indigenous research that demonstrates the centrality of Indigenous languages in understanding an Indigenous worldview.”¹⁹ The Michif language speakers in the community of San Clara/Boggy Creek can lead the way to a “liberatory praxis” employing the concept of *kiya waneekah* which provides a deeper understanding of our cultural ideas and expressions.²⁰ The expression, *kiya waneekah*, was first introduced and explained to me by Eva Brazeau who is a Michif language speaker and my community co-researcher in this project. As the title to this thesis suggests, it is an expression used to remind us as Métis not to forget who we are, or where we come from. Gaudry highlights, “The ultimate goal of any liberatory praxis is to help revive the knowledge of what it means to be Indigenous among everyday Native people, to articulate how it remains relevant in terms of decolonization and emancipation.”²¹ He emphasizes, “As insurgent researchers, our sense of responsibility toward community liberation and challenging the colonial system sets us apart from other researchers.”²² “Indeed, liberatory praxis is one of the strengths of this approach.”²³ He informs us, “A central part of articulating a liberatory praxis is developing a realisable alternative to the oppressive and exploitive colonial status quo.”²⁴

Gaudry notes, “Research is always a political process, as it always advocates some sort of political program...”²⁵ Our community based research is no different in this regard. I plan to use my position as a community researcher to challenge the current judicial narrative imposed on

¹⁹ Ibid., 129.

²⁰ Ibid.,133.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 132.

this community and reshape it to one that conforms to the people's point of view. As an insurgent researcher with a sense of responsibility to San Clara, my traditional homeland, it is my objective to work toward community liberation and challenging the colonial system.

I recently held a community picnic for the local Métis residents in San Clara-Boggy Creek, Togo and Roblin in nearby Togo, Saskatchewan. My decision to hold this event in Togo was due to its central location for my community co-researchers. I arrived in Togo to get organized a week prior to hosting the picnic. The first two days I was in Togo to prepare for the feast two Métis people questioned why I was holding the picnic there "because they don't like us in this town."²⁶ This picnic became a political process as it was held in a community with ongoing racist views of their Métis neighbours. During the course of my visit, this theme was repeated by Eva Brazeau, another Métis living in Togo who also said she considered renting the hall previously in Togo, but was advised against it because she was told, "they won't rent it to us." My Mom also recalled, that when they had first moved to Togo nearly 30 years ago, she was told by her friend who met the local people daily at the coffee shop that "scruff from San Clara" was changing Togo. Mom refused to join their coffee meetings after that and continued to go to San Clara for social gatherings even though she was reassured it was not them (Mom and Dad) about whom the local people talked. On the other hand, there was also some support I witnessed while I was in Togo preparing for the picnic as the poster advertising our event had been moved by a local Euro-Canadian resident (and family friend) to a more visible location.

Unlike the many outside researchers Gaudry describes, as an inside insurgent researcher, I have no interest in remaining distant and unavailable to community members or to

²⁶ Discussion with Rod Carriere, August, 2016.

misrepresent their beliefs, values or cultural expressions. I take my role seriously in representing our heritage and traditional connections to the local history, land and people living in this community. I encourage people to participate and allow me to use their words, language, images and stories about our local history to capture this story. Storytelling can establish our connections to this historic village through mobility, land use, culture and relationships. Through these actions, we will record the results of this research and give voice to our community.

Supported by the community, my research objective is to disrupt the narrative Judge Green's decision creates by arguing that the complexity of Métis community life here was established over generations and did not arrive all at once. I record the stories and relationships to the land as people remember them, and how they used this area for food, shelter, and to build their communities. The need for mobility propelled by economic circumstances, food security and family relationships all factor in the existence of Metis communities. I suggest that Métis families returned to and re-emerged in San Clara-Boggy Creek area after the Red River Resistance in southern Manitoba and the diaspora in 1885, from Batoche. Others returned in the early 20th century, following twenty years of exile in North Dakota when many more returned to their traditional homeland. These Métis families were familiar with the land-base, the community, and were related through marriage and blood to many of the people already re-emerging in this area. This community has always been connected to the historic network of Métis communities where they lived and worked as traders, hunters, fishermen, loggers and eventually homesteaders. By 1904, in order to homestead land and benefit from the Homestead Act, Metis had begun to accentuate their European heritage as a matter of survival and many others repressed their cultural activities from the purview of strangers.

My goal in this research project, guided by insurgent methodology, is to have the outcome accepted by the people in the community and the academy and potentially provide future insight for the benefit of the judicial community. I began this research to investigate my hypothesis that San Clara is a historic rights-bearing Métis community. Chapter one, takes us into the community where my family members are active participants in this journey as we understand métissage, Indigenous rights, Euro-centrism, colonialism and the effects of trauma and alienation on our lives. According to Rick Ouellet and Erin Hanson, researchers from the University of British Columbia, these stories are important because “Powley has shown that Métis rights are defined by the local histories of Métis communities, not by the history of Red River. Nonetheless, the Red River history is an important component of Métis and Canadian histories.”²⁷ My research is a work in progress. It is open-ended largely because of the methodology I have chosen to use including implementing a co-researcher model. This model encourages consensus in how the story is told by the participants who signed the consent forms. I honour their trust and hope to reflect our community life and its diversity shared in these stories.

²⁷ Rick Ouellet and Erin Hanson, Indigenous Foundations, accessed August 11, 2016. <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/?id=549>

Chapter I

Getting Started: Family as Network

In Rauna Kuokkanen's, *Reshaping the University*, she quotes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's remarks: "If we want to start something, we must ignore that our starting point is, all efforts taken, shaky. If we want to get something done, we must ignore that, all provisions made, the end will be inconclusive."²⁸ Despite this foregone conclusion, I held a public meeting to invite families to become story tellers with me in this research project. I booked the Métis Centre and arranged to have lunch provided. I put aside all the tables that filled the room and arranged the chairs in a circle. As people began to filter in I overheard the remark to the effect that 'I like this already.' It gave me confidence I was on the right track with my community. I shared my concerns about the narrative that was being written about the village, followed by a few comments about the historical trajectory of Métis people. I explained I wanted to conduct interviews on a one-to-one basis or in small family groups to gather oral stories about our land use and cultural perspectives. After this introduction, I invited others to share stories that came to mind that were examples of Métis ways of living. There was some skepticism of my intentions at first as clarification was sought about who I was associated with, i.e. Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF). I shared who my funding sources were and this seemed to put people at ease. I included a video of my Mom's quilt work as an example of Métis traditions and culture. After about three hours of laughter and story telling the food was served we ended our first of several meetings.

²⁸ Rauna Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007). 162

Few, if any, researchers have studied or researched this community from an insider's perspective. Aided by an inside perspective, coupled with community-centered methodologies, we can create an opportunity for our families to establish their own records of how they use the land, and what their cultural practices are. This approach is in keeping with other Métis scholars such as Judy Iseke-Barnes, who interviewed Dorothy Chartrand, in her research, "Grandmothers of the Métis Nation: A Living History with Dorothy Chartrand." Iseke-Barnes writes, "In this research, Dorothy's stories connect her family to the communities across the Métis homeland, interconnecting her story with the stories of her ancestors and the territories in which they made their lives."²⁹ She continues, "Invoking this practice of storytelling as research, Indigenous storytellers help communities understand their histories so that they can make a future."³⁰

With these insights in mind, and understanding this community is deeply spiritual and practice their faith regularly, I knew the best place to start would be by joining Sunday services to make an announcement in Church. It was here, that I began the process of (re)organizing my relationship to my traditional community. First by (re)introducing myself to the congregation, after mass was served by Father James, on July 19, 2015. From the beginning of this project, I was guided, assisted and supported by my family. My son videotaped most of the content of my invitation to the church members and I had previously discussed how to plan this introduction with Mom. We agreed that eight or nine minutes would have to be enough time to generate some interest. Besides myself, my ten-year-old son and my Mother, there were about twenty-five other people who came to mass that morning. The purpose of this personal introduction was

²⁹ Judy Iseke-Barnes. "Grandmothers of the Métis Nation: A Living History with Dorothy Chartrand". *Native Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (2009). 80.

³⁰ Ibid.

an invitation to the upcoming community meeting I was holding the following Sunday at the community Métis Centre.

Secondly, as part of my commitment to the well-being of my co-researchers I shared my research plans with their spiritual leader, Father James. I wanted him to be available to support those who may want to discuss collateral issues that may arise as a result of unburying our past. Once I made the announcement, Father James rose from where he was sitting and encouraged people to be proud of their heritage and to become involved in this community project.

Through word of mouth, my cousins heard about my intentions and came out in force to support and listen to my presentation at the Métis centre the following Sunday. My sister, Jan arrived from out of town to support and help with the organizational aspects of attending to the group who were coming. She was able to videotape parts of the meeting after I had sought everyone's permission to do so. My mom came as well and as usual assumed responsibility for ensuring I was in tune to the ebb and flow of the group whom she knows very well. One small but important example of many she underlined for me was to stick to the time frame as people may come but they will also want to leave as planned.

As I noted, in our first meeting on July 27, 2015, I laid out the framework of my research plan, including my reasons and motivation for the project and I identified my own support system in place from the academic community. I explained, there is a lack of clarity concerning outsiders who have assumed control of the narrative of our traditional community. I understood from memories as a youngster who grew up in this community, that I was asking a lot of them to sign consent forms to participate in this project. Generally speaking, it's my experience that people will guard their privacy so requesting their consent is one thing but, to sign a form is quite

another. I hoped they would be convinced the forms were necessary to satisfy the University's Panel on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE) and secondly, it is an assurance that their material will not be misappropriated. This requirement of securing their consent was essential for me to research our community as a graduate student. I hoped most people would support and gift me with their signatures to tell our story.

Research Organization and Planning:

Understanding key cultural events that underpin community-life in San Clara-Boggy Creek is essential. Making connections with key players within the community milieu must occur to build interest and support for families to come together. As previously noted my methodology includes working with participants who have signed consent forms and are/were from the village of San Clara-Boggy Creek. I have been conducting interviews and recording stories since July, 2015, on Métis cultural identity and local land use. To date, with the support of family relationships I have held three community presentations, attended one craft fair, visited four different communities and logged roughly 6,274 kilometres as I travel between Winnipeg and this community situated in the north-east corner of Treaty 4 territory. On August 20, 2016, I organized a picnic in Togo, Saskatchewan that drew approximately 100 people to this event. I have conducted 15 interviews, usually about 2.5 hours in duration, averaging 36.5 hours. There are now thirty-six signed co-researchers on this project and research documentation is continuing to expand. I included a small, nine-question survey at the picnic that 36 people returned to be counted. Another example, of research documentation I received, was a response from the St. Boniface diocese who holds the archives for the Oblates in the Province of Manitoba. The Oblates were the first missionaries in this area. The correspondence from the Oblates Diocese is written

in French and the direct value of these documents will be explored in future as part of this ongoing research project. Even more recently, I have received copies of oral stories by an early pioneer, Joseph Elphege Mailhot, from a former San Clara resident, about the first pioneer families to settle in the Duck Mountain. There are about a dozen pages or more written in French that was retrieved from the Provincial Archives of Manitoba in 2004. They were gifted to me November, 2016.

To offer a chronological view of my methodology, I began with advertising in The Roblin Review newspaper on July 21, 2015 inviting Métis families originally from San Clara/Boggy Creek area to meet me on July 26th at the Métis Centre in the village of San Clara. I also took this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the Manitoba Research Alliance for their funding support and my affiliation as a graduate student with the University of Manitoba. I contacted Clifford Paul, the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) representative for the San Clara local to book and arrange for payment to rent the Centre for the afternoon.

Applying Methodology in Boggy Creek

In August, 2015 I contacted Johnny LaPlante who is the regional MMF representative for the Boggy Creek local, 12 kilometers north of San Clara, to meet with his group. I was looking for an opportunity to be invited to Boggy Creek to discuss my research plans with them. In our telephone conversation Johnny was not sure if these residents wanted to have a similar meeting of the kind we recently held in San Clara. However, he did invite me to their annual craft fair/community garage sale to meet the local people and other family and friends who would otherwise not be in the area. I thought this was an excellent opportunity so I paid the ten-dollar fee, picked up a few knickknacks and set up a table alongside the others who were there to sell their arts and crafts along with other items they had on hand. I brought my consent forms and

other reading materials I had and prepared to answer questions about my purpose for being there. It was not long before people became curious about who I was and what I was doing there. After I explained my research intentions a few people shared some memories of their own experiences or others they had heard about in the community.

Within a short time, someone was sharing a story about someone else whose ancestors had been victimized in southern Manitoba as the Euro-Canadian settlers moved into their homes. They recalled these events took place while their families were out hunting. When they returned, they found their homes were occupied by these outsiders. The noteworthiness of this story highlighted the fact that intergenerational trauma from these historical events can still be recalled in the minds of local residents. One elder, Velma Watson, recalled her grandmother 's story about her grandmother being a young girl living in the Red River settlement during the Resistance. These oral histories can still be found in this region and the fact that they can be recalled speaks to the depth of the trauma that was carried through generations of families who suffered from these events that happened generations ago.

As the afternoon unfolded in Boggy Creek, I secured six more signatures and telephone numbers to add to the list of seventeen people who had already signed consent forms in San Clara. My family relationships in the community, including my brother Bob facilitated my participation in this community event. This methodological approach resulted in a positive outcome and propelled my research forward as I began to realize that other people were also interested in our local history and culture in this area.

Getting organized to meet people in Boggy Creek was a bit more challenging in the winter of 2016. It was the coldest day of the year and it was the farthest distance northwards I had to

travel. For this follow-up visit in February I had the support of my cousin Monica Bangle who previously met with the other organizer, Sharon Lavalley, of the Louis Riel Day Celebrations and passed along my request to participate in their holiday festivities. After I received their approval I returned with my power point presentation that I have now used several times and continue to build on as our story receives more material. The first time I used the power point presentation was to introduce San Clara-Boggy Creek to the university community. I used it again in San Clara in February, 2016 as a method of explaining and decreasing the anticipated anxiety some participants may have about how the material they shared would be used. In other words, I employed this tool as a trust building exercise coupled with an opportunity to share the stories already gifted to me. The power point has been set up to include music, photographs of people who consented to be interviewed and a brief story of their connection to the area along with pictures I had taken of them. As well, I included several examples of their arts and crafts. I also include maps, infrastructure details and other items of interest. In this way people, can see how their information is being used and disseminated. It also creates an opportunity to receive immediate and direct feedback from people on the relevancy of our community story.

Utilizing computer technology in an area where internet access is sketchy or simply unavailable can be problematic. This predicament encouraged both Monica Bangle and Johnny LaPlante to try and resolve the issues of connecting my computer program to their electronic equipment but with little success. In times like these, as a researcher, it is a good idea to have a backup plan in place. During this minor distraction, several people offered to help sort out the problem before I could begin our discussion. Despite the lack of sound quality, we launched into a discussion about the project and I narrated the slides. The learning curve in community based

research demands that methodologies you chose be adaptable and appropriate to the environment. Community-based methodology must be flexible and at times spontaneous as it does not usually unfold in a controlled research setting. Despite the glitches, I managed to get my message across and it ignited a great deal of discussion that lasted several hours. Afterward, when the group discussion ended, people came up to share more of their personal stories and some made suggestions of other people in the community I should talk to. We ended the celebration with a potluck feast and traditional Métis music.

Skip Sanders who attended the Boggy Creek community update and signed my guest book encouraged me to speak to an Elder in the community who has many stories of the community history. The caveat was that I should not tell him that I'm from the university because he may not speak to me. However, apparently, his memory is still very good and he worries that when he is gone his stories will go with him. Skip has offered to introduce me to this Elder when I return to the community. These brief excerpts are some of the many experiences we shared as the people who attended the celebrations at the Métis Centre in Boggy Creek looked back anew at their history. This project and this meeting offered a 'space' to renew interest in their past and remember stories that were retrieved from the common history we all share.

I frame these experiences of social gatherings, feasting and music as opportunities to nurture our culture and friendships/relationships as well as affirming our collective identity. Because these stories touch people so deeply they can also be experienced as healing stories. Authors, Radu, House and Pashagumskum address healing in their article, "Land, Life, and Knowledge in Chisasibi: Intergenerational Healing in the Bush." They note, "In its various contexts, healing thus functions as a mobilizing agent towards action, a call for taking

responsibility for finding solutions to self and communal empowerment by using culturally appropriate and locally negotiated forms of action...”.³¹ They describe a healing program that takes place in the bush for Cree youth but also has applications relevant to community healing as well. They state, “Going to the bush, participating in a sweat lodge, sewing moccasins, fishing and trapping, cooking geese, and many other cultural activities are all healing practices.”³² They add, “Healing thus anchors and shapes identity in line with the local cultural ethos of what it means to live a good life.”³³

After the last community meetings held in February, 2016, the tally of signed consent forms amounted to twenty-seven signatures and there was still more interest from others, who have yet to give permission to use their stories. Besides the highly valued traditional knowledge, this research is uncovering other artifacts people have in their possessions, including an old peace pipe handed down from Sharon Lavallee’s Grandfather. This pipe has been in their family, as Sharon explains, “since an Indian Chief gave it to her Grandfather’s Grandfather.”³⁴ There is a collection of stones that have been shaped into hammers, throwing balls, and a grandfather or ‘shaman’s rock’ by historic First Nation’s people who either traded or inhabited this area. The first person to reveal her stone was Yvette Bouvier and some months later, Frank Hiebert revealed his stones. Both opportunities to view their stones were in their homes and they were happy to give me permission to photograph them with their artifacts. Another story, about yet another stone artifact, was told by Ephrem Paul during our last community meeting in San Clara.

³¹ I. Radu, L. House, and E. Pashagumskum, “*Land, Life, and Knowledge in Chisasibi: Intergenerational Healing in the Bush.*,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 94.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Sharon Lavallee related this story to me in February, 2016.

He quickly went home to retrieve his stone that day but couldn't find it. These articles hold a great deal of meaning to the current holders who proudly share them once I am entrusted to respect their beliefs and the stories that accompany them.

Kitchen Table Methodology

Since I connected with the Boggy Creek community in August, 2015, I returned to meet with Yvette and Wilf Bouvier, later that fall. Their life passion is upholding traditional and cultural values by producing arts and crafts and collecting items of information through newspaper clippings, genealogies, and oral stories about their families and community. They also maintain some Michif language skills and have friends in the community with whom they can practice speaking.

Substantially, the goal of organizing, planning and discussing this research has been to educate and present my hypothesis to the community. That is, to help community members understand the chronology of events that disenfranchised our peoples from their lands and communities and to remind them that the Euro-Canadian government is still actively engaged in dispossessing our rights and culture. I try to impart that although we are few in numbers, there are things we can do to push back. One thing we can do is tell the story of our history, our local land use and our family connections to those who settled these communities. Many people from this region are already involved in cultural preservation through their writing, arts and crafts, food, music, dancing, language, and taking their cases forward in the justice system. As an insurgent researcher, my role is intended to support these ongoing efforts and be counted as another who has joined the fight for justice to protect these dwindling resources that define our culture, heritage and identity.

As noted, I returned to the Shell Valley in February, 2016, to participate in the Louis Riel Day celebrations with these communities. As is becoming customary, I called ahead of time to request an invitation to become part of the planned celebrations. These opportunities provide an avenue for me to share our story so far. I was warmly welcomed back in both communities and we carried on lively discussions over the duration of both afternoons I was there. As my research is becoming more familiar, more people are signing consent forms and contributing their traditional knowledge to support this project. Besides my presentation, these events are filled with singing, fiddle/music playing, food, laughter and sharing stories. People seem more ready to join the conversation as I continue to focus on the importance of pushing back.

I contacted and spoke with Charlie Vermeylen to discuss my research and to hear about his experience and knowledge as court representative for Eugene Langan in this central court case. Although not a lawyer, Charlie has many years of experience defending Métis constitutional rights in hunting and fishing. He understands his constitutional rights and is the unofficial leader of the Métis Rights Coalition (MRC). He describes the MRC as an open organization to any Métis whose main objective is for the protection of Métis hunting and fishing rights. I spoke with Charlie by telephone in July and met him again on Sept. 5th with Eugene Langan (R vs Langan, 2011) and his cousin Donald Langan who are both Michif language speakers. We shared stories for a couple of hours about their court experiences and the outcomes. Don gave me the opportunity to hear my first introduction in Michif in many years. It was a pleasurable afternoon of sharing stories, drinking coffee and enjoying a few laughs. As I was explaining my methodology to them, I mentioned a brief comment I had made, in my invitation to the church community, earlier that summer. I shared that I thanked everyone using the Anishinabek term *miigwech*. Without

hesitation Charlie said “we don’t use that word around here.”³⁵ I enquired why we wouldn’t use that word as it simply means thank you, in Anishinaabemowin. His response was that the leader of the MMF uses it all the time and as far as they are concerned David Chartrand does not speak for them. I thought this was an acceptable term given that we have no hesitation in using Merci as a way of saying thank you. If we can use our grandfather’s French language, why couldn’t we use a word to reflect our Indigenous grandmother’s language.

As I noted, Charlie tried to explain to me that miigwech was not used around this area. I sought more clarification and hoped that they were not going to be too upset with me for bringing the topic up to begin with. So I asked again, is it because you don’t like David Chartrand that you don’t like the word being used? Charlie said no it wasn’t that it just wasn’t the right word. I turned to Don and Eugene and asked them if they knew what the Michif word for thank you was, and they concluded it was Marcee. The subtle difference between Merci and Marcee was lost on me until I had an opportunity to speak with Métis scholar Fred Shore who is fluent in French. He explained the difference in these words are in their inflections. Although Charlie, Eugene and Don didn’t sign consent forms that day they did sign my guest book along with providing their phone numbers so we could continue our discussion about their court case as well as other issues while we agreed to meet again in the future.

Another recent interview revealed the story of what happened to Eva Brazeau’s family who moved across the border into Saskatchewan, to Crescent Lake, which is about 60 kilometers west of this area. It is well documented that when she was a child there was a government movement aided by the Catholic priest underway to remove the Métis families from their homes

³⁵ Interview with Charles Vermeulen, Don Langan, Eugene Langan. September 5, 2015.

for reasons unknown to her. These events took place in the mid-1960s as she recalls. One Sunday, while people were attending mass services, the government had moved into the community and bulldozed all their houses and filled the only drinking water well with garbage. They lost their gardens, their livelihoods and their community overnight. As a result, many people had to move to Yorkton, Saskatchewan where they were met with racism and hostility especially in school. This forced re-location affected the spirituality of their *nimoshôms* and *nohkoms* as the attack against their community stole their way of life and sense of daily purpose. With sadness, Eva shared if there was any justice, it was that most Métis kids knew how to fight and could defend themselves from being bullied and pushed around in town where they felt they were not wanted.

Eva's experience mirrors the story of what happened earlier to the Métis community of Ste. Madeleine, Manitoba where families were similarly victimized by the removal and destruction of their homes to make way for a community pasture. These actions were conducted under the auspices of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (PFRA) in 1938. In the early 20th century this community was located on poor sandy soil but eventually the residents were able to work hard enough to build their own church. "The only aspect of community life which remains today centers around the graveyard which stretches over two acres of land amidst the grazing cattle. The old-timers continue to attend the crumbling graves of their family members. Most of Ste. Madeleine's ex-inhabitants see this as their final resting place."³⁶

³⁶ Ken Zeilig and Victoria Zeilig. *Ste. Madeleine: Community Without a Town: Métis Elders In Interview*. (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1987): xii.

Another Métis community that was wiped out because it didn't fit in with the Euro-Canadian vision of progress was Rooster Town.³⁷ In an article written by Carson Hammond for *The Uniter*, (Winnipeg's weekly urban journal) he describes Rooster Town as a bush community. "As recently as the late 1950s, the space sandwiched between Grant Avenue and Taylor Avenues, and extending from Wilton Street west until Lindsay Street, was occupied by the now-little-known bush community as Rooster Town."³⁸ Hammond, quotes Lawrence Barkwell extensively in his article, which was recently newsworthy because "...the Manitoba Métis Federation and the University of Winnipeg are partnering on a research project aimed at gathering first-hand accounts of the lost community."³⁹

Rooster Town began as a Métis community with its own distinctive culture in the early twentieth century according to Barkwell. Sometimes during the late fifties, the government "expropriated" the residents from their homes and built a mall.⁴⁰ Enriching the city and the developers and offered the residents 50 dollars to leave the area. If you were Métis in 1950s Canada, your labour and humanity were cheap and your rights to live and work where you chose were usurped if they didn't fit in with the notion of progress by the Euro-Canadian government.

³⁷ Carson Hammond, "Rooster Town: The Winnipeg Community That Nobody Remembers," *The Uniter*, October 31, 2012, accessed May 17, 2016, <http://uniter.ca/view/rooster-town-the-winnipeg-community-that-nobody-remembers>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Shared Cultural Experiences

In her study of the Métis at Île à la Crosse, Brenda Macdougall explores four generations of “... Métis history through the interpretive lens of wahkootowin.”⁴¹ Macdougall is a leading expert on the history of Métis and her central concept of “*wahkootowin*.” Wahkootowin is a Cree term meaning, ‘a worldview linking land, family, and identity in one interconnected web of being.’⁴² I am suggesting San Clara is part of this larger interconnected ‘web of being’ uniting this region with other Métis families and communities that are scattered across the prairie landscape of Western Canada.

Macdougall determines, “The Métis of the northwest were able to create a space for themselves within the region, in part, because of the religious and economic lifestyles of their paternal and maternal ancestors.”⁴³ Like the Métis of the North West the ancestors of San Clara and Boggy Creek communities were able to create a space for themselves based on religious and economic lifestyles. They grouped together to live in peace, raise their families and practice their culture. I suspect the San Clara and Boggy Creek communities were spared the agony of the government wrecking ball because they lived on land few others wanted. Or perhaps, the Métis here avoided the fate of Crescent Lake and St. Madeline’s because they often identified as Euro-Canadians while still identifying this area as homeland to their own traditional Métis culture.

In her paper, *Grandmothers of the Métis Nation*, Judy Iseke-Barnes shares Dorothy Chartrand’s lifetime of researching her family and community history and the interplay between the fur-trade, the roles of women in the forts and their relationship to the land. She explains,

⁴¹ Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 446.

⁴² *Ibid.*, back cover.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 247 – 248.

“This paper also retells some of Dorothy Chartrand’s journey through twenty-five years of research in archives to unlock the interconnected stories of her family and community, the fur trade, and other Métis communities, through which her ancestors weave their lives.”⁴⁴

Using my own genealogy, I have been able to establish who our family is, where they lived, and in some cases where they travelled and died.⁴⁵ The story of my genealogy is one of adventure, hardship, struggle and in several cases our ancestors have clearly demonstrated a willingness to fight against colonial injustice. Fortified with this knowledge I have chosen to push back against the ongoing colonization of Métis people in this community using education, community involvement and oral history as my de-colonizing weapons of choice. In the following paragraphs, I record how I have set out to accomplish this goal of reclaiming our communities’ heritage from Euro-Canadian revisionism. I also propose San Clara-Boggy Creek should be recognized as an equally important stronghold of Métis culture and tradition along with other already recognized Métis communities in Manitoba.

In another example of interconnectedness with other historic Métis communities, scholar, Nicol St. Onge, records the Boyers of Saint Laurent, whose descendants also identified as French Canadians. With the benefit of genealogical information, I am able to determine we share the same family system connected through marriage. St. Onge writes, “... in fact the narrator’s paternal grandparents, Pierre and Genevieve (Martin) Boyer, had declared themselves

⁴⁴ Judy Iseke-Barnes, “Grandmothers of the Métis Nation: A Living History with Dorothy Chartrand.” *Native Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (2009):70.

⁴⁵ Gabriel Dumont Institute and *Métis Culture and Heritage Resource Centre Inc.*, (Book #3339, 2014). Ancestors of Dennis H. Davey.

to be Métis in the 1870 census.”⁴⁶ “Genevieve Martin’s father Abraham Martin was a French Canadian who married a Métis woman from the north-west, Euphresine Gariépy.”⁴⁷ My paternal lineage includes, Abraham Martin Jr., b. 1833, (son of Abraham Martin dit Barnabe b. 1797) and was Genevieve Boyer’s brother. Abraham Martin Jr.’s daughter, Elisé (Martin) Bouvier is buried in Ste. Claire cemetery in San Clara. She is my great-grandmother. These family relationships support the interconnectedness of kith and kin who settled many of these traditional Métis communities across Manitoba.

One of the exercises we accomplished in our meeting in February, in San Clara, was looking at the plan of Township 30, Range 28, West of the Principal Meridian grid. This grid is demarcated with the original homesteaders of Boggy Creek by Delmer Funk, a long-time resident. Many participants at the meeting could remember the original homesteaders and agreed that most of the quarter sections were homesteaded by Métis families. This exercise gave focus to our discussion and moved the conversation forward about how we and our neighbours are still interconnected.

When the 144 quarter sections that make up Township 30, are deconstructed in terms of how the land was used, and by whom, we can observe who lived in this area. For example, I organized the landholders into four categories. The results consisted of: 1) Crown lands, the largest stakeholder in the region with 53 quarter sections. 2) other land uses that held 12 quarter sections, such as, one section was set aside for the school, and another section was owned by

⁴⁶ N. St. Onge, *Saint-Laurent, Manitoba: Evolving Metis Identities, 1850-1914*. (Regina: University of Regina, 2004), 66.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

the Hudson Bay, Surprise Lake was on another quarter section, while Friesen’s Mill operated on another quarter section of land. The game warden property occupied yet another quarter section and finally the forestry tower had the remaining quarter section, 3) European Homesteads were found on 28 quarter sections, 4) 51 quarter sections were home to Métis family homesteads (see Figure 1). To view family names and locations, please see Figure 2.

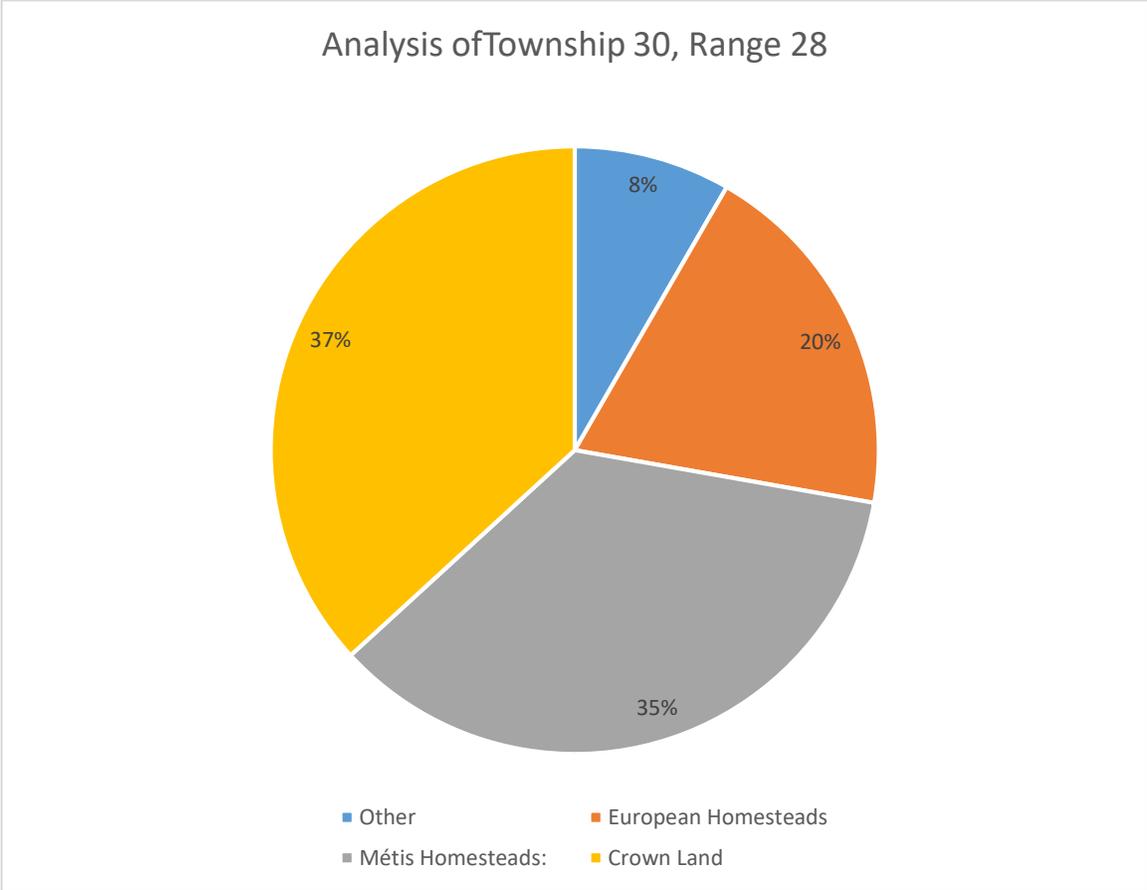


Figure 1: Analysis of Township 30 Range 28.

ORIGINAL HOMESTEADS (PRIOR TO AND INCLUDING 1925)

TOWNSHIP 30—RANGE 28W

Fricco's mill 31	Doc Nolan Oly Olson	Patter 32	Phil Vohn Jees Nolan	C 33	C John Bennett	C 34	C Forrest Tower	C 35	C John Funk 36
Arthur Nolan	Charlie Nolan	Emerson Vohn	John Bennett	C	Forrest Tower	C	C	C	C
Abe Bennett 30	Jake Funk Toby Morrian	School 29	Jarvis Smith	Julius Hiebert Jr. 28	Joe Lulibeck	Corny Hiebert 27	Dick Hiebert Frank Sawatsky	C 26	C 25
Herman Gottlieb Ed McKenzie	Surprise Lake 9	Glen Lester Fred Lester	Ally 20*	Earl Lester 21	Joe Lulibeck Gerrit Warden son Gerrit	Duwa Friesen 22	C	C 23	C Fred Morrison 24
Ernest Thorne 18	C	Joe Mailhot Mrs. Davey	Joe Mailhot Charlie Davey	Frank LaFord 16	Henry Davey Charlie Nolan	Pat B. Langgan 15	C	C 14	George Morrison 13
C	C	Hudson 8	Pat Langgan	Alex Kavaliec 9	Pat Langgan	Jack Bell 10	C	C 11	Pete Wiens Jr. 12
Joe Paul 7	Emery Mailhot	Bay -	Pat Langgan	Pat Langgan	C	Ben Bonham	C	C	C
Murcel Paul 6	Joe Langgan	Justin harogue	Batter Bawier	Bob Davey 4	Pat Langgan	Antoine Bawier 3	Louis Bonham	Joe mickay 2	STEVE Burwash Store Burwash Dolphus Bawier
C	C	George Fillion	Bill Buckley	Otto Klutz	Norman Bawier	John Bawier BRAZEAU	Alex Justice	Pat B. Langgan	Hubert Charters Jr. Bert Charters Jr.

Figure 2. Original Homestead Quarter Sections. (Map details courtesy of Delmer Funk)

Testing Methodologies: Research as Activism

In preparation for engaging the community, I reviewed the work of other scholars interested in storytelling as activism. In *Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance*, Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes examine the writings of authors who explored the concept of decolonization. They find that, "... decolonization does not fit the demands and expectations of the western Euroversity – it is alive and vibrant, being theorized and enacted around the globe through practices such as storytelling."⁴⁸ Guided by principals of insurgent methodology and finding ways to actualize trust, openness and good will in the community my objective is to encourage every voice to speak out and be heard. The knowledge they share by way of family stories, customs and culture benefits the traditional knowledge of the community. These histories of land use from long ago, memories of "the hunt" and harvesting of wild plants for food and medicine, basket weaving, quilting, beading and jewelry-making are all cultural touchstones that are interconnections or wahkootowin that tie us to the land. Based on stories shared, it becomes clear that surviving as hunters, fishers and trappers traditionally defined who we were to a greater degree than farming or any other economic or social activity.

Sium and Ritskes "examine the role that Indigenous storytelling plays as resurgence and insurgence, as Indigenous knowledge production and as disruptive of Eurocentric, colonial norms of 'objectivity' and knowledge."⁴⁹ When they put out a call to writers the response they received was "far more subversive than we could have anticipated."⁵⁰ They realized "... that

⁴⁸ Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes, "Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): III, accessed 6 May 2016.

<http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/viewFile/19626/16256>

⁴⁹ Ibid., i

⁵⁰ Ibid., ii.

decolonization, despite its relatively new entry into academic vocabulary, has been practised and engaged and theorized in Indigenous communities in ways that already yielded rich, complex layers of thought.”⁵¹

Sium and Ritskes referred to “insurgent moments” to describe the deeper meanings found in the stories they were hearing as “articulations of the rootedness of Indigenous thought, of the differences that fortify and maintain a strong resistance to colonial power.”⁵² It recently occurred to me that I was witnessing “insurgent moments” in the stories I heard in Boggy Creek. For example, their resistance to giving up spiritual connections to the land represented by the stones they cherish. Their identity represented by the Michif language connects them to their heritage, as does the Métis sash, the flag, including their diet of bannock, ducks, even tea and other identifiable characteristics maintain strong symbolic resistance to colonial power. As Armand Lucier, another community co-researcher explained in one of several interviews, that owning a still (for home-made brew) was a way of life for people. They knew it was illegal but they did it anyway and the skills to make “home-brew” were handed down through generations in family lines. These characteristics maintain their distinctiveness from the colonial powers. For the most part these factors continue to represent meaning in the community and these stories continue to affirm their identity today.

Discussing insurgent Indigenous movements around the globe, Sium and Ritskes suggest “While dominant scholarship might push aside methods such as autoethnography or traditional storytelling as not rigorous enough or as ‘identity politics’ the experiences of those who live out

⁵¹ Ibid., ii.

⁵² Ibid.

decolonization are integral to the movement.” It is our hope of course, that the stories emerging from this community do become integral to the dominant discourse and reminds those who wield power that our people “embody the scars of colonialism and the long histories of resistance and triumph.”⁵³ There are many examples of scarring that was shared in the stories told to me. Those such as Eva’s experience of having their family homes bull-dozed by the government and Armand’s story of people being fearful of the ruthless game wardens who threatened people’s ability to feed their families which often meant they survived without fresh fish and meat or risked going to jail.

Sium and Ritskes reminds us, “Through the trans-generational memory transmitted by their stories, Elders ensure the survival and continuance of Indigenous epistemic traditions.”⁵⁴ As I noted earlier, Skip Anderson told me about an Elder who understands this to be true as he worries that when he is gone much of his traditional knowledge, experience and stories will also be lost. “For many communities under siege by the triangular threats of (settler) colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalist-modernity, story-telling becomes a site and tool for survival.”⁵⁵ These threats are real and have impacted this community for decades. Telling this story becomes even more urgent, as we advocate for its recognition as a historic site, before it eventually collapses into colonial obscurity.

The dearth of written history is problematic for the academic and even more so for the juridical systems as oral history traditions are often treated with skepticism or simply invalidated. However, I know the people in the community understand these stories to be true. As we

⁵³ Ibid., iii.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., v.

deconstructed our past together as a group, many of the stories that emerged, could be collaborated by others who either experienced or witnessed these same events. I hoped that as people joined in these meetings some would come to share their stories and still others would also share my concern for the future of San Clara's history. Furthermore, I wanted to add synergy to my position vis a vis, San Clara and Boggy Creek, and recognize this community is interconnected and is part of the broader network of historic Métis communities. As events proceeded, more people came out to listen out of interest and still others were skeptical that this research is too late because most of the Elders have died.

I further explained my research intentions by posting an invitation on social media on June 13, 2015. I have received about 130 views on social media since then and was contacted by several people through email and telephone. Because of messaging with one responder, Doreen Funk contacted her elderly parents and encouraged them to speak with me. Together her parents, Delmer and Irene Funk, now in their late eighties and early nineties and I have had three interviews beginning on Sept. 21st 2015. As often as possible, I make a point of stopping by their home on my return visits to update them on our progress and to chat about the old days. I show them how I integrate their stories and photos into the overall story-line, and ensure they are comfortable with the outcome. I incorporate details such as the building of Happy Lake school in 1927, on their land, as noted by Funk.⁵⁶ This rural area known as Happy Lake is further north of the village and it too is considered part of the broader San Clara community.

⁵⁶ Doreen Funk, *Looking Back: At Family and Friends*. Unpublished family and community history book.

Utilizing Social Media as Methodology

Prior to returning to the communities, I posted a video on July 11th 2015, which I made for a graduate class. I incorporated this video as methodology, and as a way to introduce myself to the on-line community. The video is called “Survivance” and it introduces my historic family connections to the Métis Nation and offers an example of healing from the subsequent trauma and despair inflicted on our families using Mother’s quilt work as the basis of our spiritual renewal. The title of the video is used as it is intended by Anishinaabe cultural theorist, Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor describes “Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not mere reaction, or a survivable name.”⁵⁷ He continues,

Survivance stories honor the humor and tragic wisdom of the situation, not the market value of victimry... Stories of survivance are a sure sense of presence... Most of my stories are about survivance. No matter the miseries, most of the characters in my stories take on the world with wit, wisdom, and tricky poses. My stories are not the tragic mode, not the themes of heroic ruin, destruction, and moral weakness. My stories are tricky not tragic, ironic not heroic, and not the comfy representations of dominance.⁵⁸

By incorporating this video as methodology, I was hoping people would recognize I wanted to research our community from a place of strength and they would relate to my story. As well, I wanted to use this video to foreshadow my storyline and generate interest in researching our community.

My family members and cousins are active participants in engaging other residents in the community on behalf of this research. My mom is pivotal as family knowledge keeper and resource provider. She informs me who may be interested in sharing their stories and of the

⁵⁷ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), viii.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

general health of some of the older residents. This helps in determining who is available to consider consent forms and who may be interested in joining our research project. Now that I have returned to the community after so many years away people ask me who I am. Once they know who my parents are there is a sense of familiarity in their response that relays a multitude of unspoken words conveying a sense of belonging and community identity.

Positionality in Research

Knowing and understanding the concept of insider/outsider relationships is a primary building block in developing a methodology as it applies to Indigenous communities. Relationships are one of the most valued cultural landmarks in Indigenous society. For example, Shawn Wilson writes, “The importance of relationships, or the relationality of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology, was stressed by many people...”⁵⁹ “Several stated that this relational way of being was at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous.”⁶⁰ In this context, one must understand his/her role as a researcher and where it positions them within the fabric of the community. Without a relationship, trust between participants and researchers must be developed. Fundamentally, in community-based research you are cast as either an inside or outside researcher. The role of an inside researcher in the community implies you intend to conduct your research based on your family relationships within the community. As an insider, most people will know who your family connections are.

The second role is as an outsider in relationship to the community. In other words, the community members are unfamiliar with you and may potentially view your motives as suspect

⁵⁹ Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 80.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

when it comes to defining cultural differences. I suggest much of this caution is in response to cultural differences that was in effect code for racism. Regardless of what role the researcher has, it is imperative to establish a relationship built on trust and mutual respect. Your credibility as a researcher may be challenged based on your associations with other groups and your efforts will be assessed on your capacity to 'fit in.'

As an outside researcher developing 'rapprochement' with community members can be time consuming and labour intensive. For example, spending many hours interacting, communicating and visiting residents to establish a relationship where people will begin to engage with you and share their stories. Even so, all researchers must continue to earn the respect and trust of the community members at each stage of their research process. In some situations, it may be tempting to believe the community is homogenous and developing credibility in one sector of the community will apply universally to other sectors. However, this community is stratified by political and economic realities in much the same way as in other communities. In some instances, the community may be hotly or subtly divided and on other issues there could be a great deal of cohesion and unity. Understanding these layers of complexity among members who share the same community can be challenging. Herein lies the potential to miss the nuances of community life and remain regulated to the sidelines of community experiences. Other variables to consider that may impact research agendas are age, personality, gender and race to highlight some examples without going into greater detail in this paper.

There are also risks and reasons to proceed with caution as an insider especially in research where the inclusion of one's own family, relatives and friends become part of the

research project. An important rule to conceptualize and remember is any action creates a reaction and this universal law applies to both sets of researchers. In regards to being an inside researcher Tuhiwai Smith elucidates,

“the known methodological risks are seen from one perspective to be about the potential for bias, lack of distance and lack of objectivity, and from another research perspective to be about the potential to see the trees but not the forest, to underplay the need for rigour and integrity as a researcher and to conflate the researcher role with an advocacy role”.⁶¹

The benefits include a shared family history and knowledge of community perspectives. With this said, there are also advantages to being an outside researcher as well. For example, as an outsider your personal relationships are not put at risk in the same way as they might be for an inside researcher. However, insiders have a degree of familiarity with people who become their co-researchers in community-based research. According to Sium and Ritskes “*who* does the storytelling, remains an important question in decolonization work.”⁶² In Brenda LeFrancois’ s article on “...the psychiatrization of Indigenous children in the child welfare system” discussed by Sium and Ritskes she self-describes speaking from “... the tenuous position of a settler scholar.”⁶³ Sium and Ritskes describe “... her article as a “story telling approach to research” that seeks to disrupt and implicate, she continues to explain the fragility of ‘telling’ from the position of an outsider.”⁶⁴ Regardless, if you are an inside or outside researcher, your relationship in most situations will determine whether people will be helpful and share information.

⁶¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. 206.

⁶² Sium and Ritskes, “Speaking Truth”, iv

⁶³ Ibid. iv

⁶⁴ Ibid., iv.

In my situation, I feel privileged to enjoy enduring relationships demonstrated by a willingness of people to share their stories and confer a certain degree of trust in me by signing consent forms. The process did not always go smoothly as some individuals pushed back when I didn't get all the details quite right. In these cases, I value their honesty and passion in sharing their responses and letting their thoughts and emotions on these important cultural issues be expressed. I will discuss some of these interactions in greater detail in chapter two.

Creating 'space' to make these stories available is a way of de-colonizing our identities and enhancing our understanding of who we are as a community. These stories are the narratives that shape our traditional beliefs and understanding of our culture. Participation in this process creates an opportunity for the community to define its own identity. In my view, it is our obligation to unsettle the Euro-Canadian establishment who would prefer to control the narrative.

Research Analysis

I gathered much of my data during the timeframe of July, 2015 and February, 2016. Below I offer an analysis of my research outcomes. (Figure 3). I utilized a variety of methods to collect data including, consent forms, telephone calls, one-to-one meetings, social media, emails, community meetings, craft fairs, and attending two Louis Riel Day Celebrations. As the charts below highlight, social media has been very effective in generating participation and interest in this project. With each posting I shared on social media there was a positive corresponding response either in return messages and to a lesser extent emails. Once the social media posts were available, I followed up by making telephone calls to schedule interviews. The Community Participation chart highlights that following the advertising campaign in June, twenty people

attended the first community session in San Clara in July with slightly fewer numbers in Boggy Creek in August. These figures correspond to the signatures I collected in my guest book as I invited people whom I have spoken with to sign and permit me to collect this data.

The first community meeting in San Clara in 2015, and the exposure I received at the Boggy Creek craft fair a month later, was followed by a significant increase in attendance at the follow-up sessions at the Métis Community Centre's in both San Clara and Boggy Creek in February, 2016. A few explanations may account for this increase in attendance including the fact that it was a holiday celebration, more people had heard about the project through word-of-mouth and I had already held several interviews. Whatever their main justification for attending the meeting in February was, once we began people stayed and generously participated in the discussions. Others in the community whom I have spoken with more recently, such as, Doug Klassen have expressed pride that I am conducting this research and that our community history is important. In another recent conversation with Linda Allerie in August, 2016, she also expressed feelings of gratitude that I am pursuing this research initiative because she believes it is time we all overlook our different political agendas and come together to heal as a community. She expressed her view that bringing people together as part of this research is a healing experience for her.

Analysis of San Clara/Boggy Creek Community Research Participation

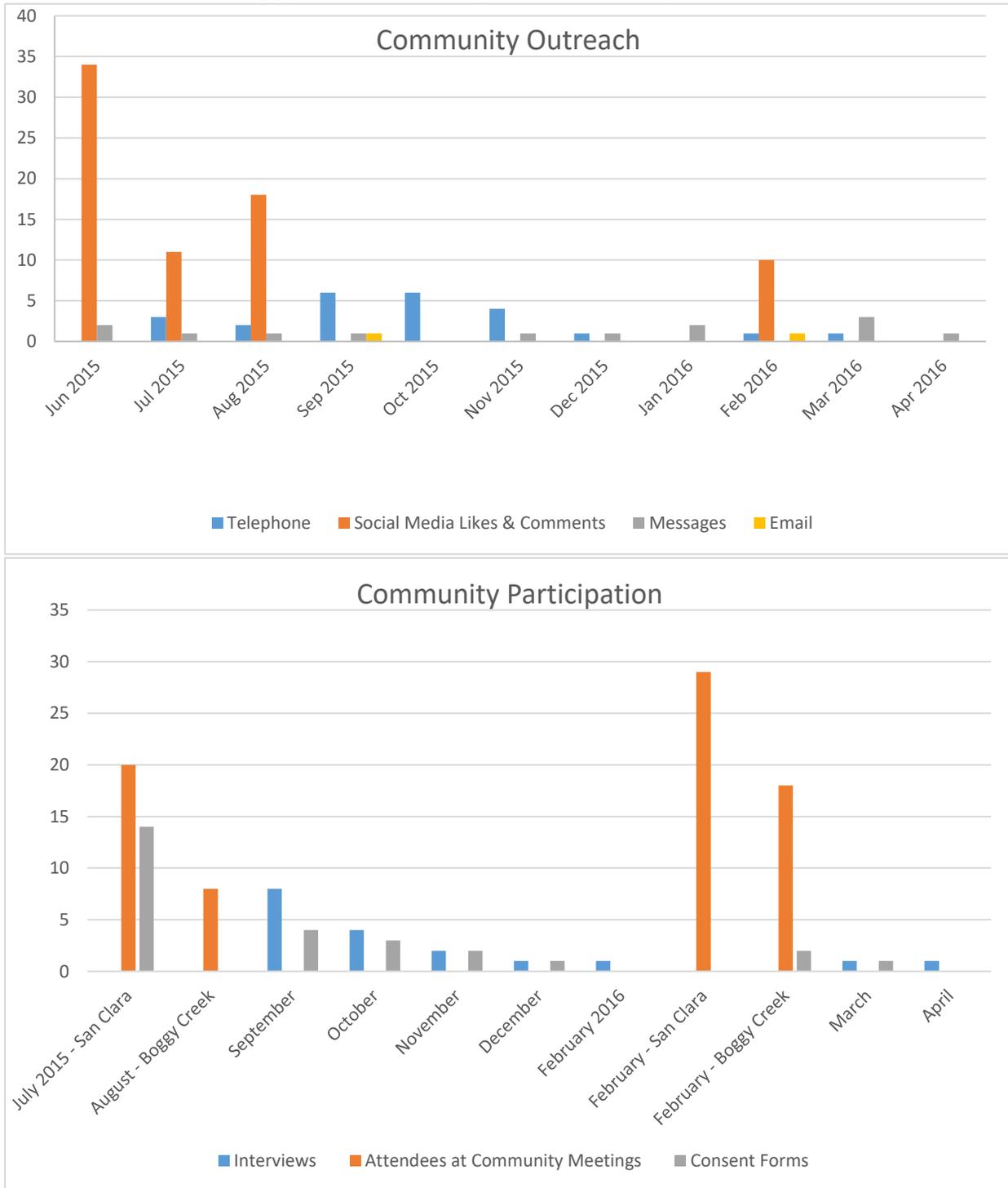


Figure 3 Research Analysis

Looking Back

Much of the community social life by the mid-twentieth century in San Clara was determined by the church calendar including how people mourned their losses and their code of dress. For example, it was considered respectful for women to wear black for a year following the death of a loved one. During Lent, it was discouraged to eat certain foods that were considered luxuries such as butter and red meat. Strict observers would only have fish on Fridays. Other restrictions placed on the community during Lent were dances and community-wide celebrations. As most of the Métis social activities were ensconced in the civilizing effects of the Church, at least, during Lent, people did not dance in public in San Clara.

Over the course of our interviews in the last year, some people spoke of the fear of the game wardens and other agents of the government such as police, priests and school teachers who terrorized their parents or grandparents by invading their privacy in search of wild meat, fish or home-brew. Some were disgraced for speaking their language which was especially discouraged in schools by teachers and priests. Along the way, I was reminded of the Michif expression, 'Kiya Waneekah' which means don't forget who you are or where you come from. This expression speaks to me and guides me as I am challenged to learn, understand and intimately know the long struggle for justice these families deserve, including my own who share this historic community.

In a recent (November, 2016) social media correspondence with Eugene Carriere, a cousin of mine, and grand-nephew to J. E. Mailhot whose land San Clara was built on and who is considered the founding father of San Clara, the modern-day village, provided these details from a local history book. Although he clarifies these details were researched by a previous classmate

of ours in San Clara, Madeline Mailhot, in 1971, and published in the Roblin Review, Eugene is acknowledged for bringing these details forward to my attention⁶⁵ While it is significant to understand how the evolution of the modern-day village of San Clara was formed and by whom, my focus for the purposes of this research is acknowledging the community of Métis people who lived here in the Unorganized District, R.M. of Park, prior to Monsieur Mailhot's ownership and subsequent sale of the land to the re-emergent Métis that returned to this area. The formalization of the village name occurred in 1925.⁶⁶ And the first lot in the Village was sold in 1931, while, the second lot was sold in 1939. The village site was formally surveyed in 1946.⁶⁷

Looking Ahead

My final goal in the framework of this project was to coordinate a feast to celebrate our groups' participation and cohesiveness. This goal was discussed with both groups in February and most agreed it was a good idea and they would plan to attend. Primarily, I wanted to gift my co-researchers, friends and families in a show of appreciation for their support in becoming involved as co-researchers. However, due to its location in Togo, where it was mentioned that there are racist attitudes still present, this event could also be interpreted as a political symbol of solidarity and strength among family, friends and community. The idea of a feast eventually evolved into an afternoon picnic which was held on August 20th, 2016.

Connie Henry Paul, and Ephrem Paul, both generously gifted their time to sing and play music for us. Picnics are one of our traditional ways of sharing food, celebrating, maintaining and

⁶⁵ Lorene Ward and Margret Del La Marc, *Shell River Municipality: Century One: Memories of Roblin and Rural Districts: 1884-1984*. Published by Roblin History Book Committee, Roblin, Manitoba. Friesen Printers, Altona, Manitoba, Canada. 1986.

⁶⁶ Notes from Mrs. Lachance gifted by Bernice Andrusiak, 2015.

⁶⁷ Ward and Del La Marc, *Shell River*.

renewing relationships with Elders, cousins, neighbours and friends. For this event, I encouraged people to contribute to a 'pot luck' style meal by bringing some of their own favourite foods. The response from everyone was overwhelming as they shared plenty of familiar foods including salads, warm bannock and a variety of desserts. I started the event by borrowing Connie's microphone to welcome everyone. I took a few minutes to remind people we were celebrating as friends and family within walking distance of Fort Tremblanté. The 1794 North West fur trading Fort that was the first home of not only our ancestors in this region but others as well, including Frank Hiebert who also descended from Cuthbert Grant Sr.'s daughter, Marie Marguerite Bellehumeur.

Our genealogies suggest we *were* settled in this region and children were born here pre-European control in 1874, with the signing of Treaty 4. We know Cuthbert Grant famously returned to his Mother's people, who were from this area, after he returned from Scotland where he was educated. There is no basis from my perspective to suggest that Métis didn't arrive in this area until after 1906, well after post colonial control by the Euro-settler government.

In my introduction to our guests attending this picnic I was happy to point out that we do have good reasons to celebrate in this area because our forbearers also settled here. Celebrating our connections to each other, by gathering here this summer, honours that past and sets the stage for future progress. Many people who attended the picnic, have since decided, that it went very well. I would agree, and add that it was also the basis for renewal of spiritual connections to each other and the land. I suggest this event has the potential for future celebrations of cultural awareness simply by joining together and proclaiming our identity. It is clear, no one is interested in living in the past, but it is generally accepted that the past anchors us as we move forward.

Considering the mobility characteristics of Métis life, which has defined progress since the fur trade and the buffalo chase that encompassed a hundred years and more of progress. Eventually our people were displaced from more desirable locations in southern Manitoba and elsewhere ending their traditional way of life over a vast area of the Canadian Prairies, including North Dakota and Montana. As I suggested, many would return here because they had previous connections to the land as evidenced by our genealogies.

On that day in August, 2016, we stood shoulder-to-shoulder and celebrated our heritage as family and community. There was an introduction in Michif gifted by Eva Brazeau followed by a prayer by Elder, Clara (Davey) Brazeau. With the sounds of Michif being heard in the air, sharing traditional food was soon followed by jigging and dancing, there was a sense that something unique and important was underway here as we celebrated community pride in our people. Inevitably, all this interest culminated in people asking if we were planning another event for next year. I encouraged those who asked about next year's picnic to continue the momentum we created that day, plan together, and organize early to ensure success. This methodology gives everyone an opportunity to participate in planning the celebration. I believe events such as this one, can sow the seeds of change, while heightening people's awareness of their history and rights. My objective implementing this methodology was to get the conversation started, primarily among ourselves, about our identity, our culture and when we arrived in this area. (See Appendix v).

My family welcomed everyone when we hosted the picnic in Togo, where my brother, Bob lives. With the help of my Mom, sisters and brothers, we took care of all the background planning and organizing involved in hosting this community feast. My research grant covered the

costs of the venue, food and entertainment. This community event, while planned as a social gathering, offered another opportunity to grow my research program. To achieve this, I developed a brief survey that 36 of the 86 people who signed my guest book returned. My survey sample included nine questions including; Do you identify as Métis? What customs/activities do you participate in? I wanted to know what topics people were interested in knowing more about. Did they want more community meetings? In hindsight, I should have included another question about language. For example, how many people know how to speak Michif and/or French. I also recorded attendance numbers and had consent forms available.

Once the figures were in, there were approximately 100 people who attended the picnic with 86 people who signed the guest book. An additional eight more people at the picnic signed the consent forms, bringing the total signed consent forms for this research project to 36 people, who agreed to become community co-researchers (see Figure 3). This event brought people from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba together, including the local communities of Togo, Roblin, San Clara and Boggy Creek. We had fun, stories were shared, many caught up with old friends, others made new ones and it provided me with an opportunity to update the community.

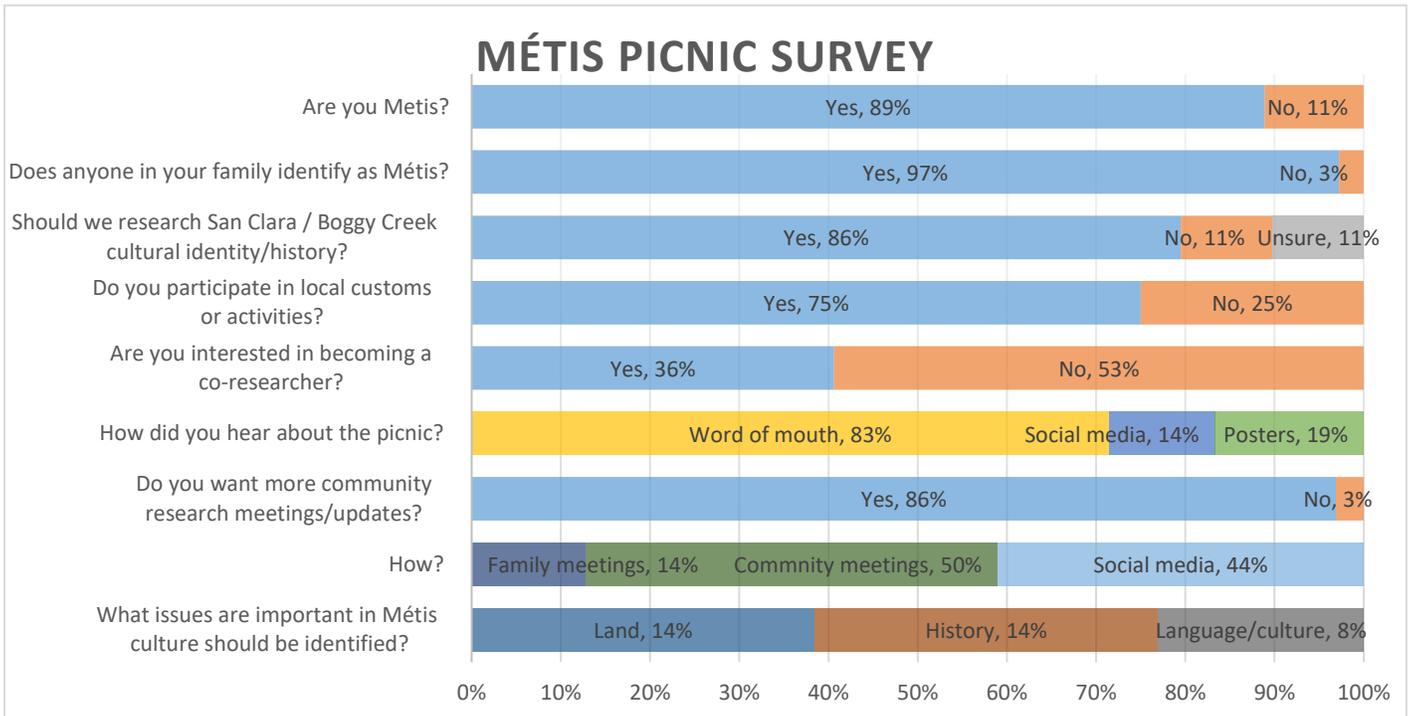


Figure 4 Survey Métis Family Picnic

As noted earlier, our project uses storytelling as methodology to record the local history of the people living in this area. This research is just getting started and is dependent on working together with family members, relatives and friends in the community. As the facilitator of these stories, I am proud and humbled to take part in the re-telling of these events that shape our history and is the basis of our traditional knowledge. The descendants of those who were marginalized for many years and lived in obscurity tell many of these stories.

Chapter II

The Spirit of Gift Giving:

Small Gifts Mean a Great Deal

Delmer and Irene Funk gifted me with three hours of recorded stories about early homestead experiences and copies of school records in 1938-39 from Happy Lake school. We drank tea and enjoyed Irene's cookies while we signed consent forms and talked about the history of the community. Delmer began our interview by telling me Basil Dumont was the first homesteader that he knew about in San Clara-Boggy Creek who arrived in 1883. As far as Delmer and Irene can recollect Basil Dumont was the first of all the Dumonts who eventually settled in this region. The Dumonts were recognized as Métis people in the region.

Using locations where current families live as landmarks they helped guide me visually to the exact land location, S.W. Township 30, 29, Range 28. They also reminded me that the current locations of the roads are not in the same place as they were in the early days of the homesteaders. Delmer shared stories about his family arriving from south Russia in 1874. His grandparents were nine and seven years old when they first immigrated and settled in the Red River valley in Morris and Plum Coulee as part of a larger group of other Mennonite families. Delmer relates that it was Queen Victoria's representative who sent out scouts to recruit them to come to Canada. He also recalls his Grandpa telling him they were not allowed to bring any money into Canada, so with the little they had, they made buttons. Another story he related to me was about logging in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He describes another local family who were loggers and logged up in the Duck Mountain. They would haul their logs down to the Shell River, rolled them to Shellmouth and floated them down to the Assiniboine River where they

were then floated to Brandon. Delmer recalls this story very clearly because his father-in-law, Steve Burwash was one of the men who worked on rolling these logs down the rivers.

Irene, who identifies as Métis tells me her parents were born in Canada with her Dad's family arriving from Ireland. She remembers a story of her Mom making cheese to sell to the "thrashers." Thrashers were men who moved from farm to farm helping farmers "stook" their hay before combines arrived on the frontier. Her family were mixed famers and always planted large gardens. They arrived in the region to the south of San Clara in 1910. She grew up with twelve siblings. Their sheep produced wool they sold in Togo where it was loaded onto the train and taken to market. Irene remembers they all learned to knit with the wool they sheared from their sheep. Delmer, like other men who grew up in this area worked away in Churchill loading boats at the harbor in the winter time. They would go away to work for the winter, quit in the spring and come back to the farm until fall when they would go back again. Both Irene and Delmer talked about farming before electricity arrived. Irene remembers heating milk on the wood stove to feed her children. They used flour bags to carry in snow during the winter. In the springtime, as children it was their job was to keep the fires burning throughout the night while the sheep were birthing their lambs.

In another article written by Lawrence Barkwell, retired coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research for the Louis Riel Institute, he does recognize and include San Clara as home to the Métis prior to the 1870s. He also provided scrip identifying people who were either born nearby or died here, including, Alexandre Roquebrune dit Larocque, who married the granddaughter of the famous Guillaume Sayer. Sayer was tried for illegal trading in the Red River settlement. He was convicted, but no penalty was imposed. The Hudson Bay authorities could

not enforce their monopoly on trade. The outcome established free trade for the Métis in 1849. Alexandre Larocque died in 1913 at San Clara.⁶⁸ Scripts were issued to Marie Chartrand, born 1837 at Duck Mountain or Duck Bay, claim no. 1696; and Marguerite (Missyabitt) Sanderson, born 1827 at Duck Mountain, claim no. 1697.⁶⁹

During my interview with Wilf and Yvette Bouvier we enjoyed a cup of tea and shared Wilf's birthday cake. Yvette recalls there are still two original log cabins built by early homesteaders left in this area, one was built by German settlers and the second house was built by Prosper Henry, another local Métis family. Yvette shared that her first language was Michif. When they moved to the area it was all German and her older aunts and uncles were already speaking English. She says "I kinda lost it because Mom was teaching me French and Grandma was teaching me Cree so there was a big fight between the two of them and aunts and uncles were laughing at me because I couldn't say the words right."⁷⁰ As our conversation carried on I discovered Yvette made Métis sashes on her loom which stands in their kitchen. I asked if she could make me one too and after naming a modest price she agreed. We chatted about the significance of colour in the sashes and what they mean. She told me a story about how she suggested the color green to represent the local community. She showed me examples of her tufting work presented as framed works of art. Besides tufting with Elk fur she sews Métis styled clothing, beadwork, moccasins and jewelry. Wilf carves figurines and beads from antlers and wood. Both have travelled extensively to craft fairs all over Canada and the USA to market their crafts. My sash is woven with vibrant colors of red, black, yellow and blue. It is a beautiful gift I

⁶⁸ Conversation with Lawrence Barkwell, *Occasional Papers*, Louis Riel Institute, November, 14, 2016.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Conversation with Wilf and Yvette Bouvier. October, 2015.

will treasure but I also recognize that it represents a culture in this region that is vibrant and finds expression through a worldview that includes interconnections to the land and each other.

Meaning-making: Indigenous Spirituality

Native carved stones were an interesting theme as I met with people over time. Several people have at least one and their attachment to them over time seems to grow. Yvette has what



Figure 5. Yvette Bouvier's "Shaman Stone"

she calls a 'grandfather' or medicine stone. Frank has two others; one he calls a hammer stone, the other a Cherokee throwing ball. The hammer is about 10 inches high and looks barely used. The second stone in his possession, he describes as a Cherokee throwing ball. This much smaller one is perfectly rounded that looks very much like it could be used to throw. The hammer stone is substantially bigger with a concaved

shape around the upper third of the stone. Franks suggests it was purposely worn down likely by friction to allow it to be attached to a handle. At our last community meeting as photos of these stones were presented to the group Ephrem offered that he too had a special stone. These stones when they are discussed suggest they hold deep meanings for their owners. There is a sense of pride and excitement when I ask for further details about where they found them and what they mean to them. Their reactions infer a spiritual relationship that connects them to these historic artifacts.

I have shown photographs to an archeologist at the Manitoba Museum of Yvette's 'shaman' or grandfather stone that looks like a bear or an owl depending on how it is held and it

fits nicely into the palm of your hand. Although the archeologist discussed the erosion of the stone that may have added to its current condition, he admitted it also appeared that someone's hand had carved at least part of it. However, he could not enlighten us to any possibilities that it was used as a healing stone or who may have been its previous owner or which peoples it represented. Word, has it there are other stones in the community as well. The idea that these stones are healing stones or sacred items for the owners strengthens their spiritual connection to the land and each other creating a powerful bond. In their eyes, these stones represent and connect them to their land and their history. It seems that the scientists' view of Yvette's stone is the result of erosion, yet it has not swayed her opinion and the meaning-making she attributes to it. These different worldviews represented by science and spirituality became evident and were contrasted by Yvette's 'shaman stone.' The Métis people here appreciate it for its spiritual healing properties while the Euro-Canadians understand it as erosion. This difference in worldviews is exemplified by poet Lee Maracle.

She writes:

Stones hold sound, forever locked voices
Speaking through stone - grandfathers
Stone sings of what could have been⁷¹

During the course of these interviews spanning roughly two or three hours each I am developing insights into the cohesiveness of our Métis communities held together by family ties and friendships. People have generally asked about my Mom's health and openly share stories

⁷¹ Lee Maracle, *Talking To The Diaspora* ARB Books, 2015.

of their histories. They offer small gifts in nearly all the homes I visit from tea and lunch, to homemade brew from local wild plants, and music, books, genealogies, journals, hand-written notes and court documents. Of course, there is always the gift of laughter generously shared too as joking and sharing funny stories are a big part of what we do when we get together. These moments are always the best gifts to receive and happily so many Métis people are eager to share their laughter and friendship.

As importantly the gifts of knowledge, insight and caring are also freely shared with anyone who shares their time and listens to their stories. These stories tell of different journeys from other parts of “Turtle Island” where some still have land that have been passed down from older generations.⁷² Much like the development of Métis identity in Montana as Harroun Foster explains in *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community*. “For the Spring Creek Métis of Montana ethnic identity rested on kinship ties, which supported a deep sense of belonging, and continuing recognition of difference from both Indian and Euro-American groups.”⁷³ “...Métis families retain strong feelings of “we” and “them” that provided a sure sense of who they were and who they were not.”⁷⁴ As Charlie Vermeylen explains in the conclusion of this paper we too had a strong sense of ‘us’ and ‘them.’

As I noted, our interviews are usually held around the kitchen table. We often begin with how my family is doing, we share stories and I often depart with small gifts. These expressions of appreciation and sharing are also reflections of nurturing and bonding between friends, families

⁷² Note: North America was, and is known as Turtle Island by the First Nations peoples.

⁷³ Martha Foster Harroun, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 222

⁷⁴ Ibid

and communities. In *Spirit Gifting: The Concept of Spiritual Exchange*, Elmer Ghostkeeper, a Cree Métis from Alberta writes about the culture of gift giving as he shares his experiences of being caught between two worldviews. One worldview of living *with* the land and the second worldview of living *off* the land. He learned how to live with the land growing up in his Metis settlement called Paddle Prairie in northern Alberta surrounded by his extended family in 1950-1960's.

This conflicting set of worldviews was also familiar and affected many local people as they struggled to stay near family and friends *with* the land but eventually found it necessary to make a living *off* the land instead. Like Ghostkeeper, many of his generation who began living off the land were set in motion by a change in farming technology, as industrialization took over, and created other jobs that took them further afield from their home communities. Especially when seasonal farm work was no longer available that many had relied on and allowed them to return to the community after the haying season was over. In our area, many were drawn further north as Delmer mentioned to work on the docks in Churchill during the winter. Many others became miners, such as my uncles and cousins, which meant they had to relocate their families on a permanent basis. Still many others worked seasonally, in the bush as loggers, truck drivers and other work which kept them away from their families for extended periods of time.

Despite all these different patterns of mobility which impacted the extended families of San Clara and Boggy Creek, this area is their traditional territory and where home will always be. The relationship to the land has always been strong for many who continue to hunt and fish and to those who have returned over the years until none of their families are left. In other words, they feel a spiritual connection to the land even if they are no longer living *with* the land. My ninety-two-year-old aunt, who returned recently from Winnipeg to attend the Métis picnic and

gave blessings on our food, exemplifies this gift of a sense of place received from our ancestors, who had ties to this region. Some of our people still farm and harvest from the land as their ancestors did while others left to pursue employment opportunities and build their lives elsewhere.

In the old days of the 1880s, these families followed the buffalo, then they labored for Euro-Canadian farmers with larger land holdings than they themselves had in the early to mid-1900s. In modern times, people now leave to pursue education, new experiences, adventure, health services and of course the all-encompassing pursuit of employment. This rhythm of out-migration in community life is familiar to most families here as friends and relatives leave to pursue livelihoods in other parts of their historic territories and beyond. The reasons for leaving may have changed and are much more diverse, but the pattern of mobility is embedded in the community and it remains as stable as it was in the days of the fur-trade.

Ghostkeeper shares his journey of reclaiming his spiritual past and writes about how he learned to bridge both worldviews. Understanding the rhythms of the seasons described by the Métis cosmology chart his parents lived by and reconciling his community life, represented by the Gregorian calendar, helped him to bridge both worldviews. The gifts of traditional knowledge and spirituality from his parents and grandparents eventually helped him to understand how to find his balance between the cultures he grew up with. This point is important in our research too, because holding these community meetings creates space for Elders to share their knowledge through stories that connect us to our own Indigenous worldview, and ultimately their stories include an element of spirituality. Their views and spiritual beliefs becomes the basis of our Métis identity. To succeed in finding this balance we have much the same challenges that

Ghostkeeper addresses. Those of us who have lost our spiritual connection to our past can regain it by understanding the traditional knowledge and language of our Elders. The gift of acceptance by the community and the reciprocity in these meetings, including interviews with language speakers, nourishes our spiritual energy. I believe these relationships can also nourish the spirituality of other descendants looking to understand how to balance their own worldviews. This research facilitates a reciprocal gift exchange with the potential to restore balance in the lives of Métis who live or are connected to this community physically and spiritually.

In a similar notion of spirit gifting, I turn to my Mother's lifetime of quilt making. On a physical level these quilts keep us warm and we are intrigued by the patterns she chooses and for what reasons, like who she has made it for. However, on a spiritual level these gifts of art create a sense of connectedness to who we are and it nourishes our spirit at the same time. These quilts become larger than their sum of parts as they take a life of their own and are passed down as family stories that hold deeper spiritual meanings for those who receive these gifts.

Another recent example of gifting in this community happened on August 20, 2016 which was the day of the Métis picnic in Togo. Many local people who attended the picnic also had plans to attend a benefit supper for another community member from San Clara who suffers from health problems that compromise his ability to work. They have it in their hearts to go from one community to another, both several miles away from their home communities to support a friend and family member in need. No doubt, having his family and friends join to support him was an uplifting spiritual experience of this community-wide sharing and gift giving. They are a small group of people but their gift giving is a huge part of their lives and it nourishes the community spiritually. Even in this way, for those who may have lost their spiritual connection to the land it

can be reconnected by witnessing and being gifted by people who still maintain their connections in this traditional territory.

With so much pressure to leave the land for work and the influx of settlers, the spiritual connection to the land was fractured for many and the dominance of Catholic Church life took over for many others. The seasonal calendar we were familiar with was now also connected to unemployment, seasonal work and extended periods of time where many men were absent from the community. Yet, the spirit of gifting has always been present in this community and it is a way for people to affirm their connections to each other and to the land. I interpret gift giving or spirit gifting as described above, also happened in most exchanges I was party to in this research process. The sharing of traditional knowledge, food, laughter and stories are all examples of spirit gifting. It is evident most gift giving in the community is about sharing but it also reinforces the bonds between families and friends. It is often spontaneous and like all other gifts of this nature it comes from the heart. It could be a hug, a laugh, a cup of tea, a book or a party. It is part of the culture and the concept of gift giving is shared and appreciated by almost everyone.

Other writers, such as Jennifer Adese, wrote her story as a gift to inform and disseminate knowledge she had gathered in her own writing and research. She "... argues that such stories should have greater influence in the political spectrum of Métis peoplehood and Métis political activism."⁷⁵ These remarks resonate with the action-oriented approach to research Gaudry supports in his work with insurgent research methodologies. In part, I offer these years of research to this project along with my family, friends and co-researchers to be accepted as gifts

⁷⁵ Jennifer Adese, "Spirit Gifting: Ecological Knowing in Métis Life Narratives," *Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014), accessed May 09, 2016, <http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/22191>.

to the community that raised us and gave us our cultural values to pursue what the Cree call, “mino pimatisiwin” or the good life.⁷⁶ While we are making a political statement by pushing back against these ongoing efforts to disenfranchise our community, we are getting in touch with our spiritual past that includes the act of gift giving. Without recognizing our traditional territory as a Métis historic site, it has the effect of sublimating evidence that Métis people were here along with First Nations as the first history-makers in the region. As significant as this historic land is for hunting and fishing it has nourished our spirits for generations.

Feminist scholar Genevieve Vaughan in *The World of the Gift Economy*, uses the Greek goddess Artemis as a metaphor to look at the concept of gift giving as opposed to a life based on the market economy. She offers an intriguing alternative to an economy based existence by describing a futuristic life in a town where implementing a gift economy eliminated diseases and anti-social personalities were rare. Essentially, she offers another perspective to consider when examining the power of the gift and receiving it as opposed to the logic of exchange and the market economy. Ideally, she suggests, we would be better off as a society if we focused more on our relationships with each other and the land than on money and market forces.

I share this story because it emphasizes the importance of gift giving. In Vaughan’s story gift giving is offered as an antidote to the capitalist market and exchange system where everything is exchanged for profit or at least to get something in return. The gift giving I was a recipient of in the homes and communities I visited was similar to that found in other Indigenous cultures where people share based on friendship and family bonds. In some cases, bartering is also a form of exchange where money is scarce and hard to come by. To illustrate this point, I chose an example

⁷⁶ Note. Mino Pimatisiwin” means a “good life” in Cree language.

from my own childhood. As a thirteen-year-old I began babysitting for a local family who farmed. I bartered with them to receive live chickens in exchange for my services as a babysitter. Eventually, I collected about thirteen hens. Although the money would have been nice I understood that a chicken would go much further than a dollar or two to help my family out. I was never asked to do this by my parents, but early on as children we learned to gift our families, or better understood as “pitching in,” in exchange for labor we provided to others. We all practised this form of gift giving in some capacity as we came of age. This was our way of gifting or helping our family out using very little capital. We understood gift giving and bartering were ways of giving and sharing when there was little money available.

Our cousins the Brazeau’s, who live in Winnipeg, would arrive for their annual holiday in the village bringing used books and occasionally gifting them to us. In a world where our toys were made from cardboard, old clothing or anything thing else available including, tires, old barrels, sticks and bits of wood there were few other options beyond our imagination and what we could find to entertain ourselves. These books gifted me with the freedom to dream of possibilities I never knew existed. These forms of bartering and gift giving examples benefited everyone, sometimes unknowingly, in spiritual ways as well as in their intended physical merit.

As another example of gift giving in the community, I will share an experience that showed up early in our first community meeting in San Clara in July, 2015. During a discussion of what cultural landmarks defined our community, Velma Watson responded with, “we recycled everything, because there was no money to buy anything.”⁷⁷ The implicit meaning in this statement, besides the exchange of one commodity for another, suggests people shared or

⁷⁷ Velma Watson was part of our San Clara community discussion in July, 2015.

bartered because they understood these items were needed and they could help. These examples of bartering and gift giving are familiar to most people, who readily share and gift each other with surplus items they no longer need, especially when it helps those in greater need. This includes, but is not limited to, labour, clothing, textiles, garden vegetables, wild meat and fish.

Chapter III

Seeking Our Language Speakers:

Importance of Language.

Significantly, 'old' Michif is still spoken by some in this close-knit community using the same dialect found in other historically recognized communities. Language is understood to be a touchstone of cultural identity and heritage everywhere including here. This is a significant and relative fact to consider in the history of San Clara because Michif evolved over time and has survived due to its relative isolation from other French and Indigenous language communities. Indigenous writers, Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson write about the protection of language. "Language is a manifestation of the finite contained in an infinite mystery. Everywhere we are born to a language, everywhere it binds our consciousness (Hutchinson, 1984).⁷⁸

John Crawford in *Speaking Michif in Four Métis Communities*, identifies San Clara-Boggy Creek as an example of comparable dialect to the Michif language spoken in St. Lazare and Camperville which is located two hours north-east of San Clara and sits on the fringe of Pine Creek Reserve on the southern edge of Lake Winnipegosis. The fourth community he studied was Belcourt, situated on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota.⁷⁹ In his study he highlighted the similarities in linguistic nuances found among these communities.

⁷⁸ Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge* (Saskatoon: Purich Pub., 2000),

⁷⁹ J. C. Crawford, "Speaking Michif in Four Métis Communities", *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 3 (1985):47.

A further investigation into the literature of this geographic location reveals, that besides this seminal work, there is little documentation of Michif language spoken by the people in this community, or how long it has existed in this region. It is clear, however, that Crawford viewed San Clara-Boggy Creek as a Michif language speaking community. He determined in 1985, that most people could still speak Michif here a generation earlier. He suggested, due to its geographic isolation, speakers here have maintained a similar character to the dialect spoken in the other communities he studied.⁸⁰

Most of our grandparents spoke a combination of French, Cree, Michif and English and some of our parents would converse in French, but we are English speakers now, some might even say with our own colloquial dialect. Our parents and others were raised speaking French or Michif but by the time they started school many of them were speaking English. Still others only learned to speak English later in school. In general conversation with English-speaking Euro-Canadians from other nearby communities, it was accepted that people living in San Clara were pre-dominantly French speaking. Unlike today where priests are moved from community to community after four years of service, during my childhood our long-time parish priest stayed in the community for decades. He greeted us in French, he initially recited mass in Latin, and in later years in French and eventually switched to English. However, his language preference was obvious as he usually conversed with parishioners in French. By this time, most of us were English speakers in school and those of us who spoke a different language generally spoke it at home with their families.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 47-48.

Of course, most of the Michif speakers have died as generations unfold and fewer people are learning the language. Our parents understood French but seldom spoke it and many didn't teach us to speak it either, although many of us are familiar with the basic greetings used in French. Those children who were raised by their grandparents stood a better chance at retaining their language skills while many others had lost them. In an interview, Eva Brazeau remembers her grandparents speaking several languages including French, Cree, English, Salteaux, and different dialects of Michif.⁸¹ For many others, who were unable to or discouraged from understanding this historic language the effect has been near total loss of this cultural landmark.

It was unexpected, but it turned out to be the right moment to meet Eva Brazeau in the fall of 2015. Because of this encounter facilitated by my brother Bob, who is a neighbour of Eva's, I learned to become a bit more familiar with Michif. Eva is passionate about language and is concerned about losing it as most people in our families who could speak it have died. Over several months, I interviewed Eva three times. The first time we met we spent time getting acquainted and figuring out our relationships to one another. It came as little surprise that between my father's relations and her Mother's family we had a mutual bond. Of course, we enjoyed a cup of tea as she shared her life experiences being raised by her nimoshôm and kokum. With each interview, she sprinkled in Michif expressions and stories she learned from her kokum and nimoshôm and other family relatives. On the last occasion, we met, we also arranged to meet her relatives, Margret and Frank Hiebert around the kitchen table at her house. There was plenty of food Eva had prepared in advance and after lunch, we spent several hours sharing stories and learning to speak Michif.

⁸¹ Interview with Eva Brazeau, 2015.

As I noted, Frank's family and ours are related by way of Cuthbert Grant Sr. and Utinawasis who lived in this same area generations ago. We are descendants of their daughters, Josephte, who is my ancestor and Marie who is Frank's. Eva and Margret's families arrived from North Dakota to homestead in Boggy Creek early in the twentieth century. I eventually asked Eva if she and Margret would consider reading a tale about a small Métis boy, that was written in Michif named Nolan, and his grandfather's adventures. The book included a (CD) or voice recording as well to accompany the story. Eventually, they agreed and with much laughter we began listening to the story. The speaker, on the CD, Norman Fleury, is Salteaux-French Métis, his inflections were different from Eva and Margret's, who speak a Cree-French Métis dialect. These differences soon became apparent as we listened for words they understood. Eventually, after some time had passed they relaxed and their language skills began to surface too. They could understand the story-line we were listening to; however, the written words were less familiar. After we listened for a while, I decided to ask if they would teach me some basic sentences in Michif. They agreed and as they reminisced, they marveled at how beautiful the language sounds as they heard it again. It reminded them of their family and stories of days gone by.

Besides learning these few sentences, I also felt fortunate to experience the bond between these speakers who share this language that will soon disappear from this area. They speak it with such passion and excitement they seem to cry with joy at the sound of it. I am privileged to share this brief introduction I learned from them. They are two of only a few families left in this area who know Michif well enough to converse in it. I genuinely felt bonded to this small group of kin and language speakers. I still have a long road ahead but the following introduction is what I was gifted with by them:

Tanschee! – Hello!
Mo no Denis Davey – My name is Dennis Davey
Neow weschia San Clara – I am from San Clara
Demi tow eh ten outta a ya yawn – I am happy to be here
Oh-ten-nee kaayaash ka kiish paynic nic ka knock – This is my
historic home⁸²
Mo famee oh tow weshia – My family is from here
Marcee – Thank you.

Of course, with so few people in this area who can still read and write Cree Michif the spelling of these words will require further research but for now they are spelled phonetically. The exception in this introduction, is the word “historic” which I borrowed from the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) virtual library of Michif words.⁸³ The GDI virtual library is a good source of information because it offers both visual and auditory cues that allows us to see the word in print and to hear it.⁸⁴

The language speakers I met in our traditional territory tell me that our dialect is nuanced and it differs from Cree-French Michif spoken in other parts of the prairies. There is even a difference between Margret and Eva who lived in close but different communities growing up, with perhaps Eva’s accent and word choices more closely aligned to the Cree language while Margret’s inflections are steeped in French. Given these details, I approach listening to people from other regions with this understanding in mind.

Another source of Michif language available that I encountered is a booklet written by a group of women from St. Laurent (2016). They explain their booklet is intended for people without any knowledge of the Michif French language. Besides it’s usefulness as a dictionary, it

⁸² I added “historic” later to reflect the identity of the village.

⁸³“Michif Dictionary,” The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture, accessed August 26, 2016, http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php

⁸⁴ Ibid., accessed 26 September 2016.

has several helpful phrases to describe foods and items you might find in the kitchen. It also offers examples for how to refer to relatives and days of the week, among many other important details.⁸⁵ There is also a trilogy of story books about a young boy named Nolan, (mentioned above) who learns to understand his Métis heritage and embrace his family traditions. These booklets are written in both English and Michif. Two of the booklets are accompanied by computer discs (CD) featuring Norman Fleury translating these stories into Michif. (2011).⁸⁶

I also note that I included one of these booklets as part of my interview with Eva and her relatives. Much laughter filled the room as old memories were brought back and Eva and Margret tried to remember their first language. Nowadays, there is less opportunity to speak it especially for Margret whose sister recently died. While her sister was alive they spoke to each other regularly on the phone which gave them both practise. This exercise provided another opportunity for us all to hear Michif again. Accompanied by gales of laughter, we became so animated as everyone was talking at once and memories of their Michif-speaking days returned, the interview became much more about old friendships buoyed by history and a shared language as it renewed and uplifted our spirits.

“We Don’t Use Miigwech Around Here”: Learning to Say “Thank You” in a Cree-French Village

In my conversation with Charlie Vermeylen, Eugene, and Don Langan in my meeting with them on September 5, 2015 I mentioned that in my concluding remarks in Church the past month or so I had used miigwech to say thank you. I explained it was intended as a gesture of solidarity

⁸⁵ June Bruce, et al., *Michif French: As Spoken by Most Michif People of St. Laurent, Manitoba* (Winnipeg: McNally Robinson POD, 2016).

⁸⁶ Wilfred Burton et al., *Call of the Fiddle = Li Vyayloon Ka Taypwatikooyen* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011).

with First Nations families who were subjected to the terror and denial of their language in church-run schools and secondly, I was equating it with the French verb “Merci.”

Charlie was the first to mention “we don’t use that word around here.”⁸⁷ I tried to pin point why it wasn’t used here, as my assumption was that it was simply a word from another Indigenous language that represents our grandmothers and simply means thank you. Charlie explained it was a word that MMF president David Chartrand uses all the time and he doesn’t speak for them here. I wondered aloud if they didn’t like this word was because they didn’t like the most public person who uses it with them or was it something else. Charlie said no, that wasn’t the reason they don’t use it, but it is not the right word to use around here.

The Langan boys are both Michif language speakers so I turned to them to understand if there was a specific Michif word they knew of to say thank you. They thought for a moment and said they use ‘Marcee.’ At this point, I still hadn’t picked up on the fact that the inflection was different and they couldn’t explain it either. It wasn’t until weeks later when I spoke to Métis scholar Fred Shore that I understood the difference was in the inflection.

I spoke with Ephrem Paul who is a few years older than I am as the craft fair was winding down last fall. He remembers my older brothers and I when we were neighbours living not far from the village, when I was quite young. He is a friendly approachable guy who is interested in this research and wondered if I wasn’t already too late to record the stories as most of the old-timers are gone. I agreed and explained that I thought we should do it while there are still some who have stories and language that connect us to our land use and our history. I asked him if we could get together to visit and share some of his stories. As this was a quick encounter in passing,

⁸⁷ Interview with Charles Vermeylen, September 5, 2015.

and he was not sure if he wanted to, I didn't think it would happen. However, just as we parted ways he came back and gave me his telephone number. This was an important and meaningful exchange for me as it added validation to the importance of this research on one hand, and on the other, it affirmed an old friendship.

Sharon Davey is Ephrem Paul's sister who is married to my cousin Greg Davey. Greg and Donna Davey Poyser who I interviewed earlier with Velma Watson are siblings. Our fathers were first cousins. Their mother's family arrived from North Dakota. As I noted above we were neighbours to Ephrem and Sharon, their parents and other siblings. We were not overly familiar with each other's families as children, but everyone here knows everyone else. In September, 2015, I met Sharon and Greg at the community fowl supper. I was there with my Mom and brother, Bob. There were great servings of food including *là gullèt* (bannock) of course, *bullèts* or meatballs and many other standard favourites including turkey and all the trimmings.

Eventually as dinner was ending most people left; Sharon and Greg arrived later and sat across the table from my Mother and me. It was great to see them and we chatted about various things. Eventually Greg said, "I hear you are writing a book about this area."⁸⁸ I replied that I was not sure it was going to be a book yet, but I was interviewing people to talk about traditional land use, culture and our families. This opening carried the conversation straight into an unexpected response from Sharon. When Greg mentioned this research, I was reminded of the earlier conversation I had when I met Charlie, Eugene, and his cousin Don on September 5th.

⁸⁸ In conversation with Greg and Sharon Davey, September 2015.

I wanted to understand if the response toward using miigwech in San Clara was universal so I casually mentioned I had used it on previous occasions. In this situation, Sharon was quite a bit more animated as she pointed her dinner fork directly at me and said, “We don’t use that word around here!”⁸⁹ My Mom and Greg chuckled at her reaction while I was taken by surprise by her instinctive and passionate response. Charlie’s response was equally as direct when I had



Figure 6 Courtesy of Richard Davey

used miigwech in his presence. I related to Greg and Sharon that I had used the Anishinabek word for “thank you” in earlier conversations and wondered what Michif word they would use to say ‘thank you.’ The sound of the word ignited such a swift reaction from Sharon that it made us all laugh, including her. I recall trying to regain

my footing with “I see this word carries a lot of meaning. Would you be willing to meet with me and tell me more about it” or something to that effect.⁹⁰ We laughed some more and agreed to meet again to share her views. I tried to explain, I wanted to understand what the corresponding word to “merci” was in Michif that is used in the village. My logic was if we were willing to use the French “merci” inherited from our grandfather’s language, why would we not use an Indigenous word to honor our grandmothers? Sharon made it clear during our conversation at

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

the fowl supper that we are Cree-French-Métis and this language signifies an important component to our cultural identity.

Although this language lesson was a challenging lesson for me to learn I felt it was given to me without reservation because I was an ‘insider.’ Charlie is a boyhood friend and even though we haven’t seen each other in decades we are still friends. After years of court experiences, he didn’t hesitate to let me know his feelings on the matter and how important language and our birth-right to hunt as Métis are to the community. As for Sharon, I suspect she also didn’t let my inexperience or lack of cultural sensitivity slide because I am an insider. If I had been an outsider, I wonder, if she may not have mentioned anything and accepted I didn’t know what I was talking about. Instead, luckily, she didn’t hold back any emotion or truth. The act of posing “miigwech” as a question, - why won’t people around here use it? - was enough to cause a visceral reaction for some people.

It can be hard to ‘hear’ your ‘missteps’ when they are challenged by people you hope to work with. This was an important story to have both as a community member and as a researcher. It was clearly an expression of cultural and linguistic territory. In my long absence from the community, I was reminded how clearly people whom I grew up with, remain authentic and will clearly express themselves, no holds barred!

Since then, I have chosen to use marcee as a sign of accuracy, respect and consistency in using our own language. When I had met with Charlie for the second time in February, 2016, I related my exchange I had with Sharon Davey at the fowl supper. Charlie told me, I “had hurt her feelings with that word.”⁹¹ I had not connected the emotional response as “hurt feelings” but, it

⁹¹ Conversation with Charles Vermeylen.

definitely gave me a new way of looking at the ‘weight’ this word can carry in this community. Now I understand it is a matter of pride and inflection. Because of this experience I have gained a new appreciation for the fact that this is a Cree-French community and we speak French-Michif if we can speak our language at all. This was a very clear example of protecting language knowledge and cultural identity that I was happy to have.

As we move forward, most families are unilingual now although some may still be teaching their children ‘old Michif.’ As we witnessed there are traces of Michif in the community but fewer people can speak it now. Others no doubt, are still speaking French and Michif with their families and in their new communities. But for many of us now, English is our first language and I consider this to be an enormous loss to our Métis worldview, our spiritually, our relationships to each other and to the land. Understanding our culture at its core comes in large part from knowing our language. In this transitional period of losing Michif speakers, those people who continue to recognize what our cultural language is, and what it is not, benefit all of us whose traditional knowledge has been interrupted by colonialism. The traditional knowledge of the language speakers sets us apart from other regions and communities and strengthens our own identities.

Progress, Loss and the Market Economy

I think it is important to acknowledge that many people who left these communities in search of prosperity and better living conditions have by and large done very well for themselves in the Euro-Canadian driven market economy that so determinedly saw the Métis as needing ‘improvements’ if they were to compete in their market. It is reasonable to suggest that many families from this region have produced at least one successful entrepreneur if not more based

on knowing who everyone else is in the community. To suggest many people left in search of greener pastures is true, but it is also fair to say others left because they had to leave for economic reasons. With the population numbers, significantly lower now than when they were reported by Jean Lagasse in his 1957 study, San Clara is nearly abandoned. This reality reveals the opposite to be true from the 1950s Euro-Canadian worldviews, that we refused to leave our villages to find work, and that the skill sets of our parents and grandparents were cultural handicaps. What the Euro-Canadians refused to factor into the equation in 1957 was the competitive spirit and determination our people have and their will to survive. Euro-Canadians understood our endurance from a historical pre-Canadian government controlled perspective, but in the lost decades, contrary to their 1950s-belief system, our drive to survive did not abandon us nor did we abandon our culture.

Of those who left many have returned over the years to visit when they can. Many were well prepared to do the hard labour required to become successful beyond the borders of the village. Many also possessed life skills that allowed them to thrive in areas that others found difficult to embrace especially in manual labour markets. Besides the artists, craft-makers and writers many others also have outdoor skills, farm skills and a deep understanding of nature and survival. In recent years, the remaining community members pull together to hold and support a summer festival called The Shell Valley Jamboree. It brings out hundreds of people over three days of celebrations with local talent, families and friends coming together and enjoying the beauty of the countryside, renewing old friendships and making new ones. It's a local event that everyone tries to attend and its popularity continues to grow each year.

As always, Métis people have learned to adjust and thrive and still maintain their family connections and appreciate their culture. Competition seems to be in their blood as memories of old ballgames against visiting teams unified the community. We hated to lose as most do, but many were prepared to do the hard work required to becoming successful while still appreciating the role of underdog in the Euro-driven market economy. I think that position strengthened our spirit and determination in other challenges as life unfolded. In this milieu, people regrouped and cast their fortunes afield where many enjoyed lucrative successful careers and stable family lives.

In her book, *Halfbreed*, Maria Campbell discusses many of the same issues of poverty and despair she experienced growing up that resonates and intersects with many experiences living in San Clara. In telling her story she states, “My people fled to Spring River* which is fifty miles north-west of Prince Albert.”⁹² Historically, both of our family groups fled to avoid persecution, jail and becoming marginalized as social outcasts. Unlike Campbell, as children for example, we were not forced onto the road allowance to survive (although some around the community did live on the road allowance) and our lives were isolated from reserve influence. Assimilation was well underway beginning with our Grandparents who accentuated their French heritage to fit in as Euro-Canadians. We too had met other families of differing nationalities especially after we started going to school in Roblin. Campbell observes, “They looked cold and frightening, and seldom smiled, unlike my own people who laughed, cried, danced, and fought and shared everything.”⁹³

⁹² Maria Campbell, *Halfbreed* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 12

Note: * Names and places have been changed in some cases.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 28.

Catholic Church rituals guided the rhythm of our lives in the village until at least the 1960's. For example, in the evening wherever we were when the church bells rang it was time to drop our activities and attend evening prayers. Other than for evening prayers, and Sunday mass, the only time we heard the bells ring was to announce the death or birth of someone in the community. Most of my childhood was spent playing with my brothers and sisters, our cousins and friends, or roaming the village and nearby countryside. During the summer, we could often be found at the fishing hole about 10 kilometers away in Boggy Creek. In the winter-time we would try to snare rabbits in the nearby bushes. Those who had skates could skate on Carriere's pond. There were no real organized groups or activities for children to pass the time away. Parents volunteered to be coaches and organizers for baseball and hockey games, which were huge favorites in the village. Later on, like most prairie communities, they organized themselves and built a curling rink and the veterans eventually built the Legion Hall that held dances for many years.

Attending mass was the most serious affair growing up. We were expected to wear our Sunday best, sit and stand straight and absolutely no talking was a must. Should you be caught doing any of these things you could expect a sharp clip on the back of the head from an aunt or another Elder. When we were not in church or on 'the teams' we usually made up our own games and played by our own rules. Like everyone else we learned to survive and cope by watching how our parents managed their lives. We witnessed how assimilation into Euro-Canadian society influenced what they wanted us to learn and understand. Important issues such as language would be left behind, as many of us would leave the community as English speakers to build new lives elsewhere.

The village itself did not have a mayor or any councilors but there was a Reeve in charge of municipal affairs. As I recall, the village was governed by committees that came together to plan and organize a specific activity. After the project was completed people returned to their regular activities until they were called upon and the next project was organized. There were some groups like the Catholic Women's League who put on fowl suppers and church picnics in the summertime. Other small groups or individuals who looked after the community hall, the curling rink and repairs to the church, including the priests' residence that stood next door like a stately old manor in comparison to the small houses the rest of us in the village lived in. The church residence, from a child's perspective, had a huge veranda that always seemed cold, uninviting and distant. There was a regular school committee that met occasionally to discuss school issues. In many ways, the community resembled most other small prairie villages off the grid in the mid-twentieth century.

Although I was unaware of it at the time, my generation was the end of a long decline in sharing a common identity united by family and friends that held the fabric of our historic community together. This common bond was nurtured by a blend of French and Cree languages we often called Cree Michif that eventually gave way to English speakers. This way of life for our families in the village was now becoming a thing of the past. For my family, at least, this was the end of centuries of living together as friends and neighbors. We can trace many of the same family names who co-habited alongside ours for generations beginning in the Red River Valley and beyond. The Métis Nation, the Canadian militia attacks, St. Francois Xavier and other southern Manitoba communities, North Dakota and westward settlements are re-occurring themes that emerge in our community research. Our ancestors are resting in cemeteries in

southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and North Dakota where they had lived and died next to each other. Most of us from my generation will probably no longer know who our neighbors are, nor is it likely we will be laid to rest together. The difference between our generation and our Euro-Canadian neighbors was the sense that we must change to become more like them. We were sublimated between worldviews in a culture that was invisible to the eyes of our neighbours. This forced change was dominated by poverty, uncertainty, racism and denial.

By the early twentieth century the Euro-Canadian government's efforts to assimilate Métis families was well underway, fueled by fear, competition and judgement. I believe the decline in our way of life created an identity crisis that began for many Métis and continued for generations. This downward spiral initiated by war was compounded by the disappearance of resources that they relied on for survival. Colonization and the eventual thievery of these resources including land, hunting and fishing forced a diaspora that dislocated Métis from their families and communities in southern Manitoba and the borderland communities along the 49th parallel of Canada and the United States. When people were forced out of southern Manitoba and elsewhere many returned to their traditional territories; in other words, they went home. The familiar Pelly Trail would take some people back to Boggy Creek to their traditional hunting territory near the upper Assiniboine River (figure 7). Our ancestors, including the famous Grant family and their descendants were already established near here by 1793. Their presence was known in this region with the building of Aspen House at Fort de la Rivière Tremblante, a few kilometers west of Togo.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Browne Losey, *Let Them Be Remembered: The Story of the Fur Trade Forts* (New York: Vantage Press, 1999), 174-175

I recently had an opportunity to go visit the exact location of this somewhat isolated old North West Company Fort last summer with my cousin, and fellow community co-researcher, Reid Bouvier. Reid's sister is related to the current landholders. The land now belongs to a Euro-Canadian family of German extraction who has owned it for over a hundred years. The Fort lies in a beautiful secluded location a few kilometers north of the main secondary road west of Togo. After about fifteen minutes of climbing up the east bluff, we approached the top of the hill above the valley to witness the beauty of a spectacular panoramic view. From where we stood, at the highest point on the landscape, it was easy to imagine this would likely have been a strategic location to observe anyone approaching the Fort from all directions including coming up the river or approaching over land. The valley below is divided by a narrow ridge where the much smaller Rivière da la Tremblante flows on the east side of the ridge and joins the much greater Assiniboine River on the west flank as it meanders southward on its journey.

Other Métis families who would have settled here also came because of the fur trade, or to hunt and fish. Marriages occurred between local First Nations women and the travelers or voyagers from the east who used these waterways and likely stayed for the same reasons Cuthbert Grant was recorded to have remained here, which was simply, this area was his favourite place to be. They survived here by hunting and trapping and only much later subsisted on farming marginal agricultural land. In reality, this land has always been conducive to Métis families' cultural survival as hunters, trappers and fishermen. The isolation of this area in the 18th 19th and early 20th centuries permitted a degree of protection from outsiders as our culture developed and shielded us temporarily from the onslaught of settler society.

The need for economic survival defined Métis communities in the past but so did their families, friends and culture. The need for mobility was and still is today what drives the difficult decisions of leaving families behind to participate in economic opportunities elsewhere. By the mid-twentieth century, if you couldn't survive here by farming there wasn't much else to do. The Shell River Valley to the north east of historic Fort Tremblante lacks core industries and infrastructure required for economic growth. This area is primarily known for its abundance of large game such as moose, elk and deer and of course, fishing. The capitalist system, with government approval, extracts all the available natural resources like pulp, large game and fishing from this region and exports them to other Euro-Canadian communities and the profits are taken with them. These market decisions have had the impact of forcing local people to leave this area and build new lives elsewhere. Conveniently, this 'forgotten' Métis history further cultivates the outsider view that this village was never part of our culture or traditional territory.

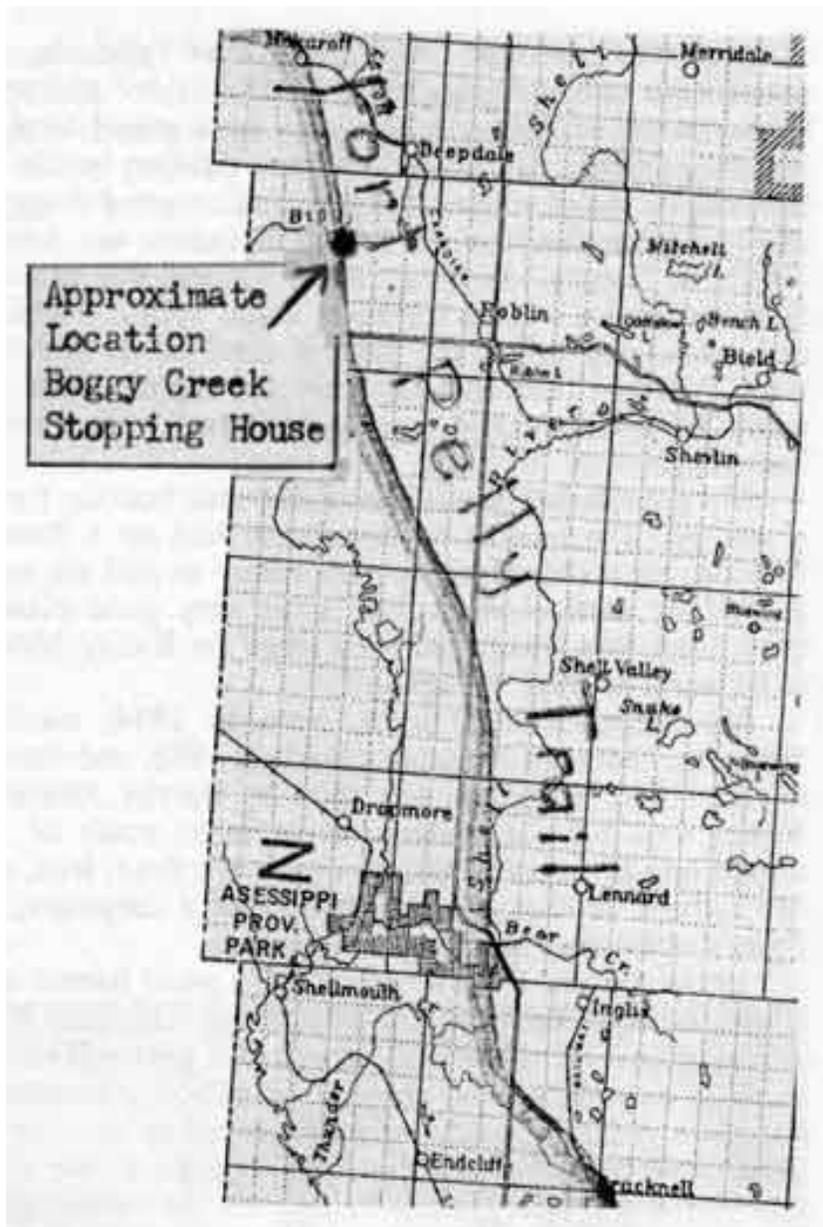


Figure 7- Pelly Trail

Missionary and Other Cultural Events

The first missionaries arrived in San Clara from the St. Philips Mission in Kamsack, Saskatchewan. My aunt, Clara Brazeau (b.1923), remembers stories told by her Elders of people from San Clara, who travelled north to Kamsack, for midnight mass on Christmas Eve with horses

and cutters prior to 1911.⁹⁵ This journey, especially in the winter-time, was a considerable distance of about fifty kilometers. To appreciate the challenges of winter travel even for shorter distances my Dad told us a story about hauling hay, a distance of twelve miles, during the winter in the 1930s. It was potentially dangerous work for the horses as eventually the moisture from their breath would freeze to ice covering their nostrils and making it difficult to breathe. To ensure the horses safety they would have to stop occasionally to de-ice their nostrils and ensure they weren't galloped and overheated which could also result in their death.

Eventually, even before the San Clara community built their own church in 1911, services were held as early as 1904, when the first pioneers, from North Dakota arrived, including; "Bouvier, Langan, Laplante, Larocque, Laviolette, Lizotte, Martin, Jerome, and Paul's."⁹⁶ Mailhot's arrived from Quebec and families from Southern Manitoba including; Carriere's, Lucier, Laliberte, Burwash, Davey, Larocque, Lachance, and Brancannier settled around San Clara."⁹⁷ According to community traditional knowledge, reported by Madelaine Mailhot, the first Catholic mass was held here at S.W. ¼ of 24 – 29 – 29a, at my Great Grandfather's, Antoine Bouvier's Homestead in 1904. The mass was performed by "Father Decorby, an Oblate Missionary from St. Phillip's Saskatchewan."⁹⁸ My Mom's sister, Anita Dixon, an Elder in the community shares that the church was built "...in 1911 and was in constant use until Nov. of 1996"⁹⁹ that's when the community built its new church and received an "Official Blessing" in July, 1997.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Interview with Clara Brazeau.

⁹⁶ Lorene Ward and Margret Del La Marc. *Shell River Municipality: Century One: Memories of Roblin and Districts: 1884 – 1984.*

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Anita Dixon, *Roblin and Rural Districts Family Histories: Volume III.* Homecoming: July 14-23, 2000. 268. *Note: Published by Goose Lake High School, Roblin, Manitoba.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.



Figure 8. Grandma Davey's Collection, North Dakota, 1943

Many families in the community who are Catholic have gone to great lengths to affirm their faith. On Sundays, before cars were available people would come from far and wide on horseback or on foot to attend Sunday services in the village. It was a social opportunity to share news, visit with friends and notice or be noticed if you were looking for romance.

Eventually other social outlets offered opportunities to get together but the Church always played a central role in the lives of most families here even before the community built the first church.

Since the 1957 survey in Lagasse's study that counted 950 self-identified Metis in and surrounding the village of San Clara, the population has declined. The following timeline passed down by former schoolteacher Mrs. Lachance noted that Arthur Carrierre established the first store in the village in 1925. Mr. Glutik opened a second general store in 1942. The poolroom opened its doors in 1947. Construction for the hotel began in 1946 and held its grand opening in 1948. The electricity arrived in 1953 and the Legion Hall was established in 1957. The curling rink came later in 1967. During my childhood, in the sixties, there were two rows of houses on either side of the main road that travels north to Boggy Creek. In 2016, there are perhaps fewer than 12 families scattered across the village. The church, which the community fund-raised to build, the cemetery which the community donates to maintain and preserve and the Metis Centre, erected in the 1990s are all that survives of the community infrastructure. These remaining structures stand as a testament to the faith of the community

and are a visible commitment to their community cooperation while proclaiming and celebrating their culture.

When Jean Lagasse described the purpose of his 1957 study, he identified three goals:¹⁰¹ In a sub-section of his article entitled, “1) Developing an Employable Personality” he writes “The primary cause of unemployment for Indians and Métis is a cultural one.”¹⁰² He adds, “Two of the main cultural handicaps are their unwillingness to relocate to areas of employment and their irregularity at work.”¹⁰³ Obviously, with the greatly diminished population of San Clara, most people who lived here did indeed relocate for employment. The construction of the buildings in previous decades demonstrates that their irregular work habits were not as problematic as reported. According to Lagasse’s article, in the late fifties ‘white society’ blamed cultural differences for barriers to employment that Indigenous people refused to overcome. Lagasse continues, “While the lack of work is certainly causing much misery for the Métis, their inability to make use of the little work there is should also be a cause of concern.”¹⁰⁴ “It would appear, as I have said earlier, the past experiences of these people and the conditions under which they are now living do not produce a type of person much in demand in our society.”¹⁰⁵ Lagasse offers several solutions under the sub-heading, “Culture and Social Problems” with the primary solution he suggested, was to hire a presumably Euro-Canadian person (although he does not state this explicitly) to live in their communities and bridge the racism, (number 7) “As several

¹⁰¹ Jean Lagasse, “The Métis in Manitoba,” *Manitoba Historical Society Transactions* (1958-59), 3rd ser. <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/metis.shtml>, 8.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

predominantly white communities have difficulty in accepting Indian and Métis people.”¹⁰⁶ This “Community Development Officer” under the heading, “3) Prepare them for Action” “...would seek to promote a sense of cooperation among the people.”¹⁰⁷ “... for he knows that they must learn to work as a group before they can solve their own problems.” He also adds, “Other courses would be given to develop leadership and the ability to function efficiently as a member of a group.”¹⁰⁸ These recommendations clearly demonstrate the attitudes of white society in the 1950s toward Métis people, perpetuated by Lagasse, himself a person of Métis descent. This sociological assimilationist approach revealed Euro-Canadian society believed Métis people lacked the agency to survive and work together as a community without their assistance. The history of construction and community events in San Clara disputes this notion. The very buildings still standing in the community today exist because of their leadership ability, a co-operative spirit and an untiring work ethic. Contrary to this popular racist belief, in the 1950s, and still active in contemporary society (i.e. lack of progress on self-determination) values such as organization and leadership, are still projected as being the domain of white Euro-settlers and their descendants.

After many community residents were assimilated into the mosaic of the larger Canadian society in pursuit of employment opportunities, the village’s act of “survivance” is still evident with the persistence of Michif language and the cultural symbols of heritage that are deeply embedded within its traditional territory.¹⁰⁹ According to Anishinabek scholar Gerald Vizenor,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, viii.

“survivance is more than mere survival-it is a way of life that nourishes Indigenous ways of knowing.”¹¹⁰ These landmarks remain in the village as symbols and testaments to those who settled this community and reflect who we are as their descendants. Despite the disappearance of most of the families here, people return to the community because of their connection to the land and their families who remained behind. Lost for many Métis descendants now is the chance of a future to remain in a culture of working and living together alongside families and friends who shared a common language and heritage. Survivance gives them back their stories, their history of survival and resistance to the pressures of colonization.

We were raised on a diet of fresh homemade bread, bannock, bologna, boiled chicken, garden vegetables, home-canned goods and preserves when they were available. As villagers, our family seldom benefited from hunting and fishing traditions. Wild meat and fresh fish were luxuries we often did not have because of the laws imposed on guns and license fees, including the real risk of going to jail. Other people, including Armand Lucier, whom I met with on three various occasions including September 18th, 25th, and again briefly on October 18, 2015 when he gifted me with his music, talked about these hardships that affected many people. Armand lived on (or with) the land, on a farm and he ate a more traditional diet including berries, the odd gopher, beaver, ducks, fish or other wild game his grandfather would bring home.¹¹¹ We occasionally had beaver and wild rabbits if someone else gifted them to us.

Survivance is a term coined by Vizenor using two words survival and resistance. According to Vizenor survivance is “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the state of native survivancy.”

¹¹⁰ Gerald Vizenor, , "Acts of Survivance," Survivance, 2016, accessed September 08, 2016, <http://survivance.org/acts-of-survivance/>.

¹¹¹ Interview with Armand Lucier. 2015.

Untangling the Myth

Once my paternal Métis grandmother who was a Bouvier, arrived from North Dakota as an infant, and later married “an Irishman” they presented to Euro-Canadian settler society as Irish-French Catholics. We were Irish-French on my dad’s side for at least four generations beginning with our Irish ancestors who arrived from Sligo, Ireland and were married in Montreal in 1850. From my Mother’s side of the family, we understood we were French-Canadians despite having a rich Métis heritage from both her maternal and paternal family lines. Grandma Bouvier was a descendant of the Pagé’s of the Red River Resistance in 1879. Grandpa Bouvier, married into the Dauphinois family who were also descendants of the Red River Resistance. I don’t recall Mother’s father, ever really talking about our background much at all. He was a family man who worked very hard all his life. He never learned to read or write but could repair his tractors and machinery by understanding how they worked.

When the family got together there was always much talk and laughter among our aunts and uncles and usually everyone was in a pretty good mood. It seemed the conversation slid easily between French and English with only English being used when we were spoken to. That is how I remember our family gatherings with my Mom’s family. Although alcohol was a factor in our lives I don’t recall any being served at Grandpa’s house because he didn’t drink. As children, all our aunts and uncles and their families were invited for their annual Christmas supper. One year there were so many of us children, Dad had to make three trips to get us all home with some of us riding in the back of the truck. Grandma and Grandpa’s little house was only about three or four kilometers’ northeast of us and was so overflowing with family at Christmas dinner that it took at least three different table settings to feed everyone. Grandpa and the men were served

first, followed by Grandma and all the aunts. Finally, after what seemed like hours the children were called to the table. Although he had friends, Grandpa seldom socialized and he was not very approachable to ask personal questions. Having said that Armand Lucier related a story to me about Grandpa Bouvier who would pick up Joe Morrissette (another early resident) in his truck and they would chatter in Michif as they drove to town together. Apparently, as Armand relates the story, Grandpa Bouvier could speak Michif very well.

As a child, I did not understand the nuances of our 'different' French because we didn't understand that what we were hearing was Michif. Grandma Bouvier, as a small child was sent to Winnipeg on the train to school to learn French which she could both speak and write fluently. There is a funny story about Grandma that when her neighbor Madame Mailhot, would call on the telephone she would converse in her best French, suggesting at home with Grandpa, they spoke a 'different kind of French', language formed over time using a combination of Cree verbs and French nouns.

Grandma Davey took great pride in her Irish-French marriage and further integrated her traditional ways of living with Grandpa Davey's more European skills as a farmer. Together they homesteaded and raised their large family with the meagre food they could grow or sell while Grandma's ability to set snares and catch the odd rabbit for supper contributed to their diets. They raised their family by farming their homestead, picking berries and Seneca root, and she was well known for being deeply religious. Some would also say she also worked as hard as any man.

As children, we were closer to Grandma Davey and had a much less formal relationship with her than we had with my Mom's parents. In other words, we could pop into Grandma's house

for a visit and she would feed us whatever she had on the stove. We spent more time picking berries with her, scrubbing floors and visiting back and forth. She lived closer to us in the village and sometimes gifted us her home-made meat pies and mint chocolate cakes. Grandma Davey usually greeted us as young children with 'smooches.' We were seldom greeted without a hug and a kiss as I recall. As children, we never met our Grandpa Davey and later learned he spent many years in the Brandon Sanatorium. This situation created a long interrupted period in our lives as a family and his absence drew a lot of heartache. However, in death, my Grandparents were reunited as the family chose to bury them side by side. Wahkootowin shaped our worldview by these traditions of marriage, (three siblings, including my maternal grandparents in one family married to three siblings of another) and community social events, including most newborns in the community were baptized and for whom Godparents were named.

Almost everyone in the community as I recall, also had nicknames at one time or other during their lives. In my family, as the generation of my parents became adults, things had changed. We were unilingual, marriages to outsiders were more common and divisions occurred between the 'haves' and 'have nots,' the landowners and the landless. It seemed those who gained a stronger footing somehow felt more privileged than those who couldn't and perhaps felt more French than Métis as well. Despite these economic gaps, some traditional teachings embedded in the fabric of the community still bound most everyone together including family gatherings and language.

As Ephrem Paul explains their family trajectory during his upbringing included speaking Michif and they always understood they were Métis. Although we were neighbors as children, our language and understanding of who we were, was quite different. Their parents always

acknowledged they were Métis and they are fortunate to be Michif language speakers today. In our family, it took about three generations to disconnect us from most of our traditional knowledge, including language loss of both French and Michif. Archival information reveals that my Mother's paternal grandfather, JB Bouvier, and his family identified in public documents as Métis including census reports, scrips and homestead applications.¹¹² Colonialism, racism and poverty robbed many of us of the enjoyment of "mino pimatisiwin" or the good life. The connection to our languages, the land and its bounty were lost through laws that prevented us from hunting and fishing, and private property rules that prevented people from plant harvesting, including berry picking. My aunt, Beatrice Bouvier, nee Larocque, related a story to me recently about her dad who was a long-time trapper in the area. She recalled that he was caught and sent to jail for trapping a muskrat to feed his family that was within walking distance from his home. One of her eldest sisters had to make the trip to Dauphin (approximately 100 kilometers south) to pay his fine and bring him home, which added to the cost and ability to feed his family.

In my interview with Armand Lucier on September 25, 2015, we talked a great deal about what it means to be born a Métis and how the government is removing these privileges. After many years of supporting the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) he began to question why he was having to accept all their policies. The Federal government gave money to the MMF yet they had not received a dime. Eventually he decided to leave the MMF and joined the Métis Rights Coalition (MRC). Armand believes that Métis should have top priority to hunt and fish and only then should the government make money by selling licenses on the resources that are left. He believes this situation should apply not only to include hunting in the Duck Mountain but they

¹¹² See Appendix II. Copy of Homestead application for JB Bouvier.

should also be recognized as having the right to hunt throughout the prairies. He believes “at least the rest of Manitoba should know that we do have rights.”¹¹³ “That we are people born with these rights, that we have these rights, these are birth rights.”¹¹⁴ We don’t need a paper; we don’t need harvesting cards or whatever to go fishing or hunting or whatever else.”¹¹⁵ Armand also confides,

we don’t really want to push it too hard, but if they digged deep into the British North America Act, ya, we own all the environments, we own the forestry and we own all the minerals. I don’t think the government wants to get in too deep about a discussion with us about that. It was brought up to me and I said we should leave it alone because we don’t want to open up a can of worms that could stir up another Rebellion.¹¹⁶

Armand recounts that one time we “were not allowed to hunt and fish period.”¹¹⁷ He shares the story of his brother, Larry and Charlie Vermeylen and what happened a few years ago. After using clothes pins to secure two lines of twine across a section of a lake they then called the conservation officers to report “two guys were fishing in closed waters.”¹¹⁸ Eventually they were charged with fishing offenses. “This went on for two or three years and it was booted out of court.”¹¹⁹ “From then on we began to be recognized as Métis born with rights.”¹²⁰

Armand turns the conversation to his memories of when the conservation officers had too much power. He shared, “The poor Métis were so scared of the law. They were scared of the conservation officers; they were just plain scared. They would be plucking a duck in the spring

¹¹³ Interview with Armand Lucier, Sept. 25, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

and they would go hide to pluck this duck then they would sneak it into the house and cook it really fast and eat it because they were scared... they were scared to eat it... they would get caught and go to jail.”¹²¹

Elements of *mino pimatisiwin* or the good life that we managed to hang on to are our stories, music, dancing, food and our relationships with each other. Our true identity, which was never freely discussed, but generally known of, was cloaked in misunderstanding and led to confusion about who we are especially when we began attending school in town. In town, we would be snubbed and were told to go back to the bush. This fractious combination of identity confusion and denial of our heritage, rich as it was, stole our pride and those of many of our older generations.

San Clara was not the only community experiencing an identity crisis by the 1950s. Nicole St. Onge discovered through her research in Saint-Laurent, Manitoba that “What is striking about the history of this settlement and about Métis history in general, is that by 1950s well over half the descendants of the 18th and 19th century Canadian-European workers and local Native women did not perceive themselves, and were not perceived by others, as Métis or “Half-breeds.”¹²² “They had fully integrated into so-called white society.”¹²³ Unlike many of the residents in St. Laurent, my aunt Elaine who lived in San Clara as a child in 1950s (when not at the convent in Ste. Rose) related a story about going to town with her sister Anne, for an afternoon movie at the theatre. While they were there they were taunted and teased by the town girls who sat in the row of seats behind them. My aunt recalls these girls being very mean

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² N. St. Onge, *Saint-Laurent*, p.4.

¹²³ Ibid.

to them as they sat there “taking it” and tried to watch the movie. She retold this story to me recently, and remembers feeling very ashamed of who she was.

This example of racial profiling and non-acceptance by so-called white society clearly delineates the difference in these two village cultures during the 1950s. St. Onge “concludes her argument that if a family once defined as Métis became prosperous, its white parentage was emphasized until the day, at least in the Oblate parishes, when it would merge with the French - Canadian element.”¹²⁴ The evolution of Saint-Laurent and San Clara differed on this point as well. As St. Onge points out, “By the second decade of the 20th century, being Métis in Saint-Laurent was as much a function of one’s class as it was of one’s ancestry and culture.”¹²⁵

Although we had a few French-Canadian families among us including the Catholic priest who did show favoritism to certain parishioners – usually those who spoke or sang in French fluently. San Clara never experienced an influx of outside French settlers who changed its socio-economic class or Métis cultural practices in the way that St. Onge describes happened with the Saint-Laurent Métis. No one from our village area escaped these forms of racism, when they went to town, especially as schoolchildren. Lighter-skinned people, were discriminated against as well, and called Indians. An old classmate of mine, who grew up in Roblin, recently shared a story about the attitudes of townspeople when she joined us for the fowl supper in San Clara that I have discussed earlier. Her story was that as far as Roblin kids were concerned, if you were from San Clara, they would be looking to pick a fight with you. For many village kids who had the skills to fight back, they did if they had to, but for others, it caused a lot of fear and many left school

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

as soon as they could. Although things may have changed since, however, back in the day for the townspeople, being from San Clara meant they were free to be physically and verbally abusive toward you just because of where you lived. Some of us were discriminated against in school by the teachers, whereas, some physically bigger town kids picked on the smaller, quieter or shy village kids. There were many other examples of racism, including my aunt's experience at the local theatre in the fifties. Including, one recently shared story by Juliette Lizotte Robertson, who "remember(s) really feeling looked down upon by the people from Roblin because I came from San Clara."¹²⁶ Her father-in-law, from Roblin, warned her husband, "... about knocking up some squaw from San Clara, when we were dating."¹²⁷ These stories have endured after decades of living away from the village.

When dances were held in San Clara at the Legion Hall, young people from out of town would usually show up. It would not be long before fist-fights broke out with the outsiders who either came from Togo, Roblin or other nearby communities. People would scatter, the music carried on, children would hide under the tables and eventually the scrappers would be thrown out of the hall. The dancing would continue until the musicians were ready to take a break. Physical fights were part of the landscape in San Clara, whose own nickname is "Dodge City" as people sorted out their differences at the many parties, or other social gatherings which were often spurred on by alcohol. No one ever seemed to get seriously physically hurt, but scores were often settled in this way. The police were seldom called, as people preferred to settle their own differences among themselves when they had them.

¹²⁶ Conversation with Juliette Lizotte Robertson, (Social Media) November 3, 2016.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Our ancestors were known for being more diplomatic as they were heavily involved in the politics of the nineteenth century. Especially in 1869, when Louis Riel led the Red River Resistance and again later in 1885, during the Battle of Batoche. The connection between his family and ours is well documented with the marriage of his fourth sister, Octavie Riel, to my maternal, maternal's great-grandmother's brother Louis Lavallee in 1875.¹²⁸ Not only do we share a Métis identity and common heritage with these historic figures but these details also underscore why we should be concerned about our culture. United by common causes generations ago to secure a homeland and freedom to practice their culture, they fought to defend their right to live and work together. Today's battle against colonialism does not include a militia and weapons that kill, but it is not over yet either, as we now take our issues into the courtrooms and battle colonialism with education.

Our ancestor's journeys can be traced using genealogy charts to highlight a history that predates the formation of Manitoba in 1870, as a province of Canada. When Cuthbert Grant settled Grant town with approximately 100 families, now known as St. Francois Xavier, many of our extended families settled with him and the surrounding areas as members of his kith and kin.¹²⁹ We can trace where our ancestors lived on river lots in the Red River Valley during and after working in the fur trade in the late 19th century. For example, André Carrière Sr. from St. Norbert lived on Riverlot 267, whose patent was recognized by the Government of Canada in 1875. The Right Honourable Francois Dauphinais, from St. Francis Xavier, (SFX) lived on Riverlot

¹²⁸ Nathan Kramer. "Memorable Manitobans: Louis Lavallee (1852-1935)", accessed May 17, 2016, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/lavallee_l.shtml.

¹²⁹ Bruce D. Sealy and Antoine S. Lussier, *The Métis: Canada's Forgotten People* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1975), 45.

17, patented in 1883 and Alexandre Pagé, also from SFX, received a patent in 1881, for Riverlot 23.¹³⁰ Besides these early landowners, many others were neighbours then and still are today.

Before the turn of the 20th century and after the ‘troubles’ and the dispersion of the Métis in southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan, I suggest many families returned to San Clara, through circuitous routes to the isolated Shell River Valley. It was here they chose to return to homestead. It seemed many people came back here to forget who they were and to start anew. They seldom spoke of why they left their old communities and shared little of their previous lives.

However, the likelihood of Euro-Canadians allowing their communities to be overshadowed by poor disenfranchised Métis families stretches the imagination under most circumstances. In *R vs. Langan*, I am reminded of how this decision binds our community together with Campbell’s “Spring River” as fictional Métis communities. In our case, the ‘fiction’ is in the re-writing of our history, whereas, for Campbell, she created her own fictional community to write their story. Both stories reinforce the Eurocentric myth that Métis peoples did not belong anywhere and were simply nomadic ‘hangers on’ from one community to the next. The judge reinforced this myth by removing our right to recognize San Clara as our historic homeland because as Métis scholar Jeremy Patzer suggests we were twenty years too late to settle down.¹³¹

This situation is not unusual in Canadian politics according to Métis scholar, Fred Shore, who analyses the history of government culpability in *Past Reflects the Present: Métis Elders’ Conference*. He writes, “Once regulated to a position of irrelevance in the Canadian mosaic, the

¹³⁰ D. N. Sprague and R. P. Frye, *The Genealogy of the First Métis Nation: The Development and Dispersal of the Red River Settlement, 1820-1900* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1983), Table 5.

¹³¹ Jeremy Patzer, “Even When We Are Winning, Are We Losing? Métis Rights in Canadian Courts,” in *Métis in Canada: History, Identity, Law, and Politics*, ed. C. Adams, G. Dahl, and I. Peach (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2013), 329.

Métis discovered that while they were denied full membership in the Canadian mainstream because of the “rebel” background and Aboriginal status, they were also denied status as “Indians” under the Indian Act. Literally caught between two worlds and not welcome in either, the Métis were forced further into the background economically and politically.”¹³² I suggest many of these families I interviewed are emerging from this state of economic and political isolation imposed on our predecessors with the intent of fighting back to re-assert our birthrights. Our goal is to remain connected to our historic worldview, the land and our spirituality which includes a belief in God and a spiritual connection to nature. People here have fought for the right to subsistence hunting and want to harvest wild vegetation and other materials that are historically part of our culture.

Why Should We Care?

There are compounding factors of the survey conducted for the Manitoba Historical Society (MHS) by Lagasse who recorded 950 people self-identifying as Métis living in San Clara and surrounding area and the more recent omission in Barkwell, et al’s paper of historic Manitoba Métis communities from the literature raises deeper concerns that somehow the narrative of this community, now languishing in obscurity, will be forgotten about in the public record.

The court’s encroachment on our cultural heritage highlights the issues of duality and agency. On one hand, it was beneficial to be forgotten about during the “Red River Resistance” in southern Manitoba and after the “Battle of Batoche” in Saskatchewan. However, on the other hand Western European history tends to ignore events that are no longer visible and this community suffers from cultural obscurity in the eyes of the Euro-Canadians who wield power.

¹³² Fred J. Shore and Lawrence J. Barkwell, *Past Reflections Present: The Métis Elders’ Conference* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation, 1997), 10-11.

The old adage ‘out of sight, out of mind’ comes into view in this case. I also suspect many Métis liked it this way in the past and many still enjoy the peace and harmony of being with the land and nature and out of sight. It is well documented that Métis families were dispersed and their lands were taken by force yet many never lost their ability to survive using traditional ways or “agency” as intended by historians Brownlie and Kelm, in their article. They argue that agency must be understood in context of not only the Indigenous people’s ability to survive colonial rule but to acknowledge the gravity under which the Euro-centric settler government aggressed upon the Métis and First Nation’s peoples.¹³³ In the long run, this agency gave Métis people sustenance to usher in their return and fight for their birth rights beginning in the mid-twentieth century as evidenced by research including our own recently held interviews.

To allow this court decision to stand unchallenged would be to ignore the great accomplishments of our grandfather and grandmother’s efforts to build a society and protect their children’s way of life. Also, noted earlier, one has only to observe our genealogies and the cemeteries in the Red River Valley and San Clara to realize these families have purposely lived and died together for nearly 250 years. We are their descendants. They were among the drift of 18th and 19th century travellers and explorers settling the west as Chief Factors, fur traders, voyagers and freemen who married First Nations women and raised their Métis children around their trading posts, trap-lines and fishing grounds. These historic locations eventually laid the foundations for establishing these current Métis communities.

¹³³ J. Brownlie and M. E. Kelm, "Desperately Seeking Absolution-native Agency as Colonialist Alibi," *Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 4 (December 1994): 543-556.

These neglected factors highlight the way that Euro-Canadian privilege is continuing to rob contemporary Métis families of their history and their future. Ever since the earliest European explorers arrived on North American shores or as, Indigenous peoples refer to it, Turtle Island, they were already prejudiced against the First Nation's people. The Euro-Canadians are continuing to try to re-write our history and void any accomplishments or contributions made by the Métis in this region. Subsequently, they have created myths such as the primitive and lazy Métis that are still perpetuated as truisms today. These myths allow Euro-Canadians to demonize Indigenous Canadians as they justify the theft of traditional Indigenous lands, communities and culture to claim as their own. As the descendants of these Métis warriors, we are pushing back with Métis methodology, recording our own local history using the power of family knowledge. Buttressed by our history and traditions the community members embody the tools we require to decolonize and protect our historic homeland as we embark on this journey of self-exploration and self-renewal.

Conclusion

Second Chances:

Community Resilience Takes a Stand

Being in the presence of family and friends over the past year who instill vibrancy and life into these communities has been a very rewarding experience. I have witnessed many examples of resilience as people share their stories, music, food and hospitality. I have received warm hospitality from friends at both San Clara and Boggy Creek, Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) locals, as well as from members of the Manitoba Rights Coalition (MRC). It is both encouraging and supportive that the MMF communities, not known for their social activism, to come out for these research meetings and make them successful. The MRC activism has resulted in their recognition as an organization by government officials. Significantly, all these people remain interested in their history. Their stories speak to our resiliency as a community as we try to understand the customs and traditions we were raised with. Sharing these stories that relate to our local history defends our privilege to this area as a rights bearing community. We are all participants on some level in decolonizing our own identities and protecting our culture, as we understand our history. San Clara-Boggy Creek families have always supported their communities by working together and celebrating important events as a community.

Brenda Macdougall writes about Métis community identity and how it emerges. As I have noted several times she uses the concept of “wahkootowin” or worldview to describe how relationships work.¹³⁴ Wahkootowin is witnessed in San Clara today where we find families still

¹³⁴ B. Macdougall, *One of the Family*. 16

interconnected through marriage and social relationships that continue to build strong family and community bonds. This is a community where connections to the land through hunting and fishing, plant harvesting, arts and crafts are still thriving. The structural examples of these bonds can be seen in the building of the church and community centres. The current church is the third structure built by these same families. The first church, built prior to 1910, had burned down losing much of the cemetery in the fire. Following the fire, a second church was erected in 1911. This church stood for about 80 years and was the centre and symbol of community life for many years. When this structure began to fail, people united together again to build a third church. It took several years and a dedicated effort by many members of the community to make it happen and this too was the result of *wahkootowin* or the interconnections to each other, the land and bonding together through spirituality.



Figure 9. Antoine and Élise (Martin) Bouvier's family. Circa. 1940s.

Families Stick Together: Moving Forward as Community Co-researchers

It is this community resilience and cultural glue that I hoped I would encounter when I returned to propose we conduct this research project together. The traditional knowledge of this community history shows that our people work together and remain connected through social and spiritual relationships. I wanted to tap into this life force or interconnectedness and convince them to believe in this research. I wanted to convey the message that our community was at risk of losing its identity in the eyes of the law and that our predecessors who built this village would be denied their place in history. As well, they would lose the privilege of being recognized as the community builders in this area. Without recording our local histories this situation also threatens our future land claims and heritage that connects us to this territory. We want outsiders to remember that our ancestors were driven to obscurity and returned to this area. Now their life's work of building this community is at risk of being disenfranchised.

The task of uniting everyone behind a common objective is difficult to achieve under most circumstances. In this community, I mentioned there are at least three different groups that co-exist here and share the broader community. There is the San Clara MMF local, the Boggy Creek MMF local and the MRC. I have met with members from all three groups to try and understand who they are and what each of their mandates are. My own views are relevant but it is more important that I maintain a degree of impartiality to keep all the discussions open between differing viewpoints on local issues. As a Métis scholar, I hope to transcend the political boundaries of these three groups as I seek their support to understand the cultural underpinnings we all share.

This cohesion would strengthen our goal and push back against the views formed by the juridical system about who we are. United by storytelling, buttressed by genealogies and focusing a collective response from the community can become a legal instrument for change. It is important that people have the freedom to choose which organization they belong to as it encourages diversity within these communities. However, to identify cultural characteristics that reflect the whole community gives us strength in numbers.

Historically our families were independent and freemen but when they chose to settle and build communities they chose to settle together as friends and families. This collective occurred despite the Euro-Canadian settler government's fear of having too many Métis in one location. These communities evolved as other Métis families moved with the seasonable migration of wildlife, to find employment or were pushed aside from one location to another. Their history of sticking together and maintaining their culture began in this region of the Shell River in the 1790s with the families of Cuthbert and Utinawasis (Margret) Grant and their children. Of course there were others and future genealogical study will reveal who else was part of this original settlement.

We know this region supplied furs to the market economy. Several people relate stories of their grandfathers trapping and selling furs into the 1950s. These trap lines were maintained by mostly Métis men in this region that worked and travelled together as part of a brigade during the fur trade and the bison hunt. Later those who did not apply for land under the Homestead Act or those who were unable to earn a living on their own homesteads became a source of cheap labour for Euro-Canadian farmers.

When these families began to homestead in this region they survived by sticking together and helping each other out by trading food supplies, labour and by gifting or 'recycling' products among themselves. They shared their skills and worked cooperatively to build the community infrastructure and their homes. They nurtured their culture through social bonds, marriage, community events and dances, and of course their faith.

One Small Success Story: The Path to the Future

Although most attendees to these events I have held are older there are still a few children who live in the community and are living as traditionally as their parents can provide. I instantly appreciated the value of our research project as one of the children, Nation, who is about 10 years old conveyed an interest in the Boggy Creek Louis Riel Day (2016) presentation when she recognized her community church immediately. I was especially moved when an Elder whom I had recorded earlier, talked about his grandfather making duck soup as part of their family diet. As I related this story later in the group, Nation immediately responded by adding



Figure 10.

that her grandfather makes duck soup too! In my view, this comment solidified the continuity and familiarity with traditional diets. In this case, traditional knowledge was shown to span five generations. This traditional food has been hunted, served and appreciated for many generations.

Besides recognizing duck soup, Nation can also easily discuss other cultural foods, such as bannock and wild meat. She is also learning to play traditional music on her fiddle. Her grandparents, Brian and Roxanne Paul are very active in

the music community in San Clara and Boggy Creek. They themselves were both raised in the community with parents who played music. Brian hunts, cooks, makes delicious bannock and plays nearly every Sunday at church services. Nation helps serve mass on Sundays and as she has grown old enough to participate in these services, she gains more responsibilities. In many ways, Nation is becoming the carrier of traditional knowledge for future generations. This youngster exemplifies why this research is important. She is one example of everything that is right about our culture when there is so much attention on what has gone wrong. She embodies hope, a sense of community and commitment to nurturing, success, progress and the agency that her grandparents and the whole community has gifted her.

There are other children who live nearby or visit their families and grandparents when they can. They come to enjoy the cultural festivities that occur all year long and of course the main event, which is a three-day festival that begins in July and brings families together to socialize, listen to music, and watch performers from other regions who come to sing and dance. It is a time to visit, relax and re-new acquaintances. Besides the music festival, there are fish derbies planned including a winter ice-fishing event. For so few people left in this area they continue to plan, organize and execute events at a steady pace. I recently saw a social media post from a young woman who was raised in the village and like many of us who had to find the long trail out of this traditional homeland, yearned to come back and build a life. Over the years, others have shared this same dream and some have returned to live in the area. Many people assume active roles in the community to ensure our traditional cultural activities will survive into the next generation.

The community welcomes new people and there is always a need to plan fundraisers for future projects or in support of individual families. This perseverance flourishes despite obstacles placed in their path such as lack of employment, education and the younger generations who must leave the community. The children who remain are initiated into cultural activities of community life often beginning with the Catholic ritual of baptism. As they mature they participate in community events first as spectators and eventually learn to take over roles held by their parents. This continuity still exists in hunting families, musical families and can be found in almost all the families as they contribute in some way to the ongoing traditions of community life. There is a saying in popular culture that 'it takes a community to raise a child'; Nation embodies this adage. This community has been home to and is responsible for bestowing and preserving a Métis identity on those of us who are born into families here. We want to carry on this tradition, leaving no child behind, when it comes to knowing who we are, where we come from and what our rights to this historic Métis community are.

We are raising our children to become knowledge keepers and to carry on the stories our ancestors shared with us. As cultural heritage is passed down from previous generations children learn about their spirituality, cultural activities, foods, music, and ways of life including hunting and fishing. As we encourage more children to identify with their traditional heritage through education and research I hope to see a resurgence and interest in traditional ways of living. It is important to teach that living one's culture does not mean living a nomadic or dying culture. That it is possible to move forward with a bright future embracing technology and competing in the capitalist market while still maintaining our cultural identity. The class distinctions and racism are

realities that exist in the broader society but can be modulated with a strong identity and education coupled with an unwillingness to accept the status quo.

We are standing up to be counted as the historic people of this traditional homeland. We are not deterred by colonial power that relies on fear and mythology to disenfranchise our families from our traditional territory. As more people become engaged in this research the stronger our voices become. These are not new concepts to the people who live here. They have known their strength is in numbers whether they are planning to construct a new church, Métis centre, a music festival or even a fowl supper. They have nothing to prove; as they demonstrate year after year this is their way of life. Working alongside family and friends as our ancestors have done in the past, we are preparing our children for the future. Nation and children like her are the future for these communities. The opportunity to teach them that this is their traditional homeland and a birthright is the first step to securing that future.

Kinships are the Ties that Bind

In my last interview with Charlie, we talked about many issues that are near and dear to the MRC, including Métis lifestyle and hunting rights. He describes how they hunt and rely on each other in harvesting the animals. They work cooperatively when necessary but are independent hunters the rest of the time. In this interview, Charles or Charlie (as I've known him all my life) informed me that some people remain "leery" of me and that "I won't get the true story of them."¹³⁵ They also "wonder what I am doing poking around all of a sudden" as they "have rights they recently won and is very close to their hearts and don't want to jeopardize them."¹³⁶ Charlie adds "Now we are in the hunting guide, the Métis have a constitutional right but at first it could have been taken away maybe... they didn't want to spoil it."¹³⁷

When I first met Charlie, Eugene and Don Langan last September there was skepticism about my motives for researching the community. According to Charlie when I interviewed him again in February, 2016 Don was wondering, "what's going on here, there's got to be a reason..." I was doing this.¹³⁸ To be fair Don did not know me that well even as kids and like many of us, we are distrustful of people who we do not know. However, fortunately for me, based on a longstanding friendship with Charlie he supports this project. He related the following statements to me regarding his explanation to Don about what I was doing;

no maybe people just want to know our story for a change. Maybe Dennis wants to share what we have. It's a good thing. There is nothing wrong with people knowing who we are. Cripes that's good... I'm happy at least our story is getting out. It's a good thing.... It should

¹³⁵ Interview with Charles Vermeulen

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

be even more dearer to you [me] because you are from the same community. It [the story] should be told by us from within.¹³⁹

This was the kind of support I hoped would materialize among community members while others took the time they needed to get more comfortable with the idea that their stories are important. Charlie understands I have a vested interest in how we as a community are portrayed because these people are also my relatives and friends. Charlie grimaces as he relates another story of someone else who came to the community a few years ago to do a documentary and drove around in a brand-new truck. He stated,

Well it made us look like we were millionaires... well that's not who we are, we eat rabbits to survive... that wasn't the right story... I tell people. At that time, we didn't... we never thought nothing, we were just people ... nobody was different we were all the same we thought even in Roblin... except when we went to different people's houses and we started to look around and realized hey they are not the same as us... what are you doing cooking this..." laughter... ¹⁴⁰

Charlie is now a grandparent. Along with almost everyone else I interviewed he is totally invested in teaching his grandchildren about the culture they are inheriting. In other words, they are passing along their traditional knowledge through oral stories and life experiences to the next generation of Métis youth. Nation is but one example of the youngest generation who is in tune



Figure 11 Pencil sketch of Ste. Claire Church. Courtesy of Doug Martin.

with her cultural heritage. As I mentioned her grandparents, Brian and Roxanne Paul were raised with parents who were musicians and who are now teaching her to play music.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Wilf and Yvette have practised arts and crafts for decades to the economic benefit of their family. There are many other talented artists from the village with impressive skills, but the artists themselves who gift us their work are modest. In this case, I think of Doug Martin, who sketches in pencil and creates beautiful detailed drawings. There are traditional Métis dancers, singers, writers and quilt makers who enrich this area and who are now ensuring these skills and their community will be there for future generations to enjoy.

There is a microcosm of self-sufficiency here that survives because all the elements required to be self sufficient are still present. People look after each other as best as possible and enjoy a rich cultural heritage along the way. As Charlie noted, we thought we were the same as everyone else until we learned to appreciate our differences. We learn who we are from a young age and many of us recognize that we are Métis as soon as we start interacting with outsiders. We realize we eat different foods; we have values that interconnect us as a community expressed by wahkootowin or relationships with each other. There is a community spirit that is expressed by a willingness of nearly everyone to pitch in and support each other in times of need. They come together to celebrate cultural activities, mourn losses and practise their faith, and in some cases, they hunt and protect their Indigenous rights together.

Charlie explained the court case that began this journey has been successfully appealed and Judge Green's views have been overruled by a higher court. Although, as I understand it, this means the fishing charge was overruled by a higher court and not the issue of San Clara's status as a historic Métis community. In any case, the battle for Métis rights is ongoing and according to the Powley case (1998), *R v Powley*, the Supreme Court clarified that those rights are defined by local history. Defending these rights is an act of decolonization. Education is key in defense of

rights as Métis scholar, Marie Battiste writes, “Every First Nation student recognizes the dilemmas and fragmentations in his or her educational experience.”¹⁴¹ She could just as easily have been speaking for the Métis from San Clara/Boggy Creek as education is difficult to obtain due to driving distance, racist attitudes in town and economic disadvantage. She continues, “A major obstacle to educational achievement has been finding the courage to live what we believe.”¹⁴² “This quest for wholeness, authenticity, and spirituality is embedded in the educational reforms urged by Indigenous knowledge.”¹⁴³ The traditional knowledge we possess should be a valued asset to the education curriculum and pedagogical development of our children as we re-emerge and strengthen our identity.

Storytelling describes how community relationships work and the interconnectedness we share with the land helps us to understand our collective history. This process has been the main objective of our research project. Since our recently held picnic on August 20, 2016, thirty-six people have now signed their consent to tell these stories (see Figure 12).

We are recording our traditional knowledge, which not only exists but has guided us even when it was not clearly understood. Moving forward, many of these stories will be transcribed and gifted to the University of Manitoba archives for the protection and future use of this material by other people interested in the Métis from San Clara-Boggy Creek. This knowledge exists as a living entity that includes a spiritual element. It is our traditional knowledge that guides us as we

¹⁴¹ Marie Ann Battiste, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited, 2013), 188.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

lay claim to our traditional communities through the act of storytelling. This is our story of decolonization, restoration and renewal.



Figure 12.

Note: For additional photos, genealogy and miscellaneous information used in this project please see Appendixes i - iii. Beginning with my genealogy, I organized the material with the older generations presented first. I include several pages of genealogical information to establish our families' presence in the 19th century political ethnogenesis that led to the formation of the Métis Nation in the Red River Valley. I have included photographs taken of older family generations because they tell their own story and represent a snapshot of our family in the early decades of the 20th century.

List of Abbreviations

LRI (Louis Riel Institute)

MMF (Manitoba Métis Federation)

MRC (Métis Rights Coalition)

MRA (Manitoba Research Alliance)

SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Council)

TCPS 2: CORE (Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics)

Glossary

Kiya Waneekah. Michif meaning “Don’t Forget who you are or where you come from, family”

Marcee. Thank You in Michif.

Merci. Thank you in French.

Mino pimatisiwin; Cree meaning “the good life.”

Miigwech. Thank you in Anishinaabemowin.

Tanschee. Hello in Michif.

Wahkootowin. Cree meaning for worldview, interconnectedness between people, places,
things into one web of being.

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Appendix i

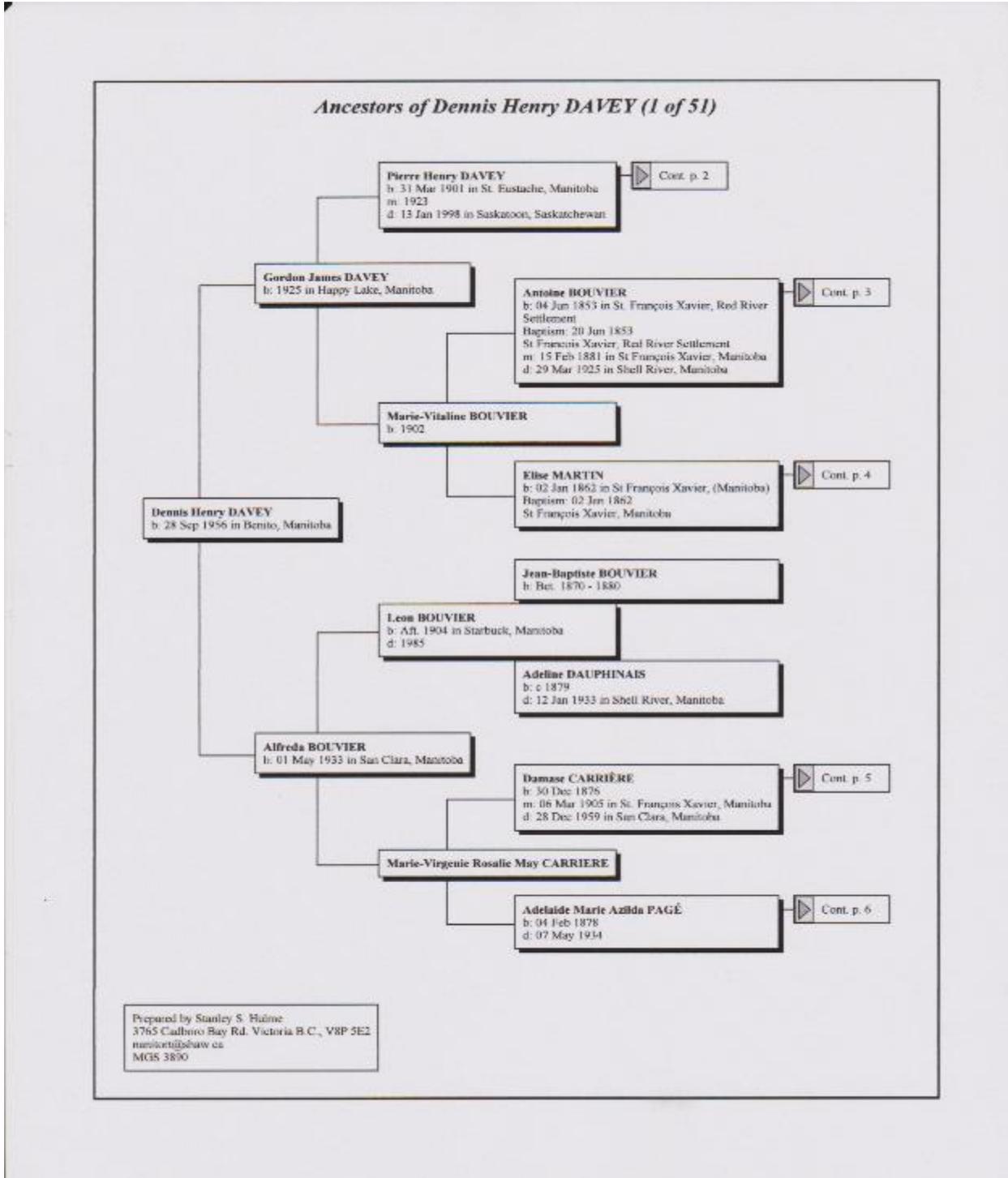


Figure 13. Courtesy of Stan Hume.

Person number 13 on this page is the same as person 13 on page 1

Alexis Dauphinais

Born 6 Nov 1840 #26
Marr 30 May 1865
St-François-Xavier, Manitoba
Died 13 Nov 1922
Sanford, Manitoba

Adéline Dauphinais

Born 15 Mar 1878 #13
St. Francois Xavier, Manitoba
Died Unknown

Philomene Carriere

Born Oct. 1847 #27

François Xavier Dauphinais

Born 1 Jan 1815 #52

*Provisional Sergeant
Member of Legislative C. of M.
1871-1876
Represented St. J. L. 1867
Cantonment - V.P. of Peace Co.
evacuated by Wolsey's troops
in 1870.
1882 - m. Marguerite Morin
at St. John, N.D. age 74.*

Françoise Paul

Born Jul 1817 #53

Michel Genthon Dauphinais (See page 18)

Born 25 May 1784 #104
Marr 1819
St-Boniface, RRS, (Manitoba)
Died 3 Oct 1844

Victoire Ouelette (See page 19)

Born c1790 #105
Died 25 May 1877
Cyross Hills NWT

Paul Paul (See page 20)

Born 23 Jan 1783 #106
Sorel, Québec
Marr 21 May 1832
St-Boniface, Manitoba
Died 3 Jun 1867
St-François-Xavier, Manitoba

Marguerite Lavallée (See page 21)

Born c 1800 #107
Île-à-la-Crosse, (Sk)

André Carrière sr.

Born 30 Mar 1779 #108
Boucherville, Quebec
Marr bef 1807
St. Boniface, RRS, (Manitoba)
Died 1861
St. Norbert, Manitoba

Angélique Dions/Lyons Dionne (See page 22)

Born c1787 #109
St. Boniface, RRS, (Manitoba)
Died 14 Jul 1861
St. Boniface, RRS (Manitoba)

Jean Baptiste Rivard (See page 23)

Born 19 Mar 1773 #110
St-Genevieve, Québec

André Carrière jr.

Born 28 Jul 1807 #54
North West Territories
Marr 22 Feb 1830
St-Boniface, RRS, Manitoba
Died 14 Nov 1878
St. Pierre-Jolys, Manitoba, Manitoba

Marie Anne Rivard

Born 1809 #55
RRS, NWT, (Manitoba)
Died 15 May 1887
St-Pierre-Jolys, Manitoba

Thérèse Bélanger

Born c1780 #111

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Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2W 4X5

Figure 14. Courtesy of MMF.

Person number 12 on this page is
the same as person 12 on page 1

Jean Baptiste Bouvier
See this person on page 4

Antoine Bouvier
Born c1824 #48
Marr 11 Jan 1847
St-François-Xavier, RRS, (Manitoba)

Marguerite Lariviere
Born c1791 #97
bur. 24 Aug 1861
St. François Xavier, RRS, (Manitoba)

Casimer Bouvier
Born 13 Feb 1848 #24
St-François-Xavier, Manitoba
Marr 22 Nov 1870
St-François-Xavier, Manitoba
Died 29 May 1930

Alexandre Duboishue Breland
See this person on page 4

Geneviève Breland
Born Abt. 1827 #49
Died 31 Jul 1857
St-François-Xavier, Manitoba

Emilie Wells
See this person on page 4

Jean Baptiste Bouvier
Born 1878 #12
Died 28 Jun 1956
San Clara, Manitoba

Jean Baptiste Laplante
Born Abt. 1809 #50
Marr bef 1833
Died 30 Nov 1864
St-François-Xavier, Manitoba

Adelaide Laplante
Born Abt. July, 1855 #25
Died 26 Dec 1931

Joseph Desfonds
Born Abt. 1799 #102
Rupertsland

Madeleine Dufont/Desfonds
Born 1819 #51
Lac Winnipeg

Joséphite Désbiens
Born 1805 #103
Lac Superior

Metis Resource Centre 2014
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Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2W 4X5

Figure 15. Courtesy of MMF

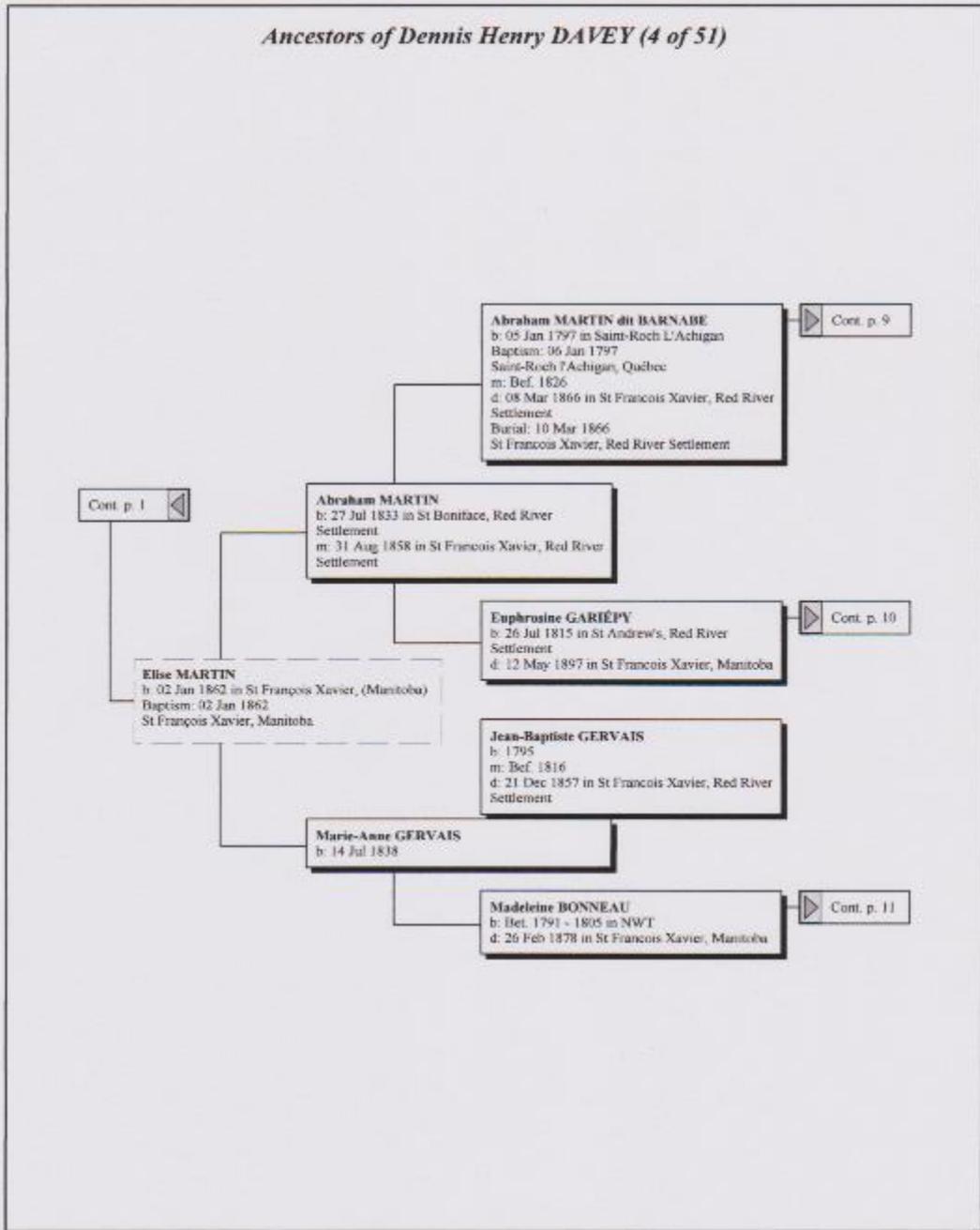


Figure 16.

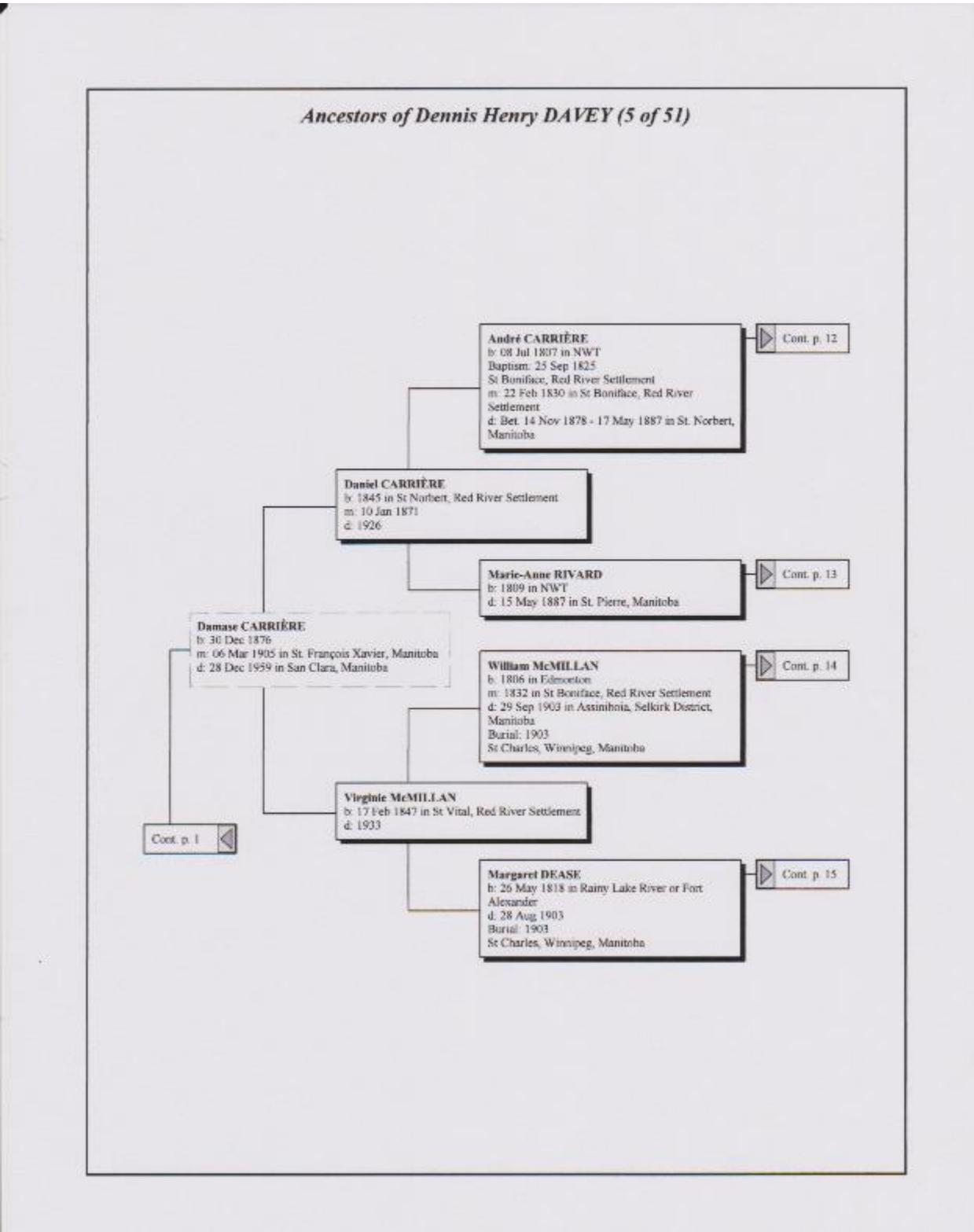


Figure 17.

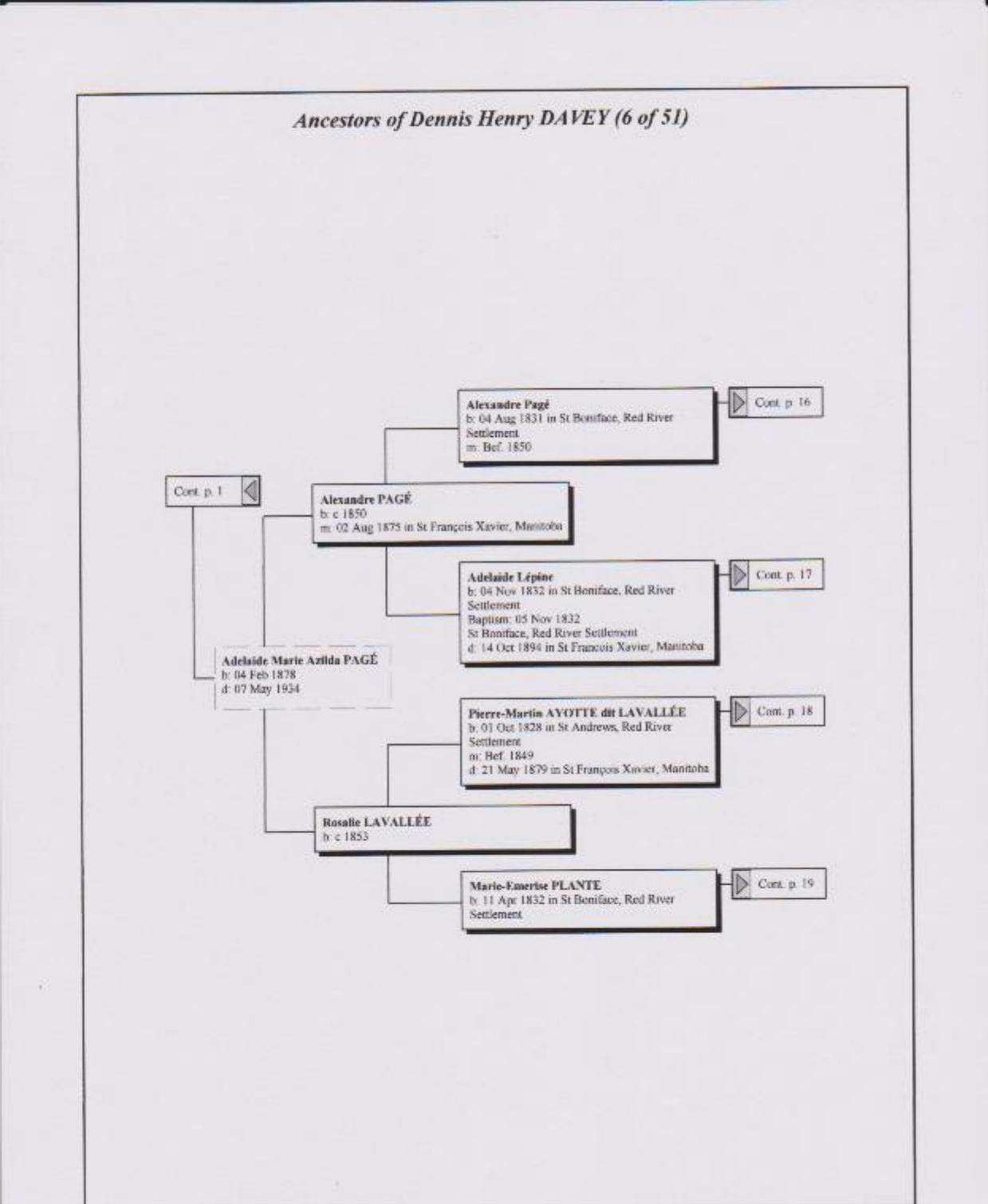


Figure 18.

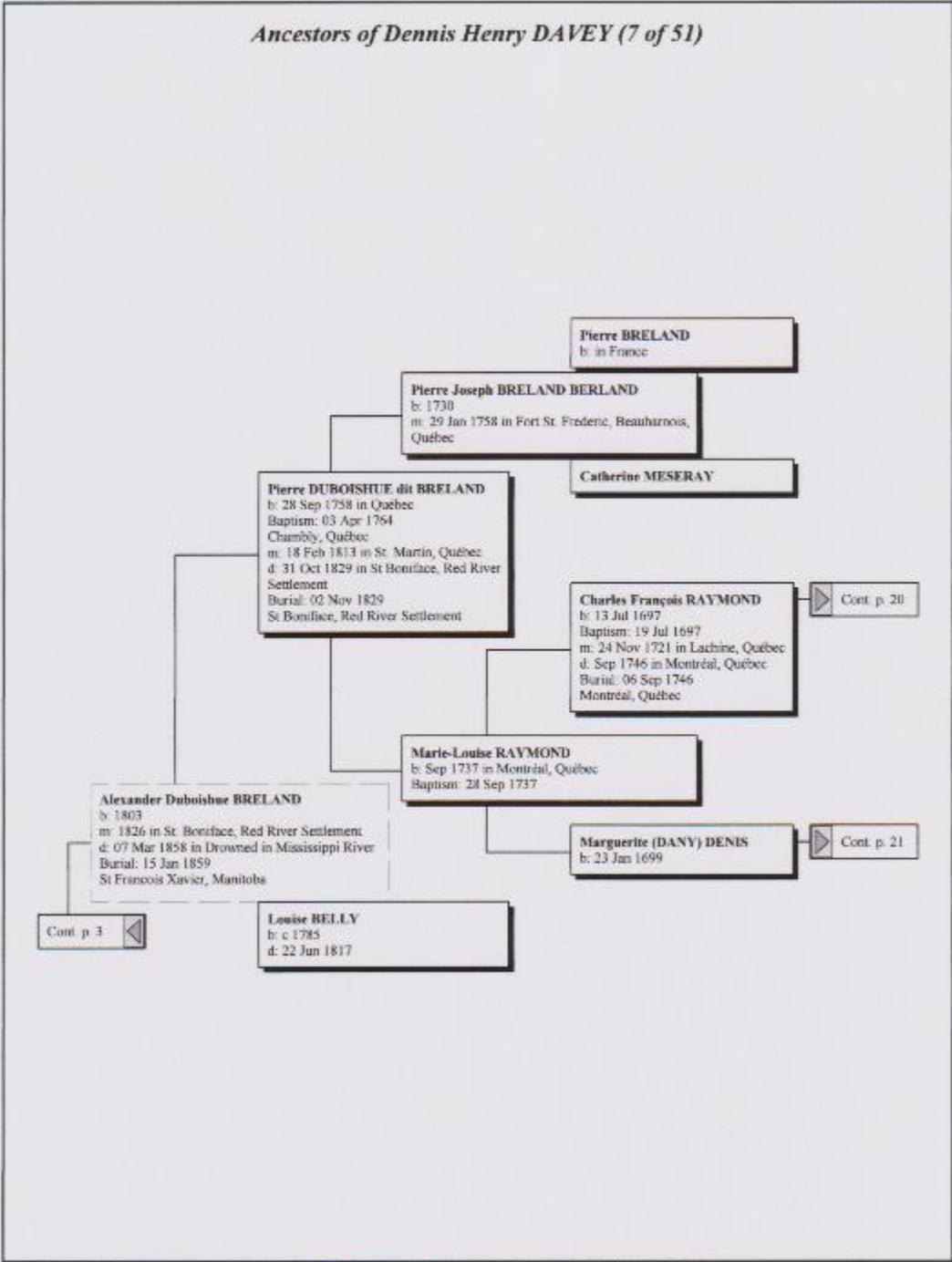


Figure 19.

Ancestors of Dennis Henry DAVEY (8 of 51)

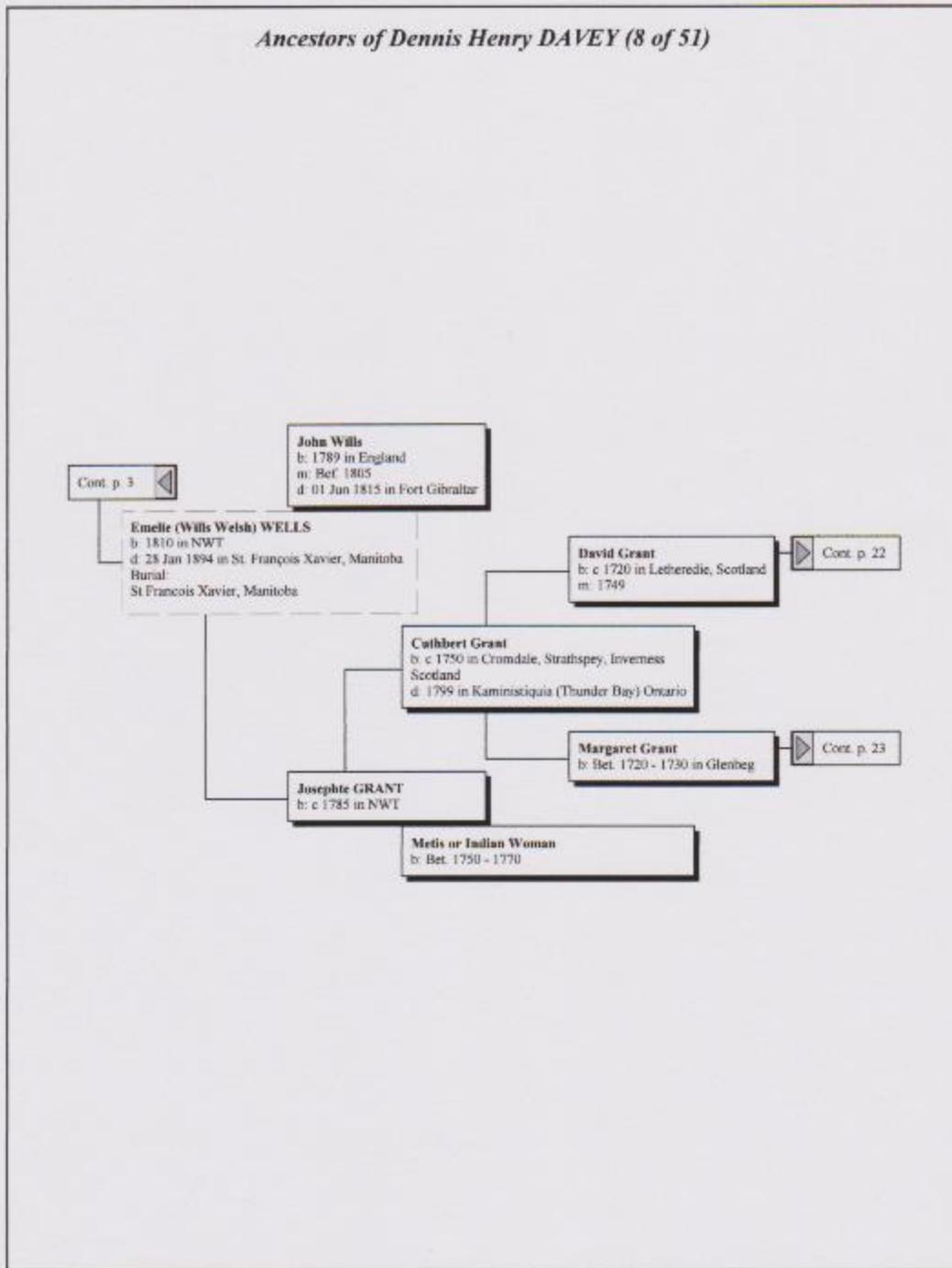


Figure 20.

Appendix ii

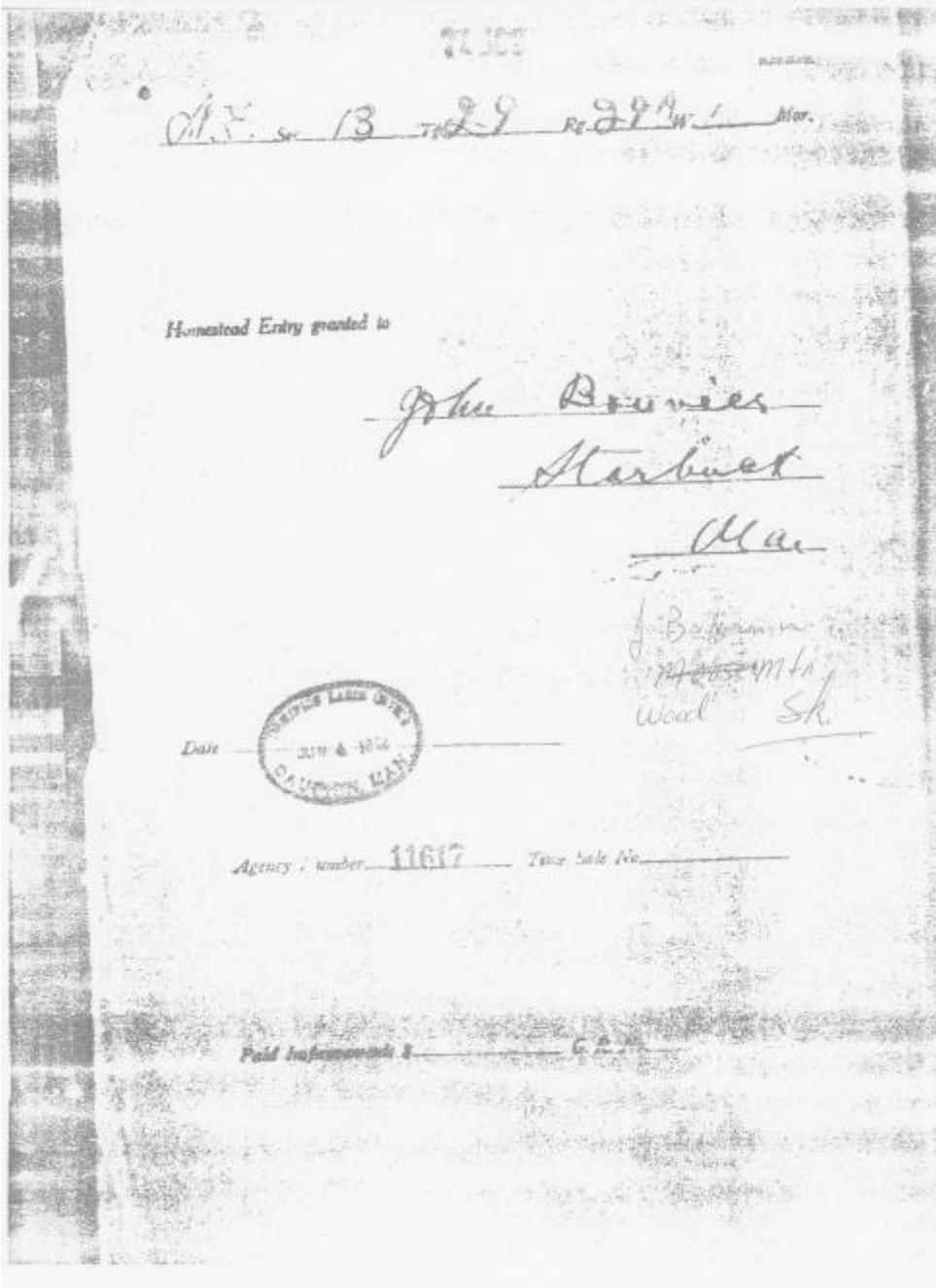


Figure 21. Courtesy of Dennis Carriere - 2016

1901.

Before JAMES ANDREW JOSEPH McKENNA, of the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario, Esquire, duly appointed and sitting as sole Commissioner at Winnipeg in the Province of Manitoba to investigate claims of Halfbreeds in the territory included in the Province of Manitoba, as now constituted, which was not included in the said Province as constituted by the Manitoba Act, 23 Victoria, Cap. 3, born up to 31st December 1885, and claims remaining to be dealt with in the North-West Territories, of Halfbreeds born up to 31st December 1885, personally came and appeared.

Jean Baptiste Bruner Claimant,
who being duly sworn, deposes as follows:—

Question 1. What is your name?

Answer Jean Baptiste Bruner

Question 2. Where do you reside?

Answer Manitoba

Question 3. How long have you lived there and where have you lived previously?

Answer Fifteen years
Wood Mountain

Question 4. Where were you born?

Answer Wood Mountain

Question 5. When were you born?

Answer 25th January 1880 (valued A)

Question 6. What is your father's name?

Answer Cassius Bruner

Question 7. What was the name of your mother before her marriage?

Answer Adelaide Le Plante

Question 8. Is your father a Whiteman, a Halfbreed or an Indian?

Answer Wh

Question 9. Is your mother a Whitewoman, a Halfbreed or an Indian?

Answer Wh

Figure 22.

in the Prince of Wales
 being dug near south
 I have known the clamour
 Jean Baptiste Olivier for
 his infancy. I saw him
 with his parents between
 Leyhess Hills and wood
 Mountain for the first. The
 family were hunting. He
 was in a ^{moss} bag and ^{then}
 perhaps a year old. Three
~~years of age~~ ^{I saw}
 the ^{family} family with John ^{last}
 before ^{at} wood Mountain
 60 years?

Snow before near
 Armonk in the
 Prince of Wales
 the 16th day of December
 A.D. 1401
 W. M. M. M. M.
 A. M.

W. M. M. M. M.
 A. M.

Figure 23.

Appendix iii



Figure 26.



Figure 27. (L) (GGGrandparents) Casimir & Adelaide (Laplante) Bouvier. (R) Pierre Paul & daughter. Seated: Adéline (Dauphinais) Bouvier, (GGrandmother). Courtesy of Geraldine Laviolette.

La mère de Bridgit Davey (femme de Pierre Juare)

2



Catheline (Kelly) Davey
age 100 yrs died at 104 yrs
No date as to when
this picture was taken.
- she is a sister to James Davey
(my grand father) - Anne

1



Hedwige + Daughters
Elizabeth, Katie, Annie &
Faye?
Do not know who Faye is?

1915

Figure 28.



Figure 29. Top left: G. Vitaline (Bouvier) Davey – wedding photo. Top right: GG. Hedange (Godin) Davey Bottom left: G. Mae (Carriere) Bouvier, sisters & families Bottom right: (R to L; sisters) Vitaline Davey, Rose Carriere, Genevieve Charbonneau, Santoine Lucier.

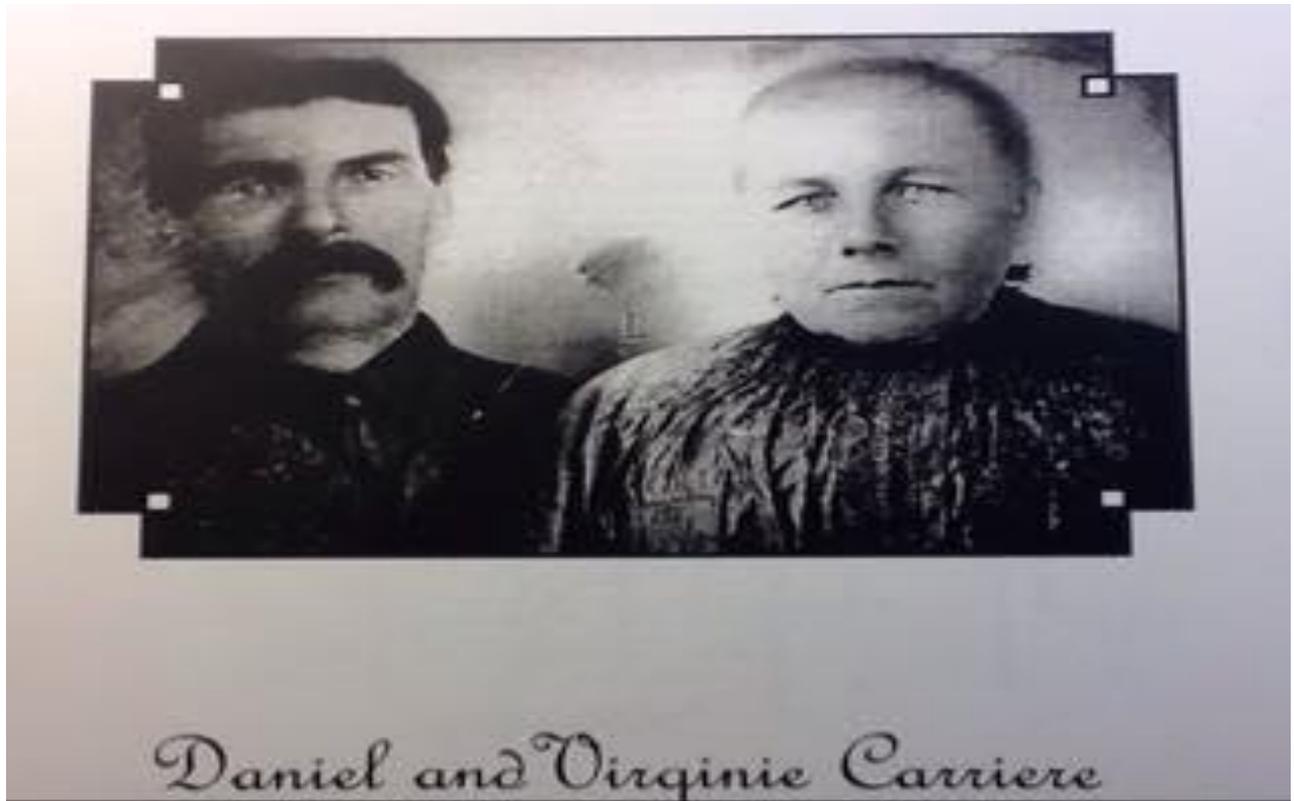


Figure 30 Maternal GGrandparents.



Figure 31. Paternal Grandparents; Vitaline and Henry Davey & children



Figure 32. Arthur Carrière, Unknown, John Bouvier



Figure 33. Phillip Davey's Family.



Figure 34. (L) Norman Bouvier (Brother, to Grandma V. Davey). (R) (unknown) Senecel. Courtesy of Geraldine Laviolette.



Figure 35. (R) Rose Carrière (sitting) Norman Bouvier



Figure 36. Catherine and Mark Davey



Figure 37. (L) Damase Carrière w/Gr./d. Freda Davey (R) Daughters Mae Bouvier, Emma Carrière & Irene Bouvier



SAN CLARA, MINN. 1955

Figure 38. Courtesy of Doug Martin.



Figure 39. Courtesy of Doug Martin.



Figure 40. 1st Day of Marriage for Gordon & Freda Davey, Nov. 8, 1950 (C) Morley Davey, u/k, (R)Bob Laplante



Figure 41.