

Elise Vivier Boyer. (1868-1976)

By Norman Fleury and Lawrence Barkwell

Elise Vivier was born on July 24, 1868 in North Dakota and baptized on April 1, 1870 at Teton River, Montana. Her parents were Michel Vivier born at St. Francois Xavier in 1847 and Elise Deschamps born 1867, also at St. Francois Xavier.

Elise married Norbert Boyer, Cha'-Cha' (Cat), the son of Joseph Boyer¹ and Felicite Patenaude, on January 16, 1921 at St. Lazare (Fort Ellice). Her sister, Isabelle Vivier, was married to Norbert's younger brother, John Boyer. Elise was a step-mother to her husband's children because she did not have children of her own.

Norbert was born at Indian Head on January 31, 1862. Norbert Boyer's uncle, Isidore Boyer, fought and died during last day of fighting at Batoche, May 12, 1885. He is buried at St. Antoine de Padoue Cemetery, Batoche. Norbert was first married to Julie Swain, the daughter of William Swain and Angelique Bryere in 1883 at Fort Ellice. Julie died on March 22, 1893 at Fort Ellice.

Elise, Mrs. Cha-Cha as she was known by one and all was a mid-wife and traditional medicine woman. She treated tuberculosis patients, and women's miscarriages and hemorrhages. She and Norbert farmed east of Fort Ellice next to Joseph Bell Sr. She made her livelihood by cutting cord wood and fence posts, trapping and hunting, tanning hides and making robes. She also earned money picking buffalo bones.

She was a great believer in the Roman Catholic faith but also practiced traditional Indian ways of worship. She attended Sun Dances, Sweat Lodges and Shaking Tent ceremonies. Mrs. Cha-Cha spoke of the Louis Riel Resistance and of meeting Riel when she was fifteen. Most of her people came from the United States to join the fight during the Resistance. It was after the 1885 Resistance that they settled around Fort Ellice. Previous to this they were transient workers descended from the plains buffalo hunters.

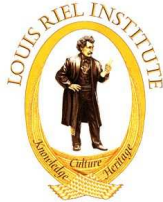
Her own clothing was made from hides, tanned to make gloves, mitts, dresses, vests, coats and moccasins. The thread she made from sinew. She made cutter robes from horse and cow hides. It is said that she raised cats and also asked farmers and townspeople for strays. After receiving a good number of cats she killed them and tanned their hides, then sewed them together to make cutter robes. The robes were colorful, warm and useful; often these robes sold for \$50.00 or \$75.00 each.

Mrs. Cha-Cha dried meat which kept for months. She made her own pemmican, and dried saskatoons for future use. She baked her bannock and made her own preserves and jams. Mrs. Cha-Cha could skin any animal, a job she performed for many trappers.

Her entertainment was old time dances, card games, playing checkers, going to Sports Days and visiting neighbouring reserves for Pow Wows. She spoke several languages, Michif, Cree, Saulteaux, Sioux, French and English.

¹ Joseph's son, Joseph Boyer Jr., Ptchi 'omme (Little Man), Norbert's brother, became Chief of Okanase now Keeseekowenin Reserve. Joseph Jr. was born circa 1857 and married Angelique Bone.

She was independent, a charitable person willing to help anyone. She fostered many Metis and First Nations children. Her livelihood was based around her cultural and traditional values. I personally knew Mrs. Cha-Cha when I was young and called her Grandma. She came to visit us at China Town. In her elder years she lived with a variety of relatives but moved to the senior citizen's home at St. Hebert, Saskatchewan then to Notre Dame des Lourdes after breaking her hip. On October 22, 1967 she was presented with The Order of the Crocus for her contributions to Canada. She died at age 108 and is buried at Notre Dame des Lourdes.



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