

## **The Métis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conference**

**June 18-20, 2003**

**Saskatoon**

**Day 2, Laliberte Sessions (A)**

**Start Clip: 00:50:32**

**Heather Devine:** Now, after doing all this research, I did find that certain themes emerged, and that's what I'm going to concentrate this paper on today, talking about the things that came up in my research that influenced whether a person ended up as identifying as a Métis person or not, because as, you know, that first generation of mixed-raced children, they were what we might call proto-Métis; they weren't Métis yet. They could go in different directions. They could either be reabsorbed culturally into a Native band and become culturally Indian, or they could be socialized as Europeans, or they could possibly be Métis and become that big "M" Métis, a person who identifies with the specific historical group in Western Canada.

So, how does that whole thing start? Well, these are the themes I've identified, and I'm going to deal with them briefly and offer some suggestions. These are the themes which keep on coming in. First of all, the presence or absence of Euro-Canadian or European males in socializing children; that's one of them, and I'll deal with that in a minute. The initial goals, the economic goals that these outsider males had in coming to the fur trade company in the first place, it makes a difference and I'll explain that. Epidemic disease. You'll say, "How, what does that have to do with being Métis?" You wait, and I'll tell you. Serial marriage practices—oh, this is a real fun one. Now, anybody who's done Métis genealogy knows it's just, it's really wild, especially in the first generation, it's pretty wild. The introduction of Christian beliefs actually has an effect, and not the way you might expect. And, again, economic conditions in Lower Canada, you think, "Well, what does that have to do with anything?" Well, it does; these are indirect things that I'm talking about, but they do have an effect.

First of all, as John Foster and Jennifer Brown and others have pointed out, it's really key to socialization whether the white father hangs around or not because they play a key part in socializing children. And one of the things that is related to this is one of the reasons that there are French Métis, because the Canadien engagés and Freeman who formed country marriages with Aboriginal women, they stuck around. Why did they stick around? The Canadiens that you hear about, who become Freeman in the upper country, who don't go back to Quebec, are different from the average contract employee. The pork-eaters that you've heard about, the pork-eaters are on small contracts. They're going to Grand Portage and they're going home. They're only there temporarily. However, the people who are signing three-year contracts going into the Athabasca area from Montreal, they are there for the long-term, much longer. Why?

First of all, those people come from families where the fur trade is a way of life. It's not something that they do for temporary money, like a summer job. I mean, everybody in Quebec at that time knew how to handle a canoe and snowshoes and they could get around, but the people who were signing longer contracts are people who are in the business. Their families are in the business. The Montreal fur trade is a family-centred enterprise. It's comprised of military officers, government officials, merchants, outfitters. And they all marry each other. An outfitter will marry the daughter of another outfitter, that kind of thing. And they hire their relatives to man canoes. It's all very closely linked by kinship. There are a few different occupational classes in the Montreal fur trade you should know about. You should know about them because these are your ancestors. They are importers and wholesale merchants. Some of them are involved in retail selling or fur trading. Outfitters. The outfitters are responsible for hiring engagés. They were responsible for servicing the inland posts with goods. They are in partnership amongst themselves or with wholesalers. Independent traders, also known as negotiants, they conduct their own trading. Merchant artisans, who'd retail their products to traders, and moneylenders.

Now, as I mentioned before, these people tend to marry amongst themselves. Now, even though the British took over the fur trade elite in Quebec after the conquest, there was still room to move for Canadian outfitters and traders. Those people continue to participate in the Montreal based fur trade. They are getting the financial backing of wealthy Canadians who have connections and money, and it's those individuals who move west, to winter in the west. And it's those people who are establishing the kin relations with Native bands because they're the ones that are staying there long enough to do that. And several men that we know of as being the patriarchs of Métis families in the West fit this occupational profile that I've laid out for you. The men from families of Montreal merchants, outfitters, negotiants, and their relatives are the men who become Freemen in the Upper Country.

**End Clip: 00:56:59**