Métis Family Life – Leah Dorion

Module Objective: In this module, the students will learn how Métis families have oriented themselves since the beginnings of the fur trade to the present. The students will also learn why genealogy is so important to Métis families and individuals.

Métis Family Life: An Overview

Family Life is very important to the Métis. Family relations have in fact always been important to the Métis, especially given their mixed ancestry. At first, this made Métis family life and family values very complicated since the Métis had various First Nations, French-Canadian, Scots, Orkney and English relatives. Often, relations between the parent groups and even their Métis children were not always cordial. It was only when the Métis population grew and the Métis began to intermarry other Métis, that the Métis family really developed. Métis intermarriage or endogamy was practiced largely because the mixed heritage offspring of First Nations, Europeans and Euro-Canadians felt themselves different from their parent groups and similar to each other that they preferred intermarriage. Métis intermarriage remains the most common form of marriage among the Métis.

Traditionally, it has been maintained by historians, archaeologists and social scientists that the Métis were a mere byproduct of the great continental fur trade, which led to the birth of European Canada. The Métis were said to have been the result of liaisons, often illicit, between willing First Nations women and female-starved European adventurers. Of course, while the Métis emerged as a people largely as a result of the fur trade, they, nevertheless, developed their own group cohesion, which often proved contradictory to the aspirations of their fur trade fathers or their First Nations relatives.

The Fur Trade and the Beginnings of Métis Family Life

Right from the beginnings of European settlement in Canada, there were mixed heritage people. However, it was only when these populations got sufficiently large that true Métis family life developed. Before this time, in what is now northern Central Canada and Western Canada, Métis family life centred on First Nations maternal extended families and a European or Euro-Canadian father. In New France and Acadia, the pattern was the opposite: Aboriginal women married French and Canadiens to make a French and Catholic colony. As Samuel de Champlain (1567-1635), the so-

called “Father of Canada” once wrote, “Our Young men will marry your daughters, and we shall be one people.” Of course, this was to be done at the expense of the development of any sort of mixed heritage identity. Therefore in either circumstance, a true Métis family life could not develop.

What circumstances led to the development of the Métis family? The expansion of the fur trade in what is now Western and Territorial Canada led to the development of a large culturally aware mixed heritage population.

The Métis were known as the “Children of the fur trade”. Marriage was the best way for European and Euro-Canadian men to secure economic and political alliances with the First Nations during the fur trade. In this way, the European and Euro-Canadian traders gained increased access to the furs and fur bearing territories of the First Nations. Marriages put traders in direct and intimate contact with the groups they worked with. The marriages meant a man had to meet certain social and economic obligations to his wife and to her family or home group. However, it also meant that the man secured

special economic and political privileges, which he would not have obtained without marriage.

First Nations and later Métis women were desired as wives by European and Euro-Canadian traders for practical reasons. Early fur traders lacked survival skills and cultural knowledge, the traders needed help to stay alive in the wilderness and to trade, successfully, with the various Indigenous groups. Aboriginal women were indispensable providers of food, labour, information, interpretation and cultural mediation for these men. They also provided European men with many skills and opportunities for trade. Aboriginal wives acted as interpreters and taught their husbands their languages. They also acted as cultural mediators because they became knowledgeable about European culture and behaviour through intermarriage and post life. The traders, then, learned about appropriate protocol which helped smooth trade negotiations.

European and Euro-Canadian men entered into custom of the country marriages, or marriages □□"*à la façon du pays*"("in the fashion of the country"), with First Nations women and later Métis women. Rather than taking place in a church, the marriage ceremony followed the

tradition of the First Nations or Métis women's group. The relationship was binding as long as both parties were willing to continue the relationships through consensual cohabitation, not legal sanction. In order to marry a woman, a European or Euro-Canadian trader often had to give gifts to her father before permission was granted. The gifts were commonly ponies, provisions or trade goods. This expense, however, was often made up very quickly when the trader began collecting furs from his new family group and selling them at a higher price.

The fur trade companies at first resisted the development of long-term fur trade marriages between their employees and First Nations women. Initially, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) objected to, and even threatened, employees entering into unions with First Nations women. This did not discourage Company men, however, from participating in such relationships and producing mixed-heritage children. As a result, the HBC's London Committee was forced to modify its prohibition of employees entering into country marriages. Officers with the HBC were the first men granted the privilege of marrying First Nations women.

Prior to 1800, the North West Company (NWC) had an informal policy in which men were to enter into short-lived relationships with First Nations women but not to establish permanent residence with them. Initially, the care of the resulting mixed heritage children was not a priority for the NWC or their fathers. However, after 1800, the NWC encouraged its men to enter into more stable relationships with First Nations and Métis women. The HBC's Council of the Northern Department eventually initiated a policy in 1824 to ensure country wives and their children were provided for. If an employee, after completing his contract with the company, decided to return overseas he had to designate a portion of his pension to his country wife to support her and the children's economic wellbeing.

It was not long, however, that mixed heritage women became the favoured marriage partners of the fur traders. For instance, in 1806, the NWC made a rule against employees marrying First Nations women. This was seen as an attempt to ensure that the large number of mixed-heritage girls produced through country marriages could find fur trade husbands to support them. These Métis women were seen as more attractive because they had kin ties to the First Nations, but understood European and

First Nations customs and languages. Mixed heritage women were raised in a fur-trade environment and had an inherent knowledge of this lifestyle. And because of their ties to the First Nations, Métis women provided opportunities for their husbands to increase their trading activities.

The church greatly opposed these "irregular" marriages when they arrived in the northwest after 1818. The clergy put great pressure on the European and Euro-Canadian men to consecrate their relationships through Christian ceremony. The church imposed its standards on traditional practices, not recognizing their validity. From their worldview, custom of the country marriages were immoral an unstable. While many couples entered into a church sanctioned form of marriage, many did not. They continued their relationships through consent and choice, not because of the authority of an external agency. In their opinion, custom of the country marriages were equally as viable as solemnized marriages.

March 30, 1888 letter from Archbishop of Rupert's Land
Re: "heathen polygamy"

Thank you for sending me the agenda paper. I see from it that the question of heathen ***polygamy*** *is to be considered.*

I cannot help questioning the present ruling that a heathen before being baptized should put away all but one of his wives.

According to a law written in their hearts they recognize adultery and it is branded as such among them. According to the same law they certainly do not regard polygamy as such. Again the custom of allowing them to choose which wife they shall retain, generally the youngest is a recognition of their lawful marriage to such. To be true to the principle thus laid down they ought only to retain the first married. Of course this does not affect the question of baptized persons.

Métis women, particularly those who were educated and acculturated, enjoyed considerable status from fur trade marriages prior to the arrival of European women to posts and settlements. Indeed, mixed heritage daughters of post employees gained security and status from marrying fur trade employees. Educated daughters could secure the best marriages if they married officers at the posts. Some women achieved considerable status and were surrounded by all the luxuries, which could be afforded to a European in Canada. Uneducated mixed blood women, however, were more likely to enter into less formal relationships with lower ranking employees such as voyageurs or freighters.

Some of these ties between fur traders and European women were very enduring. For instance, Betsey Sinclair, daughter of HBC factor William Sinclair and his First Nations wife Margaret (Nahoway) Norton, was Governor George Simpson's country wife in 1821-1822. By February

1, 1823, she married clerk Robert Miles according to the custom of the country and produced 10 children. This union received church consecration in 1840 and the family eventually retired to Canada West (present-day Ontario).

Once British women arrived at settlements and fur trade posts, however, Métis women lost their positions of prestige. These women initiated serious competition to maintain or achieve social status, primarily through marriage, and racial intolerance at posts and settlements. As Sylvia Van Kirk (1980:201) has documented, in various parts of the British Empire, "a direct relationship can be traced between the growth of racial prejudice and the arrival of white women." British women often felt they were out-competed for husbands by women they felt were racially and morally inferior, or were jealous of the relations British men had with Aboriginal women prior to their arrival. The British women also felt that only they should be members of upper class fur trade society. Rather then being treated as equals, Métis women were viewed as inferior and were expected to act as lackeys, looking after the European women's wants and needs. In the opinion of some of these women, Métis women lacked the appropriate background to deserve to gain such status.

Many European men ended their country marriages in favour of marrying the incoming European women, or kept their Métis wives hidden as mistresses. Increasingly, Métis women found that they were the objects of racial intolerance. Some officers shunned their Métis mates because of growing prejudice in the posts and settlements or kept them hidden as mistresses. HBC officers were pressured by people such as Governor George Simpson to break off relationships with country wives and seek marriages with incoming European women. Some men refused to sever their ties to their Métis partners, however, even at the risk of missing career advancement.

While some men maintained their relationships with Métis and First Nations women, the women were not treated equally in public. Métis wives were not often taken out socially for fear of being the targets of disparaging remarks. As such, these women often became confined to home and family with drawing from the public spotlight.

Nevertheless, because of their ability to adapt to the fur trade lifestyle, their education and their level of acculturation, Métis women retained their desirability as wives for fur trade employees and officers in outlying

areas until 1870. European women, on the other hand, expected the best treatment, food and lodgings, and maintained airs of superiority over Aboriginal women, yet could not adapt to the still-frequent hardships of life in nineteenth century Western Canada.

Traditional Métis Kinship Ties

Métis Intermarriage Practices

Métissage is the practice of forming and maintaining a mixed heritage population, which originated when European and Euro-Canadian men and First Nations women began to have children. More specifically, though, this refers to the practice of the Métis marrying within the larger Métis community rather than seeking partners beyond it. Such a closed system for the selection of marriage is called an endogamous marriage system. This practice has helped to establish a sense of identity and community. It is also a form of endogamy, where potential marriage partners are chosen from within the larger Métis community or population rather than from the general population.

The St. Laurent, Batoche and St. Louis, Saskatchewan Métis practiced endogamy almost exclusively for many generations, at least until 1940. Thus, many of the families in these communities were strongly

interconnected. This form of marriage crosscut French and English Métis communities and often extended between Métis settlements or territories, which served to minimize the effects of assimilation. Métissage promoted and established a close-knit community for the Métis, a practice, which was founded on and helped maintain a common culture and history. Most significantly, this practice helped ensure that the Métis were linked to one another for mutual support, particularly in times of resource depletion and distress. Kin ties could be vital links in times of low productivity and people knew they could count on their blood or married relatives to help them.

Métissage was practiced not only in communities with a large number of settled or semi-settled Métis, but also in regions with a dispersed population. For instance, the early Métis residents of the Grand Cache region in what is now Alberta intermarried to a great degree. While widely dispersed for a large part of the year, individuals from different family groups brokered marriages when the community joined together for communal activities. Men married women who were born in a different area or family group and the men relocated, at least for a time, to the woman's family's residential

area to establish kin ties and expand their social network before establishing their own residential pattern.

In order to encourage Métissage, the Métis often married their cousins in a system known as cross-cousin marriage. For instance, your mother's brother or father's sister's son or daughter would be your cross-cousin. Among many First Nations groups, such as the Western Woods Cree, cross-cousins were seen as viable and desirable marriage partners. However, parallel cousins were not. Parallel cousins would be your mother's sister's son or daughter or your father's brother's son or daughter. In some instances, a person's parallel cousins were viewed as that person's brothers or sisters. The Métis in the Mackenzie District of the Northwest Territories still practice cross-cousin marriage and the Catholic and Anglican churches have not placed an incest taboo on this marriage form. An incest taboo is the prohibition of sexual relations between immediate kin.

Among the Métis in the Batoche, Saskatchewan region, first and second cousin marriages were common, though marriages between second cousins were more accepted and

encouraged. If a husband or wife passed away, it was a fairly regular practice for the living spouse to marry the deceased spouse's brother or sister. The second marriage, then, is still a cousin-based marriage. This served to further reinforce the kinship ties between the children of these marriages and to the families of the spouses. In addition, by marrying within the community and not to non-Métis people outside the community (exogamy), the Métis were able to maintain and practice their language, culture and religion.

Marriage to cousins helped to establish stability for recently immigrated people, such as those who dispersed from Red River to areas such as Batoche (in what is now central Saskatchewan) and the southern Mackenzie River Valley (in what is now the western Northwest Territories). Endogamy eased the insecurity and solitude experienced by immigrants. The practice quickly established a network of close relationships in the new territories. This provided a sense of community and preserved linguistic and cultural continuity.

Métis men found marriage partners in far flung places as well. Fur trade employees involved in transporting goods often met their potential wives at posts of destination

hundreds or thousands of kilometres away from their home posts. After transporting a return cargo back to their home posts, men would frequently travel back to the post where they met their sweethearts in order to court and marry them.

In some regions, Métis and First Nations people commonly intermarried, rather than seeking partners from beyond the Aboriginal community. While, in other regions, there has been little Métis-First Nations intermarriage. At Fort Resolution, Northwest Territories, marriage between the Mackenzie Métis and Chipewyan has been rare. The Métis have been more closely aligned with the Euro-Canadian population in terms of economy, values, and practices. This has led to more Métis-non-Aboriginal unions and fewer Métis-First Nations unions.

Métis Kinship

All societies have developed means of naming their relatives and determining descent. Kinship is the means by which individuals determine relationships between themselves and other people. Relatives and family organizations serve to help deal with problems facing all human groups, such as the need to facilitate division of

labour, cooperation between the sexes and the need to provide a proper setting within which to raise children. Kinship and kinship terms provide clues about how the family is structured, what relationships are considered close or distant, and attitudes regarding these relationships.

The Métis follow a kinship system known as bilateral kinship. A person relates equally to both sides of their family and recognizes ancestors on both their mother and father's side of the family. That is, people in a bilateral kinship system trace descent through both parents simultaneously.

Kinship terms such as these serve to identify people who can provide economic aid, support in times of conflict and support for the young, the aged and the infirm. Marriage, more than descent, served to integrate individuals into Métis groups. Intermarriage provided a large kinship network and a flexible, efficient system through which people could be distributed across a landscape and make a living. The kin a person could trace through marriage, as well as through parents, aided him or her in securing aid and support in their precarious lifestyle. Kinship terms serve to identify

who belongs in one's own group and who has similar roles within the social system. They also function to strengthen relationships between people.

A Métis kin group is made up of a circle of both paternal and maternal relatives. A person's kin are designated as that group of people closely related to one living individual through both parents. Therefore, each person's kin group is oriented around him or herself, the ego. An ego is the focal person in the kin group and degrees of relationship are determined in regards to the ego. For instance, you would identify the people within your own kin group and you would be considered the ego. This means that each person's kin group is different. Your kin group is made up of parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and relatives through marriage. Your cousin's kin group would be different because these same people would have different relationships to your cousin, and he or she would have different in-laws than you.

Kinship terms function to strengthen and reinforce important relationships between people. They also identify who belongs in one's group and who has similar roles or relationships. For instance, in nuclear

families, siblings are differentiated from cousins. In Métis extended families, though, a man and his male cousin might call each other by the kinship term "brother" due to their similar roles. In addition, in some Métis and First Nations communities, the father and father's brother are identified by the same term.

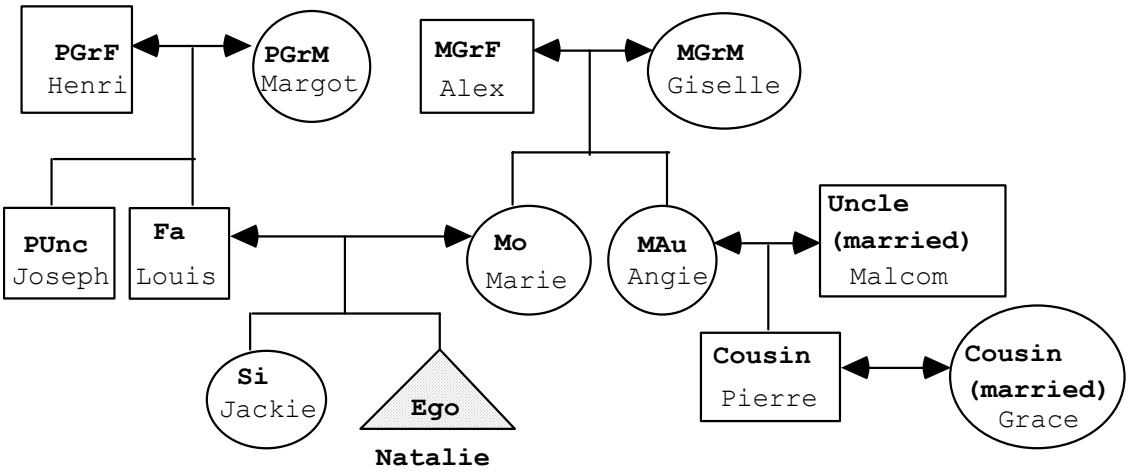

Chart 1: Kin group as seen through the eyes of Natalie, who is the ego.

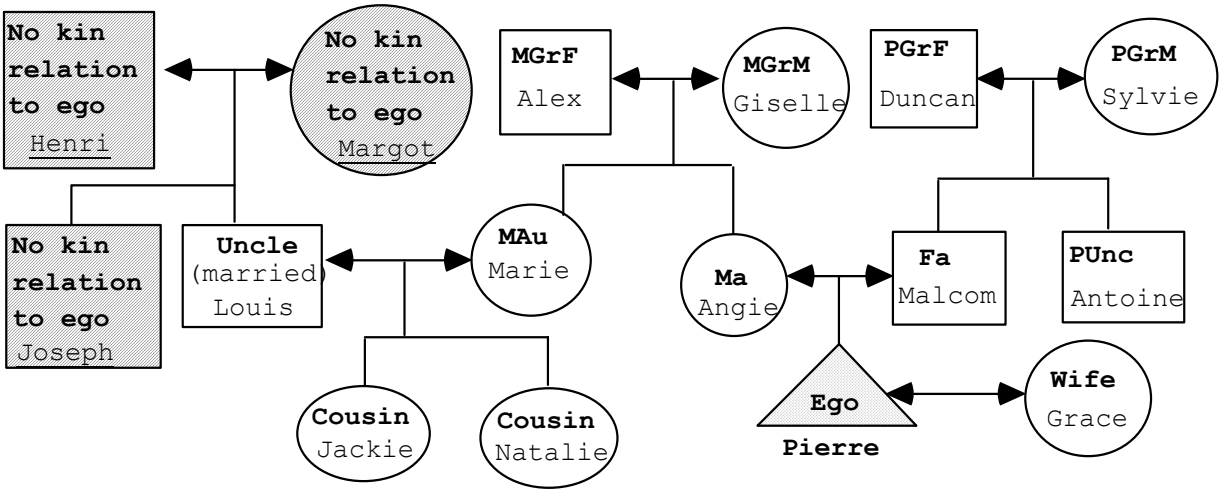

Chart 2: Kin group as seen through the eyes of Natalie's cousin Pierre, who is now the ego.

Legend: Circle= Female; Square= Male; Triangle= Ego
Fa= Father; **Mo**= Mother; **Si**= Sister; **PGrf**= Paternal Grandfather **MGrF**= Maternal Grandfather; **PGrM**= Paternal Grandmother; **MAu**= Maternal Aunt; **PUnc**= Paternal Uncle; **MGrM**= Maternal Grandmother

Traditional Métis Family Structures

The family is one of the most important social structures of a community and a culture. It can be an effective vehicle in establishing and promoting pride in identity and heritage. Métis families occur in two basic structures – the extended family and the nuclear family. The household often consists or consisted of more than the immediate family. It was not unusual to have three generations – grandparents, parental siblings and their children – living in the same house as the mother-father-child unit. In the communal system of the Métis, it was an accepted and desirable practice for several relatives beyond the immediate family to live together and view themselves as the family unit.

Extended families are composed of more than a mother, father, and their children. An extended family might include parents and their children, grandparents, and one or more parental siblings and their children if any. This family traveled and worked together through much of the year. Extended family membership was often fluid and loosely structured. Family members always had the option

of joining or leaving. The family's composition and size might change depending on whether resources were abundant or scarce. For instance, family size might increase during spring fish spawns and divide in the winter when game became scattered.

The extended family was one of the most important social institutions of the Métis. While more common in the past, the extended family is still alive today. Many households still include grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins. Grandparents are respected for their wisdom and experience and they hand down much of the Métis culture in homes. The extended family did not always live under a single roof, however. The extended family could be made up of kin who traveled, hunted, fished and gathered together for a portion of the year. They might inhabit several tipis, tents or other shelters but lived communally and shared everything. The extended family established as well as reflected the communal values so important and necessary to Métis culture.

The extended family established and reflected the communal values of the Métis. In a subsistence-based economy, each member filled important and flexible roles, which contributed to family survival. Each person's efforts increased personal benefits and lessened the effects of hard times, promoting interdependence.

Hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering in isolated environments required people to rely on each other in order to survive. Living with an extended family was a means to ensure that sufficient resources could be obtained to live in often-harsh environments.

Each family member had roles to play, though the roles could be diverse and required flexibility in definition depending on social and economic situations. The co-operation between men and women ensured that families had meat, fish and plant foods to eat, clothes to wear, vehicles for transportation and a home. In order to supply their families with meat from big game, men had to spend prolonged periods of time away from their families hunting. While men were away, women took care of the children, made and mended clothes and snowshoes, processed food and hides, snared animals and gathered plant foods and medicines.

Extended families do more than lessen the impact of economically difficult times. The close contact between several generations of people aids in the transmission of traditions, values, and worldview. For instance, men were not always successful when they went on extended hunting trips. Children learned snaring, gathering, and fishing

techniques from older family members to help feed the group when game animals were scarce. As a result, they learned firsthand the benefits of interdependence.

In Métis extended families we have seen that a boy's male cousin is often called "brother". This is because the cousin fills the same role in the family and to the boy as would the boy's biological brother. Similarly, grandparents are sometimes referred to as "mother" or "father" because they help raise the children complementing, to some degree, the same roles as the parents.

The Batoche registers from 1885-1920:

- Annual average of 3.4 marriages a year.
- 10-12 children per couple.
- Couples usually lived to approximately 45 years, completing about 20 years of marriage.
- Women, as a result of closely spaced pregnancies or too many pregnancies, died young. Few, as a result, lived past the age of 50 with the same spouse. If a woman was able to make it through her fertile period, however, there was a good chance she would live to old age.
- The average age of women at Batoche 1885-1905 was 63, while men lived to an average age of 56.
- High infant mortality (less than 5 years old), about four per family.
- Relatively high birth rate helped to compensate for the influenza/flu epidemics in 1890-91 and 1897 and tuberculosis epidemics between 1899 and 1904. From 1894-1904 there were 191 deaths or 19 per year, a rate, which almost overtook the birth rate. The high birth rate and large families

> maintained a population figure close to 450 inhabitants from 1885 to 1920.

Wage-based economics, urban settlement, and Euro-Canadian values impacted upon the Métis extended family structure. Euro-Canadian society was oriented around a nuclear family structure – two parents and their dependent children. Earning a wage often meant that one parent could support several people. As a result, traditional Métis economics and the extended family were de-emphasized. In a nuclear family structure, competitive values were emphasized. People competed for jobs and money to live independent, rather than interdependent, lives. This change in values was driven as much by Euro-Canadian social and religious attitudes as it was by economics.

Family members' roles changed in the nuclear family. The imposition of a value system based on competition and autonomy was often destructive to traditional Métis family structure and roles. This shift emphasized the man's role as the breadwinner in the family while it devalued the contributions of the elderly, mothers, and children. Men were considered the head of the household but did not always contribute significantly to raising children. Emphasis was placed on earning money rather than sharing, time, labour, and resources. Even amidst a

changing value system, however, many Métis families included older relatives in the household. The Métis continue to live in extended families today.

Spousal and parental roles in a nuclear family structure were relatively restricted in the past. Women were mothers, tended the home and raised the children. Men maintained a position of dominance and authority and were the breadwinners. Today, however, women have joined the work force and many men take an active part in childrearing. Culture and tradition can be maintained effectively within the nuclear family. As lifestyles have shifted to adapt to changing economies and political environments, so too have the means by which values and customs are passed on.

Michif Family Names

Mother: *mawmaw* or *ma mayr*
Father: *pawpaw* or *li payr*
Daughter: *ma sueur* or *ma soeur*
Son: *aen garsoon* or *koushish*
Children: *lee zawnfawn* or *lee pchee*
Parent: *aen parawn*
Grandfather: *moshom* or *moushoum*
Grandmother: *kokom* or *koohkoum*
Grandchild: *noushishim* or *nousoushimak*

Métis Marriage Patterns

Since their beginnings as a people, the Métis have had distinct courtship and marriage patterns. Traditionally,

romance and courtship for the Métis began early, when children met at school, church, or when visiting each other's families. Métis courtships often did not last long. In many instances the couple were not allowed to speak to each other; instead they would have to content themselves with writing notes as a means to express their feelings. A third party would pass on the notes. In other instances the families knew the children well and were happy to see them develop a bond, as they grew older.

Couples were not given much private time and many parents had strict rules regarding their daughters' social life. Parents were often very watchful of their daughters and sometimes sent a younger sibling along with a couple on their outings. A suitor might whisper terms of endearment to the woman he was courting in several languages because of this lack of privacy. For instance, he might call his sweetheart "musk ox" in Cree, "wolverine" in French, and "my little pig" in English. As a result, men asked their sweethearts to marry them after short courtships. In other circumstances, the families of the couple were close friends and happy to see the children develop a bond.

George William Sanderson recounted how challenging it was to court his sweetheart, Elizabeth. Elizabeth's mother would rarely leave her by herself. When Elizabeth's mother was off milking a cow, George sneaked in to see his sweetheart, whispered a few words in her ear, and asked her to marry him. She agreed. This was the entire courtship! He then had to ask Elizabeth's mother for consent to marry Elizabeth.

In the nineteenth century, in what is now Alberta, some Métis men accompanied by their fathers visited the woman's father to discuss the relationship. The son's father told the daughter's father the respect his son had for the daughter and what the son's intentions were. The daughter's father then asked her if she would accept the man as a husband. If she did, arrangements were made for a wedding and a decision was made about in whose house the wedding will take place. The house chosen was generally the largest in the area and the owners would offer it happily out of respect for the couple and their happy occasion.

In the first part of this century marriages were arranged, with the mothers usually acting as the initiators. To a lesser extent, missionaries were also

involved. Arranged marriages could be problematic because the partnership was not founded on love. The parental and religious expectations for the couple might not necessarily be those of the couple. In many instances, one or both of the partners were not emotionally ready for marriage. The Métis of the Mackenzie District maintained the practice of arranged marriages until the early twentieth century. Among the Métis living in the Red River Settlement, however, arranged marriages were rare.

In more recent times individual choice has prevailed, however, there still exists family and community influence, and the standards imposed by these institutions are more or less conformed to. It has been observed that this contrasts with the Red River Métis who have a tendency to break free from conformity by following their passions. Romantic love seems to be a prevalent and important feature of the Red River Métis. Among the Mackenzie Métis there is no stated rule of exogamy, however, no marriages occur between individuals sharing the same last name of a paternal ancestor.

Women were considered available for marriage after they had completed their first menstrual flow. Men were

considered adults when they had proven themselves as hunters, generally when they had killed a large game animal such as a moose, caribou or bison. These rites of maturity were originally part of First Nations tradition but had carried over into Métis groups who maintained First Nations customs and beliefs.

An ideal marriage partner was of the same faith and who came from the same community or village. The courtship period did not last very long. Métis men in early times commonly cemented engagements by giving gifts to the bride's father, a situation akin to early marriages between European men and First Nations women. For some French, Catholic Métis, an ideal marriage partner was someone of the same religious faith and from the same community. When marriage partners were selected from outside the Métis community, French-Canadian settlers were favoured partners. In such instances religion, family network, and language were important criteria in partner selection.

Intermarriage with non-Métis people and the institution of the nuclear family has had damaging effects on Métis identity. This is particularly true in Métis or predominantly Métis communities where there was an influx

of non-Aboriginal settlers (e.g. St. Malo, St. Agathe in Manitoba). Large numbers of French-Canadian settlers moved to Roman Catholic Métis communities because of a common language and religion. Within two or three generations the Métis lost much of their language and culture. The Métis settlement of St. Paul des Métis in Alberta underwent this process. When a large number of French-Canadian settlers moved into the area in the 1920s and 1930s, the community dropped "des Métis" from its name. Many Métis began to deny their heritage referring to themselves as "French".

Not all Métis communities have experienced this loss of identity through intermarriage, however. In areas where the majority of the population remained Métis, settlers commonly took on the Métis traditions and lifestyle. St. Laurent, Ste. Eustache, and Richer in Manitoba are examples of such communities.

In more recent times courtship and dating have changed considerably, due largely to the secularization of society. For instance, in the pre-1950 era, marriage customs and family life in the St. Laurent, Manitoba area, were characterized by strict morality, church influence, a desire to marry within the Métis community, and close family ties.

Young people today will date for several years before marriage, desiring to establish themselves economically first. They will also marry later in their twenties rather than in their late teens or early twenties as they did in the past. With the demise of the extended family most couples no longer live with a set of parents immediately after the wedding. Instead, couples prefer to establish themselves in their own residence, sometimes in a different region from both sets of parents.

Traditional Métis Weddings

Traditional Métis wedding ceremonies were lively, festive occasions, which involved the couple's extended families. Early on, ceremonies were very simple and probably included only the marriage partners, the missionary and possibly a witness. As time passed, the ceremonies, particularly in larger centres such as Red River, involved more family members and friends and could become great social events in themselves. Brides wore gaily-decorated gowns and shawls and the couple would be accompanied by bride's maids and groom's men. To announce that the wedding service was about to begin, young boys ran from house to house-ringing bells.

People arrived at the church in carts, sleighs, carioles, and on horseback depending on the weather.

Planning a typical Métis wedding in the mid to late-nineteenth century involved the cooperation of the entire family:

- The groom to be, the father of the bride, and the priest set a date for the wedding
- Mothers and female kin took care of cooking and organizing festivities.
- Men were contacted to play their instruments for the dances
- Friends and relatives provided the family with food for the meals
- Children helped out by taking care of young siblings

Arrangements for Métis weddings in the nineteenth century in Manitoba involved the entire family and many friends. The wedding date was set by the groom-to-be, the father of the bride and the priest. For people in Batoche, in what is now Saskatchewan, and probably in the majority of the Métis communities dependent on the bison hunt, weddings were regularly set for January and February. This is a period in which people would be more settled and not on the hunt.

Mothers, *Koohkoums* (grandmothers) and other female kin cooked and baked for the wedding feast. People in the community gave the family meat, berries and vegetables

for the wedding. Women got together to sew quilts for the couple while making plans for the celebrations. Even the children helped out, cleaning and carding wool to line the quilts. Men played their musical instruments for the dances. As the day of the wedding approached, the men helped make the house ready for feasting and dancing. Family and friends who came to stay at the homes of the couple assisted in the care of the young children and in cooking, cleaning, gathering firewood, picking berries and carrying water.

Some brides-to-be received dowries. Furniture, kitchen utensils, bedding and animals were sometimes given to women upon marriage. The dowries were not consistent from community to community or even within the same settlement. More than anything, the goods the bride received were dependent on the financial background of the parents. If parents were not able to give much in terms of material goods, they were always willing to donate their time and services.

Over a century ago in what is now St. Albert, Alberta, the bride would be transported to the church by the groom's bestman in a brightly decorated cart or sleigh, while the groom himself arrived in another vehicle with

an attendant. After the service, the bride and groom drove away together while their attendants, numbering four men and four women, followed after in pairs in their own carts or sleighs. The couple was received outside the church to the explosion of gun blasts and shouts. The wedding was always held in the morning and a dinner was held at noon, after, which fiddling and dancing started.

The parish priest of the local church conducted the service. Some Red River ceremonies involved family members giving speeches to the bride and the groom welcoming them into their new families. To finalize the ceremony the bride and groom would be wrapped in an *Assomption* sash in the form of the infinity symbol to signify their everlasting relationship. Other times, and in other places, the bride would receive a wedding band.

After a wedding, the couple's families hosted dances and feasts of wild game, bannock, pemmican, pastries, and cake. The father of the bride would serve his best wines, made from chokecherries, potatoes, or rhubarb. Toasts would be given to the bride, while the groom would be humourously instructed in the treatment and care of his new wife. The dances and celebrations were laced

with humour, mirth, and singing. While each community might have its own distinctive celebrations, they were all similar in duration and the intensity of the dancing and feasting.

In the pre-1950 era, five issues characterized marriage customs and family life: strict morality, church influence, endogamy, large families and close family ties. Today, endogamy is the only marriage custom that remains and it is being practiced in increasingly lower frequencies. Morality is more open, and people are freer of supervision from parents and the influence of the church. Religious faith is no longer as important as criteria for partner selection. People continue to get married in the church, but not necessarily to someone of their own faith or even in a church of their own faith.

In many Métis communities, marriages, to a large degree, were and are common-law and not solemnized. This was simply part of Métis culture for many decades when country marriages were the norm. For many women in northern Saskatchewan, this stems from dissatisfaction with the institutions of the Church, the legal system and the emphasis on the nuclear family. The Church placed a stigma on unwed mothers and cohabitation. Women were

expected to get married according to Church doctrine before having a family. The views of the Church often resulted in women assuming subservient positions to men. This, also, is a view commonly socialized within the nuclear family unit.

Post-martial residence refers to where a newly married couple resides after they are officially married. In the past, residence patterns among the Métis were somewhat different due to cultural, social and economic circumstances. For example, some traders, particularly with the HBC, would, when their contracts were up, take their First Nations and Métis brides to Britain with them. This would be a significant culture shock for the trader's wife, being isolated from her kinship network and extended family. Where couples moved to raise a family or resided influenced every aspect of the social development of their family and personal relationship. These influences are still evident today as our surrounding environment always affects us.

In nineteenth century Red River the bride and groom, once married, did not immediately go to live together. The groom spent his days at the father-in-law's house until the time came for the couple to leave for the home of the

groom's father. This was most commonly on a Tuesday following the service. After a boisterous welcoming party, and while living at his father's house, the groom built and prepared his and his bride's home. Once the house was completed the couple would move in and establish their own residence. The bride and the groom, in this situation, both came from the same community and remained there after betrothal.

In Rupert's Land men would frequently marry women who were born in a different area than they were. When women married it was tradition that they remained in the family's community. Once married the men relocated, at least for a time, to the woman's family's residential area, a case noted for the Grand Cache Métis of northern Alberta. A newly wed couple might live with the woman's parents until they were able to get a residence of their own which might or might not be in the same territory as the wife's family. In instances where the groom was a tripman (boatman) and his bride was located in a destination far from his post of operation he might relocate his bride to his home unless he could operate from the post nearest her home.

Sons in Batoche, St. Louis and St. Laurent customarily settled on lands adjacent to their parents'. In comparison, there is no pattern regarding post-marital residence within the Beaver Métis colony of Alberta. However, full adult status could not be attained until the couple established a family and a residence of their own. The ideal post-marital residence for Métis in St. Laurent, Manitoba in the first half of the twentieth century was for the couple to stay with either of the parents for economic reasons or until the couple had their first child.

Métis Child-rearing Practices

Identity and pride in heritage begins with the family. The way parents view themselves is passed on to their children. Parents introduce children to their values and beliefs pertaining to the social, physical, and spiritual worlds. These help to shape children's self-concept and their ability to relate to other people. Children who grow up in homes where cultural traditions and practices are part of everyday life are more likely to take pride in being Métis. With an emphasis on gaining prestige within a capitalistic economy (often through assimilation) and the nuclear family structure, pride in

being Métis often was deemphasized or lost. Children in many nuclear families now identify less with the traditional structure and values of home and family. In place of the extended family children are taking to other organized social groups, such as sports teams, for support and entertainment.

The residential school system also disrupted traditional family structures and child rearing practices. For many weeks, if not months, parents would not be able to see their children and, as a result, their influence would diminish. Métis cultural practices were replaced with Euro-Christian values and teachings and pride in identity was frowned upon. However, many nuclear families have made an effort to emphasize cultural pride in their children's upbringing and include grandparents as important educators and role models. The Métis have been able to adapt their economic pursuits, family structure and child rearing practices to changing social and political environments. Through it all, the Métis have managed to keep their identity intact and culture vibrant.

Métis families are rich in devotion and affection. Children are seen as gifts from the Creator to be

cherished. Traditionally, parents were very permissive with children. In some homes, there were no structured meal times or bedtimes. Children ate when they were hungry and went to sleep when they were tired. Nevertheless, Métis girls were more subject to rules of etiquette and behaviour than were boys. As well, they had more chores and responsibilities around the home. Boys were encouraged to practice their survival and hunting skills through play and games, and were often given more liberal treatment.

A great deal of emphasis was placed on communication and parents rarely yelled at their children. Parents preferred to talk to their children in order to maintain a peaceful co-existence. Spanking was an infrequent form of discipline. Socialization, not control and domination, was the preferred means parents used for child rearing in the past. Parents wanted to raise their children to operate effectively within their culture. These methods are still effective means of child rearing today.

Parents emphasized the importance of learning from experience and arriving at one's own conclusions. They tried to instill in their children a willingness to

cooperate yet be self-reliant. Young people were taught to listen to their Elders and to respect all living things.

Métis parents commonly used participation in all aspects of social, economic, and spiritual life as a method of teaching appropriate behaviour rather than lecture, control, and authority. As a result of this experiential learning, children have grown up being able to operate effectively within, and contribute to, their culture and community. For instance, rather than repeatedly telling a child how to skin an animal or do beadwork, he or she would simply be given the appropriate materials and allowed to try the activity. Whether they succeeded or made mistakes, the child would learn in a non-judgmental environment and be more likely to gain the skill more quickly than through lecture and testing.

In hunting and gathering families, children learned to value silence and became accustomed to hunger and loneliness. To this end, some babies were not fed for a few days after birth or were left to cry until they realized it was futile to continue. No child, though, was neglected if in need of care. Children were taught not chatter aimlessly or among old people. Instead, as a

sign of respect, they learned to listen quietly when Elders were speaking and to not look directly at a person who was talking to them.

The child rearing practice among the Mackenzie District Métis is more of a communal effort rather than strictly the responsibility of the parents. This loose structuring of child rearing is most evident in the scheduling of the child's day within the family context. For other families this structured mealtime does not exist. As well, few families have strict bed times for their children. In the summer young children often stay up late into the night until they almost drop from exhaustion or decide for themselves to go to bed. As a result, a child is looked after by anyone within the community who happens upon them, and within this brief contact the child is cared for.

Among non-Aboriginal middle-class families this may seem haphazard or even neglectful, however, no child is left in distress or discomfort for long. It must be kept in mind that the tolerance for discomfort is relative, because like the northern First Nations and Inuit children, Métis children are taught at an early age to tolerate discomfort and pain at a noticeably higher level

than non-Aboriginal society. But at the same time the child is conditioned to understand that he or she is surrounded by people who are concerned with their wellbeing and are willing to provide care. It is interesting to note that a characteristic of Métis childrearing is that youths and young men are as likely as women to play with, attend to, and soothe children not only from their own family, but from other families as well. This contrasts with non-Aboriginal society in which youths and young men by and large pay little attention to small children, except in some cases their own.

With regard to parental and marital authority in the past, it is noted that the men had little influence in this sphere. Due to their involvement in the fur trade as transporters, Métis men have traditionally been absent from the household for much of their lives. The effect of this absence was to reduce his role at home and therefore his authority, resulting in more feminine authority. Male dominance in the household existed upon his return, however, it was not overwhelming. Among the Red River Métis the mother and grandparents largely raised the children, with the father serving as the authority figure. Working life for the men began under

the tutelage of their father learning such skills as hunting and trapping. Non-parental Elders meanwhile shared the teaching of feminine roles to young girls.

It was a common practice among early fur traders and voyageurs to abandon their country families when they left an area. Initially, it was HBC policy for employees to return to Britain upon completion of their contracts, and not to take up residence in Rupert's Land. Consequently, men ended up leaving their country families behind. Their biological fathers gone, many of the early mixed-heritage children were raised in First Nations groups with little European influence.

Children who were left with the mother's home group, which was usually a First Nations or early mixed-heritage community, were named according to First Nations traditions. Some men in the HBC willingly left their children with First Nations kin. These fathers realized they could not take care of child within the context of their position in the fur trade and did not want to disrupt their children's identity and kin ties. They felt that, due to their frequent moves to different posts and inability to remain in Rupert's Land upon the completion of their contracts, it would be in the best

interest of the children to have a secure family and identity. The HBC eventually ruled that employees had to either take their families to Britain or assign part of their pension to the abandoned family. This ensured the child(ren) and mother had some degree of security when the father left Rupert's Land.

Sons received a Christian name and formal education in Rupert's Land, Upper Canada, Lower Canada or even Britain if the father remained with the family or took an interest in the child. Female children, generally, were left with the families they were born into, in "Indian country", and did not receive a Christian name or formal education. This dichotomy of privileges could, and often did, occur in the same family. Sons taken away from their First Nations or mixed-blood kin would be raised by their fathers, invariably gaining an English or French upbringing. This investment of social, economic and emotional commitment by European fathers to ensure a child's proper upbringing, education and placement was known as patrifocality.

Sons were taken from their families by their fathers at least twice as often as were daughters, who more commonly remained with the mother and her family. This tradition

of maintaining a familial tie to, the customs and traditions of, and residence with, the mother's side of the family is known as matrifocality. Having a link to the people in "Indian country", Métis women were able to aide European men in making contacts and trade partnerships. In addition, they were able to provide a means to ease the transition of their brothers back into Métis communities. Women, it seemed, formed the nuclei of many of the Métis families in the Canadian northwest while men (particularly European or Euro-Canadian traders) would come and go.

Métis men were traders, trappers and boatmen who also frequently had a reputation for having wives and families throughout Rupert's Land. Men were commonly away from their families for long periods of time or, occasionally abandoned them. This resulted in the mother being more influential in a child's development than the biological father. The father's authority in the home was minimal while the mother's was consistent. When a man returned from his travels, he exerted a certain degree of dominance in the household until his departure. If a family traveled and hunted and gathered together, both parents were equally influential in child rearing.

Raising children, while primarily the task of the mother, tended to be a communal effort. Other women and female kin looked after children when the mother was not around. Child rearing was loose-structured and anyone in brief contact with the child-helped care for him or her. In turn, when a female child was old enough she would reciprocate by babysitting the young children of her mother and other female kin.

The mother is the prime contributor to the child's early socialization. Mothers take great comfort and pride in their children, dispensing love and care. They teach children proper behaviour and etiquette, their language, certain survival and domestic skills (based, to a large degree, on gender), and their beliefs and traditions. In some communities in northern Saskatchewan where Roman Catholicism is dominant, it is the woman's role to instruct the children in the religion, particularly when preparing for communion. The mother, when she is the influential family figure, passes on the sense of inheritance, the sense of family identity and pride in cultural heritage.

Men are always around the baby. This is particularly true in extended families and close-knit communities.

Husbands or male kin take care of youngsters at home when a woman enters a hospital to have a baby. The father and male kin play a more active role in child rearing when a youth is less dependent on the mother, typically after the child can walk. Men take male children on daily rounds, placing more responsibility on the child to perform errands for other family members, and introducing him to a larger social world. Fathers, along with uncles and grandfathers, teach their sons many survival skills, such as how to hunt, trap and handle a weapon. On farms, the male children were taught to help with haying, cleaning the barn, feeding the pigs or tending the garden.

Young children receive much adulation and indulgence from both sexes. They are held and played with, taking part in all family activities even if they just observe. The baby sleeps with the parents, in a crib or in a hammock over their bed. The baby is swaddled when put to bed. In the day the baby is kept in the centre of household activity, which is usually the cooking and eating area. Métis children of both sexes learned early on to share in chores and responsibilities. This helped to develop the qualities of self-reliance, communal responsibility, and family interdependence.

The advent of the wage-based economy has disrupted the father's role in child rearing, however. With men having to take jobs away from their communities, they do not have a consistent hand in making decisions with the family and guiding their children's development. Making mutual decisions regarding the family was a traditional value of the Métis, but prolonged hiatuses by the men prompted the family to make decisions, which were practical at the time but not always consensual. Making money to support the family became a top priority, at the expense of traditional family values.

Grandparents were always involved in child rearing. They assumed the role of "good life examples" and were important educators and custodians of heritage. Because of their active role grandparents were sometimes referred to by the term "parent". Grandmothers cooked meals and made clothes for the grandchildren. They taught their granddaughters housekeeping skills, cooking, gathering, clothes making and snaring. The grandfathers taught survival skills, values and traditions and told entertaining stories, which provided lessons and information about the environment and the culture.

Large families were very common and often lived in small log cabins. It was not unusual for a couple to have six, ten or even sixteen children. If a family was particularly large, some children might go to live with grandparents or other kin in a separate household to help alleviate some of the mother's burden. If a mother and father separated, the mother frequently took her children to her mother's house for aid in raising the young one(s). In other instances, if a baby was orphaned or parents could not care for a baby another family would adopt the child. The natural parent or parents might visit the child in the care of the adoptive parents.

Métis Genealogies

Métis genealogical work is becoming a fascinating component in better understanding Métis history and family life. Today, many Métis search their family histories out of interest to better understand who they are and to provide tangible means of their Métis status. Indeed, in order to become a member of certain provincial Métis National Council provincial affiliates, and to be recognized as part of the Métis community, Métis often have to provide records of their ancestry. By doing genealogical work, they can document their Aboriginal heritage.

Genealogy is the study of family descent. This information is placed on either a pedigree or family tree chart. Genealogy serves to record the accomplishments and experiences of people in an historical, geographical, social and economic context. Tracing your family descent is important because it helps formulate your identity as an individual and it helps you understand where you and your ancestors originated. We all have unique family histories and they provide a great source of fascination and pride. For many Métis, the tracing of family trees shows the cultural, social, geographical and economic relationships among members in the larger Métis community. Tracing the history of Métis families creates a stronger connection to the community. You may want to encourage your own family and others in your community to begin research on family and local community histories.

Everybody has a unique family history, which is a source of fascination and pride. Constructing a genealogy and family tree chart helps people understand where their ancestors originated, providing a strong connection to their family and community.

The best way to get started on your genealogy is to sit down with your parents and grandparents and chart out the relationships of your family members and deceased relatives. There are two types of family tree charts that you may want to try. The first type of chart is a basic chart only of parents of past generations. The second chart is more detailed and traces the relationships of all family members such as your brothers, sisters and cousins and how they are related to each other. As you fill out your charts it is important to get all significant information such as birth dates, deaths, places of birth and dates of marriage and any other details that are significant to your family.

Many Métis families have passed down information and events from generation to generation in the form of oral history so it can be challenging to find written materials so interviews are an essential research method. Once you have basic family information visit your local library to see what resources they have that maybe useful. Local and community histories are great books to begin the search. Your library will also have information such as old newspapers, old city directories and scrapbooks that have wedding and engagement notices and other useful family information.

Once a person constructs a basic family history they should begin searching for written sources. There are some books already written which detail Métis genealogies or how to do a family history that can be found in libraries. A good source for researching Métis genealogy in Western Canada is *The Genealogy of the First Métis Nation* by D.N. Sprague and R.P. Frye.

Archives house historic images of and writings on topics such as early exploration, development, settlements, and fur trade posts. They are one of the most important sources for researching family histories. These organizations house different historical writings and records on topics such as early exploration and development, settlements and fur trade posts. The Hudson's Bay Company Archives (**www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca**) in Winnipeg, Manitoba is a particularly rich historical resource. It contains documents from across Canada, some of which date back to the seventeenth century. Most archives will contain church records, homestead records and census records. Census records from 1666 to 1901 are available for researchers and they outline details such as property ownership, housing, birthdates, place of birth, racial or

tribal origin, religion, education, employment or occupation of peoples across Canada. Church records contain data on religious background, births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths. Census records outline a person's heritage, employment, education, religion, and whether they own property. Homestead records can tell you the history of your land and who owned it from generation to generation. Consult an archivist about these documents. In addition, local genealogical societies can provide guidance, service, resources and information to help you begin the search for your family history.

Genealogical societies such as the Saskatchewan Genealogical Society (**www.saskgenealogy.com**), and historical and cultural agencies such as the Metis Resource Centre (**www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca**) and the St. Boniface Historical Society **(www.shsb.mb.ca/englishindex.htm)** also provide assistance to Métis interested in knowing more about their family genealogies/histories.

To obtain oral history information, a researcher has to be prepared to ask questions about ancestry, personal history, daily and family life, social events, education, economy, politics, and religion. It is a good idea to

record oral history interviews so as to not miss any information when taking notes. Interviews can also be conducted with a group of family members to help spur memories and remembrances. Try to make a list of questions before conducting the interview so you don't forget not to ask anything important.

Arrange interviews with people that you feel you can comfortably answer the questions. It is a good idea to record the conversation but make sure you ask for permission from the person(s) you are interviewing. Sometimes you may want to do group interviews with several family members as this creates an atmosphere where everyone can share memories and ideas and often more information can be remembered collectively by a group. It is important to ask family members questions about social, political, cultural, educational, religion-spiritual issues, practices, beliefs and values, traditional customs and ceremonies, personal history, family life, making a living, community life and daily lifestyle. Take the time to brainstorm as many questions you can think of that you want to ask the person or people before the interview.

Ancestry
Has your family always lived here?
Did they migrate? If so, from where, when and why?

What is your family's cultural affiliation(s)?
How do you identify yourself?
Did you or any of your family participate in WWI or WWII?

Personal History
When and where were you born?
Who were your parents, cousins, sisters and brothers? How large was your family?
Was there heat, running water, electricity and insulation in your home?
What kind of furniture did you have?
How did you and your family make their living?
Did they have a garden, farm animals, or practice agriculture of any kind?

Cultural Features
Discuss how any special clothes or designs within your family's dress code.
How did your family celebrate special events? How was Christmas and New Year's celebrated?
How were marriages performed and celebrated?
Were there any special arts and crafts practiced by family members?
What languages were spoken at home? Outside the home? In school?
What were your dances and/or social events like?
Were you or any of your family members affected by racism or discrimination?
Are there any special traditions practiced by your family?
Do you eat and prepare any cultural/traditional foods?
Was there any special stories and events passed down from generation to generation?

Family Ties and Family Life
Describe your chores at home and your brothers' and sisters' responsibilities.
Did you family do special things together, such as camping, hunting, story-telling, berry picking?
Was there a strong family loyalty? Who ran the household?
Who did the disciplining of family members?
Are there any other family members you remember and why?
Who were the significant people in your life who helped you to develop your attitudes, ideas, etc.?
Who raised the children? What was the role of children in the family?
Were there different jobs and roles between women and men?

Daily Life
Describe a typical day you remember as a young person.
Describe the house you grew up in?
Describe your community and how it has changed over time.
Where did you get your services such as food, mail and health care?
How big was your community? How was the community organized?
How did your father make a living? What were his duties and responsibilities?
What was your first paying job? How old were you?
Describe your work history?
Were you affected by unemployment? If so how did it affect you?

Spirituality
What role did religion play in your life?
What was the role of the church in the community?
Are there any special religious or spiritual customs in your family?
Do you think the church is more or less influential today than it was in the past?

Educational Life
Did you go to school? If so, where and when?
Describe the structure and organization of your school?
What level of education have you obtained?
What was taught in your school? Who were your teachers?
What were your likes and dislikes about school?

Political Life
What party or parties did your parents vote for? Did they vote in elections?
Were any family members involved in politics? If so, what was their involvement?
Did politicians ever visit your home when you were living with your parents? What did they talk about?

Difficulties in Tracing Métis Genealogies

It is difficult to identify the earliest unions between European men and First Nations women because they were not recorded. Instead, these marriages were conducted according to the traditions of the Aboriginal groups and

no official documents were produced. The arrival of missionaries in the New World quickly changed these marriage practices. The clerics did not acknowledge the "country marriages", referring in their journals to the wives merely as the trader's "Indian" or "half-breed" women. The missionaries worked vigorously to convert the local First Nations population, partly in order to stop such non-Christian unions. As a result of this conversion, First Nations women were given Christian names, obscuring their Aboriginal ancestry in what is now Central Canada. Thus, a person trying to trace their ancestry, knowing or suspecting that there is Métis and First Nations heritage in their family, would have a very difficult time elucidating the identity of their ancestors in early Central Canada.

In what is now Western Canada, there was not the same push for assimilation. However, missionaries in Rupert's Land (most of present-day Prairie Canada and northern Ontario) would not acknowledge country marriages. Prior to the arrival of missionaries, this was the prevalent form of betrothal in Rupert's Land. Because missionaries did not recognize this form of marriage, they refused to enter Métis or First Nations women's names into mission journals. A couple might be referred to as "the post

clerk Pierre Desjarlais and his half-breed woman". Only once marriages had been solemnized by Christian ceremony would the wives' names be entered.

Naming and marriage practices or how fur trade officials or clerics recorded names also affected the development of Métis family names – thus making tracing Métis family names even more difficult.

Polygamy, or having more than one marriage partner, presents difficulties for people researching genealogies. Métis men who traveled the country as trappers, voyageurs, or trip men were renowned for having numerous wives and families. Having more than one wife is known as polygamy. Practicing polygamy throughout Rupert's Land meant that a man might have sired numerous children. If the father abandoned these families, half-siblings might not be aware of each other's existence. Some of these children might not take their biological father's last name, and their ties to him and their half-siblings would be lost to history. These well-traveled men rarely kept journals. As a result, there would be few, if any, records of their relationships, wives and children.

It was not uncommon for Métis, Euro-Canadian or European employees of the fur trade to have several country wives, and children by several of these women. A modern researcher would have a difficult time determining the relationships between the men, their wives, and the children because few inland middleman traders and freighters kept journals. If a man had children with several, widespread women he might not take an active role in their upbringing. The children might grow up not knowing their connection to their father, let alone take his surname. As a result, a modern researcher could not find out about these children's full family history.

Women in many cases, though not practicing polygamy, mothered children by different fathers through their lifetimes. Depending on economic situations, men were sometimes unable to remain in one territory with one family. They might have to leave for other regions, having little influence in their children's development. Knowing that partnerships were commonly transitory, women would enter into relationships with different men. One mother, then, could have children by several men. The children might take their mother's surname because she would be the constant parent in their lives. This would

result in the same genealogical conundrum as suggested above.

Disruption in surname inheritance sometimes occurred in families of Métis men who were killed in the two world wars. Babies and very young children might be raised by the mother's family and be given their surname. Each succeeding generation, then, would maintain the maternal surname. The father's surname, though, would not be directly associated with his descendants.

Métis Surname Modification

Métis surnames were also modified. English-speaking government officials sometimes made errors when recording French-Canadian Métis names for censuses during Scrip Commissions. Officials recorded some names phonetically if the Métis person could not spell. A literate Métis, however, would provide a different spelling of the same name. Thus, succeeding generations of Métis might spell and pronounce their same surname differently.

Surnames can undergo modification, producing side-branches on a family tree. Errors were sometimes made in recording French-Canadian names when the English

government compiled censuses and lists of those who accepted Métis Scrip. For example, there are Métis who have the French-Canadian last name "Paquin". Phonetically this last name is pronounced Poh-kah. English speaking people spelled the name "Pocha". As a result, succeeding generations of Métis began pronouncing this "Poach-ah". Members of a Pocha family might not realize that they are part of the larger Paquin family. Similarly, a researcher would not tie the two families together in the same genealogy if he or she is unaware of the modification.

Métis Adoption of Nicknames

Nicknames are known to have been substituted for surnames and become established in records. For instance, Joseph Beaulieu of the Northwest Territories amassed considerable wealth and had many wives. As a result he was able to run the district along the southern Mackenzie River according to his own law, becoming a sort of "King of the North". According to legend, Joseph sent his son north to the Coppermine River where he met a party of starving travelers. One of these men was a prince of unknown origins. Upon learning of the elder Beaulieu's holdings and influence the prince gave him the title of

"King". The son of the elder Beaulieu adopted the surname "King" as his own. This surname was passed on to later generations and Beaulieu ceased to exist in this particular line.

The Beaulieu surname did not die with the elder Beaulieu, however. During this man's life missionaries convinced him to give up all but one of his wives. The parting wives returned to their family territories but continued to carry and pass on the Beaulieu name. Currently, four distinct Beaulieu surname groups claim descent from this man along the southern Mackenzie River. These groups are made up of a Métis and Slave Beaulieu group and a Métis and Chipewyan Beaulieu group.

Métis Disparity in Naming Children

During the early years of the fur trade there was a disparity in naming mixed-blood male and female children. In many instances, when the father took an interest in their sons, they would receive a Christian name and be removed from the First Nations or mixed-blood group to gain an education. A man's daughter, however, was just as likely to be left with the mother's group and not

receive a Christian name. The descendants of this man through his son would probably be recorded. Descendents through his daughter, however, would be lost to written history as his progeny. In such an event, it might be impossible to tie a sister and brother together in a genealogy even though they are genetically related.

European fathers sometimes sponsored their mixed blood sons' education and upbringing. These sons received their father's surnames. However, their sisters might not receive the same sponsorship and surname. As a result of this naming disparity, records might not indicate that the sister or her descendants were related to the brother or the father.

The two children of Hudson's Bay Company officer Ferdinand Jacobs illustrate this naming disparity. His son, Samuel Jacobs, traveled to England for an education while his daughter, Thu'cotch remained in the York Factory vicinity.

Questions and Activities:

1) What are some of the problems in tracing Métis family genealogies?
2) What are some of the avenues open to researchers trying to trace their Métis family histories?
3) Traditional Métis courtship was very different than courtship in the present. Outline some of the differences between past and present courtship patterns among the Métis. How are these patterns similar? How are they different?
4) What did the Church think of traditional Aboriginal marriage patterns? How did this affect the Métis?
5) How did the entrance of European women into fur trade society impact upon the Métis? Was this a beneficial thing? Why or why not?
6) How similar and how different would a contemporary Métis marriage be from a traditional one? Describe in you own words what a traditional Métis wedding would have been like. What sights and sounds would have occurred at these events?
7) How have Métis kinship patterns varied through time and space?
8) Discuss traditional Métis childrearing practices. How are these similar and different to current practices?

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