I

The Early Years
1900-1932

1
Extraordinary Families

THE DECADE following the rebellion of 1885 saw the Metis rapidly disintegrate as a national unit. Where racial and national oppression by the Hudson's Bay Company had been the dominant social factors in the North West, class now became the dominant motivating force in the new West. Because of this, the Metis middle class, the wage workers and the educated elite identified their interests with the various classes of the new economic order enveloping the West. Among this Metis elite were the maternal parents of Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady.

Malcolm Norris was the son of John Norris, a classic example of the poor Scot who had come to the New World and made his fortune. Born in Caithness in 1826 to a peasant family, he went to work at age sixteen on a freighting schooner. He soon tired of the sea, however, and signed on with the HBC for a five-year contract as a laboring "servant." In 1846 he made his way to Fort Pitt on the North Saskatchewan River, where he spent the next eighteen years serving "the Company."[1]

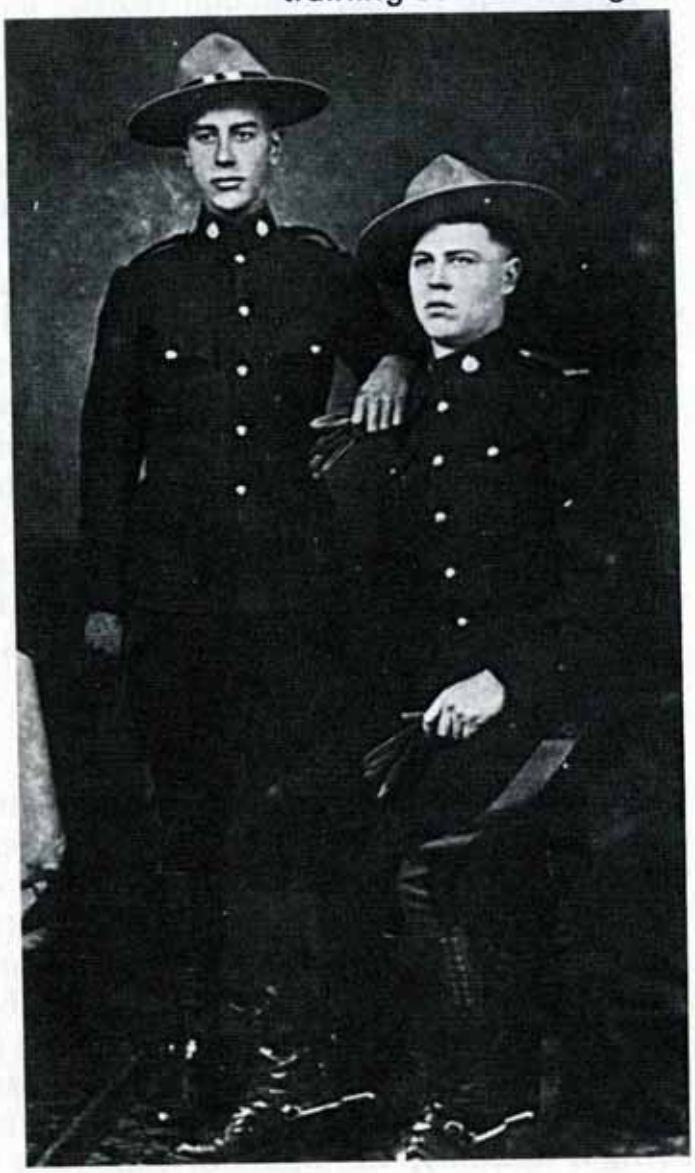
In 1864 John Norris abandoned Fort Pitt and the working man's life to organize, with a partner, the first brigade of Red River carts to make the journey from Red River to Fort Edmonton. The three and a half month expedition with 200 carts was a historic trip, pioneering a trail essential to growth in the Fort Edmonton area. It was also the beginning of Norris' success as an entrepreneur. In addition to his ventures in merchandising and transportation, he became involved in a saw and grist mill east of the fort in 1879. In 1882 he and Ed Carey established one of the first stores outside the fort, a store which was by the turn of the century the largest in Edmonton.

Norris' attitude to the Northwest Uprising of 1885 is not known, but it can be surmised that his perspective was that of a white businessman. One account by a contemporary suggests that both Norris and Carey's Metis wives had close contacts in Indian tribes and that it was, in part, these informed sources that enabled the white community to devise its

The infant Jim Brady

Kathleen Brady Allan

Malcolm Norris at seventeen with an unidentified friend at the NWMP training centre in Regina



strategy in the tense days of the spring of 1885. While he was considered by his peers to be a fair and honest man, Norris' integrity did not prevent him from engaging in the most profitable enterprise of the day: the purchase, for a pittance, of the land scrip which impoverished Metis were disposing of in great quantities. By the time of his retirement in 1897, John Norris was a wealthy man who had sold his interest in his store for $50,000.

John Norris married three times. His first wife—the Metis Mary Pelletier—bore eight children. His second wife, Bella Fraser, died childless at an early age. About the time of his retirement, Norris began to share his home with Euphrosine Plante. Like most Metis she was a devout Catholic, and though he was a less than devout Presbyterian, the difference prevented their marriage.

Euphrosine Plante, Malcolm Norris' mother, was the daughter of Xavier Plante, who was the son of Abraham Plante, a pioneer homesteader from France who had settled at Alberta Beach, near Edmonton. Xavier Plante and his Metis wife, Elizabeth (nee Belcourt), were prominent figures of Lac Ste. Anne, one of the oldest Metis communities on the prairies. A farmer and entrepreneur, Plante owned a saw mill and built the clay baking oven used by local women to bake the area's first loaf bread. He was also reputed to have grown the first wheat in Alberta. In 1871 he was appointed magistrate for the town of St. Albert. The Belcourts, too, were connected with business enterprise, and their name was among the first to appear in local church records.[2]

It was unusual for a prominent businessman in turn of the century Edmonton to marry a Metis—by now there was no shortage of European women. But if John Norris chose outside his race, he chose within his class. The union held great promise for its children's passage into the mainstream of the new society. The first of the children of "Jack" Norris and Euphrosine Plante was Malcolm Frederick, born May 25, 1900.

By 1885 two of the main centres of Metis nationalism, the Red River and the South Saskatchewan, had witnessed confrontations with the Canadian state. The only major settlements which had escaped conflict was the cluster of Metis mission settlements around Fort Edmonton. The villages of Lac Ste. Anne, St. Albert and Lac La Biche attracted refugees fleeing Red River in the early 1870s and the South Saskatchewan after 1885. These settlements grew rapidly following the Metis' illusory victory in the 1869-70 struggle. Persecuted by new Anglophone Canadians as well as old, treated to racist abuse and outright brutality, the Metis of Manitoba were gradually forced to abandon their birthplace. They fled south to Pembina in the United

States, to the Saskatchewan River Valley and to the agricultural mission settlements around Fort Edmonton.

Among those who travelled to the mission settlements in 1874 was Laurent Garneau, James Brady's grandfather. Garneau, one of the soldiers of Louis Riel's irregular army, had taken part in the liberation struggle led by Riel in 1869-70. He shared with his fellow soldiers and Metis loyalists the disillusion and demoralization which was the aftermath of those events.[3]

Laurent Garneau was descended from the Garneaus of St. Pierre de Montmagny, Quebec, who arrived in the colony in 1632. He was born in Bays Mills, Michigan in 1840. His father was the chief factor of the old North West Company at Sault Ste. Marie—before the company merged with its rival, the HBC. Laurent's mother was a Sioux, captured by the Ojibwa in a raid against the Minnesota Sioux. The North West Company factor, Garneau, ransomed her and placed her in a convent, where she received her education and learned the French language. Having ensured her a proper education, he married her.

Laurent Garneau made his first trading expedition into the Missouri River basin in 1859. Hostility from the Sioux in the area made trading difficult and later that year Garneau and his party were pursued by a Sioux war party. In dire straights, some of them near starvation, the party was rescued by a band of Metis hunters from Pembina. Shortly afterwards Garneau made his way to Red River, where he remained until his move to Edmonton in 1874. Five years after his arrival he met and married Eleanor Thomas, whose family had arrived at Red River from the Hebrides, via Hudson's Bay, in 1812.

The 1885 rebellion affected only a minority of the Metis in the Edmonton area. It seems likely that most of those willing to assist or in other ways sympathize with their Saskatchewan River brethren were expatriates of the Red River and former colleagues of Louis Riel. Such was the case with Laurent Garneau.

On May 11, 1885, Pierre St. Germaine, a Metis farmer living near Battle River, was arrested on the suspicion of being a Riel sympathizer. Threatened with execution, St. Germaine informed the police that Garneau was a spy for Riel.

It was probably inevitable that Garneau would be arrested, for his ties to Riel were too well known. However, according to stories passed down through the family, Garneau's fate was made easier by the presence of mind of his wife. When the North West Mounted Police arrived at the house, Eleanor Garneau was doing the laundry. She quickly reached up to the place where incriminating documents, including a letter from Riel, were hidden, placed them in the wash tub and calmly destroyed them by rubbing them against the washboard. Upon entering the house, the police went directly to the spot where the

documents had been hidden.

Despite the lack of documented evidence Garneau was charged and jailed for treason. Accounts differ regarding his fate. Family accounts suggest he was sentenced to death and was reprieved only through the intervention of prominent Edmonton citizens, including Frank Oliver, the Liberal politician, and Bishop Grandin. Garneau undoubtedly knew both men (Garneau himself was a Liberal and later ran for election). Contemporary accounts say, however, that Garneau was released after a month in jail awaiting trial. Three months later the prosecution failed to appear and the charges of treason were dismissed.[4]

Laurent Garneau carved a comfortable niche in the business and political world of the Edmonton area. According to some, by 1905 this once-simple Metis rebel could write a six-figure check on any bank in Canada. He had accumulated his considerable wealth in fur trading, timber, ranching and land interests—at one point owning much of Strathcona, an area of Edmonton now called Garneau. He was, as his grandson would write, "a man of substance, with an enviable rating in Dun."

In 1901 Garneau moved from Strathcona to settle in St. Paul des Metis, a Metis "colony" 150 miles northeast of Edmonton. The colony had been established in 1895 by Father Lacombe, who had persuaded the federal government to lease the four townships of land to the Church for an agricultural experiment involving the countless destitute Metis who then roamed the plains. Garneau would live there until his death in 1921.

Garneau's daughter, Philomena Archange, was born in 1876, two years after her parents had arrived in Strathcona from the Red River. Archange, one of nine children, became Alberta's first registered nurse of Metis ancestry. On November 28, 1905, she married James Brady, Sr., in Edmonton.

When Laurent Garneau moved to St. Paul des Metis in 1901 he was followed by his sons and sons-in-law. The cluster of buildings that marked the homesteads was known to local Metis as Garneau Village. James Brady, Sr., followed this tradition and moved with his wife into the sancturary of the Garneau clan.[5]

Brady was born in Black Rock County, Ireland, in 1877. He was twenty years old when he emigrated to MacGregor, Manitoba, to take up a job with the Canadian Pacific Railway. Unhappy with the way it treated its workers, Brady left the CPR in 1903 for an abortive attempt at homesteading at Ellerslie, south of Edmonton. From there he moved to Edmonton.

Brady was not from a humble background. An educated young man—he studied law at Exeter College in England—he was not forced by circumstance to emigrate. His family was wealthy and a tradition of

adventurism—and of liberalism—was well rooted. Brady's family had come to England from Ireland in the great exodus of the nineteenth century. James Brady's father became wealthy as a railway contractor and engineer. The family settled in Barnstaple, where his father sat on the town council and eventually became mayor.

At about the time of his father's death in England, James Brady was settling at St. Paul des Metis on the North Western frontier. Soon after, in 1906, he left St. Paul for a temporary residence on a homestead at Lac St. Vincent, a few miles north of St. Paul. Two years later, on March 11, 1908, James Patrick Brady was born. Years later, James Patrick described the event:

> The little log shack in which I was born stood near Lake St. Vincent, near the old St. Paul halfbreed reserve. The lake possessed a pristine beauty in those early homestead days before it succumbed to the blandishments of the tourist. The lake was originally known as Atimoswe Lake. In the euphonious musical language of the Crees it was referred to as Dog Rump Lake... The night I was born was marked by a raging blizzard. My mother was alone. After hours of battling through the raging storm, my father and Dr. Charlebois, the early pioneer Doctor of north east Alberta, reached me in a state of exhaustion. He was too late. Like William Blake, I had sprung naked and bawling into the world of man.[6]

2

Malcolm Norris The Early Years

AN OLD METIS FROM Saskatchewan described the fate of his people in the twentieth century this way: "It used to be that you would have a Metis driving his horse and wagon down the road and following along behind was his little dog. Now the white man is driving the wagon and the Metis is like that little dog, running along behind."[1] It was during the first two decades after 1895—as almost a million Europeans burst upon the Canadian plains—that the Metis world was decisively subordinated to white society. It was during this period that the young Malcolm Norris forged his perception of the world.

From his earliest days Norris lived in a world of contradictions. Not only were white and Indian realities separate but each held contradictions for Norris. Norris found that the dignity and peace of the Indian past co-existed with the shame and misery of the present. He also quickly discovered that, in white society, pious preaching went hand in hand with the inhumanity of racism. The turmoil caused by these early conflicts remained a bitter memory throughout Norris' life, so much so that he virtually never referred to his childhood in later years. The antagonism between the two worlds, and within each of them, bred tensions in Malcolm Norris which would always have both a personal and political expression.

Norris encountered the prejudice, jealousy and rigid standards of the new society early in his life. Jack Norris' "marriage" to Euphrosine Plante, a beautiful Metis woman proud of her ancestry and 35 years his junior, was resented by the children of his first marriage. Although they, too, had Metis origins, Norris' marriage to a Metis in 1852 carried no social stigma; in 1900 it did. This, and the "informality" of the union, condemned Euphrosine Plante Norris in the eyes of her step-children, some of whom were actually older than she was. Feelings ran so high that Jack Norris was obliged to maintain two homes. He shared his Edmonton home with a son and established another in

nearby St. Albert for Euphrosine and his second family, whom he visited on weekends.[2]

It was in St. Albert in 1906 that Malcolm Norris began his formal education, attending the small red-brick schoolhouse run by the Sisters of Mercy. He was an exceptional student and soon outgrew what the sisters had to offer. He graduated to the Seminary of the Oblate Fathers, a preparatory school for boys intent on becoming priests. Malcolm's parents did not intend to send him into the priesthood; the seminary was simply the only other school in St. Albert. After a year at the seminary Malcolm and the rest of the family moved to Edmonton. There they lived in a grand new house built by their father at the corner of 118th Avenue and 133rd Street. For the first time the family was really together.

On their return to Edmonton in about 1910, they found a city in the middle of its first boom—one which saw the population grow from 2,600 at the turn of the century to 50,000 in 1912.[3] This phenomenal growth devastated the Metis. Long before the boom peaked, the Metis "nation" was not only dead, it was all but forgotten, living only as history in the suppressed memories of its people. The majority of Europeans, having arrived a generation after the final Metis defeat at Batoche, knew nothing of the Metis or their history.

Though he had retired before Malcolm's birth, Jack Norris continued some of his financial dealings, usually at home and often over dinner. The Norris yard was criss-crossed with the ruts of the many wagons which brought Edmonton's ruling elite to visit. Among these were members of the city's religious hierarchy, including the legendary Father Lacombe, the founder of St. Paul des Metis, and Dr. McQueen, the Episcopalian Bishop. The Norris home presented an interesting social mix. True to his pioneer roots, Norris' dinner guests might include domestic staff, other Norris employees—Metis and white—children from the first family, and the occasional transient or adventurer looking for someone to stake his prospecting. It was common for thirty people to sit down to dinner.

The illiterate Jack Norris had developed a homespun liberal philosophy. He imparted this racial and ethnic tolerance to his children and practised it unswervingly. At one dinner a farm hand of Norris' objected to the presence of a black man at the table. Norris immediately told those who objected to pick up their pay and leave. A defender of the underdog, Jack Norris did not forget his humble origins.

However democratic and egalitarian his dinners, Jack Norris was a rich man and lived as one. His Edmonton home was luxurious, as Malcolm's sister Emily recalls:

> It had eight rooms, well furnished; the parlour had a Brussels

> rug tapestry, upholstered love seat and chairs, lace curtains as was the mode of the day...We had a very good piano and record player. The dining room was large, boasted three deer heads, mounted, one moose head and a walrus tusk—all the pride of my father's heart; a large oval table and a...beautiful English oak sideboard with hammered brass fittings.[4]

Malcolm's informal lessons in tolerance were bolstered by similarly informal lessons in national pride. Metis heritage and the rebellion of 1885 were constantly discussed. Both Jack Norris and "Freezien" (as his mother was called) told endless tales of the proud heritage of the Indian and Metis. Freezien delighted in telling her children stories of her own family and of the Metis struggles under Riel and Dumont. She emphasized her pride in Riel, "a man who defended the weak."

It was not only his mother's stories which attracted Malcolm Norris to traditional Indian life. Much of his free time was spent with his half-sister, Elizabeth (one of Freezien's three children from her previous marriage), who lived and farmed on a reserve 25 miles northwest of Edmonton. She was a treaty Indian by virtue of her marriage to Dick Callihoo. As Emily recalled, "On the farm Malcolm was free to hunt all he wanted. In those days much of the area was heavily wooded, and prairie chicken, partridge, rabbits and deer were abundant. During these visits Malcolm learned to speak Cree fluently."[5] Malcolm probably came to know his mother's family as well. Her brothers, Xavier, Gaston and Felix, all married mountain Indian women and lived in the bush, north of Edmonton. Indian life naturally was not all romance. Malcolm could not have escaped noticing its pervasive poverty and deprivation. And the racism Malcolm experienced in town had an even uglier expression on the reserve.

Perhaps the only lessons which did not take root in Malcolm were the religious ones. Freezien was a devout Catholic and the children were sent to catechism every Sunday morning. Malcolm, in deference to his mother, memorized the catechisms, but his attention was superficial. He observed the Church's exploitation of native people on the mission farms, where the priests lived well off the labor of Indian and Metis. "Religion is a crutch, and death oblivion," he told Emily.

It may have been these conflicting images and observations which led Malcolm Norris to a seriousness and brooding uncommon for his age. He shared with his sister Emily a devotion to reading; his particular interests were history and the cultures of other people. He shied away from childhood activities, and outside of the family had no close friends. His intellectualism placed a barrier between him and his father, who had simple tastes and enjoyed simple conversation. "He was never

a boy," recalled Emily, "he was always like a man." Malcolm was impatient with those slow to see the world as he saw it. Impatience would remain characteristic of him throughout his life.

Norris needed no persuasion to pursue his education. He had been top of his class through his four years at the Jesuit College in Edmonton where he became fluent in French. At sixteen he was on the threshold of university. He had never wanted anything so much. But the death of his father in 1917 brought an unexpected end to his hope of attending university. It was a stunning and bitter blow.

Despite his devotion to his children's education, Jack Norris failed to provide explicitly for Malcolm's university education in his will. Norris' Scottish lawyer and executor, Mr. Gibbon, interpreted the will to the letter. He had been a frequent guest at the Norris table and certainly knew of Jack Norris' views on education, but when the family pleaded with him to interpret the will more liberally, they were treated in a cold and peremptory manner. There would be no university for the young Half Breed, Malcolm Norris.

Gibbon's decision ended Malcolm's education and his "childhood," such as it was. For Malcolm, it was the most devastating expression of the cruelty of white society. In Emily's words: "I think from the time that tuition was denied Malcolm he became a 'socialist,' always seeking to help the weak over the strong." It was decisive, too, in sharpening the tension between his different racial origins. Until then, pride in his Indian ancestry was taken for granted, the fruit of his father's lessons in tolerance and his mother's family stories. The racist abuse of power by the executor turned that pride into a weapon against Canadian bigotry. Malcolm Norris began wearing his Indian ancestry like a medallion. He later began to introduce himself as "Redskin Norris," and claim, to those least likely to appreciate it, to be an "improved Scotsman."

Malcolm's bitter resentment waned, and he entered the adult world of work. His father had provided generously for the family's upkeep and Malcolm was not obliged to work, but Jack Norris had also drilled his children in the solid, Protestant virtues of self-reliance and industriousness. Though he still lived at home, the first money Malcolm spent would be his own.

The termination of his education spelled an end, also, to Malcolm's niche in bourgeois society. His first experience as a member of the working class was at the Dunwagon Lumber Mill, where he "rode the saw, cutting logs into lumber." The job was short-lived, as Malcolm, drawn perhaps by his parents' vivid portrayal of his people's romantic past, sought adventure. Considering his future political convictions, his choice of "adventure" was ironic. At age seventeen, Malcolm Norris joined the Royal North West Mounted Police (RNWMP), enticed by

the news that a contingent of the force was going to Russia to fight the Bolsheviks!*

Norris' squadron did go to Siberia in 1918, but he did not. In 1917 the force established a minimum age of eighteen for those joining the squadron, and Malcolm's career ended with the completion of his training in Regina.

Disappointed at being barred from one adventure, Malcolm was soon off on another. In 1919 he entered the fur trade—the business which had opened the West but which was now little more than a historical curiosity. The Hudson's Bay Company still dominated the trade, and it was with the company that Malcolm first found work, at Fort Vermillion on the Peace River. In 1921 he became assistant post manager at the company's fort at Little Red River, a position he retained until the summer of 1923.[7]

By the end of his stay he was disenchanted with the way the company mistreated and cheated the Indian trappers. Among the numerous ploys used to cheat the Indian was the "counting trick." A company employee would count out the number of furs brought for sale, and as he did so would lay them on top of a large pile already there for the purpose. Inevitably the number would be smaller than the Indian claimed, but as the evidence was now hidden among unidentifiable furs the Indian had little choice but to accept. The company's attempts to extract the maximum profit from their trade with the Indian were legion. The Indians would put up at the company bunkhouse for the duration of their stay at the village, and Malcolm was often ordered to charge them enough for board and room to cover the cost of the furs. Even government assistance to Indians was abused; the Indian Affairs Branch gave bacon, lard and flour to the company for distribution to Indians. The company followed the practice of substituting its rancid supplies and keeping the government supplies for its own trade.

Following his resignation from the company, Norris opened a trading post of his own opposite the Hay Camp on Slave River near Fort Fitzgerald. He was motivated as much by a desire to give the Indian trappers a fair deal as he was by making a living.

He might well have returned to Edmonton and to university in 1921, when he received his first yearly stipend provided in his father's will. But four years of earning a living in the wilderness had apparently

*Saskatchewan and Alberta had their own provincial police, and during the war the RNWMP's main task was to help the Dominion Police put down opposition to conscription and government corruption in war activities. It was also keeping a watchful eye on potential subversives of Hungarian, German and, after the Russian revolution, eastern European descent. When the "subversive" threat failed to materialize, the RNWMP allowed its members to join the army, and in the true spirit of anti-communism they formed a special squad to go to Siberia.[6]

tempered his wish for a formal education. In any case, thoughts of returning to school were set aside that same year by his marriage to Mary Celina Tardiff. The inheritance money would go instead to purchase a freighter canoe to service Norris' trading business. Malcolm and Celina would spend the next five years—trading, trapping and hunting—in and around the Fort Fitzgerald area.

In the far north Norris was almost entirely removed from the new settler society and Celina reflected the life he had chosen. A French girl of fifteen from Fort Vermillion, Celina was not a native but had been raised in the bush and was Malcolm's equal in the partnership that bush life demanded. In 1922 their first child, "Willy," was welcomed into the world by the repeated firing of Indian rifles—the traditional Indian salute reserved for the birth of male children.

While in Fitzgerald, Celina did leather and bead work, while Malcolm hunted and trapped in the rich fur-bearing land of the far north. He was among the most successful trappers in that large area which included parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan and the District of Mackenzie. On one occasion the family, now with two children, travelled with two other men by canoe to the barren lands to trap martin and white fox—a trip that involved 33 portages and took ten days each way.

Although his immersion in the old world of the North West seemed complete, Malcolm never cut himself off completely from the modern world. Far from the centres of learning, he committed himself to self-education. And he was determined that his children would receive a formal education. Celina was not spared Norris' preoccupation with education. The children's schooling would require a knowledge of English, and Norris therefore forbade the speaking of French in the home. Yet Celina spoke only halting English, and Malcolm's impatience prevented him from carrying out his promise to teach her to read and write English. The language issue reflected the constant tension between the two realities that Malcolm Norris tried to bridge. While Celina was a perfect match for her husband in the bush, she could not satisfy his intellectual needs. Each summer Norris would return to Edmonton, sometimes without Celina, to maintain contact with the modern world.

Malcolm never revealed who or what influenced his thinking in these early years. The northern bush was isolated from the radical ideas sparked by the struggles in the new order and spread by the itinerant workers as they criss-crossed the prairies. Celina recalled that he was always "defending the weak" in the north and this, combined with the books he read, must have shaped his political views. In search of intellectual companionship Norris even sought out local priests, although it seems certain he received few socialist ideas from this

source: he once physically ejected a visiting priest when the cleric attempted to burn one of Norris' radical tracts in the woodstove.

In 1924 Malcolm and Celina's second son, Russell, was born and in 1926—the same year that Freezien Plante Norris died, aged 63—Celina gave birth to their first daughter, Pauline. As the family grew, Norris was increasingly bound by family responsibilties, particularly education. In 1928 their first child, Willy, reached school age and the family moved to Edmonton. The next year, for unknown reasons, the family moved to the Entrance area in the foothills east of Jasper, where Malcolm opened a trading post and where, in 1929, Celina gave birth to their fourth child, Ethel. In 1930 they returned to Edmonton to establish a permanent home and see to the formal education of the children.

In his last two years of trapping in northern Alberta and the barren lands, Norris had taken an interest in prospecting. The vast Precambrian Shield was just coming under its first scrutiny by mining interests and geologists, and once in Edmonton Norris began classes in geology at the University of Alberta. Norris was to become one of the first prospectors to explore the area whose mineral wealth would fashion the pioneer mining town of Yellowknife.

In these years Norris struck a satisfying balance: prospecting provided a continuing link with the wilderness while Edmonton provided an intellectual milieu. In the northern trap lines and trading posts, time had all but stopped. By contrast, the Canadian prairies of the thirties provided even the most famished intellectual appetite all it could handle. The prairies were in political and social turmoil; a tremendous class struggle shook the country as workers and farmers confronted a capitalist system whose very existence seemed threatened. It was an atmosphere made to order for Malcolm Norris.

It is not clear when Norris first became attracted to socialism, but it is certain that his childhood and subsequent experience made him receptive to radical theories. He had seen the business class—albeit the small capitalists of Edmonton—first hand. He knew them to be racist and ruthless in their pursuit of wealth. As a champion of the underdog he could hardly ignore the fact that those whose cause he championed were denouncing and protesting not only their day-to-day misery but the whole social system in which it was rooted.

In the 1920s and 1930s, as today, the socialists were far from unanimous as to what constituted socialism. Proponents of socialism from the American Socialist Party, the Communist Party, Fabians and Labourites from Britain, and the gradually emerging amalgam that reflected the home-grown radicalism of the prairies—the "social gospel" of the radical ministry—all joined in the attack on the "moneyed interests" and took up the cause of the growing class of

destitute working men and women of the prairies.

Norris' humanitarian concern, his personal generosity and perhaps his intellectual curiosity contributed to an eclectic, undogmatic view of politics. His predisposition to action would led him to the political tendency that seemed the most "practical." Norris' impatient nature demanded a politics which could show promise of immediate results.

Norris was apparently first attracted to the political tracts of the Fabians and the British Labour Party theorists.[8] As Norris himself never outlined the development of his political thinking, one can only surmise that his attraction to British social democracy would have made him sympathetic to the founding of the Farmer-Labour Party, in 1930, and its successor, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). Of the variety of socialist tendencies that participated in the founding and building of the CCF the Fabians and Labourites were predominant.

Despite his attraction to city life and to the radical intellectuals of the CCF, it was not these people nor their politics which would move Norris to his most intense political involvement. Among the destitute and miserable in those depression days one group stood out clearly and unequivocably as the most impoverished, not only without work—for they were seldom given this opportunity—but without basic human rights, without hope, without dignity. It was with the Metis people that Norris would find himself fighting for social justice.

A.W. Norris

Jack Norris, founding father of Edmonton, circa 1900.

A.W. Norris

Malcolm Norris family home, Edmonton, 1930.

3

Jim Brady
The Early Years

SHORTLY AFTER THE BIRTH of James Patrick, his first son, James Brady, Sr., moved from Lac St. Vincent back to St. Paul des Metis. Brady's marriage to a Metis made him eligible for a land grant at St. Paul provided by the Church administrators of the exclusively Metis settlement. It was here, after years of restlessness, that James Brady, Sr., would finally settle down. And it was here that James, Jr., would develop his understanding of the new West.[1]

St. Paul was the only substantial Metis settlement established after the defeat in 1885. Among its founding families were a large number of Metis who had fought in the rebellion, including a branch of the Dumont family. Just weeks before his death in 1906, Gabriel Dumont visited St. Paul, where "Indian and Metis gathered from miles around to meet and talk with the grand old hero."[2]

The militant roots of the Metis of St. Paul would have a great effect on the young Jim Brady, as would his Irish father's radical liberalism and anti-imperialism. These two influences were to mold Jim Brady and prepare him, as he grew older, for contact with socialist ideas, the contemporary radicalism which would sweep across the West in the decades to come. Early in his life Brady would come to identify with the downtrodden. For Brady, the contradiction was not so much between the white and native world as between the rich and working people. Explicitly rejecting any notion of becoming what the Cree called *ogimow* ("big shot"), Brady would throw in his lot with Canada's laboring classes.

The Bradys moved to St. Paul just as the settlement was approaching its demise as a Metis community. Concern for Metis welfare was not the only motivation of the good Father Lacombe and the Catholic Church.[3] The Metis had frequently been betrayed by their religious leaders, for the Church, in the final analysis, guarded its own interests before those of its parishioners. The St. Paul colony was no different. While its

Glenbow-Alberta Institute

The Garneau sisters: Agatha, Archange (Jim Brady's mother), Charlotte and Placide Poirier, circa 1900.

Glenbow-Alberta Institute

Laurent Garneau, comrade in arms of Louis Riel, businessman and Liberal politician, 1918.

dream of a New Quebec died with the rebellion of 1869-70, the Catholic Church held tenaciously to the influence it still had. Though they could not have a French Catholic West they could, at least, have French Catholic enclaves. This was to be the role of St. Paul and the French Metis—a Catholic island in a Protestant sea.

But Lacombe's plan went awry. Substantial financial aid from the Dominion government was not forthcoming, and the strain on Church coffers became unacceptable. Furthermore, the new society which was engulfing the plains was even less prepared to accept the Metis as equals than the white population of 1885 had been. The Metis were no longer an acceptable flock for a Catholic Church trying to maintain its prestige in the new, Protestant, order. For financial and religious reasons, the colony would have to be disbanded. The decision was made secretly and the Metis' first hint of disaster came with the arrival of white "squatters" in the summer and fall of 1908. The Metis discovered that the clergy had proposed to the Dominion government that the colony be disbanded. Metis protests and a petition with 100 names sent to Ottawa had no effect. As in the past, the Metis' petition "elicited no reply or consideration."[4] On April 10, 1909, the colony was officially disbanded and its lands opened to general homesteading.

The Metis' attempts to defend their settlement obliged the Church to justify its actions, and it claimed that the Metis had failed to adapt to agricultural life. Yet, while there were Metis who were poor none were destitute and there were many who lived a comfortable and even prosperous life—as recorded by Jim Brady in his later capacity as Metis historian:

> ...The results attendant upon this [agricultural] venture were remarkably successful. Many Metis were comparatively well to do. Many possessed large herds of cattle and horses and other holdings of a comfortable nature...Some opinion can be derived from the following figures:
> Dion Laboucane: 1,200 cattle;
> Elzea Poitras: 400 cattle, 300 horses, chain of trading posts;
> Lawrence (Laurent) Garneau: 400 cattle, 135 horses, chain of trading posts, timber birth and saw mill;
> Louis LaFramboise: 160 extra grade cattle, threshing machine;
> Jean Lariviere: 100 acres of cultivated land;
> John Ross: 125 cattle, etc. etc.[5]

The Church was not content to simply abandon the unwanted colony; it wished to replace the Metis with French settlers from Quebec. To accomplish this, the Church systematically attempted to defraud the Metis of their land. The white squatters had taken over the land in what

appeared to be a well-organized plan. The Metis asked the RNWMP and the Dominion land agent to intervene, but the squatters, supported by the clergy, ignored official orders to leave and remained on the land until it was officially opened for homesteading barely a year later. They then applied for patents to the land they already occupied in contravention of the Dominion land regulations.

Under the colony scheme individual Metis had not held actual title to the land. Pressure on the Dominion authorities by educated Metis resulted in many Metis receiving title to land they might otherwise have lost to the squatters. But the Church was determined to implement its new scheme. A secret syndicate comprising a Dominion land agent, a former agent of the Catholic Church and a local trader formed to purchase Metis lands. With the assistance of the influential local priest, Father Therien, many of the more gullible, illiterate Metis were induced to sell their lands. The Metis continued to resist, however, and, led by the more prosperous, educated Metis settlers, among them Laurent Garneau, and assisted by James Brady, Sr., the illegal syndicate was exposed, and its members fled the area. A Royal Commission was established to investigate the whole issue and, according to Jim Brady's documented account, "the lands were restored to the Metis by Order in Council during the dying days of the Laurier administration."[6]

Yet much of the damage was irreversible. The psychological and spiritual attacks on the Metis, led by the clergy, had a devastating effect on Metis morale. Many gave up the fight and sold their lands. It was a situation remarkably similar to that following the resistance of 1869-70, when racial abuse drove the Metis from Red River. Within a few years St. Paul was dominated by Quebecois, and the former Metis settlers became the laboring and servant class employed by those who had conspired to disinherit them. By the time Jim Brady was reaching adolescence, many local Metis were destitute.

Language and faith were inseparable to the French of St. Paul as elsewhere—the speaking of English was identified with Protestantism. The Bradys were the first family in St. Paul to speak English and, despite their devotion to the Catholic faith, were regarded with suspicion and resentment.

Despite their questionable ancestry the Brady family became both prominent and popular in St. Paul. Within a few years of moving to St. Paul James Brady became Dominion land agent and Post Master. His legal training was used to defend the Metis land against the Church conspiracy and, although his training was not officially recognized in Alberta, it allowed him to represent local people in court, which he would do in return for a tub of butter, a basket of eggs, or, as often as

not, for nothing. Archange Brady, who was a nurse, was the only medical professional for 30 miles and her services were called upon and paid for (or not paid for) in a similar manner to her husband's. The Brady children, of whom there were eventually eight (three sons and five daughters), would jokingly call their father a "gentleman farmer." James Brady, Sr., owed this tag to the fact that he received a substantial yearly stipend from his father's estate and seldom did any serious physical labor. The farm was run by Archange, who, with the help of the children, tended the 400-500 turkeys as well as at least a dozen milk cows. Harvesting was done with the help of hired hands, mostly Metis.

The Brady philanthropy was not confined to free legal and medical services, and the Brady children were advised to heed their father's favorite adage: "Ability plus Opportunity equals Responsibility." The Brady house came to be known as "Pennsylvania Station." The Brady doors were never locked; it was not unusual for the family to rise in the morning and find a new family sleeping on the floor. Had it not been for his wife's practicality, James Brady, Sr., might have given the family into poverty.

Of all the children it was James Patrick who took his father's example most to heart. At age eight he could be seen taking a sack of flour or the better part of a slaughtered pig to some nearby Metis family. For the recipient the gift was no luxury; families in the area were all too often in dire need.

The Brady generosity did not save them from racial abuse. White children, acting as proxy bigots for their more discreet parents, brought home to the Metis children the awful consequences of their colored skin. For the children it was a shocking revelation, for they had been insulated in an environment in which the only prejudice was against intolerance itself. In reference to his first year at school in 1915, Jim Brady noted in his Journal: "My first contact with racial discrimination. The unending ordeal of daily combat."

Jim Brady had not faced racial discrimination until he was seven, partly because of the benefits of being middle class. Life for the Bradys was not the daily struggle it was for most Metis. As well, the Garneau clan was among a handful of Metis families that were proud of their ancestry and history. This, too, was an outcome of their economic status. Pride in being Metis was a luxury only the most independent or determined Metis could afford. For most Metis, the greatest gift they could have was that of being able to pass as a white person.

St. Paul was a microcosm of the Metis dilemma after the turn of the century. Metis parents encouraged their daughters to marry white men if they could, for marriage was a sure escape—if not for the Metis woman, at least for her children. Metis women who married white men commonly denied their Indian ancestry as a duty to their husbands'

careers. Metis men were not so fortunate. It was a rare occasion for a Metis man to marry a white woman. That social taboo was one of the strongest in white society. The Brady children were often advised by whites to deny their origins—for their own sake. But the Brady family had no intention of denying their heritage. Not only had their father taken up the Metis cause in the Reserve lands fraud but he and Archange continually pointed out to the children their pride in Metis heritage. He constantly directed them to assist and defend Metis people whenever they could; that the Metis were an oppressed group had been made very clear to the Brady children.

In 1918—as the world awaited the end of the first Great War—Spanish flu swept the world and millions perished. On November 11, Armistice day, the plague was just beginning to wane in Edmonton. Edmonton's death toll was 445. In St. Paul 30 people out of a population of 500 died. Archange Brady was one of them. Archange's death affected James Brady, Sr., deeply. He quit his official positions and retired. For a time Anne, only twelve years old, looked after the youngest children. Shortly after their mother's death the six youngest children were sent to a convent while Jim remained in St. Paul with his uncle and aunt, Louis and Bessie Garneau. The Bradys would remain divided until 1930.

It was about this time that James Brady, Sr., and his eldest son began taking extended trips into the wilderness. Jim Brady was, in the language of the day, a "sickly child," suffering from a lung ailment which was thought to be developing tuberculosis. The trips into the bush strengthened the young Brady and consolidated the close relationship which had already developed between father and son. Jim Brady's adoption of his father's philosophical ideas and moral standards and his remarkable intellectual curiosity inspired his father, who became an enthusiastic mentor.

Both Jim's grandfather, Laurent Garneau, and his father were Liberal Party activists, and both had run for office. In 1896 Garneau ran for the Territorial Council but was denied his seat in a controversial decision. He also lost a scandal-ridden and disputed provincial election in 1913. James Brady, Sr., ran unsuccessfully for the Liberals in 1917.

Jim Brady's father had little personal ambition. Except for the 1917 election he never displayed any interest in achieving political power. Mostly he campaigned for others and managed elections for a string of Liberal candidates—provincial and federal—over the years. Brady, Sr., was a classic intellectual and liberal reformer. His home was a centre of political discussion and debate about the issues of the day. From his adolescence, Jim Brady partook of these political discussions. Those who knew him claim that he was never a liberal but always a radical, even before he identified himself as a socialist. But he had great respect

for his father, nonetheless, recording this account:

> Intensely nationalist in feeling and impregnated with the traditions of anti-imperialism and the struggle for national liberation he remained all his life in the spirit of liberal thought. He loved to associate his views with those of Gladstone in the days of liberal reform and Jeffersonian democracy. Although nurtured in the Catholic tradition he could utter with conviction that as an Irishman if he took his religion from Rome he did not take his politics from the Castle, that symbol of British imperialism so utterly offensive to all true lovers of Erin...in Canada he was a Laurier partisan...As a boy my father told me of Wolf Tone, Robert Emmett and Edward Fitzgerald and the rising of '98. He quoted Curr and the speech of Robert Emmett at his trial in 1903. Above all I remember Joy McCracken's expression of pity for Ireland on the eve of his execution in Mountjoy Prison, "The rich always betray the poor."[7]

Jim's intellectual aptitude was apparent at an early age—at four years he was reading. In his seventh year, he began an informal study of the Northwest Rebellion and other important events in Metis history. His Journal records: "Felice Ward, Metis patriarch, born at York Factory 1807 and reminiscences of the early west. John and Corbett Ross and other participants of the Riel Rebellion and their accounts of events." Laurent Garneau would relate first-hand accounts of the Metis struggles. Jim absorbed the rich Metis traditions, which more than compensated for the abuse he faced because of his "mixed blood."

In 1921 Laurent Garneau, Metis rebel, patriot and bourgeois, died quietly at St. Paul. He died a poor man—his huge land holdings eroded by taxes; his enthusiasm for free enterprise in the new order apparently worn out. He had retained throughout his life an open pride in his heritage and in his last years had lived close to the Metis. It was the end of an era in Metis history.

The year of Garneau's death also marked the end of Brady's childhood and the beginning of his political education and working life as an itinerant laborer. His first job, which he did not identify, was taken at Lac Canard, not far from St. Paul. His education in the "school of hard knocks" had begun with his expulsion from public school for his participation in what he described in his Journal as "the school race riots."

In 1922 Brady returned to grade school for his final year. He also began to select his tutors from the multitude of radicals, intellectuals, unionists and political activists who wandered the Western provinces in the twenties. The 1922 entry in Brady's Journal records: "Joe Landry

of Chicago, later professor of oriental languages at Northwestern University, becomes my tutor and I learn of superior books. I become the Governor General's medallist." The Governor General's medal was the highest honor a Canadian student could receive for academic excellence. But Jim Brady's disinterest in worldly goods and personal prestige soon revealed itself. After two weeks in high school he quit. Even at fifteen he preached, and lived, the doctrine of the "common man" and rejected assistance that would have enabled him to go on to university to study journalism. He explained that this would put him above his Metis fellows and alienate them from him. He was a working man and aspired to nothing more. From this time forward whenever Jim Brady was asked to indicate his occupation, he filled in "laborer." And this is what he was, and for the most part remained, for the rest of his life.

It was with this background that Jim Brady entered that unique political school of 1920s prairie society. Joining thousands of immigrant laborers, Brady spent nine years almost constantly on the move, drifting to wherever the next prospect of work happened to take him. His curiosity constantly seeking out new experiences and his political appetite whetted by his father's example, he became an avid student of the energetic philosopher-activists who abounded in the towns, on the farms and on the roads of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The abundance of characters that Brady encountered is hinted at in his Journal, which recorded the names of those whom he remembered over the years:

> 1923: At St. Paul again—with Harold A. Welsh, the Ontario Orangeman—I became a student of racial intolerance—at Boyne Lake with Fred Poitier, the Alaskan.
>
> 1924: To Fork Lake—Martin Halverson, the Minnesota wrestler, Slim Lundlie (ex-Minnesota) the frontiersman—Lawrence Semmler, wolf trapper and later arctic fur trader—Walter Clancy, ex-U.S. Marine and Chicago stock yard Irish, expounds Irish history and tradition—Sergeant "Nitchie" Thorne of the Mounted—Billy Retell, late U.S. Cavalry (circa Custer) and genuine rough customer—Aubrey Berriman, ex-Coldstream Guardsman—Walter Elliott, old time southern cattleman—the Rick Lake Settlement and the anti-Mannerheim Finns—the Symington murder case—Peter Erasmus of Whitefish Lake, guide to the Palliser expedition of 1857 and his lost journal. An episode of agrarian peonage—I give two months' labor for free...
>
> 1925: ...My cowboy days—cowboy profiles—George Sanregret

becomes my "sidekick" and mentor—I go harvesting at Cutknife, Saskatchewan, flopped to the sward, or my first encounter with demon rum.

1926: The provincial election of 1926—Henri Montambeault, a French Canadian independentiste—Amos Delisle, UAA Member for Beaver River—I hear Henri Bourassa, the great French Canadian nationalist—the Saddle Lake Indians filched of the best portion of their reservation—Irish immigrants and the St. Bride's settlement—Charles Pepin, Chief of the Winterburn Reserve, bull whacker and South African war scout—the Fraser family, Colin Fraser and the Fraser pipes—working at Winterburn, holiday at Lac Canard.

1927: The Lake St. Vincent farm—I work for A.J. Wood, yankee rancher—the road to oblivion or vin rouge at $1.85 a gallon—chewing on the rind of adversity.

1928: Hard times—at the Wood ranch again—the German immigrants from Olderburg...two months' grubbing, or more gratis labor—Marie, my first love, or how to acquire a maximum of experience with a minimum of details—I visit St. Albert...I go back to Cutknife—Jack Cameron, the old thresherman.

1929: Fish peddling in central Alberta—in farm peonage again—French Canadians and Irish clerics—the great Catholic crusade for the conversion of Bolshevik Russia—depths of my career—Mussolini's Latern Accord—Railway construction—British chauvinism again—militia service or the tale of the inept cavalryman—no jobs but fabulous fall shooting—the big bust—local speculators ride the toboggan.

Through much of his twenties' career as an itinerant worker, Brady lived and travelled with his cousins Harley and Louis Garneau. Brady's seriousness was clear from his dedication to learning, for while others in St. Paul or on the threshing crews were spending their evenings forgetting the hard day's work, Jim Brady would be in his bunk reading. While he did indulge in that classic evil, playing pool, he seldom went to the frequent dances—and when he did he never danced.

Clearly Jim Brady experienced difficult times during the twenties and yet never expressed any desire to live differently. He was, in his choice of friends and his political allegiance, part of that rapidly growing mass: the Canadian working class.

To the present generation of Canadians, Brady's attention to political theory and political development may seem exceptional, but in

the twenties it was common among workers. Many working people were disillusioned with the Canadian land of opportunity. For a huge portion of Canadian workers, life was a daily ordeal, one which brought with it a search for an explanation and an alternative.

In 1930 Jim Brady boarded the train at St. Paul once again and headed for the Cutknife area of Saskatchewan to work the threshing crews. He was 22 and had been working—when he could—for eight years. For eight years also he had studied politics and society from the vantage point of a worker. His views had not matured, or even jelled, but experience had dictated a rejection of traditional political philosophies. The year 1930 marked the election of a prime minister who would try to muzzle the discontent of the impoverished working classes of Canada—R.B. "Iron Heel" Bennett. The Conservatives were in power. The same year Jim Brady was coming to final terms with his political indecision. He recorded in his Journal: "Evangelical Protestantism yearning for a messiah—Noble Armstrong, the English railroader, introduces me to the theory of socialism." He had found a messiah of a different sort.

The next year found Jim Brady spending the winter at Wolf Lake among the nomadic Metis and Indians. His political education was taking on a new depth and intensity. In 1932 his tutors increased in number and in the militancy of their political theories, as his Journal reflects:

> Carl Axelson, Marxist agrarian leader of the Farmers' Unity League...The French Candian radicals—Dr. Gagnon, Dan Gamache and Florien Paradis—I meet more radicals—Nick Scraba, Ukrainian worker, becomes my inquisitor—Paul Chmilar, German farmer and veteran of the Ruhr rebellion—Louis Rocher, French journalist and friend of Upton Sinclair, introduces me to Darwin, Marx and Bishop Brown—a six months hiatus of religious indecision—Mary Michaluk, Ukrainian seamstress becomes my teacher—Bill Kardash, Farmers' Unity League organizer—another radical, Raphael Berlinguette, French Canadian Nile voyageur of 1885—the Edmonton hunger march of 1932—the reactionary role of the UFA govt.

Brady's "six months hiatus of religious indecision" and his introduction to Marxism were probably not coincidental. His family life had been marked by a strong religious content—long, daily family prayers, church every morning and their father's insistence upon the importance of religion. Jim Brady took his Catholic religion seriously as a child and young man, and while he lost his dedication to the rigidity and dogma of Catholicism, he had retained a philosophical attachment