

## Oliver Boulette: Métis Fiddler

Oliver was born in 1951 in the Métis community of Manigotogan, the son of William Joseph “Joe” Boulette (1915-1998) and Grace Wood. Oliver’s maternal grandparents were John Wood and Mary Bruce. John Wood moved to Manigotogan in 1876 to start a sawmill. The falling water at Wood Falls powered the mill. This mill operated until his death in 1893. Oliver’s paternal grandparents were Joe Boulette and Mary Jane Young, Mary Jane was from Bloodvein.<sup>1</sup>

Oliver was an excellent guitarist before taking up the fiddle at age 22. Oliver Boulette grew up watching his grandfather play the fiddle in Manigotogan, Manitoba, and learned the art from him as a young man, he started to play when he was given his grandfather’s fiddle. His great-grandfather was also a fiddler. Oliver credits his fiddle teachers, Tommy Knott, Wilfred Seymour and Rod Raven for his fiddling skills. Now Oliver shares this vibrant Métis tradition of fiddle music in a variety of community settings.



Oliver Boulette and Charlie Nabess play Métis kitchen music at Riel House National Historic Site (2013).

Oliver attended Residential School at Cranberry Portage, Mb. from 1966-1971. It was there that he met his future wife Laura Sanderson of Fairford, Mb. After high school Oliver worked for the Community Development Corporation, the local pulp and sawmill, the Co-Op store, then as a diamond driller, and underground miner in Red Lake Ontario at the Campbell Mine. Oliver Boulette began what would eventually be a long career as a civil servant by serving as a member of town council at Manigotogan.

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<sup>1</sup> The early Manigotogan settlers were Joseph Boulette at Lot #2 and John Wood at Lot #9.

He returned to school and completed his B.A. at the University of Manitoba. He then worked from 1982-98 in Thompson as a field worker for Northern Affairs, then director for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. He then came to Winnipeg and who served as Deputy Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, as well as Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines. After retiring from government in 2000, he answered the call to serve the Métis people and was Executive Director of the Manitoba Métis Federation from 2004 to 2010.

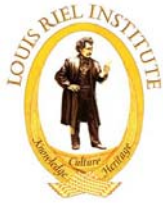
Oliver provided a chapter on fiddle music and the Red River Jig for the book, *Métis Legacy*.<sup>2</sup> He is also featured in Dr. Arthur Ray's book *Telling It to the Judge: Taking Native History to Court*. Oliver appeared as an expert witness at the *Regina vs. Belhumeur* harvesting rights trial in Saskatchewan. To convey the unique nature of Métis culture he talked about the history of Métis music and demonstrated Métis fiddle style in court, playing his instrument for the judge.



March 1964, Joe Boulette of Manigotogan, Manitoba, at Clarke Lake, near Wabowden, photograph by James Brady.

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<sup>2</sup> Oliver Boulette, "The 'Red River Jig': A Fiddle Tune and Dance That Defines the Métis." In L. J. Barkwell, L.M. Dorion and A. Hourie. *Métis Legacy, Volume Two: Michif Culture, Heritage and Folkways*. Saskatoon, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2007: 161-164.



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