

Walter Falcon—Parks Canada Interview, March 12, 2012

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Amy Como: Okay, it is March 12th. And could you please tell me your name and home community?

Walter Falcon (WF): Walter Falcon and Lloydminster, Saskatchewan.

AC: Okay, and who were your parents and grandparents and where were they from?

WF: My father was Lawrence Falcon and my mother was Leona Pritchard. And my father's mom was Alice Foy-Falcon. His Dad was Joseph Falcon. And Joseph Falcon, his father was Gregoire Falcon.

AC: It was what, sorry?

WF: Gregoire. And Gregoire's wife, my great-grandma, oh I can't think of her first name but she was a Montour. Then Gregoire's father was Pierre Falcon, the French song-poet writer.

AC: Right, right.

WF: And he was married to Cuthbert Grant's daughter, Maria Grant. Then on my mother's side, her Dad was George Pritchard.

AC: Okay.

WF: And his wife, my grandma was Mary Pritchard, but she was a, before they got married she was a Whiteford. And, George Pritchard, his Dad was Solomon Pritchard.

AC: Okay.

WF: Solomon's wife was a Trottier. I can't remember her first name. She was a Trottier, and Solomon Pritchard's Dad was John Pritchard. He was an interpreter for Big Bear.

AC: Oh wow.

WF: And John Pritchard's wife was Rosalie Delorme.

AC: Okay.

WF: And Solomon Pritchard was at Frog Lake Massacre with his Dad when it took place, and my great-grandfather Solomon he lived to be a 106. My grandfather George lived to be a 107.

AC: Wow, you have a rich history with your family.

WF: Oh yeah, and Pierre Falcon, well the Gabriel Dumont Institute, someone there transferred him playing some of the songs and poetry into English. Might have that CD there with all that on there.

AC: Yep.

WF: And what else? George Pritchard was born down in down by Lac Pelletier.

AC: Where is that?

WF: That's south of Swift Current.

AC: Okay.

WF: And grandmother I can't remember where she was born. But my grandmother on my Dad's side Alice Foy-Falcon her mom was a Simpson.

AC: Simpson.

WF: She was born around Lumsden area.

AC: Okay, right.

WF: And her name was Sarah Simpson.

AC: Sarah?

WF: Sarah, yes.

AC: Okay.

WF: Her Dad was, I guess Sarah married a Foy, but her dad, I can't remember his name, lived in Lumsden area. A lot of history like that, but my sister-in-law has it all, that history there.

AC: Genealogies.

WF: Yeah. Birthdays, that kind, you know?

AC: Okay, yeah. Did anyone in your family speak Michif or serve in the military?

WF: Lots of them spoke Michif. I speak a little bit, but very little because I lost it when I got older you know.

AC: Right.

WF: But my mom and dad spoke it, my grandparents. And, my grandfather George Pritchard, he had a brother that was in the military. His name was Pat Pritchard.

AC: Pat Pritchard?

WF: Yes, Pat, Patrice Pritchard.

AC: Okay, how were the Métis treated in your community? Did they encounter racism?

WF: Oh, yes.

AC: Yes? Do you have specific examples?

WF: Well we went to these Catholic convent schools.

AC: Right.

WF: There were incidents like grade school, grade one and two, I think. They'd break pointer sticks over our shoulders, our heads.

AC: Oh my goodness.

WF: Some over the fingers. Take our lunches in the wintertime and put them outside. Come diner time, they'd bring them in, everything was frozen. They wouldn't let us go to the bathroom when we needed to, and we'd wet ourselves and stuff like that.

AC: Yeah? Wow.

WF: And whenever we wanted to play ball or something, they wouldn't let us play, or they'd give us a position out in the field, you know? Like a lot of us were good pitchers and back catchers and they wouldn't let us play in those positions. They used to call us "dirty Indians." Like we were Métis but to them we were Indians, call us "dirty Indians." And they'd give us straps, even if we didn't do anything, they'd give us straps over our hands. There was an incident in Rosetown, Saskatchewan. We went to a convent school there, and my brother next to me, Dennis Falcon, got blamed for something he didn't do, and they kept hitting, the nun kept hitting his hands with the strap and he wasn't crying. It got to the point where both hands started bleeding.

AC: Wow, that is scary.

WF: And the next, when my dad come home the next day he went right to the school and he went after her and he said, "You hurt my kids again," he said, "Nun or no nun I'll come and give you a licken" he told her.

AC: And what year was that about?

WF: Pardon me?

AC: What year was that about?

WF: Oh, that was probably in 1962.

AC: Okay. What other Métis families lived in the vicinity?

WF: John Ross.

AC: John Ross.

WF: His wife was a first cousin to my mom. Her mom was Adeline Whiteford, but before she got married she was a Pritchard. My grandfather, George Pritchard's sister. And there was Dan Amiotte and the same thing there, his ... Dan Amiotte's mom was a sister to my grandfather George Pritchard. And Dan Amiotte's wife, Auntie Margaret, she was a sister to my grandmother Mary Whiteford-Pritchard.

AC: Okay.

WF: They lived there.

AC: Did they speak Michif?

WF: Yes, they did, yeah.

AC: Do you know any traditional Métis songs or stories?

WF: Oh just one of Pierre Falcon's song.

AC: Would you care to share it?

WF: Ah, I can't remember the song.

AC: Okay.

WF: Well, the "Battle of Seven Oaks"...

AC: Mhmm?

WF: That was play for...They even had a song that was sang, it was a...Like the song "O Canada," they picked that for Canada, that particular song.

AC: Right.

WF: Pierre Falcon had a song that they sang, oh you know, for years? When Riel was in Manitoba there it was almost always sang there. It was kind of a Métis...

AC: Anthem?

WF: Theme song, yes.

AC: Sorry?

WF: It was a Western Canadian song for the Métis.

AC: Okay.

WF: And they would all share the song at gatherings. I can't remember the name of that song now. I forget that song.

AC: Okay.

WF: I think it was fiddle music like "Red River Jig" and songs like the...oh, I can't remember the name of that song now...."Red River Valley."

AC: Okay, right.

WF: I remember my mom used to sing it to all the kids. When we were small, you know, putting them to sleep.

AC: That is a nice memory. What sort of resources did your family harvest? And when and where were they collected?

WF: Well my dad and mom, my dad did a lot of work for farmers like fencing, picking rocks, picking roots, hauling bales, and that's how he made a living. That's how we ended up in Rosetown, Saskatchewan.

AC: Okay.

WF: That's what he did. Plus, he cut pickets. He would treat the pickets plus sell them to the farmers.

AC: Alright.

WF: And there were twelve of us, nine boys and three girls.

AC: Oh a big family!

WF: I was the...my brother Bruce, and my sister Linda then there was me, the oldest ones. My brother Dennis...we had to help lots, and my Dad, me and my brother Bruce used to go out quite a bit when we were eleven, twelve-years-old picking rocks with him. You know, Bruce, you know, we used to have to do that to help to make money to buy food, and that you know? Pay rent and stuff.

AC: Yeah. Did you hunt a lot?

WF: Yeah, we used to hunt rabbits, snare rabbits.

AC: Okay.

WF: Deer. My Dad used to hunt deer. My grandfather too. Our main source of food was deer meat and rabbit for a lot of years when we lived in the Baljennie area. A log house, I remember that. The dirt floor was so packed it was just like a regular floor. Used to have to sweep it with a bough brush. My grandfather used to take bough brush and tie them together and use those for brooms.

AC: Yeah, wow. Next question, what sort of traditional medicines were used in your community and family?

WF: We'd take bough brush and make tea from that. My grandfather used to get stuff from different plants for cuts and apply, you know make some kind of, cook it kind of in a pot of water, then he'd let it cool off. Then he'd put it on our cuts and sores and stuff like that. We'd use mud for beestings. And if something you know, we had fevers and stuff like that you would go see a medicine man from the reserve or something and get medicine there, you know, drink the medicine, bring the fever down and stuff like that.

AC: Right. Did anyone in your family live on a Métis road allowance community?

WF: Oh yes, my Dad used to. He was raised on a road allowance in the Vermillion area. Vermillion, Alberta.

AC: Right.

WF: Around Calgary, south of Calgary, like Turner Valley. Lived on road allowances. In summer time, we used to camp on road allowances. When we were kids, set up a tent on a road allowance and a farmer came along and said we had to move. Well, we just moved to another road allowance. Got kicked off there. In the wintertime, we'd try and get a house in town. My Dad would get a house in town. Kind of do work for the guy that owned the house. Cut wood and that for him to help pay for the rent. Then the summertime back on the road allowance, set up a tent, cut pickets, and work for farmers. Some farmers would let us live in a granary.

AC: Okay, right. That must have been chilly.

WF: Oh, yes. That's why a lot of us have arthritis now because of that.

AC: Yeah. Did anyone in your family make beaded moccasins or embroidered items?

WF: No, not my immediate family, but I had a couple aunties that used to do beadwork and make moccasins.

AC: Do you have, do you know what happened to these artefacts?

WF: Worn out.

AC: I think that is usually what happens.

WF: I remember my grandmother, my mom's mom, used to make... They used to pick chokecherries, she'd crush them up with rocks, then dry them up on the roof of the old house. And she'd use that in the wintertime for meals and that.

AC: Yeah? How d ...

WF: She'd boil pork fat down and used to call them *le corton*.

AC: Okay.

WF: What it was, it was lard fat and the grease out of them and they'd dry it out, mix that with Saskatoon berries, chokecherries and we'd call it pemmican. Or not pemmican, ... I forget the name of it.

AC: I think pemmican, no?

WF: I think it was called pemmican, yeah. And they'd dry meat, dry fish. Then in the summertime, my grandfather and Dad would get meat. They'd go along side the slough and put the meat in a container and put inside down a hole, cover it up with a piece of wood or branches.

AC: Right.

WF: Animals couldn't get at it. So, we'd save our meat and keep it cool so it wouldn't spoil. And my mom used to make lots of bannock, *la gallett, la gallett*, we used to call it.

AC: Yeah. How did your family celebrate special occasions and holidays such as Christmas, Easter or New Years?

WF: Oh lots of times we'd make ... My mom would make her own stuff for us or sew stuff like, sew some pants, sew some shirts then we'd get that for Christmas. And, my grandfather used to make little toys out of wood. Then whatever ... We had such a big family that the neighbours would bring things over, wrapped up you know? Give them to my parents there, and say from Santa on it. And, we'd, my Dad would get a tree, cut down a tree and we'd decorate it with popcorn and things you know? It was a big thing, like my mother, my grandmother on both sides, Christmas, Easter and they were big celebrations. I mean as far as they are concerned, the families, that was a big deal to them. Celebrate Easter, you know?

AC: Yeah, families have the opportunity to get together.

WF: Yeah, Thanksgiving, New Years. People would make *les boulettes*, like hamburgers, meatballs, with onions and mashed potatoes, turnips. On New Years, they'd take turns feeding the people in the area, you know, visitors. Then they'd have dances, New Years Day dances, they'd play fiddle music. Always someone there with a fiddle, that could play the fiddle.

AC: Right.

WF: They'd dance until... Well New Year's eve, they'd dance from New Year's Eve until the afternoon the next day. I remember that. And a lot of big families you know? We spent a lot of time at my grandfather George Pritchard's there. He had some land there just north of Willowfield, land in Willowfield, but he had moved to other land, kind of in the valley. And, there used to be a lot of big celebrations there, like New Years especially.

AC: Right.

WF: Métis people from all over. He'd even have Métis people come there and work for him. He'd find jobs for farmers. He always had tractors or a team of horses, a couple teams of horses, big trucks, you know to do work for the farmers. There were a lot of different families, most of them related. They'd have their tents pitched up. In the wintertime, at my grandfather's farm there. I remember in nineteen ... I think my Dad said it was 1950, my grandfather put a bunch, they sent a bunch of Métis people to Green Lake. They promised them a little chunk of land. They had to go to work there. My grandfather George Pritchard had a three-ton truck, and he made numerous trips hauling these people to... The government gave him so much money for each load of people he'd haul to Green Lake. And my dad, my dad and mom were one who, one of the people they took there. They spent a winter there and they had it pretty tough there. My dad asked for land and they said, "You guys aren't going to get no land here." It was promised to them, so my dad just left there, went back to work for farmers in the south. There was quite a few people in that area that stayed. To this day, there's still families from those families you know that, they were plucked from certain areas in the southern part of the province. They were taken there you know? They had no means of leaving there and they had to suffer and try to survive. Well they survived, but there was sicknesses you know, bronchitis, pneumonia. It was cold up there, a lot of them were from the prairies. They didn't know how to survive out in the bush.

AC: Right.

WF: Although they got some help from different people that already were born and raised in that area, but still it was a tough life there.

AC: I'm sure. Was anyone in your family involved with the Métis Society?

WF: Oh yes, my mother's dad. Grandpa Solomon Pritchard, he was involved with the Métis Association of Saskatchewan back in the '50s and '60s.

AC: And his name again, sorry?

WF: Solomon Pritchard.

AC: Solomon Pritchard. And how are the local Métis connected to Fort Battleford?

WF: Well let's see, actually a lot of them try to avoid going near the place because things that were happening. People getting hung for things they didn't do, and they were getting mistreated. So, they tried to avoid the place.

AC: Okay.

WF: And the ones that lived around there, the Métis that lived around there they just, they were kind of, they'd do anything for the people just so they wouldn't get mistreated. Because they didn't have any means to move away from there, they didn't. They were afraid, and they just stayed there. They took what was given to them you know? The racism that was there you know?

AC: Who were or are your family involved with the fort as well?

WF: Some of them. My father's relatives were, but I'm not sure of the names, but they were in the area.

AC: Okay.

WF: Like doing carving wood, stuff like that you know.

AC: Okay. Are there any historically or culturally significant landscapes or historical sites within the area that you consider to be important?

WF: Well that one I told you about. Those three, those young native men that were buried there.

AC: Could I ask you to repeat that story if you don't mind, just as I have the recording on right now.

WF: Yeah, there was these three boys, Indian boys, native boys that were from, I think they were from Poundmaker Band, I think. They went and found this horse, and they brought it to the fort hoping to get rewarded for it, and I guess, I don't know one of the head persons in the cavalry, whoever he was called, he had a court right there on the spot. And they said, "You guys stole this horse now you got to pay for it." They hung them. They hung all three of them. Took them way in the back and they hung them. And the... They said the reason why they did that was so to set an example so that no one tried to steal off of, off of you know, the non-natives. Like these were just young men, sixteen-years-old, fourteen-years-old.

AC: And you and your brother found the gravesite?

WF: My brother had heard a little bit of history of it, and he wanted to look for them, and he went and found the site, found the three graves. And we cleaned it up there. We worked for the town of Battleford, it was 1983, I believe it was. And we cleared the area, and my brother got the town to put kind of a monument there. It's just northeast of the fort itself down towards the river.

AC: Okay.

WF: Kind of on the side-hill, that's where they hung those three boys.

AC: And there is a monument there now still?

WF: There's a little thing, there's a plaque there, but no real information on it, hey?

AC: Okay.

WF: Just give me one second ...

AC: For sure.

WF: Yeah, just my sister arriving.

AC: Well we are almost done. I just have maybe six more questions or so.

WF: Sure.

AC: Was your family involved in the 1885 Resistance at or near Fort Battleford, Fort Walsh or Grasslands National Park?

WF: No, like I said, John Pritchard my great-great-grandfather, he was an interpreter for ... He was an interpreter for Big Bear. He actually, when they had the Frog Lake Massacre, he was over there with (inaudible) when they took these two non-native women from the area hostages. John Pritchard made a deal with Wandering Spirit and Big Bear. He wanted those two women for kind of like wives, extra wives. So, he traded some horses for them. Then a day or two after, in the middle of the night he took those women to safety at Fort Pitt.

AC: Okay.

WF: And, Big Bear didn't mind because he didn't really, he kind of lost control over Wandering Spirit and the young warriors. He was kind of glad John Pritchard done that, hey? Because Big Bear was a peaceful chief, a chief of chiefs. Like Poundmaker, Thunderchild, Little Pine, Red Pheasant, they listened to Big Bear. There was the chief of chiefs because they knew him as being a wise man, hey? He wasn't a very big man, but he was very wise. My great-great-grandfather John Pritchard was an interpreter, used to follow Big Bear to all different places and he would interpret for him, hey?

AC: Okay. What happened to your family after the 1885 Resistance?

WF: Oh, some moved to the United States, Montana, Dakota, Idaho. My great-grandfather Gregoire Falcon, he worked for the ferry there. He left and he came back with a wife. He came back to the Batoche area. And, they ran the ferry, they helped run the ferry there for a while.

AC: Okay.

WF: That was after Riel was hung. They tried to avoid getting too much involved, but yet they were still involved, but they kept a low profile.

AC: Right. Has your family been in the area for a long time?

WF: Yes. Well my grandfather George Pritchard, he lived south of Battleford for I could probably say 1942, 43, somewhere in there.

AC: Okay, and how did he make a living?

WF: He worked for farmers, fixing fence, , picking roots, rocks. And, he had some horses, and did horse trading and he had a few head of cattle.

AC: What sort of relationship did the Métis have with the Mounted Police at Fort Battleford? You kind of touched on this a little bit earlier.

WF: Well there was a few of them that they were afraid of them. When I was growing up as soon as they'd say here comes the police, the RCMP we were deathly scared. We were taught to be afraid of them because of the things that, I guess the government ... An example was those three young Indian boys that they hung there. So that stuck in, Métis people around the area, stuck in their minds, you know? Not to cross the RCMP. I should mention too that my grandfather George Pritchard when he was about twelve-years-old he lived in Ponteix, they lived in a cave.

AC: Okay.

WF: Along the river. Lived in a cave, that's where they dwelled, hey?

AC: Wow.

WF: A RCMP was looking for a fugitive and he wanted to get to a certain area, they told him which direction to go, and he was going to cross this river. And, it was in the spring. They followed, like my grandfather and a couple kids. They told him not to cross the river, to go down further, you know it's more shallow.

AC: Right.

WF: "Do you know how to swim?" And he said, "No." So, he said, "I don't have to listen to you, kids don't know what you are talking about." So, he crossed the river there and of course, he fell off his horse and he was drowning, so my grandfather and a couple of his cousins they jumped in and they pulled him out. The water was cold. They got him out and they caught his horse for him and he didn't even say thank you. He just ...

AC: Kept going.

WF: Yeah, he just kept going.

AC: Wow. Did any of your ancestors work for the Mounted Police?

WF: Not that I recall.

AC: Do you know if any of your ancestors took Métis scrip at Fort Battleford, Fort Walsh or Wood Mountain? Or any place else?

WF: Well my great-grandfather Solomon Pritchard apparently he took scrip. Same with my grandfather George, I think he took land scrip. On the Falcon side, my Dad's side, there was some Falcons that got land scrip. Oh yeah, my mom's side, like my great-grandpa Solomon Pritchard, a couple of his sisters. Well one sister was married to a Sayers.

AC: Okay.

WF: He got Métis Scrip there, and they got, they still have land out by the Paynton area. Métis land, I guess they call it.

AC: Yeah, the scrip. Okay, how can Parks Canada make Fort Battleford more inviting for Métis visitors?

WF: Well, I think if they brought more of the Métis history surrounding the area. Indian chiefs like Poundmaker. Actually, there is a lot of Métis integrated into Poundmaker's camp, Thunderchild's camp, Little Pine's camp. They just, when the treaty was made, the treaty had on there to look after the brothers and sisters, to let them in for treaty, and there was some Métis that got treaty with these tribes like Poundmaker, Little Pine. But, to this day there are still family members, like relatives, like Whiteford, that took Treaty. They live on the reserve, you know? Like some of these Trotters, like in Thunderchild.

AC: Okay. How might Parks Canada include more information on the Métis history of the area?

WF: Well, there used to be some pretty good information facts and documents that Gabriel Dumont Institute should have. That they could probably extract it from that, information and that concerning the Métis history and some of what they had to go through, you know?

AC: Okay.

WF: I mean it's nice to see a part of Fort Battleford, but I mean but there is a lot of information that is not there. The information that is there is just to make the non-natives look good.

AC: Right.

WF: There was a lot of things that the Métis done around that area to help, you know? To help build that area. There's a lot of Métis families that did a lot of good things there. They're not mentioned there. You know, certain families, they're not mentioned there.

AC: Are there specific people or community groups that you would recommend Parks Canada contact to improve their interpretation of Métis history and culture at Fort Battleford?

WF: Like I said the Gabriel Dumont Institute.

AC: Okay.

WF: There are some reserves, they have a lot of information, but they won't say anything because they are afraid, some of them are Métis, and they are afraid of being kicked out.

AC: Okay.

WF: You have lots of that, you know? Rich history there, passed down, stories and that. He'll tell me directly, but he won't mention any names because they don't want them to find out they took Treaty there you know? And, they are afraid that the natives themselves, or Aboriginals find out, they'll feel, "Let's kick these guys out." They're not even Treaty. I mean they're not even full-blooded Indian. They're Aboriginal. They're Métis, mixed-blood.

AC: Right.

WF: That's happened through the years. Sweetgrass, for an example. There was quite a few families that they tried to kick out of there because they were Métis when they got Treaty. But, they didn't give ... weren't able to kick them off because it was on Treaty. But, they made it, could be, hard for some of them. Some of them moved away from the reserve, but they still kept their Treaty.

AC: True.

WF: But they left the reserve, hey. Just so they don't have any conflict.

AC: Did you or any of your ancestors spend time in the proposed Grasslands National Park or surrounding lands?

WF: Whereabouts?

AC: Grasslands National Park area.

WF: Where is that?

AC: It's to the south ... I'm thinking not, then. What we can do is to move onto the last question. A cultural, it's kind of a long one so I can kind of help you out. There is a lot of information in it. So I'll start here: A cultural resources values statement is being developed for Grasslands National Park. The Park has identified a number of potential cultural values which may be important to the history of the Park. Would any of these identified potential value themes be important to you as a Métis person? And, I'll read those shortly. If so, which ones and what connections do you see? And are there any other cultural themes, which may have connections to Métis people that should be considered? So some of the themes that they have identified are the trading post, relationship with the bison, ranching, farming, great depression, governance and administration, creation of the park and early exploration, and surveys.

WF: The Grasslands, I wonder if it would be Lizard Lake area?

AC: I wish I knew the specific area where it was. I have an idea, but I don't want to say the wrong area. I think, all I know is towards the south and I believe towards Yorkton if I'm not mistaken.

WF: I don't think ... I haven't heard anything, you know.

AC: Yeah, Swift Current area, around there?

WF: There was my grandfather George Pritchard's family, both sides, Pritchard and Trotter. Grandmother Whiteford, I think they were involved there. A good person to contact that would have some history on that is a relative of mine.

AC: Okay?

WF: Her name is, I can't remember now. Her husband is Walter Blanke.

AC: Walter Blanke.

WF: Blanke. B-L-A-N-K-E. Blanche or Blanke...

AC: Do you know where they live?

WF: Swift Current. They live in Swift Current. Her name is Cecile.

AC: Cecile. Okay.

WF: Cecile Blanke.

AC: Okay maybe we even have her name on our list here.

WF: You probably do because she is heavily involved. She was heavily involved with that Lake Pelletier. They were trying to develop it. She got the Métis people around her, opposed to it but they still went ahead and done what they wanted.

AC: Okay. So now, that was our last question and I have that DVD ready for you. And I also have, if you have an extra minute or two, I have a note here to see if I can get anymore information from you that you would like to share from your relative Pierre Falcon. Is there anything, other stories or histories that you would want to share about him?

WF: Well Pierre worked for the North West Company.

AC: Okay.

WF: And John Pritchard also worked for the Hudson's Bay, North West Company. They traded furs and stuff. At one time, there was a John Pritchard and the first Pierre Falcon, they used to ride together.

AC: Okay.

WF: Way back in the early 1800s, late 1700s I guess.

AC: Alright.

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