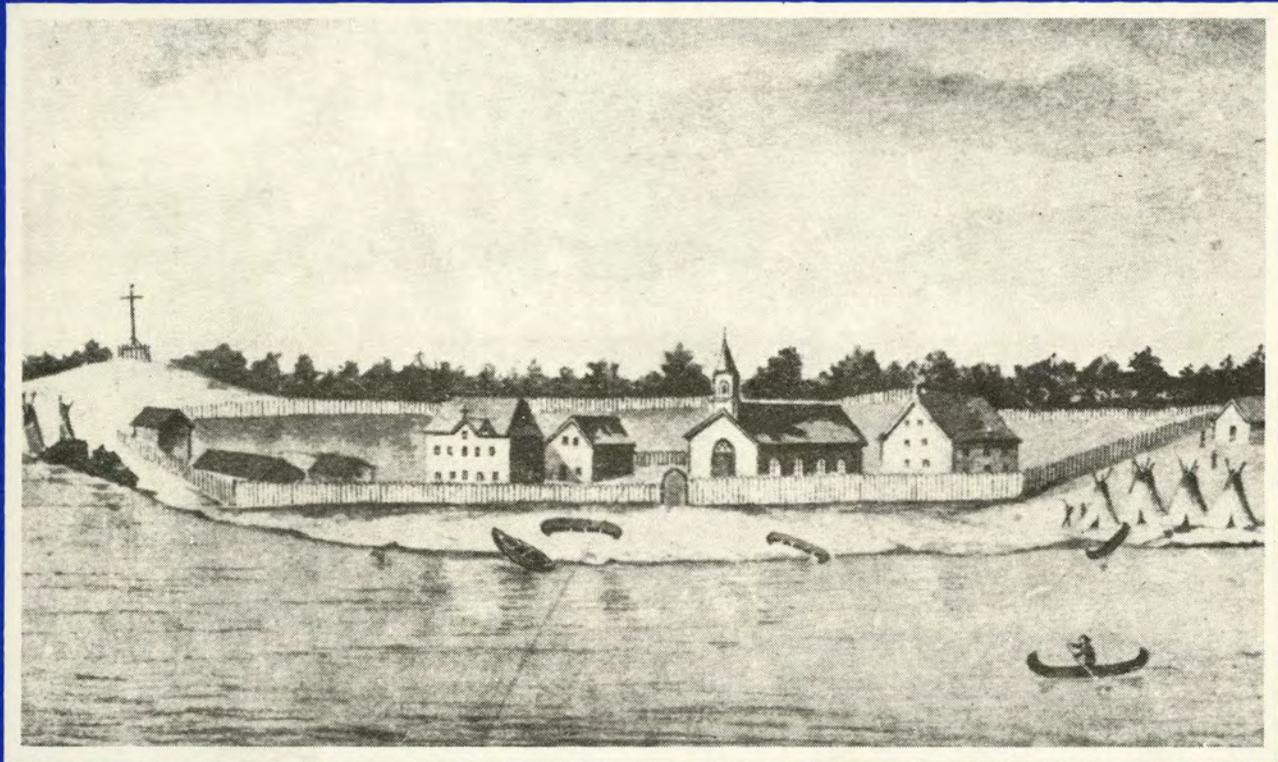


Ile-a-la-Crosse

1776-1976



"Chateau Saint-Jean", Ile-a-la-Crosse, 1860

Sakitawak

Bi-Centennial

INDEX

Prepared by Robert Longpré

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Ile-a-la-Crosse
Local Community Authority
Ile-a-la-Crosse

CREDITS

A book of this type has many cooks. Thanks must be rendered to **all** who assisted in the material, the content, and the publication of this book.

Thank You!

Interviewer Janet Caisse, for interviews and translations to English of the recollections of Tom Natomagan, Claudia Lariviere, and Fred Darbyshire;

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The Community of Ile-a-la-Crosse, for helping to make this book come into print.

Again Thank You!

Robert Longpre
November, 1976

Preparation of this publication has been a Bi-Centennial Project of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

It is our hope that this booklet will provide recognition and appreciation of our forefathers. Hopefully it will enable future generations to better understand their history and their heritage.

On behalf of the Local Community Authority, I congratulate the Bi-Centennial Committee, the contributors and writers who have prepared this historical record. I also thank the Department of Northern Saskatchewan for providing a special grant which made this project possible and helped us celebrate our Bi-Centennial.

Leo Belanger, Overseer
Local Community Authority
Ile-a-la-Crosse

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DEDICATION

This book would not exist were it not for the dream of Max Morin. A young man who has spent many hours in researching the village history, Max came to me for assistance in his desire to see a book on the history of Ile-a-la-Crosse come to life. Max brought the dream to the notice of the Bi-Centennial Committee and did all in his power to persuade the Committee of the worth and value of this project. Not that convincing was needed – for all quickly endorsed Max's vision. I, a stranger to their community, was presented by Max as the possible writer of the work. Thankfully, all accepted and trusted my abilities. I hope I have deserved this trust.

This book is dedicated to the vision of Max Morin and of the youth of Ile-a-la-Crosse. Hopefully another two hundred years will pass leaving the accumulated memories a continuing source of pride.

Much thanks must be given to the Bi-Centennial Committee in its efforts to support this book in as many ways as is possible. The future generations can do little but echo these thoughts when knowing that at least "they", the Committee, attempted to leave a lasting legacy of the past. Hopefully, the research and documenting will continue until all is made alive again.

Robert Longpre

WANDERING . . . Then Came The Whiteman

The restless highway of water shimmered in the June sunshine. Sakitawak just behind them, the canoes surged forward to reach the river opening. Furs waited in bundles for the long river trip to the "White" man. Stroke after stroke in song-like pattern bore the men onward. The lake was kind today. Manitou had bid the wind to rest and let his people pass this large water in peace.



"Lake Ile-à-la-Crosse"

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

Silence was on all sides, yet the world was filled with the sounds of an active world. The cry of the raven, the splash of the paddle, the laugh of the solitary loon, together with their brothers and sisters of the water, land, and the sky feasted in this natural, eternal silence.

This is our home. This land, this water, this air. Where ever we pull in to shore with our canoe and build the fire of warmth—that is our home. Manitou does not chain us to a piece of earth. We are like all of Manitou's children – free to roam the bountiful land and share in the life and peace of a peaceful land.

The canoes edged onward nearing that mighty river that travels to the "White" man's Fort. Behold, there appeared on the horizon, canoes – the canoes of "White" men, for all do not share the labour of the paddle. We have met you in peace.

"We continued our voyage till the twenty-fourth (June, 1776), when a large opening being before us (entrance to Ile-a-la-Crosse Lake), we saw a number of canoes, filled with Indians, on their voyage down the stream. We soon met each other in the most friendly manner".¹

Alexander Henry and Joseph Frobisher beached their canoes laden with trade goods. The presents were laid before the men of the north country. Liquor flowed, pipes were smoked, tea drunk and food shared. Words sailed through the barriers of race and language. Wonders of a country called Athabasca brought a gleam of greed and lust into the eyes of the Canadian pedlars. Trading followed the sharing of words and bodily comfort, and became part of the excitement. Knives, needles, kettles, cloth, hunting weapons and more poured freely into the hands of the wilderness people, all in return for the fur of the ever-giving land. Frobisher eyed in wonder the heaps of beaver, marten and otter before the trade canoes. Here, in return for almost worthless trinkets of a rich and fat civilization, the savages had given a fortune.

Soon time drew apart the parties and a return was made to their starting places. The wilderness trappers paddled across Lake Ile-a-la-Crosse to Sakitawak and on to their home camps. Their people waited. They would rejoice at the early return of their men weighted with the treasures of the "White" man.

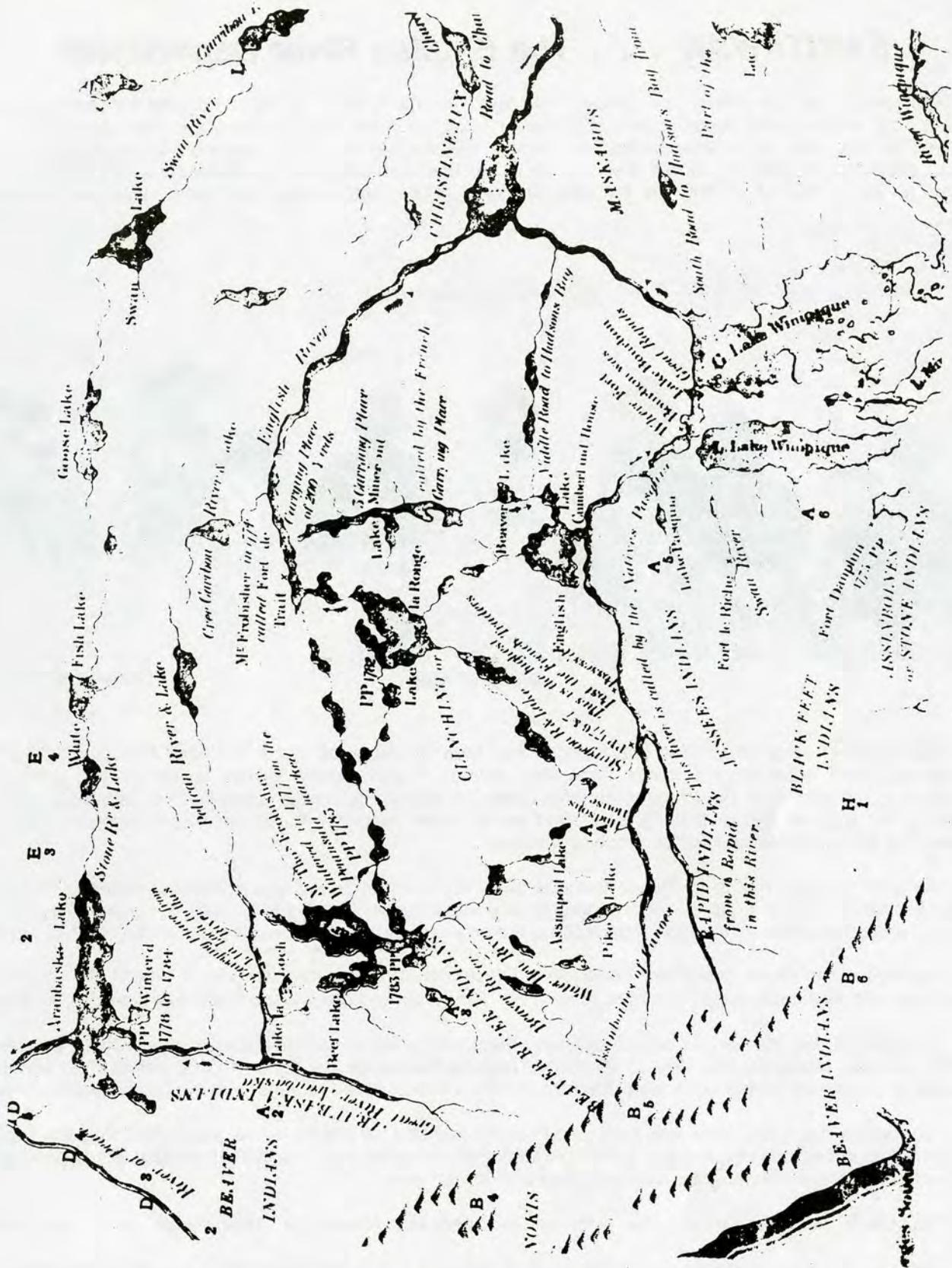
Returning to their post on Beaver Lake, north of Hearne's Fort Cumberland, Henry and Frobisher talked of the furs to be had in the Athabasca country. Some way must be found to get there. Joseph's older brother, Thomas Frobisher, was to go again up the Churchill River with a veteran of that river, Louis Primeau. Louis had set up a post for the past winter at a lake near to the trading spot at Lake Ile-a-la-Crosse, a lake since called Primeau Lake. Alexander and Joseph were to continue on to the Grand Portage and Montreal with their 12,000 beaver and large numbers of other furs.

Hopefully, Thomas and Louis would reach the Athabasca country and return in early summer with a fortune in excellent beaver.

Nature allowed Thomas Frobisher and Louis Primeau to reach the entrance to Deep River, at the southwest end of Lake Ile-a-la-Crosse. Here on an isthmus, they constructed a fort for trading and for wintering. Louis Primeau was then left to trade and Thomas Frobisher departed and followed other paths and pursuits, so suggests one writer of history, while others are quite certain Thomas remained at the fort. Whether Primeau, or Frobisher, or both – Ile-a-la-Crosse had been occupied and claimed.

Seasons passed by in quick order and the beaver lost. Furs piled high on the docks of Montreal. The Canadian pedlars, anxious to reserve the rich country of the north-west for their ever-growing wallets, decided to form an alliance and partnership. The year was 1779. The place, the Grand Portage. Now the rivalry of trade was to be directed against the English – the Hudson's Bay Company.

Peter Pond became part of this alliance. With the combined resources of Montreal, he was outfitted to seek the Athabasca country. It was Nature's intention that he should proceed to Ile-a-la-Crosse and remain at the wintering post constructed by Frobisher and Primeau. Trade was good and talk guided his plans to the spring. With the break-up of the waterways, Pond paddled northward past the lakes that bear his name, on the Portage La Loche, to the Athabasca country. He stayed the winter for trade. Then in the spring of 1784, he returned south and east to the Grand Portage only to find that he now belonged to a new company – the North West Company. The days of the "free trader" had come to an end.



PETER POND'S MAP 1785

V1/700 - 1785
PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF CANADA

SAKITAWAK . . . The English River Department

Voyageurs! Les Canadiens des bateaux! Their rhythmic chants fill the air as the loaded canoes head again for the north-west. Patrick Small, a veteran of the fur trade, sees the vision of tomorrow. The union of the "free traders" will end bitter strife between the Canadians so that the English can be stopped and pushed out from the inland positions. The August warmth drew the black flies and mosquitoes out to harass the weary paddlers. Still, better to be a free man than to be chained to a house and village and farm. Vive les sauvages!



Group of Nine

Courtesy Fred Darbyshire

So, it was in early fall of 1784 that Patrick Small took up residence in the Frobisher Fort. Seeing that only minor work had to be done to make ready the buildings, Patrick looked forward to the days to come. Little journeys to the camps of the Chipewyans and Crees left Patrick feeling the absence of a help-mate and wife. Then, to his surprise and glad delight he found one of these beautiful women who would come with him as a mate. The long winter would not be empty any longer.

As is the general rule in this land, marriage gives not only a wife, but also a whole community. Both sides react in brotherly fashion, the trader in generous benevolence and the band of his wife, in loyalty to the trader in trading and other affairs of survival. Patrick Small not only received a wife, he also secured the trade of her tribe.

Again summer came to Manitou's land. All of the people spread across the land in search of food and free moments with Manitou's earth. The hunt is soon on. The winter to come needs the thought and work of today.

In small parties, the canoes sail off to lakes, rivers and streams that have always been kind to the people. Often, a moose would offer his life and his body to help his brother be free of hunger and well clothed. His drying flesh was preserved for the cold days of winter silence. All must share together in the circle of Manitou's world.

September 1st, 1785, there was born unto Patrick Small and his unknown wife, a girl child. Perhaps because of some remembrances of a home in a different land, Patrick named her Charlotte. The house would now learn to live with the excitement, laughter and tears that a child can give.

Sakitawak has now known the union of two peoples. Already, a "new nation" is in the making.

What more could happen to give life an edge of interest? A child had given the post a new appearance. And now, there comes a stranger.

That fall of 1785, a brigade of canoes arrived at this post on Lake Ile-a-la-Crosse. Alexander MacKenzie, the party leader, had come to set up a post in opposition to Patrick Small. Hurriedly, he set his men to work at the construction. He then assessed his competitor and knew that there would be no easy task in obtaining furs from

under the practised eyes of Patrick Small. Alexander Mackenzie of the XY Company, made sure that he was not going to fail in this venture.

The winter passed without mishap to anyone, and again summer drew the canoes to the maze of rivers and lakes. The Grand Portage called to the traders once more. Goods were assembled from Montreal for each outlying post, and furs were sent packing to the great houses of the capitalists of Montreal and London. New faces came to try their luck in this northland, and some left to return no more.

For another year Patrick Small was to be opposed by Alexander Mackenzie at Ile-a-la-Crosse. Alexander's cousin, Roderick, was sent to oppose William McGillivray just up river at Lac des Serpents. Indeed, the country was beginning to appear even crowded. But, there was room for one more, a second girl child was born to Patrick and his wife. They named her Nancy.



Grandmother and Child

Courtesy Rose Daigneault

Alexander Mackenzie bent his quill and ink into busy service this year, trying to guide cousin Roderick and other outpost traders of his XY Company. Alexander's letters give impressions of the Cree and Chipeweyan peoples to young Roderick. On September 22nd, 1786 he writes:

"I met the bearer and three other Chipeweyans here last night – made them presents and they promised to go and find you to remain with you all winter. **You will require** to be generous to them. They are much afraid of the Crees. You will perhaps see **Le Petit Boeuf** – he is very troublesome in liquor – then be on your guard – he is an excellent hunter – try to retain him."²

A second letter soon after this tells Roderick of general news, mostly about the trials of tough competition. Mention is made of the general unwilling attitude of the Cree people to trade with him rather than with Patrick Small.

"There are about ten Crees at the other fort – all family connections – none of them come near us – I have no one that can make raquettes – I do not know what to do without that article – See what it is to be without women."³

With trade a hardship on the XY Company, it was only with relief that eventually the season came to a close with the approach of summer. In preparation for the annual brigade to the Grand Portage, the chiefs of the NW Company and XY Company called their workers into Ile-a-la-Crosse. Patrick Small's trader at Lac Des Serpents, who opposed Roderick Mackenzie was William M'Gillivray. Both of these young men had abandoned the traditional animosity of competitors, and had spent the winter in a very friendly relations. Their return to headquarters was a pleasant spectacle to the surprised district chiefs and native peoples.

"In the Spring after the trade was over, my neighbour and I on comparing notes agreed to travel in company to **Ile a la Crosse** our Headquarters – where our canoes arrived side by side – the crews singing in concert – not withstanding the surprise this **chorus** would have caused among the natives, we were both cordially received at the water side by our respective Employers – and what is more Mr. McGillivray and I lived on friendly terms ever after." ⁴

Canoes were readied and the two parties were off to the Grand Portage. Roderick was left to care for the XY Company's concerns at Ile-a-la-Crosse for the summer, and Mr. LeSieur was left by Patrick Small to care for the NW Company's business. Soon after their departure, the Athabasca brigade of the XY Company reached Ile-a-la-Crosse with the news of the death of Mr. Ross (Chief Trader at the Athabasca region) by Peter Pond's men. Roderick immediately set off to bring this terrible news to his employers meeting at the Grand Portage. Ill luck found him in a canoe that had a guide "knowing little or nothing of the route", so, the two managed to lose their way as often as was possible. Eventually, Roderick reached the Portage to give his news. Roderick relates in his "Memoirs" that:

"the proprietors of our concern lost no time in giving due communication of the misfortune to those of the other concern – Meetings upon meetings immediately took place and the result was the union of the two companies" ⁵

That summer of 1787 saw a change to strengthen even more the NW Company. Gone was the last of the infernal quarrelling of petty Canadian pedlars. In its stead stood a company which could and would dominate the fur-bearing northlands.

Patrick Small returned to Ile-a-la-Crosse, and took him as assistant, young Roderick Mackenzie. Alexander Mackenzie was posted to the Athabasca from where he was later to make his fame upon the discovery and mapping of the mighty MacKenzie River.

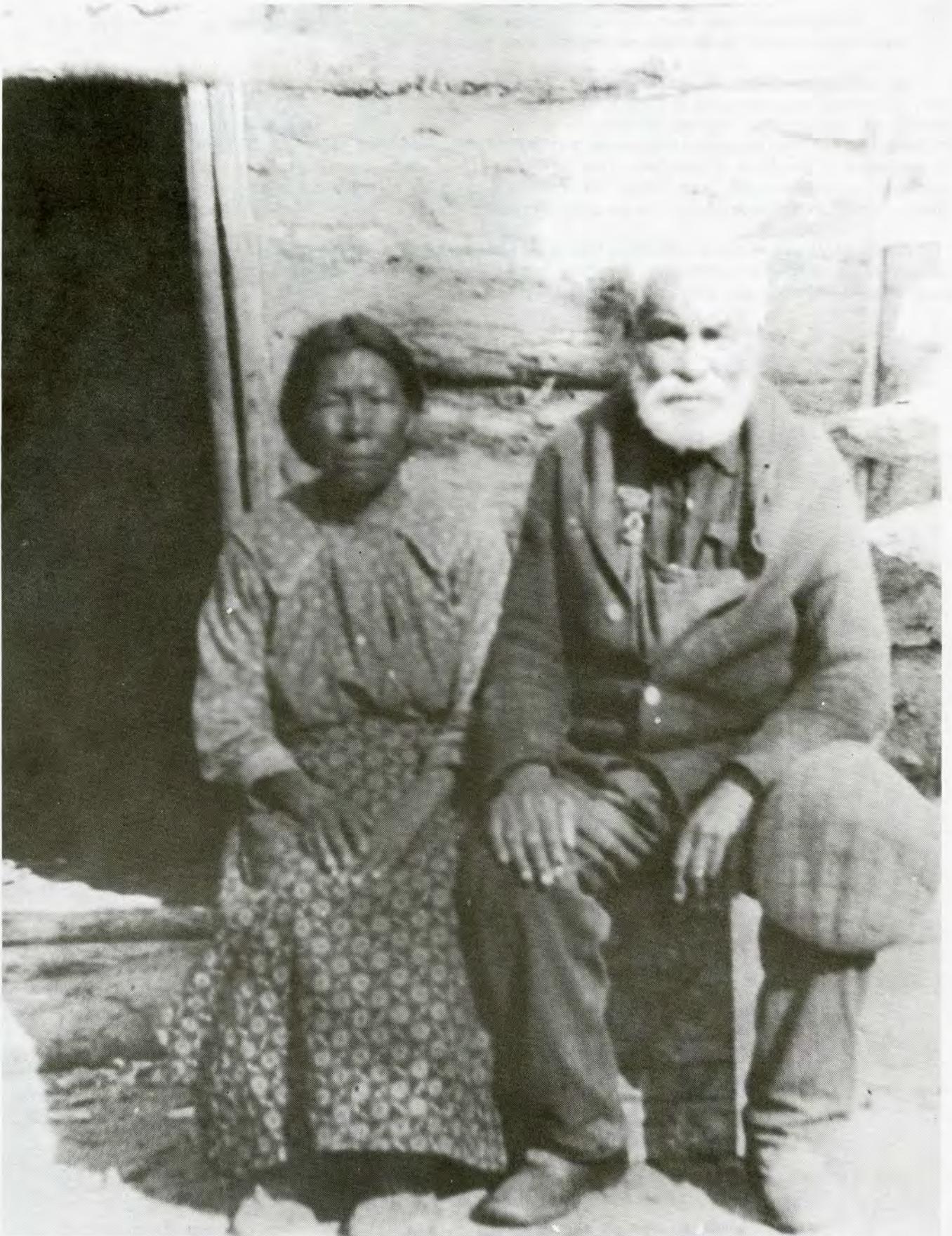
Life in Ile-a-la-Crosse again assumed the peaceful and productive occupation of securing what the land had to offer. Families prospered and grew with marriage between cultures a rule of survival. Many travellers lodged within the dwellings of traders and trappers alike. Voyageurs spent merry evenings recounting brave and daring deeds to new-found relatives and to their young and growing families. Stories of Canada and the great cities of Montreal, Quebec and Trois Rivieres, enchanted the wanderers who had adopted the Frenchman as son-in-law and brother-in-law.

In the autumn of 1790 a party led by Peter Fidler, Malcom Ross and Philip Turnor landed at Ile-a-la-Crosse. These men turned to Patrick Small for assistance in their need. They were low on provisions, several of them were suffering from injuries, and low spirited. Patrick allowed them the use of two houses. Thankfully they made camp and allowed themselves the opportunity to regard their new home for the coming winter. The houses in the yard of the trading post were built where today, nearly two hundred years later, the Roman Catholic Mission now stands. The three, being employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, saw the country and location for what it really was, the heart of the inland fur trade.

The winter passed with low provisions plaguing all at the post. Willingly, Patrick gave what he could to the Hudson's Bay men. Food, meat and net thread passed into their hands. On New Year's Day, Malcom Ross notes "Had it not been for Mr. Small, we should not have been able to be here last fall." ⁶ Human kindness had once again risen above the petty differences of men in rivalry.

Patrick Small, having spent seven seasons in the post at Ile-a-la-Crosse, retired from the fur trade and left the North-west. Knowing the ridicule and ill treatment awaiting his wife and children in the land of the "White" man, he left alone. Charlotte, Nancy and their mother were to remain at the post on a pension to ensure their survival against starvation and great want. So often were these trusting women abandoned with children to care for.

Soon after Patrick's departure, William M'Gillivray took over as chief trader. A journal was kept by Mr. McGillivray which shows the daily business of the fur trade. He notes that the local people were in the main part, Cree people. The year was a poor one. Fish became elusive and refused to be caught. The **moral** of all in the north sank. Trapping was quite unproductive in comparison to other years, most likely because hunger and want gave little ambition to work the trap lines. William notes to his friend, Roderick MacKenzie, who is now at the Athabasca post in a letter dated February 28, 1792, the problems plaguing him at Ile-a-la-Crosse. His disappointment causes him to lament:



Mr. and Mrs. Gerard at Fort Black Courtesy of Mr. McCallum and Ms. Merasty

"In short there never were such poor appearances – everything is going wrong – and it may be a matter of surprise to many how the English River has dwindled away." 7

So reads the records of the North West Company at Sakitawak. Openly they admit to the extensive trade with rum. Many times refusing to trade in necessary goods with the Cree and Chipeweyans when their trapping efforts had yielded little, they would give only rum and a "severe scolding", and wait until the next season. Some of these "White" men honoured their wives and children and remained. Most left with their accumulated fortunes to wed again in the lands of their birth. They left behind them young men and women that in their frustration and confusion would war with their fathers' brothers in search for a homeland and identity. Neither "White" nor "Indian" they had to shape the world anew to find the place; a task that has yet to be completed.

A home? What belonged to them of this land? Looking around, these children knew that this meeting place of Sakitawak, the place of their birth was their home. This settlement of Ile-a-la-Crosse survived with their births and increased. For the rest, they could only share with the people of their parents.

"EN GARDE" . . . Many Years Of A Trade War

These "White" men, they have done much to hurt us. They have taken our young men and taught them the way of liquor and dishonesty. They have brought death to us by a strange sickness and they leave many children to grow up never knowing their father, or enjoying the rights of being children. Already young men cease to listen to our counsel. Many do not even prepare themselves and their young families for the long winter months. They think the trader is the giver of life. Manitou, guide your children. They are lost in the treacherous greed of these "White" devils. Manitou, help us!

Many people died in the flu of 1781. It became harder for the Canadians to exert influence over the Cree and Chipeweyans by trade goods alone. Rum grew to a kingly role in patching up relations. Honesty, not a prime quality in a trader, saw no days of over-work in the beaver-rum trade. Rum was excessively watered down, then gunpowder added to give a stronger flavor. What wonder that the trade journals of M'Gillivray claim a serious decline in produce. The trade had drastically weakened the trappers physically and morally and left them prey to any passing disease. Yet, the people were not to be undone. Again health and vitality came to their bodies. And the fur trade again flourished.

In 1798 a young man arrived at the "new" post belonging to the North West Company. The date was September sixth; the man was David Thompson. Here young Thompson left goods for the post manager, Alexander McKay, and enjoyed a respite from the long journey to Lac La Biche. In the spring, after break-up, he came east again. By June 1799, he had arrived at the Ile-a-la-Crosse post and notes about the post:

"after the ice has left the Lake has a fine warm summer; Barley, Oats and sometimes Wheat come to maturity, and good gardens of all the common vegetables; for the Lake moderates the frosts and cold of Autumn: between fifty and sixty small canoes of Chipeweyans were here. . . . This present race have learned to build small Canoes of Birch Rind, and almost every way imitate their neighbour the Nahathaway Indians . . . early on the tenth (of June), in company with nine loaded Canoes each carrying twenty-five packs of Furs, each weighing ninety pounds."⁸

David Thompson's notes give us a broad picture of the time. Already agriculture has become a strong hold in the fight for survival. And, the fur trade is again healthy. Oddly enough, however, David fails to note a special event of his while at Ile-a-la-Crosse. On June 10th, David took fourteen year old Charlotte Small, Patrick Small's first daughter, as his wife according to the marriage customs of the day. Sakitawak had seen the first daughter of the settlement married. The villiage had now come of age.

The summer passed and brought a new company to the settlement. On August 23rd, 1799, a Friday, a canoe brigade led by William Auld landed at the Canadian settlement. William Auld, of the Hudson's Bay Company, had brought William Linklater and six other men to establish a trading house on the settlement site. Mr. McTavish of the NW Company saw these men as intruders, and straight-away began to make life and trade an unpleasant experience for these men.

Mr. McTavish and comrades made short work of the Hudson's Bay Company's initial attempt in being a practical alternative. Christmas came bearing very little in the way of happiness to the H.B. Post. Seeing no reason to remain, the six men and William Linklater left the House and went to the Hudson's Bay House at Green Lake. Mr. William Auld, his superior, records in his journal that William Linklater arrived from Ile-a-la-Crosse on December 29th. William Linklater reported that no Indians were about the place, and that they didn't expect any to appear until the spring season. No doubt, Mr. McTavish was happy in ridding the settlement of competitors.

William Linklater, however, did not give up so easy. He returned to his post at a later date. Trouble was the constant companion of Linklater at Ile-a-la-Crosse. Finally in the spring of 1806, the post was abandoned.

The Canadians basked in the revels of victory over the Hudson's Bay Company. But, they did not count on the persevering efforts of Peter Fidler who meant to see Ile-a-la-Crosse as the eventual H.B.C. stronghold. In 1809 Fidler arrived with a party of fifteen men to re-establish Ile-a-la-Crosse House.



Winter Wood

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

Again the North West Company men began their oppressive tactics. Firewood was stolen; nets were cut; stockades set afire and the opposition threatened with physical punishment. The N.W.C. were succeeding in demoralizing the H.B.C. gentlemen. Very few trappers traded with the Hudson's Bay. The main reason for avoiding the English Company was due, in most part, to the threats of the N.W. Company.

Peter Fidler kept a clear record of the actions taken by the North Westers. In one journal his letters to John Duncan Campbell at the opposing N.W.C. post reveal the situation.

"Sir,

Some of your people have maliciously cut into the ribbons of our stockade with a saw and thrown many of them down either last night or early this morning – which I presume must be unknown to you – we shall put them up again. I hope no further mischief will be done to them or anything else belonging to us by any of your people.

I am sir your obedient servant
P. Fidler
for HBC.

14 October 1810
Mr. J. Campbell

Receiving a prompt reply to this note, Fidler finds that the actions continue to take place; and he writes again the same day.

"Sir,

I hope this will be the last time I shall have the occasion to make any complaints of the conduct of any of your people and for the future you will be considered responsible for any injuries or violences they may commit either upon our persons or property – since our men arrived from the Factory this fall some of your people have carried away pile of firewood out into billets – and also within these few days have carried away two other smaller piles of cut firewood – by that your men put an immediate stop to this very disagreeable complaints in the future.

14 October 1810
Mr. Campbell

I am sir your most obedient servant
P. Fidler
for HBC

10

Matters however, were not so tame for the rest of that season. John Campbell had a bully by the name of Mr. Black in his service. That man would challenge the HBC employees to do battle with him outside the gates. At night this same Samuel Black would wait until all were asleep then he would lead a few of his friends to "scare" the opposition. Shots would be fired and then the "maruaders" would break into song. Generally the songs were about the terrible things that would happen to the HBC men. Samuel Black kept up this nightly performance throughout the winter. He would insult in no mean language the cowards within the walls. Often, during this serenade, other NW men would be damaging some piece of equipment belonging to their opponents. The seriousness of these actions was complemented by the lack of trade the Hudson's Bay received from the Indian and Metis peoples.

Fidler's men were harassed each time they left the fort. Often Black would use a fist to settle any dispute. It didn't take long for the HBC men to acquire a fear of leaving the confines of their buildings. What is outstanding about this was, the polite manner the two chiefs communicated and socialized. Below are two notes showing the contrast in their official and personal lives.



Cabin Interior

C 7785 Public Archives of Canada

Mr. Campbell's compliments to Mr. Fidler and requests the favor of his company to dinner which will be ready at 2 o'clock.

27 January 1811

Fidler's compliments to Mr. Campbell. I shall stop over at the time appointed Sunday "morning".

27 January 1811

The spring season brought more incidents of fighting, kidnapping of employees, midnight concerts and damage to HBC goods. It was with relief that the Hudson's Bay Company people saw break-up allow them to leave with their goods to return to the HBC headquarters at the Factory. Before leaving, Fidler and his second-in-command, Robert Sutherland, made their opponent, John Duncan Campbell, responsible for the Hudson's Bay buildings. Needless to say, hours after their departure in June, their buildings were demolished by fire.

It wasn't until the fall of 1814, that the HB Company again returned under the command of Joseph Howse. As with Fidler, things were unpleasant. The North Westers prepared to do all in their power to prevent the Hudson's Bay Company from becoming established in their country. Even to trade at a loss was worth the expense. Joseph Howse was replaced by Robert Logan the following years. The North West Company had acquired a new bully at Ile-a-la-Crosse; he was Peter Skene Ogden.

"He was one of the young Northwesters who were prepared to go great lengths in the struggle, and he later proved that his courage and purposefulness made him a formidable opponent. To the Hudson's Bay men he was 'the murderer Ogden', accused of holding a Hudson's Bay Indian in the water and then shooting him at Green Lake in 1816, and of leading the bitter rivalry at Ile-a-la-Crosse, where the Company's post and goods were captured under warrant in 1817 and where the Company's men had been completely encircled and terrified in 1818."¹²

It was with hope that in 1819 the Hudson's Bay Company sent in John Clarke to try his luck in finally getting established. If only they could hold out two or more years, the agreement holding the partnership of the North West Company would come to an end. At that time, hopefully, the capitalists of Montreal would refuse to continue the costly trade war.

John Clarke arrived at Ile-a-la-Crosse bringing with him a wide reputation as a tough competitor. The first month had barely passed when friction reached a boiling point. On October 6th, 1819, a duel was challenged by Clarke's man McLeod when Fraser, a bully with the NW Company, abused him and threatened Mr. McLeod with his fists. Clarke's journal reads:

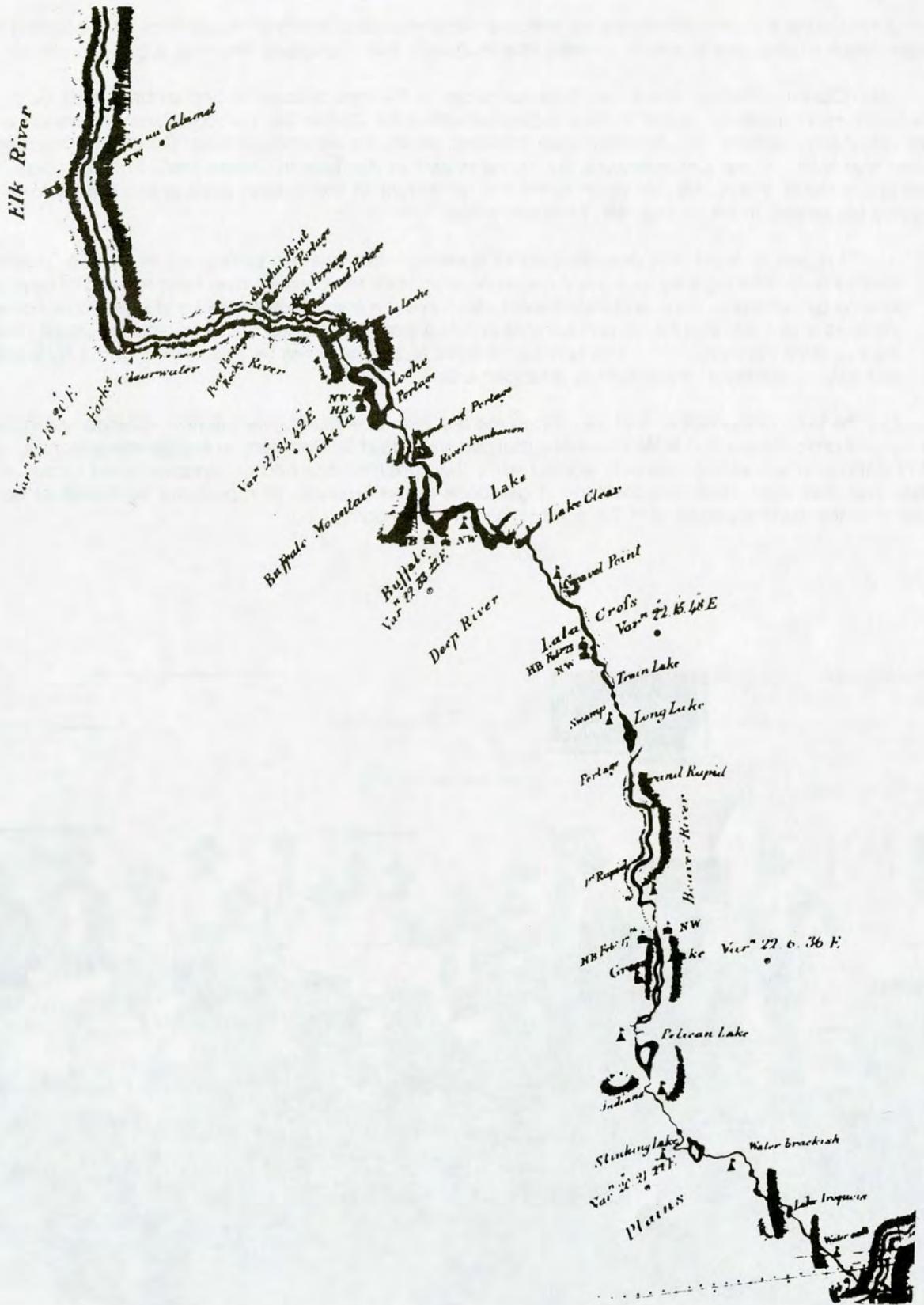
"Mr. McLeod politely told him that he was no blackguard to fight with fists but that if he had any inclination to show his bravery he was ready at a call and would walk before him into the bushes for that purpose, Mr. McMurray (a Northwester) in the interval going for a brace of pistols."¹³

As the ritual proceeded, Fraser didn't appear to take the second pistol, and the duel was cancelled. John Clarke notes here that as a result, the watching Indians saw the strong position of the HBC under Clarke. John Clarke had instilled such confidence in his comrades, that the post now bore the name Fort Superior. The petty guerilla warfare tactics continued on through the fall. New Year's day 1820 saw a **jubilant** celebration at the HBC fort.

"Saturday, 1st January, 1820 – Fine clear weather. All the men of our Fort went this morning to the North West Fort, and saluted the Master there with three volleys; but instead of calling them in as usual to get a dram, the gates were shut, and no admittance. Pethune said that he suspected they came to take the house. Gave a booze and dance to men as customary on this day: they are staunch and unanimous.

Sunday, 2nd January, 1820 – Wind North. Weather very cold. The men still drinking and boozing rum. Several of the North West servants came to our house to-day, among whom was their bully (Desjarlais). Patrick Cunningham and a few others of our men went and met him and asked if he came to fight any person in our Fort, if so, to try one of us immediately."¹⁴

The next month saw some memorable visitors come to the settlement. Lieutenant Franklin and Mr. Bach of the Arctic Land Expedition arrived, on their way to the far north country, on Wednesday, February 23rd. This party left in the company of John Clarke on March 5th, heading for the Athabasca country.



**Map by Franklin and Back
1820**

Reference V1/700 - 1820
Public Archives of Canada

John Clarke's journal continues on with the dangerous and exciting happenings of the spring season. The major result of this year's efforts showed the Hudson's Bay Company showing a good profit for the season.

John Clarke remained at the Fort Superior house for the next season. In September, 1820, George Simpson, the future HBC governor, came to Ile-a-la-Crosse with John Clarke. Mr. Larocque and Mr. Heron were then the NW Company masters. Mr. Simpson then travelled on to the Athabasca post. During the following winter he notes that most of the Chipeweyans are being drawn to the Ile-a-la-Crosse HBC Fort for trade. Rather than seeing the good in this, Mr. Simpson spent the remainder of the season reviling Mr. Clarke to all who would receive his letters. In his journal, Mr. Simpson writes:

"I regret to learn that disturbances of a serious nature are breaking out at Ile-a-la-Crosse, and I cannot help thinking they in a great measure arise from Mr. Clarke's own folly; instead of opposing the enemy by judicious, cool, and determined measures, he encourages broils and squabbles between the Officers and men, and for his amusement sends a parcel of Bullies out to decide important differences by pugilistic combats, . . . The N.W.Co. are not to be put down by Prize fighting, but by persevering industry, economy in the business arrangements . . ." ¹⁵

But the truth of the fact is, that this ended the last year of existence for the N.W. Company. Unable to endure more economic losses, the N.W. Company merged with the H.B. Company in the following months. It seems that all of John Clarke's wrong methods worked while the right methods had continuously failed for twenty years. The trade war was over. Now was the time to get back to the business of rapping the northland of her fortunes in gold – at the least expense. Ah! Tis good to be without a competitor.



HBC – Ready For Spring Transport, 1920

PA 18303
Public Archives of Canada

LES METIS . . . Voyageurs And Grandparents

"I have now been forty-two years in this country. For twenty-four I was a light canoeman; I required but little sleep, but sometimes got less than required. No portage was too long for me; all portages were alike. My end of the canoe never touched the ground until I saw the end of it. Fifty songs a day were nothing to me. I could carry, walk, and sing with any man I ever saw. During that period I saved the lives of ten Bourgeois, and was always the favorite, because when others stopped to carry at a bad spot, and lost time, I pushed on – over the rapids, over the cascades, over chutes; all were the same to me. No water, no weather ever stopped the paddle or the song. I have had twelve wives in the country; and was once possessed of fifty horses and six running dogs, trimmed in the finest style. I was then like a Bourgeois, rich and happy; no Bourgeois had better dressed wives than I, no Indian chief finer horses; no whiteman better harnessed or swifter dogs. I beat all Indians at the race, and no white man ever passed me in the chase. I wanted for nothing; and I spent all my earnings in the enjoyment although I now have not a spare shirt to my back, nor a penny to buy one. Yet, were I young, I should glory in commencing the same career again. I would spend another half century in the same way. There is no life so happy as a Voyageur's life; none so independent, no place where a man enjoys so much variety and freedom as in the Indian country. Huzza! Huzza! Pour de pays Sauvage."¹⁰

Many were the vibrant voyageurs in the northlands of Saskatchewan. Many were the music-loving paddlers of Quebec. Many were they who took to wife the fair and strong women of the Cree and Chipeweyan. Many were they who had the courage to abandon the peaceful comforts of 'civilization'. Many were their children – les Metis.

Sakitawak, for the wife. Ile-a-la-Crosse, for her voyageur. Home, for their children.

Voyageurs – the word means adventure, daring and romance. The vanguard of an ever-expanding civilization flirts with freedom and awesome power of wild mother nature. Voyageurs – our parents and grandparents.

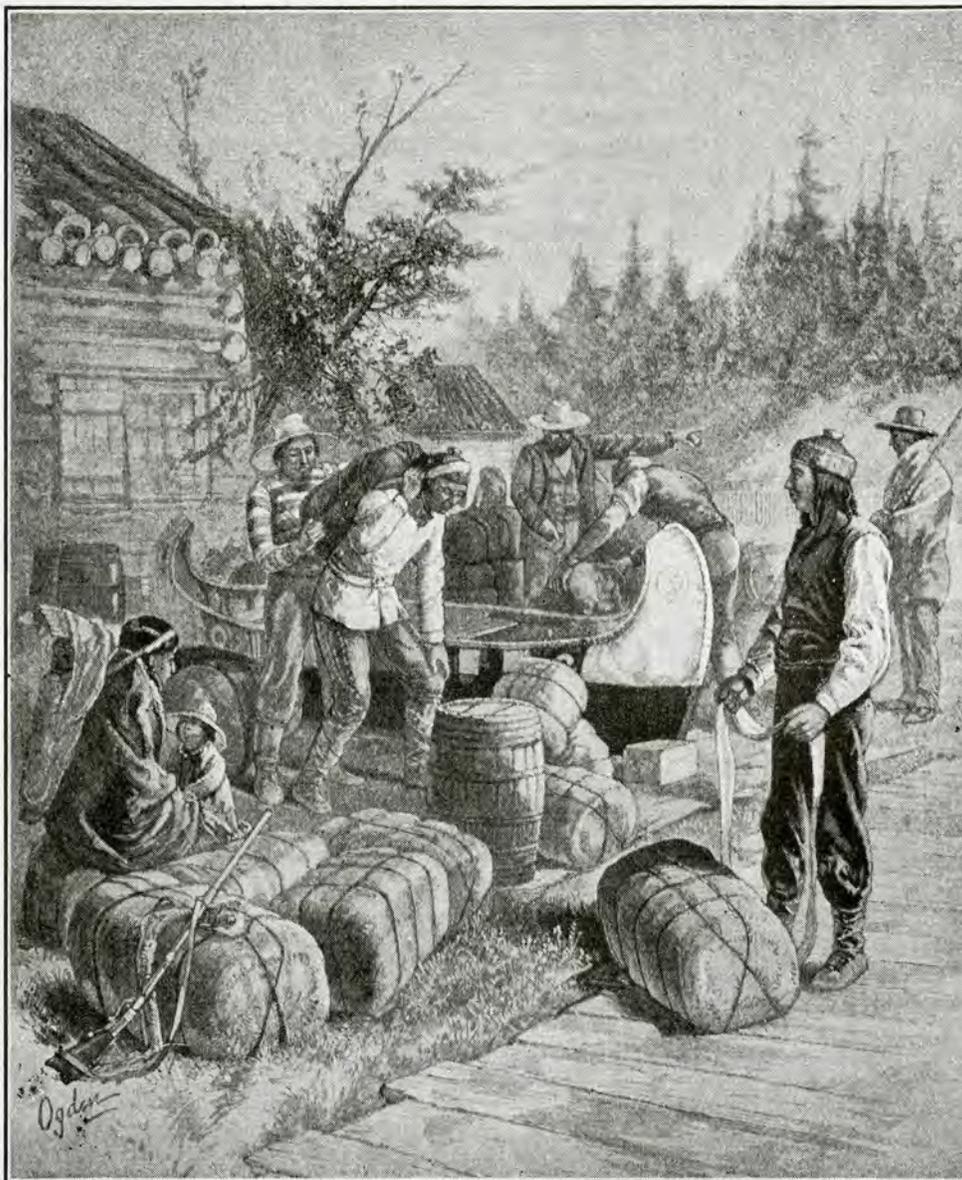


Making a Portage. From a painting by Cornelius Kreighoff

Photo Credit: Romance of Prairie Provinces A. L. Burt, 1948

Many became parents to the Metis children. Many stayed and found their final rest in the rich earth of Ile-a-la-Crosse. Sakitawak has raised many of their children, and has grown with them. Voyageurs, traders, tappers and explorers all felt the call of nature in their loins and so, took wives.

Wives mean survival. A wife meant good, strong, warm clothing. A wife meant less fear in times of accident or illness. A wife meant strength and endurance from good food. A wife meant a warm home. A wife meant companionship through the long, quiet, and lonely winters. A wife meant children.



Hudson's Bay employees on their annual expedition.

Photo Credit: Romance of Prairie Provinces A. L. Burt, 1948

Luckily we have remembered our family relations. It is with mixed feelings we regard these Frenchmen from Quebec who took our grandmothers for wives. Lost to us are the names of our ancestors of the old times when the "White" man was not in our country. Hidden are the names of our "White" grandparents of the first quarter century of occupation. However, the Hudson's Bay Company kept accounts of all our grandparents earned and spent along with their wages. Much can be learned from these dusty pages of fur trade business. The names and origins of these voyageurs remain for each coming generation to explore and question. Our heritage will not **all** disappear. Perhaps half is better than none. Perhaps none is better than divided allegiance.

Of the lists of employees kept for the North West Company, one that suggests possible roots for Ile-a-la-Crosse families was written in 1804. The list contains servants for the whole of the North West. Below are the names of some of these servants – especially those employed at Ile-a-la-Crosse:

Joseph Roy dit Charou
 Francois Boucher
 Nicholas Paul
 S. Cardinal
 Timothee Dionne
 Paulet Paul
 Francois Belanger
 Jean Baptiste Gerard
 Richard Daigneault

Francois Lariviere
 Jean Baptiste Larocque
 Pierre Bruce
 Joseph Paul
 Andre Belanger
 Frabcois Desrosiers
 Gabriel Caisse
 Francois Raymond
 Pierre Laliberte

Jean Baptiste Lemay
 Ignace Lavallee (Jr.)
 Charles Lachance
 Augustin Poirier
 James England
 Jean-Baptiste Bouvier
 H. Moreau
 Antoine Denault

17

A number of them later go to work for the Hudson's Bay Company after the union. A few become "free traders" who made their lives a family affair of trapping and hunting with their adopted Indian families.

Joseph Howse kept a list of servants who found employment in the Ile-a-la-Crosse Fort in 1814-1815. Among the thirty-three employees are names such as Charles Flett, John Flett, James Gardiner, William Linklater, and Thomas Dumont. Others came to work the following season. Among the twenty-five recorded names are Jean-Baptiste Paul, William Flet, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau and Charles Gauthier. It is important to note that in 1820-21, when the rivalry between the two fur-trading giants was at its peak, the Hudson's Bay Company had over seventy-five people employed in its service. Many of these men stayed to raise families which have continued to live in Ile-a-la-Crosse until today. Below is a list of these employees of 1820-21:

Pierre Aubin
 Jean Baptiste Bouvier
 Solomon Carpentier
 Antoine Desjarlais
 Moise Desjarlais
 Jean Baptiste Lepine

Paul Paul
 Joseph Piche
 Francois Paul
 Louis Roy
 Joseph Primeau
 Francois Piche

Lois Majeau
 Charles Lachance
 Pierre LaPorte
 Baptiste Paul
 Baptiste Loyer
 Ignace Lavallee

18

Many of these men took wives. One can be almost positive a wife was had and children raised if a man remained in the service for several years. As we'll see later, most stayed for a considerable number of years, and were followed by younger employees bearing the same surname. A few individuals were fortunate to have their marriage contracts entered into the Hudson's Bay Papers. Below are two different marriage contracts.



Mr. and Mrs. Daigneault

Courtesy of Alphonse Daigneault

Charles Gauthier and Betsy Englund (adopted daughter of James England)
Married by George Keith
Hudson's Bay Factor 1825
Witnessed by Etienne Frichette
Jean-Baptiste Le mays dit Quebec

Ignace McDonald and Margeurite Paul (adopted daughter of Joseph Paul and also consent of Baptiste Paul).

Married by George Keith
Hudson's Bay Factor 1826
Witnessed by George Keith
James Heron

19

In the list of servants for the years 1824-25, a note has been made of the position held by each employee. They read as follows:

Pierre Boucher – Guide
Jean-Baptiste Bouvier – middleman
Joseph Brissard dit St. Germaine – bowman
Pierre Bruce – interpreter
Joseph Flammand – interpreter
Etienne Frichette – blacksmith
Charles La Chance – middleman
Louis Majeau – interpreter
Paul Paul – middleman
Francois Paul – middleman
Paulet Paul – middleman

20

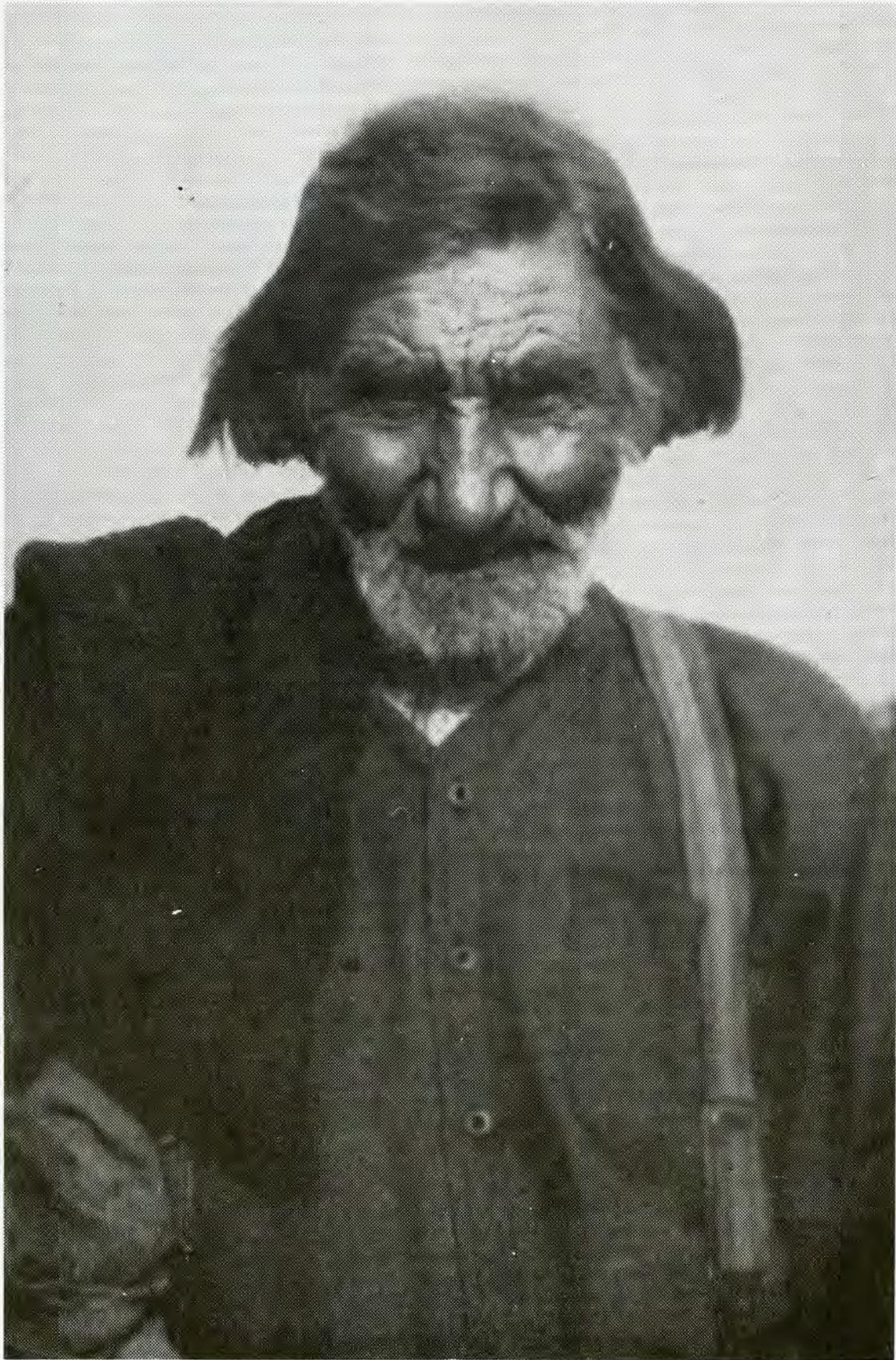
All positions were named according to their position in the boats used to transport the yearly fur trade to the Factory on Hudsons Bay. Mr. Partrick Small Jr., who was born at Ile-a-la-Crosse with sisters Nancy and Charlotte, returned for a spell in 1826-27 and obtained goods from the Hudson's Bay Fort. This was the last mention ever made of the **first** family of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Of interest to those who dwell in genealogy is the fortunes of the various families throughout the years. It is fairly easy to trace backwards to grandparents and possibly great-grandparents. However, any further back takes considerable research. A few notes may help.



Ile-a-la-Crosse Family, 1930's

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission



Michelis Bouvier.

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

With regards to the family headed by Jean-Baptiste Bouvier, a Michel Bouvier entered the Hudson's Bay service in 1830. Jean-Baptiste originated at St. Curs, Quebec and had been in the north west country since the turn of the century. Others also became employees, such as Joseph Bouvier, patriarch of the Bouvier family. Jean-Baptiste died in August, 1838. A month after this tragic occurrence the "Bay" gave a "fine gun for his boy, two large moose skins for his widow, and one third of a yard of scarlet cloth." 21

Below is a list of employees for the year 1854:

Michel Bouvier – Metis	Donald Buchanan – Canadian
Moise Ducharme	Jean-Baptiste Jourdain – Metis
Joseph Finlayson	Pierre Laliberte – Metis
Charles La Chance – Canadian	George Hodgeson
Pierre Laporte – Canadian	Peter Linklater – Metis
Robert MacKinnon – Irish	Louis Laronde
Donald McLean	Pierre Malboeuf – Canadian
Antoine Morin Senior – Canadian	Antoine Morine Junior – Metis
Thomas McKenzie – Metis	Raphael Morin
Francois Roy	Baptiste Payette – Metis
Charles Thomas – Metis	Samuel Mackenzie – Metis
Pierre Aubichon – Metis	Jean-Baptiste Sylvestre
Michel Tawiipiisim – Indian	William Stranger
James Kennedy	Andre Tous le Jours
Abraham Mecredi – Metis	
William Johnstone – Canadian	

22

Not noted in this list is Francois Maurice who had joined the company in 1851. Francois was working this year at a different post. Such was the general rule. Men were posted throughout the length of the Churchill River System from Reindeer Lake to La Loche, and on the Athabasca route. Often a complete family would move at transfer time. A wife at each post was not the rule as many mean-mouthed people are inclined to state. A voyageur often became very loyal to his family of Metis children.

Many of the family names in Ile-a-la-Crosse show that the original "White" father, worked at the post for thirty and more years. Often, as was the case with Jean-Baptiste Bouvier, they die of old age while in the Hudson's Bay Company's service. Looking at the list of employees throughout the various years mentioned, and yet to be mentioned, this is proved. Father is followed by son, and some by grandson. There is almost a tradition in who works for the "Bay." Not everybody living at Ile-a-la-Crosse worked as a "Bay" employee; many were called "freemen." Below is a list of "freemen" in Ile-a-la-Crosse in the years 1857 and 1863:

1857

George Cooke	George Stevens
William Cooke	Michel Tawiipiisim
Joseph Desjarlais	Raphael Morin
Charles Lachance	Pierre Malboeuf
Thomas Mackenzie	Philip Merasty
Jean-Baptiste Sylvestre	

1863

Thomas Bell	William A. Cooke
George Cooke	William C. Sanderson
Jean-Baptiste Jourdain	Thomas Roy
Pierre Lafleur	Charles Sasty
Abraham Lariviere	Andre tous les Jours
William Ratt	Antoine Morin

23

Antoine Morin, the patriarch of the Morin family, died in 1855, leaving his widow and children to continue living alongside the "Bay". Antoine Junior became the new family head with many younger brothers and growing children to yet join the company of the "Bay". Below is an employee list for 1865-1866:

Samuel Laliberte – Chief Factor
Pierre Laliberte – Clerk
Donald Robb – Clerk
Charles Thomas – Clerk

Alexander Mackenzie – Clerk
Ian Spencer – Clerk
William Whiteway – Clerk

Servants:

Robert Ballantyne
Thomas Bird
Antoine Bruce
Edward Campbell
Geremiah Cooke
Baptiste Desjardins
Jean-Baptiste Daigneault
Joseph Gerard
Pierre Laliberte
Francois Maurice
Thomas Makay
Philip Merasty
Antoine Morin
Pierre Morin
Francois Roy

Michel Bouvier (Senior)
Michel B. Bouvier (Junior)
Charles Caisse
Baptiste Courchene
Vincent Daigneault
Thomas Desjarlais
John Flett
Antoine Laliberte
Thomas Lariviere
Abraham Maurice
Bazile Merasty
David Merasty
Catholoque Morin
Raphael Morin

This list was added to in 1871 with:

James McCallum
Raphael Morin (Junior)
Baptiste Morin

Cyprien Morin
Francois Roy (Junior)

24

In the Maurice family, Francois was promoted from servant to clerk in 1878. Francois senior is mentioned later in this work in connection with the mission's history. Francois, like Antoine Morin, added to a fair degree, to the number of Maurices in service with the Bay. Of note of these offspring are Francois Junior, Magloire, and Charles.

Some of the family names have disappeared from Ile-a-la-Crosse. The offspring of the first HBC Factor William Linklater are noted as being employed and in Ile-a-la-Crosse as late as 1882. Today there are none to be found. The same holds true for the Mackenzie clan—all from the roots of Roderick Mackenzie of 1786. What about the McLeod family? Many had worked for and headed the posts of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company.

Many of the employees are now second and third generation employees. Often the younger sons would be sent to the distant posts to "winter" for the Hudson's Bay Company. Being the administrative centre for the north-central trade of Saskatchewan, Ile-a-la-Crosse exported many young people to remote centres which in turn began to raise new families with the old family name. A search of any northern directory will find a host of Larocques, Roys, Morins, Lalibertes, Larivieres, Durochers, Desjarlais, Merastys, Linklaters, Mackenzies, Daigneaults, Makays, Ballantynes, and others too numerous to mention.

We must not forget the Indian "grandfathers", mothers and cousins. A search of the account books at any post will give the names of many Indian trappers who have dealt with the Hudson's Bay Company. Their names are often hard to print as they are all in the native language of their owners, and rarely follow any "family tree" structure. These pages will not attempt to name them. That will be left for those who desire to go beyond a mere glance at general history.



Magloire Maurice.

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

The last list of servants and clerks available for the work presented here are dated 1881 and 1882. The people employed in 1881 are:

Pierre Laliberte – Clerk
Francois Maurice – Clerk
Walter West – Clerk

Colin MacIntyre – Clerk
Scott Simpson – Clerk

(note that Francois has been 30 years in the service)

Servants:

James Bethune
Michel Bouvier – 57 years of service
James Thomas Corrigan
Samuel Dinnet
Robert Gardiner
Joseph Ballard
Jean Baptiste Jourdain
Charles Lafleur – 20 years of service
Thomas Lariviere – 19 years of service
Louis Leblanc
Magloire Maurice
Donald McLeod
Donald McPhail
Archibald Park
Louis Roy – joined the service in 1882

William Pudge
James Daniel
Donald Frank
Thomas H. Gardiner
Joseph Janvier
Frederick Kennedy
Roy Laliberte
Donald Leblanc
Archibald Linklater
Angus McDonald – 15 years of service
Donald McLeod (Junior)
John Moore
Louis Park

25

The last mention of the Gerard Family is a note from the post kept by Francois Maurice, probably at La Loche. As head clerk, Francois lists Ambrose Gerard, Rhien Gerard, and Joseph Gerard as being servants at the post. Catholique Morin is also living at the post then and supplying fish to the post. On page seven is a photograph of a Mr. and Mrs. Gerard, who were at the time living at Fort Black, an unused post of the XY Company.

Much more remains to be recorded in print for the yet-unborn generations. At the time of writing, access to materials and people was not as readily given as should have been to give a more complete picture as to individual family histories. Hopefully this work will encourage others to open their sources of information, tell their stories and give of their wisdom. It is not yet too late.



Before the past is hurried and gone.

PA 18053
Public Archives of Canada

CHATEAU SAINT-JEAN . . . Black Robes And Grey Dresses

Manitou! Do your eyes behold the approaching strangers? Manitou! Their eyes are not of this world. Who are these people, and why do they come?

For many years our people have dwelt alongside the "White" man. He has given us trade goods in return for our fur hunt. At times he has been kind in his giving of presents. He has taken for his wife, my sister. Yet he has not tried to take my gods or my world. As each left all that went with him were the furs. We kept our sisters, their children and the stories that have come to us during the years we shared together. Often he spoke of the "Black Robes", and of the amazing places that exist beyond this earth.

Can these men be the "Black Robes"? Their words flow in a graceful river. Happiness never seems to leave their eyes. Let us welcome these men and share what we can. All are Manitou's children.

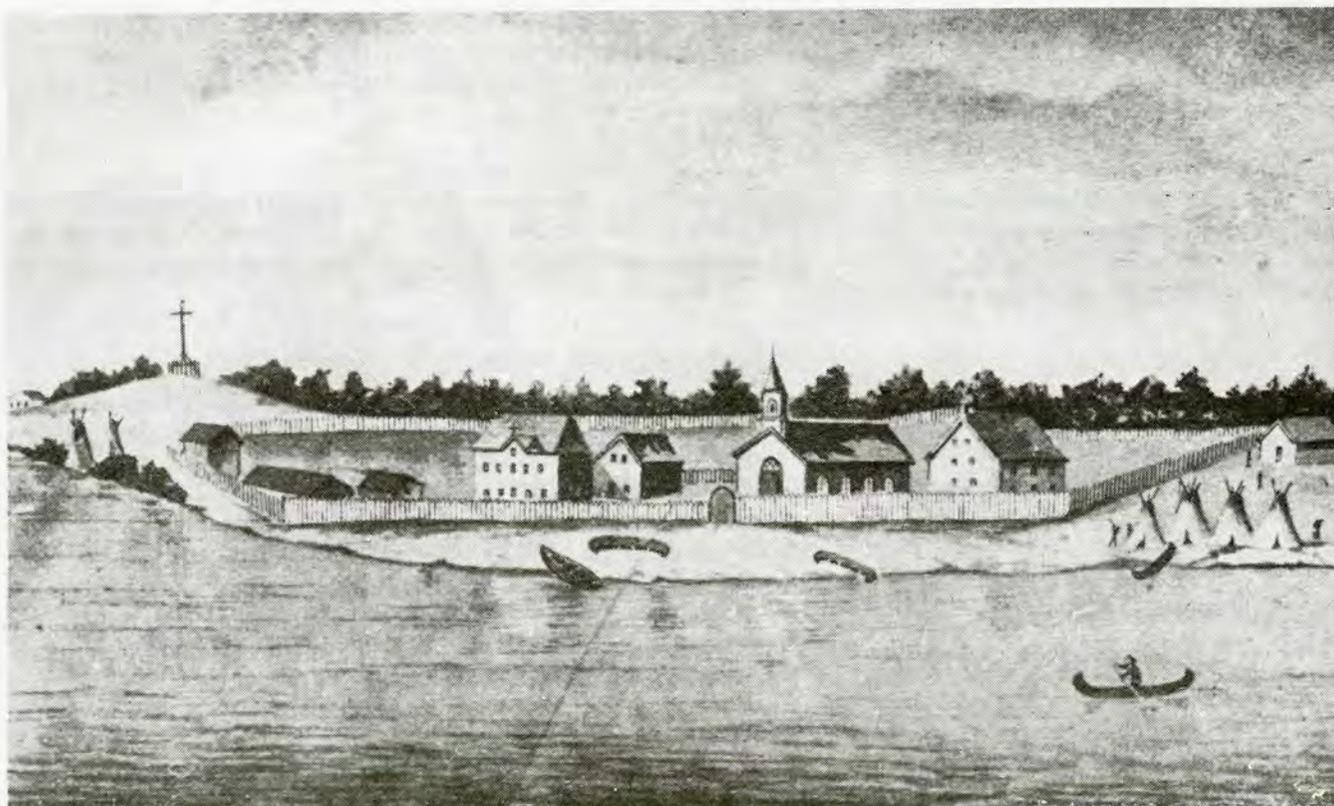


The Barge on Lake Ile-a-la-Crosse

PA 44527 Public Archives of Canada

The barge! Thirteen paddlers eased the long flat vessel alongside the Hudson's Bay dock at the Ile-a-la-Crosse Fort. The Factor, Mr. Roderick Mackenzie, now 72 years of age, was attended by his son and two strangers. Dressed in the "Black Robes" of voyageur folklore, the two men surveyed all around them with wide eyes. This day, the afternoon of September 10th, 1846, welcomed Fathers Lafleche and Tache.

Mr. Mackenzie eyed these "Missionaries" with distaste. Nothing but trouble and pain would result from their intrusion into this unspoiled country. Unable to remain silent he utters his feeling, "They'll ruin my Indians". Yet, as a gentleman, he could not but be civil and even helpful to these "men of God". The season being late, Mr. Mackenzie offered his own building for their winter habitation. Together they would pass the winter in companionship. Willingly he taught these dream-filled youngsters the language of the north. They were apt students. Cree, they studied in the morning. Chipeweyan, was learned in the afternoons. Before long, the youngest, Taché took to the winter trails in his northern education. But, enough is enough; in the spring we'll help them build their own buildings. Such must be the will of God.



Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

"Chateau Saint-Jean", Ile-a-la-Crosse, 1860

Within a decade, the mission, which had been called "Chateau Saint-Jean", grew in size. The need for more hands to offer the services of a remote mission called for the request of women's hands. Young Tache left the post to become Bishop of this north country in the Red River settlement. Seeing the able work carried on by the "Sisters of Charity", he prepared the path for their service in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

The year, 1860, another barge bore new people to Ile-a-la-Crosse. Sisters Agnes, Pepin, and Boucher rode in anticipation of the wonders told to them by their pastor, Father Grandin. On October 4th, at five o'clock in the morning, the barge entered Lake Ile-a-la-Crosse. By noon the settlement came into view. Little by little the nuns could distinguish the church, the cross and the houses. Men, women and children came from all directions to welcome the barge. Finally the barge docked.

On the sixth of October they opened the doors of their convent called "Saint-Bruno," and before long received their first medical patient, a small boy named Philippe. By the 26th of November, these "Sisters of Charity" opened their school for twenty-five boarding students. The girls used the classroom for their sleeping quarters, and the boys stayed in the rectory with the priests. At last, now the "Christianizing" of the Indians would begin in earnest through the hearts and minds of the young.

The journey to Catholicism was not to be smooth. A young warrior and trapper of the Chipewyan peoples had a dream. This vision commanded him as the "true Son of God" to lead his people. His followers obeyed his commands knowing the power of visions and the true strength of their ancient gods. Dogs were destroyed, possessions burned. The man, "Saskhe", attacked Father Grandin who left in haste for his canoe. Returning to his mission he wisely left the followers of Saskhe to retire from the self-styled "Son of God", and to eventually turn to the teachings of the Church.

Sister Sara Riel became a member of the Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission in 1871, and served in the school and hospital to her untimely death at the age of 34 in the year of 1883.

The mission lived by the grace of the inhabitants. They fed these religious people; donated of their scanty means, monetarily and with goods; and assisted in all manner of physical labour. Old man Malboeuf assisted by supplying the mission with fish caught in his nets. The Voyageurs, Canadian and Metis, gave of their salaries and their spare hours. In time the mission prospered.

Not only by the fruits of labour did the people give, also they gave of their trust, faith and friendship. One older Cree, "Oppikokiw", would at times sing of his legends and the songs of his ancestors. Of great interest were the songs of "Windigo". Oppikokiw had as daughter-in-law, Marie-Rose Piwapiskus whose family had come from the prairies of the south.

Marie-Rose soon lost her husband and never re-married at the request of her mother. She turned to Father Leguard to find a purpose and path for her remaining life's work. He lead her to the idea of teaching. As "Maitresse d'ecole – Okiskinohamakew" – she taught the children Catechism and the writing of Cree syllabics. In 1931 at the age of over 90 she died in the hospital. Her grave guards her remains at Canoe Lake.

People came from many miles to celebrate the Mass. In 1883, in July, Francois Maurice travelled through the night hours to assist at the Mass. His son, Magloire, who was then twenty, had travelled with him. Tired, Magloire sought sleep. However, Francois berated his son to forego his sleep to attend the services of the Mass. It is people like Francois who were the heart and blood of this mission.

Trouble again arose with the news of Riel's warring with the "White" man. On April 28th, 1885, a messenger arrived from Green Lake with the frightening news of rebellion. Perhaps he would come here? The thought raced through the missionaries. A retreat was planned. Boarding a barge, the mission staff and the "White" traders went down the lake and took refuge on a small island. On May 24th, the party erected a cross on the island to remind all passers-by. An inscription reads:

"In this island, the priests, the brothers, the sisters and the Bourgeois stayed during the menacing approach of the rebelling Cree persecutors, here we sought refuge among the faithful Chipeweyans."²⁶

On May 29th, the fear faded away, so the party returned to Ile-a-la-Crosse to continue their lives in their respective duties.

The turn of the century saw bad times come. High water flooded the mission from 1900 to 1905. Unable to work in the weakened buildings any longer, the Sisters prepared to leave Ile-a-la-Crosse. On September 7th, they boarded a barge of the Revillon Freres, a new concern at Ile-a-la-Crosse and bidding good-bye to the children, left Ile-a-la-Crosse.

In 1911, a new-comer came to Ile-a-la-Crosse. Father Marius Rossignol came to be pastor for the mission Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Father Rossignol decided that he would direct his zeal towards destroying the last stronghold of paganism at Waterhen Lake. He spoke and preached to these people exhorting them. "What is this religion of yours? It is nothing but superstitions—the worship of all that is not God!"

Not only did he war against paganism, he also tried to do away with the "Protestant houses of commerce" who pushed the native people to buy liquor and encouraged them to drink. Father Rossignol even records incidents of people being forced to drink. Once a young man had his mouth forced open and the contents poured from a bottle into his mouth. He was happy when, in 1915, a provincial law was passed prohibiting the sale of liquor – the source of much misery.



Marie-Rose, la « Maitresse d'école ».

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission



Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

Couronne Maurice

The "Grey Nuns" returned in 1917 to occupy the posts of medical workers and teachers. The sisters returning numbered four; Sister Saint-Nazaire, Sisters Martel, Nadeau, and Sephora. They now had a larger convent on high ground. However they never found peace from tragedy. On the evening of April 1st, 1920, while at evening prayers, a glow on the chapel windows told of another mishap-fire was consuming the convent. It wasn't until October 24th of the following year that they could enter a new convent.

While waiting for the reconstruction of the convent, a new pupil arrived. Therese Arcand of Green Lake was placed in the care of the Sisters by her mother on Christmas Eve, 1920, along with her younger brother. Therese already had two brothers enrolled in the school. One day several years later – September 29th, 1923 – another tragedy visited the mission. While returning from a berry-picking picnic, a canoe carrying Sister Nadeau and seven boys, capsized. Sister Nadeau and three of the boys died. Therese's brother was one of the victims.

Again in 1925 fire razed the convent. And again it was rebuilt.

In 1929, the years of work bore fruit. Therese Arcand departed from the mission school in March, bound for St. Albert, Alberta, to become the first Metis graduate from Ile-a-la-Crosse to enter the order of the "Sisters of Charity".

Life now assumed a peaceful pattern with occasional visits of church dignitaries. The end of a century of work came with a huge three-day celebration. July, 1946, saw a centennial party honoring the men and women who gave of themselves in the service of God.



Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

School Days – 1930's Ile-a-la-Crosse

Today, the growing goes on. Times for rejoicing and weeping continue to arrive and depart. Today, a school gives memory to Father Rossignol who died in 1961 and lies buried here. A hall bears the name of Tache, the co-founder of the mission. The stories survive and will continue to be made. Such is the tenacity of the "Black Robes" and the "Grey Dresses." Such is their devotion to duty.



Mission Church 1940



The Black Robes



The Grey Dresses

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

FATHER POIRIER O.M.I.

Father Poirier is the town pastor in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

"I am an Oblate's Father and I have recently been assigned to be the pastor in Ile-a-la-Crosse. This is my third time in Ile-a-la-Crosse as a working priest.

"It is 45 years ago this summer, that is, in the year 1931, that I first came to this area of the country. I went to Beauval to prepare for the priesthood. I had come fresh from Montreal. It was quite a change from the pavements of the big city. But, I enjoyed every step of it.

"From Big River, we were to travel in two canoes. Bishop Charlebois was going to Beauval, then to Ile-a-la-Crosse. It was evening when we left. The weather was threatening, but the Bishop was in a hurry and he asked to leave anyway. We were wind bound and properly soaked while in the lake. We had to stop and make a fire to dry ourselves before going on when the storm stopped. We made it to the end of the lake that night, and stopped at the dam which is the head of the Cowan River.

"In the morning, Bishop Charlebois started ahead with the faster canoe because he wanted to make it to Beauval that day, which was a Saturday. We were left behind with the slower outfit and we were to arrive one day after them."

"From Beauval, where I spent four years, I had a few opportunities to go to Ile-a-la-Crosse for short visits. In fact, I made one visit the first summer I was there. There I met Father Rossignol for the first time. The sisters were in a convent not far from the old house which the Fathers lived in. There was also a small hospital of which the sisters were in charge. The hospital was quite new. There were a small number of houses scattered over the point going north. The picture was exactly the same as the picture below from "Capital D'une Solitude".



Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

The Mission: Rectory, Church, Convent and Hospital – 1930's

"In 1935, after finishing my studies with Father Penard in Beauval, I was sent to Manitoba. I came back here in the year 1946, the year of the centennial celebrations. That time, I flew direct from Sturgeon Landing and The Pas to Ile-a-la-Crosse in company with Bishop La Jeanesse.

"The place was all alive with people. Many, many people had come from surrounding places and were preparing for the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the mission in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

"When Lafleche and Tache, the first oblates to set up the mission, came in 1846, there was a trading post already here. The trading posts at the time were the only places where you could meet the Indians and Metis inhabitants of the country. Most would come at certain periods during the year to exchange their furs. It should be no surprise that the missions were all built close to the trading posts. That was the only place where we could meet the people on a more or less regular basis.

"At the 100th anniversary, there were many dignitaries invited. We had among them his eminence Cardinal Villeneuve from Quebec and several Bishops. There were also people representing the government. At that time the CCF party was the government of the province.

"The CCF party was very active in the North, and I remember particularly their interest in education. There has definitely been a surge in the development of educational facilities after the CCF came to power. It provided a contrast to the "mission schools" which we had been operating on a "shoestring" budget.

"That year of 1946, I slept in the then new building, the boy's residence which since then, burned down. I was just a curious and interested visitor in that year.



Centennial of Mission

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

Courtesy Robert Longpre



"In February 1952, I was stationed in Ile-a-la-Crosse. I stayed here until the fall of 1954. I worked here in company with Father Rossignol, Father Gignol who was still active notwithstanding his age, and the old Brother August – an institution in himself.

"Now in 1952, I was able to drive to the village from Meadow Lake, in a jeep. There was a winter truck road. Travelling in the winter was usually by bombardier and trucks. Horses and dogs, however, were still in use. A new feature at the time for me, was the mink ranch. They were numerous around the lake.

"The place was definitely progressing. One facility that was here in 1952 and has since disappeared, was the hotel under the ownership of a Mr. Benoit.

"My second posting to Ile-a-la-Crosse was from 1963 to 1966. The setting had changed quite a lot. The hospital was new. I spent those three years guiding construction. First of all, due to a fire at the boy's residence, reconstruction seemed to be necessary and urgent. A new hall was built, Tache Hall, immediately after the reconstruction of the boy's residence. Tache Hall was in turn used as a church on Sundays during the time the church was demolished and rebuilt. The architect and builder was Brother Edward Boucher.

"And now, I am back after 10 years for the third time, in 1976. I am pastor of the parish. The changes since then have not only been material. There is also that new thing called "local government."

"The Catholic Church came here in the first place, and still is here, for the sake of religion."

LISTEN . . . About A Man Called Riel

Jean-Baptiste Riel, voyageur for the North West Company from the lands of Quebec. Marguerite Boucher, a young Chipeweyan Metisse from the lands of Ile-a-la-Crosse. Join now together in wedlock as decreed in the laws of the north this year of 1815.

Jean-Baptiste came to this north country in service of the North West Company in 1798. Travels and time led him to Ile-a-la-Crosse. There, marriage with Marguerite settled him. Children issued forth into this world from that union. Their names could now survive death. A son was born, Louis Riel.

In 1822, when Louis Riel was only five, he travelled with his parents to his father's homeland of Quebec. Manhood reached him as years escaped. The birthland – the great spread of wild lands called to Louis, and he obeyed. To the Red River. A young man now, he found himself a wife, a white woman, Julie Lagimodiere. They married at Red River in 1844. From this marriage, children joined the living world.

Louis Riel, the "miller of the Seine", became father to a son in the first year of his marriage. This son was christened "Louis Riel" Junior. Two more births followed which did not see the children live. In 1849, a sister for Little Louis was born, Sara. More came to be, Marie, Octavie, Eulalie, Joseph, Henriette and then the youngest, Alexandra, was born in 1863.

Louis "pere" was active in trying to better the world around himself for his growing family and his fellow Metis brothers. In the year 1849 he led the young Metis men to confront the Hudson's Bay Company's harsh monopoly on trade, during the trial of one of their people – Mr. Sayer. Success saw the armed band march off with a freed Sayer and promises of trade reforms.

Louis "pere" sent Louis Junior to Montreal. An education would help him become able to help other Metis, other "bois-brules". In 1866, Louis Junior returned to the Red River. He could speak English now as well as the French language and Plains Cree. Whether or not his grandmother, Marguerite, had taught him Chipeweyan, remains unknown. The Red River had changed. Now, there was a new name, Winnipeg.

In 1869, Louis Riel Jr., in an attempt to gain political advantage and possible provincial status for his birthland, led his Metis followers into the buildings of the Hudson's Bay Company. They assumed the powers of a provisional government. All went well with Louis as president until the death of a white man. Then, in anger, the army from Ontario marched to revenge on these brash half-breeds. In order to prevent wholesale bloodshed, Louis took the advice of Bishop Tache and left for exile.

His sister, Sara, had joined the ranks of the church in 1866 when she became a new member of the Grey Nuns, The Sisters of Charity. She was the first Metis to enter the order. In 1871 during the month of June, Sara chose to savour exile to the remote frontier, to her ancestral home of Ile-a-la-Crosse. Perhaps this self-imposed exile somehow would erase the exile forced on her brother, Louis.

The journey was long and difficult. Many days disappeared into the mist. Mosquitoes and mud and an ever-persistent rain made the path a torture to Sara and her fellow travellers. Over two months and still no end. Then, one day upon reaching the banks of the Beaver River, they were met by two Metis hunters who had been sent to guide them to the end of their journey. Sara writes in her journal:

"We found out that they had been sent by the reverend Father Legeard from Ile-a-la-Crosse; – that everyone was waiting for us at the mission. "Our men secured bark and dried it. Then they took the skins that covered our wagons, soaked them and chose the best one to make a canoe."²⁷

The journey ended with a quiet evening of thanksgiving prayers for their safe arrival on August 25th, 1871. No more did the country seem so wild, so lonely. Here was a home.

A new year passed and brought memories of the Red River and family to young Sister Sara. Hours were spent in her duties at the mission. Summer came and went. In late November of 1872, tragedy struck this young woman. Her lungs hemorrhaged while teaching some children singing. Death hovered over Sister Sara. The Last Sacrament was given to her and Sara seemed almost happy at approaching death. However, her pastor, Father Legeard, sought to have his patron saint intercede and affect a cure on this young woman. Prayers and a promise to the saint created a miracle. At that very moment Sara rose from her death-bed a cured person. She dressed and went to the chapel, then prayed. Life then started anew with Sara resuming her mission duties to the fullest. Sara writes of the miracle to her mother:

"Beloved Mama, how glad you would have been to see your child rise up from the dead. The good Lord has been generous . . . Let us requite love with His love for our family, for having chosen me as his first Metis missionary." ²⁸

That night of the miracle, Sara adopted the name of her benefactress and was called from that time, Sister Marguerite Marie.

Throughout the long years that came to pass, Louis and Sister Marguerite Marie continued to write of their trials and jubilations. Sister Marguerite Marie often talked of her wish that Louis would take to the priesthood. Then, in April of 1881, Louis married Marguerite Monet, a young Metis girl. The news of this marriage reached Ile-a-la-Crosse and his missionary sister. Sister Marguerite Marie's hopes for his eventual priesthood were shattered. Her letters at this time tell of her deteriorating health and her premonition of approaching death. Then, on the 27th of December, 1883, she died.

Sara's legacy to the history of Ile-a-la-Crosse is bountiful. Her letters make many references to local people, the art of survival, the seasons, the trade and life within the mission. But beyond even this, her writings show an immense love for the Indian and Metis peoples of the northland.

Nor does Louis' name cease to be important to the people at Ile-a-la-Crosse. Two years later, as returned leader of the Metis peoples, Louis Riel and his followers began to war with the suffocating presence of the "White" man. Batoche, Duck Lake, Frog Lake, Fort Pitt and Carlton were scenes of battle – all of them victories for the Metis and Indian peoples. The fever spread. At Green Lake unrest grew daily. Fearing the imminent attack, the post factor hid the arms and ammunition on the banks of the Beaver River. As noted by the chief factor in Prince Albert:



Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

Winter Graveyard Ile-a-la-Crosse

"we have at Green Lake, the complete outfits for the Districts of Athabasca and Mackenzie River, there are in this outfit over two hundred stand of arms, and a very large amount of gunpowder, ball and shot, as well as fixed ammunition, together with a large quantity of provisions. If these goods are taken by rebels it will very much add to their resources, as well as give them free access by the Beaver River to Ile-a-la-Crosse."²⁹

With the hiding of the stores, the company personnel attempted to abandon the post. Immediately the rebel Indians and Metis appeared and forced the opening of the post and plundered the remaining goods. The traders and the other white people then fled with their bateaux, up the Beaver River until they reached the safety of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

News of the Green Lake raid sent a fire of worry throughout the settlement. Would this Riel come to Ile-a-la-Crosse and seek revenge for his sister's death? Fearing the worst, the mission staff loaded their patients onto boats and sailed up the lake to a small island off Patuanak. Perhaps they would escape the wrath of this "madman". The temper of the Indian people continued to erupt in the country. Waterhen was the scene of uprising and \$40,000 worth of goods were stolen. But Louis did not come. Victories do not count if there be only one loss. Riel and his Metis Nation died—they died at the hangman's noose in the fall of 1885.



LES METISSE . . . Mothers And Grandmothers

Women! No fur-trade would have been, without you. Women! No man would have been, without you. Women! No children would have been raised. Women! No "Metis Nation" would be alive today. None will forget the hours of toil and care you have given. None will forget the hours of happy memories. None will forget the guiding hands and peaceful countenance. None will forget your unprejudiced love. It is you who have done the most to forge today's prosperous and secure presence. It is you who will light the path to a strong and healthy tomorrow.

Listen again to our women – les Metisse!



Couronne Maurice.

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

MARY ROSE McCALLUM

Mary is about 85 years old. She was born in the month of February. The year, she doesn't remember – but, it appears to be the last decade of the 19th century. She was born at Canoe River. All her brothers and her mother were also born there. Her father worked for the Hudson's Bay Company at Canoe River and area for forty years. Mary's mother died in 1903 in a flu epidemic. It was after her death that her father moved the family to Ile-a-la-Crosse.

"My husband died at Pinehouse. In the springtime I moved back to Ile-a-la-Crosse. There were quite a few families here then, almost like today. They were mostly older people living here. There were a few young people around, but you never saw them walk around.

"I didn't go to school, but my younger sisters did after my mother died.

"My father had to give up the cattle he had, and the gardens at Canoe River when they moved to Ile-a-la-Crosse. For, father had to work and my sisters went to school. Everyone had to work hard to make their living. Families were large and everyone had to help. I remember I used to go check the nets even when there was a storm in the middle of winter.



Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

Dog Team Resting

"My mother told us that the old people then made things with what they had. Now, people throw away so many things that just need a little fixing.

"We used to go to the bush and make a hole in a birch tree and let the syrup drip into a pail. We had a couple of pails at a time. The syrup is sweet, and the pail fills up in no time. We would boil this syrup in a large open fire. We would let the pails hang in the fire until the syrup starts to turn its color. We'd add a little flour and sugar. Gradually, it would thicken. You can eat this syrup on your bannock and on anything. It's really good!

"About picking berries and storing them, we used to store them in baskets of birch. We used to dry them and then put them in bags. They looked like raisins.

"In the fall, you make your fish – hang them out to dry, and store them to have during the winter. You clean them, pull them through a long stick and then hang them out to dry. Put them out in a shack or something and freeze them. Then, just go out and get them when you feel like fish. If you gave these to someone now, they would make a face.

"Even the fish eggs were never thrown out. They were cooked with berries and a little sugar was put on them. They used to make something like bannock with them. You squash the eggs with flour and melt them with water. It's something like making pancakes. You have a hot pan nearby which you cook them in.

"When it was Christmas, or any holy day, people would come to town from everywhere. In the summer, there were tents everywhere. In the winter, people were filled up in the homes. Horses and dogs were tied up everywhere. Now, people don't realize when these days come around.



Settler's Cabin Ile-a-la-Crosse

C7784 Public Archives of Canada

"Everyone would go visiting in different homes. The older people would invite people over for a bite to eat and drink. This was the time when people came in to see their relatives and friends.

"Before sunrise, there would be gunshots heard, meaning, the people shooting were sending their greetings out and would be waiting to get invited for tea.

"Everything is dying out today."



PA 44545



PA 44554

**Women and Children
Ile-a-la-Crosse**

Photos Courtesy of Public Archives of Canada



Children, Ile-a-la-Crosse

PA 44539



Mary Ann Kyplain

MARY ANN KYPLAIN

Mary is sixty-three years old. She works in the Women's Handicraft Co-op in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

"I was born in Ile-a-la-Crosse in 1913. When I was four my father was sent to Dillon to buy furs for Revellon Frere. My father also kept a store there. The last year we were there, there was a day of complete darkness. My mother used to tell us that there were so many forest fires, you could not see anything. It was around 1917.

"After two years stay in Dillon we came back to Ile-a-la-Crosse, The manager transferred my father again to out near Cree Lake. There was a store there and other houses. This is where I made my first communion.

"In the spring we arrived back at Ile-a-la-Crosse. My father was brought in because he was sick. My father died in June. After he died my mother was worried, wondering what she'd do about us and about how she was to make a living. I was seven years old that year. She took us home to Sucker Point where my father's parents lived. My grandfather had cattle and a garden which meant a lot to us.

"Fall came, my mother was once again worried, for we had to be moving along. Frank Gunn came to pick us up. There were four of us. There was my older sister, myself, my younger sister and the baby who was born just three months before my father died. We moved to Knee Lake. We lived around the area through the winter months in tents. My mother hunted and trapped as she taught herself. At Christmas time we would go to Patuanak so we could get picked up to go to Ile-a-la-Crosse with my grandfather.

"In 1923, my grandfather said I couldn't go back. I had to go to school. So, he put me in the mission school. He paid the priest with a mower – a thing that horses pull to cut grass.

"I didn't like being in school, but I stayed for two years. French was all that was taught. There were no grades like they have today. We were taught Catechism, and a few of us knew how to read.

"Marcel Gunn was going to take my mother out to Haultain Lake. He was her brother-in-law. I left the school and I went down to watch them leave. I was crying. My mother gave me a licking to go up.

"In September, while we were being taught, someone came to tell us we had to go berry picking. We were so happy to go out. The nun that taught us and three other little boys drowned. They were Belanger's son, Sister Arcand's brother and Charles Natomagan. The other children got to shore safely.

"When we got back we stayed without a teacher for a while. Then we had two nuns come to teach us, Sister Leguff and Sister Tucker.

"Father Moraud and Father Rossignol, with help from the brothers, used to go fishing or kill cattle for us to eat. If it wasn't fish or cattle, we would have ptarmigans to eat. We always had vegetables to eat, for they had gardens.

"When spring came, my mother took me out of school. We moved up north. She did the fishing and hunting for us. There were no such things as nylon nets then. She used to make her own nets. I don't really know what kind of thread my mother used, but it was thick. When she was done making this, we had to find something for floats. We used to go look for really dry wood, from an old "burn" – where there had been a forest fire – and cut up this wood for floats. Then we would go look for rocks along the shore to use as "leads."

"In the fall, around Dipper Lake, my mother did a lot of fishing and drying of fish. Sometimes she dried about a thousand fish. When freeze-up came, she hunted rabbits and ducks, then stored them all for us during the winter. She also stored the berries which were picked during the summer. There were no sealers then, so, she used to dry them. Then, she would put them in big jars and store them in holes in the ground. She also put some away in birch bark baskets. With all of this, she was able to keep us alive through the winter months.



"When the fur buyers came in, my mother used to sell her furs to the one with the highest price for fur. I remember this very well. She used to buy food then, buy what we needed.

"Now that we were getting old enough, we helped with the wood and other things. Pretty soon my sister got married. Not too long after we moved again to Ile-a-la-Crosse. We went to our old house. Then I turned eighteen and I was ready to get married.

"I married Joseph Kyplain, Celestin Kyplain's son. They were living at Halfway Lake, where I was going to live. We stayed there for a while. After my first son was born, my husband told me we had to go up north. He had to go trapping. We had no family allowance or social aid to help us. People had to look for food to survive.

"We used to go fishing at a place called "where the fish go up the river in the winter". The name was in Chipeweyan. I went fishing with Virginia Gunn while her husband, Harry Gunn and my husband went to Cree Lake. We were alone for almost two weeks. Virginia and I did the fishing with three dogs. This river wasn't frozen in the winter time. So, to get across, my uncle chopped a big tree across the river.

"Virginia would throw in the net while I was on the other side. I tied my side of the net on and she did the same on her side. She told me to go up the river for about ten minutes, throw in a stick and then go back. There were a lot of fish. You could just see in the river. We could hardly bring the net out, it was so heavy. It had trout and whitefish.

"When we got to Three Rivers, one year, my sister had a baby girl. She was picked up by plane, so we were left alone with my aunt and uncle. One of their daughters passed away while we were there at Three Rivers. She was buried there for two weeks. Then, when the ice broke up, we took the body and we came paddling down the river. I was taking care of it. When we stopped to camp, we buried it overnight until we got to Patuanak.

"My husband didn't come with us. He said he didn't have enough furs. So, he stayed behind with a white man who was also trapping there. Since it was his first time in these rivers, he told me to chop a tree along the river to mark where we had camped. Coming down this way, he could find his way.

"This river is full of portages. Some times you will not even go a mile when you'll have to portage again at big rapids.

"We may have paddled about two long days carrying the girl's body when we got to Last Lake as it was called. There were some people living there. But, they were not home just then. We found some fish drying in the sun and some berries that were in birch bark baskets. So, we ate. We stayed there overnight. The next day we moved along. We had to camp again, for we were waiting for Knee Lake to open up. We stayed there about a week.

"The lake opened towards the south side. We dug up the body again and moved on. We got to Primeau Lake that day. There we met some people coming from Pinehouse. They were Napoleon Caisse and a boy clerk. They gave me a ride to Dipper Lake where my mother was. Virginia and her husband took the body on to Patuanak".

CLAUDIA LARIVIERE

Claudia is fifty-nine years old, and a resident of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

"I was born on Big Island. The earliest I can remember was when we lived in Fort Black with my mom and grandparents. Then my mother died and Father Rossignol took me in. I then grew up in the mission.

"It was busy. I went to school for awhile and then I helped peel potatoes. Later the sisters showed me how to sew.

"The mission was always poor. I remember when there was a special occasion, such as Easter, we would be satisfied with one egg placed under the table. We never saw butter. On special occasions, we were fed potatoes and lard in the morning.

"Once, the mission burned. The curtains were too close to a wood stove and they caught on fire. This was about five o'clock in the morning. We had to run out in our gowns. They found us a place to stay after that. That place was in the attic of Father's house. We lived and played up there.

"We never saw the outside life. I never saw the Bay and other places in town, because we weren't allowed to go anywhere. My grandma used to visit me at the convent. We were so innocent. I never knew those things existed until I got married. It was so different."



Big Island

Courtesy Robert Longpre

SISTER THERESE ARCAND

Sister Arcand is a member of the Grey Nuns. She was born at Green Lake and went to school at Ile-a-la-Crosse. Today she is doing Mission work in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Sister Arcand was the first Metis student of Ile-a-la-Crosse to join the Sisters of Charity.

"In 1920, I was in Green Lake, I had about two brothers at the Ile-a-la-Crosse school. When I came, it was Christmas Eve, 1920. I remember that day very well. It was a hard journey from Green Lake because it was a very cold winter. We travelled by sleigh on the winter road along the Beaver River. We finally did get here. My mother brought me to the school, the boarding house, and I was left with the Sister. My mother went off to stay where my aunties were in the village. There were not too many houses. They put me in Church first of all because I was always in the way.

"The Sisters were preparing the "Creche". They asked me to put some of the decorations on the little statues. This was my first contact with the Church. I was happy, but at the same time, I was very, very lonesome. I should have come to school the year before, I guess. But, I couldn't decide to leave my mother. I had a little brother with me. I didn't mind it too much.

"At the holidays in June, there used to be two men who would come from Green Lake by canoe to here. They'd turn back and we would go home with them. We would go to Beauval and camp, then go up the Beaver River and camp again. It seems to me we camped three times on the way. Finally we were home. We stayed there the best part of two months. At the middle of August we had to come back to school again. And, I just cried!



Courtesy Robert Longpre

Sister Arcand



Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

Twelve School Girls

"I never found it easy to leave home. Never! I went home for the summers of '22 and '23' and then I didn't go back home again. I've stayed on with the Sisters ever since.

"I loved school very much, especially geography. Everything else could go, but I had to read this geography book with its big fat cover. It told all about the world, Calcutta, Bangkok and the rest of them. I tell you it was just as if it was the Bible.

"We'd always rise at about 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning. We'd have to carry our own water. We washed up and made our beds before we came down and said our morning prayers. Then, after Mass, we went to breakfast which lasted not very long. Some girls were then assigned to wash dishes, others to separate milk. Then we had other chores like cleaning oil lamps and filling them with oil.

"Around a quarter to nine we got ready for class. Those who had no chores to do had been up in their rooms mending their clothes or the clothes of the younger children. We didn't play in the morning. This was work time.

"At nine o'clock, we walked to school and sat at our double desks where two of us sat. We didn't have scribblers in those days, we had slates. We had a little cloth to wipe them clean. First we did arithmetic, the French grammar, spelling and reading. After this we'd have Bible History. I don't remember having recess though. We were very disciplined. I enjoyed school.

"Then we'd go for dinner. After dinner, we always hurried our eating – I don't think I even bothered to chew my food – it was play time. It was a great big penance if some of us had to be assigned to do the dishes. Playing was done outside.

"Then we went to school. Now we had English class. We did geography, history and English reading, spelling and grammar. Before we left school we always sang for fifteen minutes.

"We went outside to play for a half hour. At 4:30 it was sewing time for a half hour. Then it was time for prayer. Supper was after prayers. Then chores, then upstairs. It seems to me we started getting ready for bed at 7:30. At eight o'clock we were in bed.

"Morning lessons in school were taught in French. In the afternoons we went with Sister Tucker, who replaced Sister Nadeau who had drowned. She taught us in English. Sister Tucker was a very, very slow person. That's why I had lots of time to study my geography.

"I'd rise early in the morning to help with the bread. We'd always have porridge in the morning and I only had that to cook for the meal. The food was very simple, but was plentiful, that's why I grew up so big.

"We had lots of vegetables. We had a great big garden right beside the house. We helped to plant this garden first of all. Second we hoed it. We did detest it, but anyways we did it. Then we'd pray for rain so that we'd have vegetables galore.

"We spent a lot of time outside. We played and we worked. It was much more like a family. We always dressed up. We were never really cold, even on some of the coldest days.

"Then the big day came when I had to leave. We left on the 29th of March, 1929. We travelled from here to Beauval in a sleigh. But, before going, I raised my head and looked at the mission from top to bottom. I thought of the things that had happened to me. Then I came across the face of a girl who had just come to Ile-a-la-Crosse. She was crying. I then said to myself, "I will go in training and come back to help my people. That was my last thought while in Ile-a-la-Crosse."



PA 44565 Public Archives of Canada

Ile-a-la-Crosse Church 1920

FISH AND FUR . . . We Make Our Living

Sakitawak, land of four rivers. Always, your waters have yielded food for us. Your forests have kept us clothed and warm through the fury of winter's North Wind. We dwelt in your heart and took what was needed to live. Then came the "White" man.

Sakitawak, your name has been changed; but still you give to your people and the strangers. For two hundred years we have tried to strip bare the land in the quest for more of the "new" world. Thankfully, we failed to rob you of everything. As in your yesterdays, you still give birth to the fish, the fur, and the forest.

Even the strangers came to worship your bounty. Fame spread like a prairie fire, calling the lusty trappers and traders to your beaches. Trains of winter sleighs came to feed the fish-hungry south. Yes, you were the master giving enough to live yet keeping enough for your own life.

Twelve thousand fur pelts of the beaver from this Churchill River country started the "White" quest for a post in this country. Joseph Frobisher and Alexander Henry knew that a post inland from Hudson's Bay house at Cumberland Lake would yield them uncounted riches.

Fur alone could not make life inland a successful venture. Food had to be available for survival. Time after time after painful time fish proved to be the only reliable meal and the lakes and rivers were the only reliable larder. As David Thompson stopped at the post in Ile-a-la-Crosse, he wrote in his journal:

"On the evening of June 6th we arrived at the old trading post of Ile-a-la-Crosse, famous for its fine Whitefish, which is a fish peculiar to the Northern Lakes in this Continent." ³⁰

Famous already, and the year was only 1799. Listen now to the words of our people!



Tanning Moose Hide – Metis Women

Courtesy Leo Belanger

TOM NATOMAGAN

Tom is an eighty-six year old man, who is now a resident of Snake Lake. He was born at McKay Point in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

"As far back as I can remember, I was about twelve years old, when we used to come to Sakitawak by dog sled. We used to come from far to go to midnight Mass. We didn't use tents. We slept out in the open. There were only about three houses. We never used to have houses, just teepees. They just didn't want to make houses. The people who lived in houses were called "house people". They couldn't believe we lived in teepees. Later, some old men started building houses until, finally, everybody had a house.



Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

Ile-a-la-Crosse 1946

"There was a smaller church. At times it couldn't fit everybody because then, the people didn't die. Too many people used to come to church. We used to come here only for summer and for midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. There was only one priest. We used to get him to come for baptising or to say Mass for the deceased. We used to have one big Mass in a big house.

"There used to be a school in the mission where they taught only in French. I ran away from there. I went there in the fall and walked into the school. I never saw anyone, so I took off. I know this guy who was sent there, and today he knows how to read. If I had seen one person, then today I would be a good writer.

"About my grandparents . . . the men used to trap only. They never used to fish. Only the women did that. The women also got the wood. The men had to trap and hunt. The men had to have strong bodies in order to pull all their pelts and their belongings. We took the women along just to where we settled. When we used to move on, the women came along on snowshoes.

"The dogs were no good. The animals that carried our food and blankets were only pups. There were no sleds.

"Trapping was the only way of life. There was no other work. We used to trap only for beaver. At times it was poor. We used to chop the ice which was really thick, and put the traps under.

"We also used to keep baby foxes, which is called "hidden trapping". We used to build houses; put the baby foxes in them; feed them until they were old enough; then hit them on top of the head. Their fur used to cost a lot. We used to dig the foxes out of their homes.

"Later, they started keeping wolves in packs. You could just hear them howling. Then they used to sneak up on them during feeding time. Those were doings of long ago. We also used to smoke fish which was the number one thing. We all used to gather and smoke fish in contests.

"Trapping was good. The price was low, but so was the cost of living.

"It was hard . . . life was. But today, you live like kings. Ever since you young people were born, life was easy. We never used to wear parkas, just thin coats. We adapted to the cold weather because of our diet which consisted of only meat and fish. We weren't cold, no matter if blizzard or the north wind. Although we used to freeze our faces.

"But now, I am making up for it. I don't lack anything because I get a pension. Life is easy now, but it was hard then."

FRED DARBYSHIRE

Fred is a retired mink rancher and former trapper.

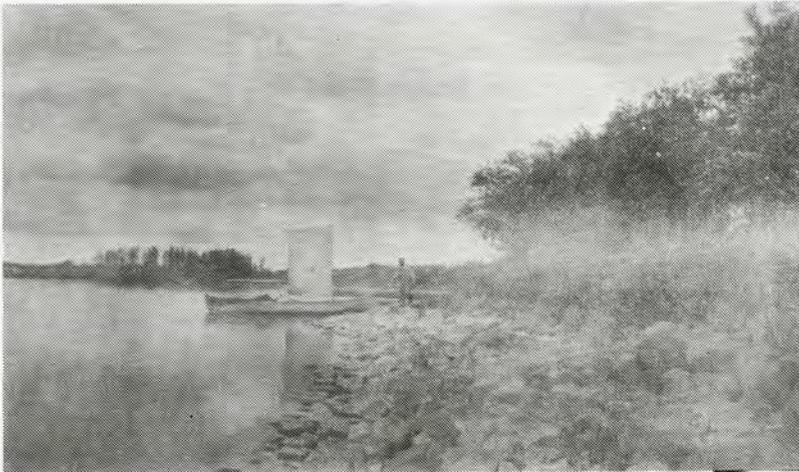
"I've been around and passing through Ile-a-la-Crosse, oh, since about 1925. That would be just over 50 years. The town at that time wasn't very large. Mostly, there were just a few shacks outside of the mission. The Hudson's Bay store was the only building down in lower village or "Snob Hill". I don't suppose there would be more than a hundred people that lived in Ile-a-la-Crosse, including the kids.

"There was a good deal more game in those days than there is at the present. So, most of us around Ile-a-la-Crosse spent our time hunting. There was no other work to be had anyway.

"There weren't so many forest fires in those days. By Golly! It's funny eh? There's so many forest fires now.

"The DNR had a building right across the mouth of the Beaver River when I first came here. I was looking for the site not too long ago, but everything seems to have been obliterated. There is not a sign of anything left there. You could hardly find where the building used to be.

"We used to paddle. If there was a fair wind, we put up a sail. Nobody had any outboard motors.



Courtesy Public Archives of Canada PA 18051

Courtesy Fred Darbyshire



"The first time I came up this lake, I came down from Souris. Souris is down on the Churchill River on the north end of Snake Lake. I came up the river to Ile-a-la-Crosse Lake on a Tuesday evening. The wind was blowing from the south. It took me until Saturday to reach the mouth of the Beaver River. I had no grub. That's how I remember going up to the DNR office that was there. I had supper with them, and got grub from them."

NAP JOHNSON

Nap was born November 30th, 1915, at Sucker Point (Treaty Land). He grew up in the area of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

"There was Samuel Mispounas, my great grandfather, my mother, and I. They were paddling as we went down the Churchill River until we got to Souris River. It wasn't a village, just a few people stayed there. We spent the winter there before moving on to the south end of Snake Lake.

"There, I remembered, the freighters came. It was the end of January. These freighters came in only once a year. They came in through Dore Lake, La Plonge Lake and across land to Pinehouse, from Big Beaver. It was quite a distance. From Pinehouse, they followed Pinehouse Lake to the north end which was the Souris River.



Winter Freight

Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

"Already, then, I had seen people making home brew. They used sugar, along with the rest. When they ran out of sugar, they used syrup. That meant that they didn't have any sugar or syrup left throughout the year.

"When it was time to come back, my uncle, Abraham Mispounas, met us at Pinehouse. He was coming from Highrock Lake with his wife and child. There were no maps to follow. We had to go on the direction the river flows, and to follow the sun's directions.

"Coming down the river we only had muskrats to eat, and we were getting tired of eating the same thing over and over. Abraham killed an otter, for we wanted to eat something fresh and new. But, to our surprise, no one could eat it. It had a strong taste and was tough. Next he killed a young calf that was just born. Then we had Jackfish. Abraham killed them by spearing them. The river was shallow since it was spring. Every curve of the river, we'd see porcupines sitting up in the willow trees. This was something else we ate. Finally we arrived at Patuanak.

"At Patuanak they paid in furs, for the goods they had taken in the early fall. This is the way most people made their payments. In the summer, each family was given about \$200 worth of goods. The people made sure they made everything last. In June, the Indian Affairs agent came in to give the people a couple of things along with a \$5 allowance to each person. Some of the things that they brought were gun powder, shot, and empty shells and caps. For one net, they gave 3 rolls of twine. Also, they gave twine sideline and other strings to make a net.

"In the summer people didn't stay together. You would generally find two or three families living together for awhile in June and July. In August, they go into the bush for hunting, because the moose go into the bush in late August. The moose no longer stay in the water. When they killed a moose, they would clear a trail for the other people to come. They kept the meat long if they dried it well. Some chopped the dry meat until it was flaky.



Treaty Day, 1907

"In August the bulls, and cows and calves are fat. When they killed these fat moose, they kept the fat in a bag – the bag where the moose has urine. They washed this bag out, filled it up with air, and kept it this way until it dried – a couple of days. When it was dried, they opened it to let the air out. The bag stayed the same. In this, they kept the fat from along the back. This fat is always soft, it is never frozen or hardens. When they want to have a little lunch, they squeeze on this bag and the fat comes out onto the dry meat.

"Pelican grease was used only for lighting. It has a strong fishy taste to it. It was called "Bitch Light" in Cree. This was used before coal oil.

"For soap to wash clothes, the livers of the catfish, the ashes of poplar wood, the duck's grease were used. To kill the ducks, people at times used arrows. Often ducks were caught in nets. Not everyone had enough shells to shoot ducks then. The soap was dark colored. It was real soapy and didn't smell bad. It was all they used.

"As I grew up, I saw people live in town, mostly older ones, or the ones with cattle and horses. They all had gardens then, about one acre each. They grew potatoes, carrots, turnips, corn, and cabbage. They had large families. They couldn't afford to move around.



Hudson's Bay Garden

PA 18068 Public Archives of Canada

"There was no stealing ever done then. People left anything anywhere. It was never taken. When a man came back he found everything. People were honest and fair with everything.

"Now, if you even leave a car out on the road, you get it wrecked, lose parts off of it, or even lose the whole thing. Same thing with a boat. Even a house out in the bush, you're bound to lose something out of it.

"For Mass, especially during the Christmas season, people came up from as far as Cree Lake. These people didn't come for drinks, just for Mass. The odd person would take back a couple of things when going back from relatives. The holy days were very sacred to them. They had to come to church on these days.

"Now when the holy days come, people just take a holiday. They don't care for anyone anymore. They don't help each other. They don't have respect for others.

"I used to go to Pautanak with my mother who was Treaty. But, I wasn't, for my father was a lost whiteman. So, I couldn't even go to Treaty school. She used to collect her \$5 each year. Every few years, she used to get a Hudson Bay blanket like everyone else. Also, three pounds of salt pork for each family, enough string for two nets, and two hooks. We used to take two days to paddle to Patuanak in a borrowed canoe.

"At twelve years of age, I started to trap.

"Once, I remember I went up north. I cannot remember the year. Harry MacDonald was here then. I went up the Haultain and Deer River. We were trapping. There were men from Beauval and Green Lake. We trapped together, at times we used the same trapline. We couldn't expect a cheque from the government. Earning a dollar then meant a lot."

Nap Johnson worked for the Hudson's Bay as a clerk for a while. Later in the thirties he worked for the RCMP as a special constable. After the RCMP, he worked for the Department of Natural Resources as a patrolman until he got hurt in 1963. In 1968 he was a fieldman for the Department of Social Services. Today, he is a tourist outfitter and has a number of hand-built cabins on various northern lakes for his business. Also, he is presently a member of the local school board and has helped to acquire a new school for the children of the town of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

VITAL MORIN

Vital is a resident of Ile-a-la-Crosse who holds many jobs and positions. He is active in local government, owns a restaurant that is new, works in hand with the provincial government and is chairman of the local school board.



Courtesy "DENOSA"

Vital Morin

"As far as I can recall, I was fairly young when my dad died. I could remember him telling me stories about him starting off early in break-up in the first part of May to go to Churchill to pick up freight for the Hudson's Bay Company. It used to take them about six months to make the round trip, to go up there and back in late fall around October, when waterways froze.

"My dad used to tell me that the trip was fairly easy going down the current. They were all loaded coming up the current. At a lot of the rapids that are fairly swift and shallow, they had to get tow ropes on each side of the river and pull the barges, empty, up the rapids. They had to haul all their supplies across the portage on their backs to above the top of the rapids. There were no outboard motors, it was all by paddle. They had paddles on both sides of these boats. I don't know how many men, but I figured around five on each side and one fellow in the stern at the big steering paddle. It took them four to five months to come up from Churchill to Ile-a-la-Crosse by those boats.

"He also used to freight from Big River by barge. They used to go up by canoe to Big River through the Beaver River, there down the Cowan River, then up the Cowan Lake right into Big River. Big River used to be a supply depot at that time.



Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

Barge at Break-up

“They used to get lumber and build barges. These barges were filled up with supplies, and bring those supplies here. Once they got here, they used to tear these barges apart. We used the lumber to build houses.

“My dad’s name was Felix Morin. My grandfather was Catholique Morin. My dad died at 66 around 1954. I was only 33 years old then.

“I started going on my own after I had completed my grade nine. I went and fished for Frank Nostrum Little Peter Pond Lake. What we did was we had a camp on the fishlines. You punch holes in the ice, you had one hundred yard nets and a jigger. A jigger is a machine that is made with a board with a pick on it. You pull it and make it go one or two feet every pull. At the end of a hundred yards you punch another hole, push your jigger up ahead, grab the line, and tie that line to the end of the net. Then you get one man pulling that line in. That’s the way you set nets.

“When you come to lifting, you punch a hole at one end and tie a line about 150 yards long. Two men pull – one on the lead line, and one on the float line. On the ice, you pull fish out. As you take them out, keep pulling the net. After, you clean all the net out. You get one man to run to the other hole and pull the net back in again.

“We used to use wool mitts, and we had these fish hooks to get around the nets so that you could ungill the fish. It made it a lot easier, because with wool mitts it’s kind of hard to get into this fine twine. It was cold work, but once you get used to the weather, it doesn’t bother you. You could be out on the lake at 30 below and the wind blowing 15 miles per hour, and it won’t bother you. You’re dressed up for it.

"When I was fifteen, I remember then, the freighting was done with teams of horses in the winter time. They brought in the freight into the stores and took the furs and fish back up to market in the south.

"There used to be strings of around 30 to 40 teams of horses in one line at a time. Three or four teams were in front to push the plow over all these lakes. The route was through the Cowan Lake up to Dore Lake, then to the Beaver River up around Beauval. Then, they went down the Beaver River into Ile-a-la-Crosse Lake, then into Buffalo Narrows.

"The main point was at Buffalo and used to spread out from there, go to the Peter Pond Lake, Little Peter Pond, Churchill Lake, and all these other places to pick up the fish and get the supplies in.

"There were quite a few accidents. Teams used to go through the ice. The Beaver River was one of the bad areas, because the river always has bad ice in places.

"From Big River up Cowan Lake, Dore Lake, Beauval, there were stopping places. From there, they used to come into the mouth of the Beaver River around Ile-a-la-Crosse here. That stopping place used to belong to Dick Kirby. They had great big stables made out of logs – they used to hold around 20 teams or more. Also they had bunkhouses for the freighters to stay in. They had a big cook shack where all the people used to eat.

"The horses were all looked after by the freighters themselves. They carried most of their feed – hauled oats and hay.

"The next stopping place was on Deep River, and it was run by Mr. Oslin. From there, they went right into Buffalo. There were three different people who had stopping places – Tom Peterson, Ryder Peterson and my uncle, Louis Morin.

"There used to be a wagon from Fort Black all the way to Meadow Lake. That road was cut open. There was a government project in them days. I worked on that road myself. That was in the 40's.

"The road was all hand made – corduroying the soft spots, the sandy spots, and then pulling some soil on top of that. There were a lot of mud holes. At that time, we worked for 50 cents a day. This was in 1940-41. The work was shovel and axe. We used to fill the wagons with sand or clay or whatever we could get close by. Also, chop poles and the teams of horses would haul the poles to the soft places to corduroy it. Then we'd put some sand or clay on top of the corduroy so the trucks wouldn't bunch up the poles. I remember we were up around mile 41, around the foot of the Grand Rapids on the Beaver River.

"I got discharged from the army in October, 1945. I spent the late fall and early winter commercial fishing at Patuanak. Me and my brother Harry were commercial fishing. We did some trapping in the spring, muskrat and beaver.

"Finally on July 1st, 1946, I got married. That day a very big celebration was taking place. The mission was celebrating its 100th anniversary. We must of had five to six thousand people here in Ile-a-la-Crosse from all the surrounding communities coming to the celebrations. We had a Cardinal come from way down Quebec somewhere. He came to help the celebration here. The Mass was done at ten o'clock in the morning, and that's where I was married, right outside the Church.

"There were six couples married that same day. One was M. Bouvier, another was George Maurice who lives at Jans Bay now. Frances Opikopew from Canoe Lake, and two couples from La Loche."



Photo Courtesy, Ile-a-la-Crosse Mission

July 1st, 1946

ROY SIMPSON

Roy is the manager of the Hudson's Bay Store in Ile-a-la-Crosse, and has been here at that job since January 19th, 1959.

"We did employ men during the winter to do what they called in those days – tripping. "Tripping" was that a man had a dog team and toboggan, and he would go right after freeze up in the fall. He took some provisions from the store – flour, lard, sugar, tobacco, etc. – and he would go out on the traplines to different camps where the natives were camped doing their trapping. He would barter with the natives for the fur they would have and then bring the furs back to the store. He might make three or four of these trips during the winter.

"When I first came, there were quite a number of trappers in the Ile-a-la-Crosse area. Over the years, I have noticed that our younger people are not taking up the fur trade – the trapping trade – that I think they possibly should. I still maintain there is a good living to be had in trapping. I don't mean that you take sixty or seventy young people and say "you go trapping!" There is such a thing as to overtrap. So, maybe it's only good for ten or fifteen people. I still think we aren't doing what we should to maintain the tradition.

"We had our trappers. We had a book which had the trappers name in, and the furs that we bought from him during the winter. We added it all up during the spring. The man who was a very good trapper, he brought in four to six thousand dollars worth of furs in a winter. On the strength of what he produced, we were prepared, in the fall to give credit in goods knowing that he would come back and give us all that he had and straighten up his bills.

"When the community started building in the downtown area, the company moved our old store and warehouse to beside the RCMP's present location from the site in Snob Hill where my house is situated. I had the privilege of staying in that old store for twelve years. It was truthfully too small a store to handle the trade and public we had coming in. We put up with it until 1972. In 1972 we got into our new building. I think the customers like it, too. There's more room to move around.



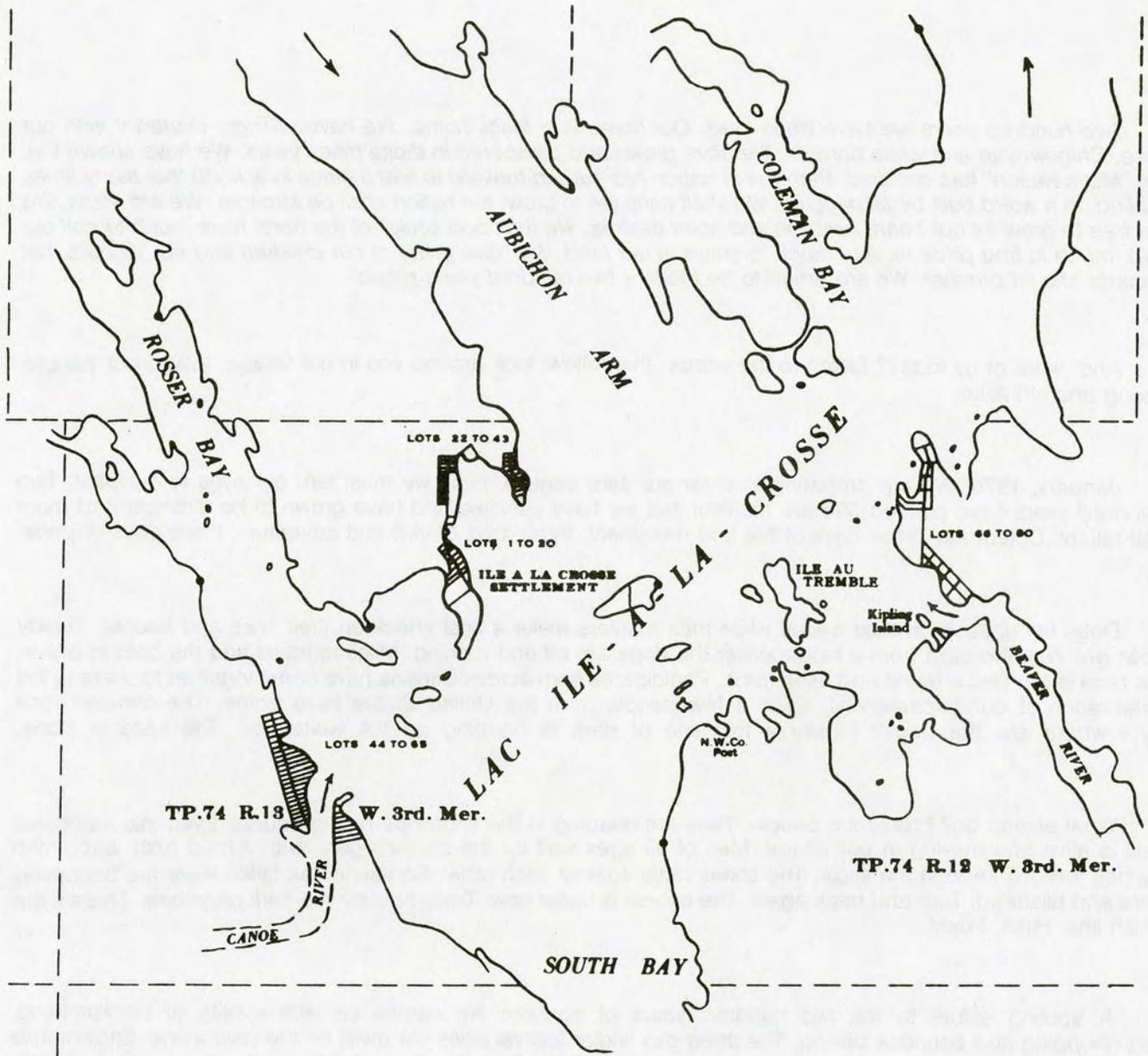


Roy Simpson

"Well do I remember the little school, the little grey building down by the mission. I believe it had four rooms with a box stove in the centre, and a cordwood pile outside. The teacher would have to get up every once in a while to throw another piece of wood into the stove. This was frozen, that was frozen. People had to wear mukluks and what-have-you on their feet. That was part of the deal, that was the educational system. I thought that if nothing else, we will likely get a hardy breed coming out of there.

"Fortunately, we survived that system, and by 1962 it was decided to embark on a good school for Ile-a-la-Crosse. There was quite a difference. They had oil furnaces and they had running water. The children just ate this up. They thought that this was great.

"In two years they added more classrooms. Then they added the "L" wing which still exists today. An auditorium was added on several years ago. And now, we have a new building. In terms of education Ile-a-la-Crosse has certainly progressed in no uncertain terms. If our community is to ever succeed, stand on its own feet, then that is what we need – education!"



Department of Interior 1922
Public Archives of Canada

Survey Map 1920

TODAY . . . We Have Not Lived In Vain

Two hundred years we have been here. Our home is a Metis home. We have willingly shared it with our Cree, Chipeweyan and white parents. We have grown and prospered in these many years. We have shown that the "Metis Nation" has not died. Rather, our nation has surged forward to find a place in a world that many times is blind, in a world built by all peoples. We shall continue to grow; our nation shall be stronger. We are Metis. We are free to grow as our heart, heritage and spirit desires. We the "bois brule" of the north have much to call our own, much to find pride in, and much to share in our land. We have given of our children and our labours that Canada should prosper. We are proud to be Metis – two hundred years proud!

And, what of us today? Listen to the words that follow; look around you in our village; talk to our people, young and old alike.

January, 1976! We are preparing to enter our third century. First, we must turn our eyes to our past. Two hundred years have passed. We are thankful that we have survived and have grown to be stronger and more self-reliant. Celebrate! Three days of fun and merriment; three days of skill and adventure; three days of pride.

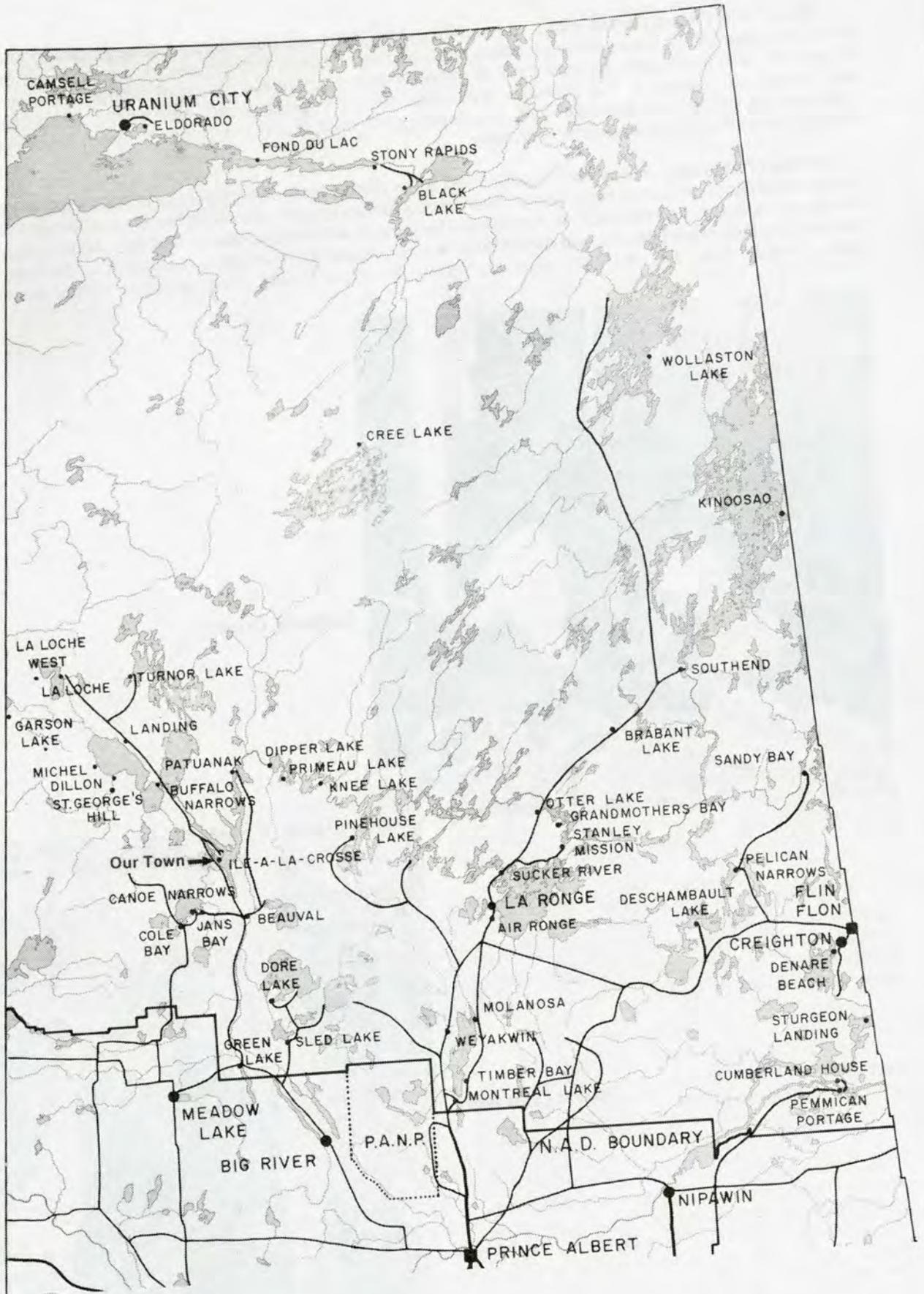
Dogs lay uneasily in their traces while their masters make a final check on their lines and hitches. Ready now; go! With the blast from a loudspeaker the dogs are off and running. Miles to travel and the cold to brave, the race is on. This is travel as it used to be. Participants from across Canada have come together to share in the celebration of our bi-centennial. Even a few people from the United States have come. The minutes race by – where are the dogs? Finally a thin line of dark is bending on the white trail. The race is done.

What else to do? Follow the people. They are heading to the snoeshoe racing course. Even this traditional skill is alive and thriving in our village. Men of all ages wait for the starter's gun. With a mad rush, each man surges forward through the snow. The shoes rattle against each other. Someone has fallen. Feet are becoming sore and blistered. Turn and back again. The course is faster now. Trees float by like dark phantoms. There's the finish line. Push, Push!

A spotting salute to the two hundred years of northern life carries on with events of backpacking, log-chopping and bannock baking. The three day winter festival does not dwell on the past alone. Snowmobile races, bingos, dances, curling and special events for the children. Finally dusk falls on Sunday evening. People retire to warm houses for smaller, more private celebrations. Time now has come to begin planning for the official celebration in July.

Summer has come again to Sakitawak. The rivers still flow strong and mighty. Still the beaver, the muskrat, the moose and the fish find nourishment in these northern waters. Sakitawak is the past alive and the home of today, as well as the hope of tomorrow for its Metis people.

Down a flight of stairs, in the basement of the convent, a group of elderly women are busy with scissors and needles. Moosehide is cut to form the traditional clothing and footwear of long-buried ancestors. Beads sparkle on the fawn-colored leather in a rainbow of color. Designs and patterns tell tales and legends that have today lost most of their words. Two of the women guide younger apprentices through the traditional arts of their special handicrafts. Mary Ann Kyplain and Margaret Caisse patiently teach and create. Each day passes and their work travels to distant parts bringing a special fame to Ile-a-la-Crosse. Welcome to the handicraft shop of the Ile-a-la-Crosse Women's Co-operative.



Saws race through wood with a screeching whine. Men are hammering, painting, gluing and planning. The Ile-a-la-Crosse Men's Co-operative labours over modern cabinets and shelves for a soon-to-be-erected building. In season, with a demand, several men sit patiently and practice the old art of snoeshoe construction. Babiche and wood are joined in the patterns and purposes of the craftsmen. Still others bend their skills to the construction of the northern lake skiff, the dependable craft of the independent fisherman. Here the past and present meet happily in economic harmony.

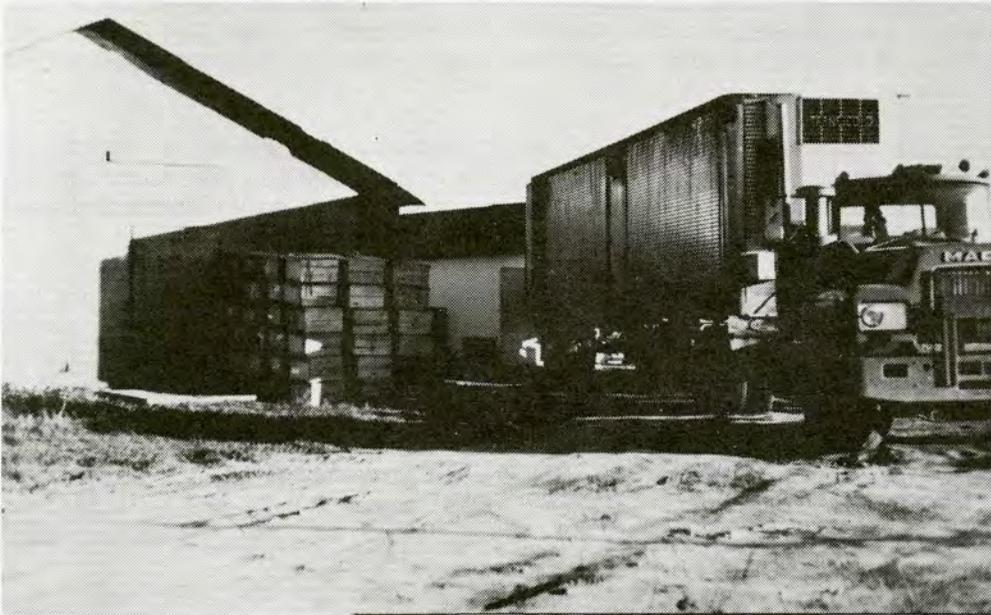
A few of the older citizens still practice the art of curing and tanning of hides. Their work is much preferable to the commercially tanned hide. The pungent odour reminding the wearer of the days when all lived by the hand of nature. Men and women such as Alphonse Daigneault, Albertine Laliberte and Mrs. Nap Johnson keep true to the lessons taught by parents and grandparents when applying their hands and spirits to the hide. But, the body grows weak and the hands begin to ache at these tasks. Will anyone follow in their tradition?



Margaret Caisse



Handi Craft Work



**Fish Plant at McKay Point –
Ile-a-la-Crosse**



**Department of Northern
Saskatchewan**



Ile-a-la-Crosse

The Lake still draws the men to place their nets in its depths. Men like Joseph Favel and Roland Daigneault. Young men still follow their elders to man the skiffs and clean the nets. Whitefish and northern pike abound and give a good living to the industrious. A fish plant readily accepts their catch according to quotas arranged the previous winter.

Muskrat pelts, beaver pelts, lynx, fox and wolf are still a respected and valuable currency for the trapper and trader alike. In this modern age, their ancient skills as trappers are in peak demand. Men such as Kurt Georges still visit and tend traplines established centuries ago. Sadly no one appears to want to follow and learn this occupation. Will the trapline die with the last of the old trappers?

The bush, the towering spruce and twisted pine give a living in many ways. In this age of almost instant and unlimited travel, the enemy of the forest has become an even more dangerous being. Fire – the killing flames race at heart-breaking speed leaving a wildlife refuge or a beautiful camping area smoldering and charred. Men are needed here to war against this enemy; many men. Men as these who proved themselves the best in northern Saskatchewan.

Sharing quarters with these firefighters the Department of Northern Saskatchewan spends double-duty watching over the livelihood of the fish and fur and feathered wildlife. Jonas Daigneault in the employ of the DNS uses his work experience as well as his intuitive knowledge of the north in planning and directing field activities.

Expansive windows exhibit the latest of dress fashions and serve to attract customers to the modern and large building now housing the venerable Hudson's Bay Company. Roy Simpson and his staff happily serve the demanding tastes of growing consumerism. Inside, canoes, wood cook-stoves share space with color televisions, stereos and electric ranges. Clothing fashions of Saskatoon, Regina and metropolitan Canada vie for the shopper's attention. Another section of the store offers grocery goods as to be found in any retail market in the South. All is pleasing to the eye.



BEST OVER ALL CREW: The Ile a la Crosse fire crew took first place in hand tool, pumper trailer and campsite competitions and was judged the best over all crew. They are (back row, left to right): Reg Cockle, conservation officer and fire fighting crew members Dennis Favel, Ivan Maurice, Lawrence McCallum, Martin Couillonneur, William Gardiner, Lawrence Daigneault and (front row, left to right): Larry Buckley, conservation officer, crew members Robert Gardiner Jr., Moise Morin and crew foreman Pete Daigneault.

Courtesy "DENOSA"



RCMP Station

Old Bay – Terry's Cafe



Senior Citizens Home

A courtyard of green surrounds the RCMP station. Several officers maintain the legal rights and privileges of a peaceful society. Manning their vans, they serve as a source of safety and comfort in times of accident, injury or emergency. Unflinchingly, they maintain the laws of their country with pride.

The old Hudson's Bay Store now is home to a restaurant and pool room. Therese Morin gives a warm chair and hot coffee to the village. The clean and bright room is appointed with several historical photographs serving to maintain the inherent pride of her people. Many are those who visit for the comfort of its simple existence.

Across the street the "old age home" gives a quiet room for the peace of the village's elderly. Here Mr. Malbouf sits on many an evening chatting with the occasional visitor. Inside, cards and conversation brighten up the last years of these grandparents and great-grandparents. Willingly, people like Marie Rose McCallum will tell of the days long since past. In here a treasure house of history is still to be found and kept for tomorrow.

The house of local government sits next door. Here is the planning room of a growing community. Here is decided the direction and philosophy of the town. In the head chair, Leo Belanger meets with his councillors and tries to get as much for this home of theirs as provincial budgets will allow. Here also, is the community's library. A modern and appealing room rests comfortably with its own special treasures.

A log cabin is guarded by a massive rack of a moose. Recently built, it houses the ideals and programs of the Metis Society. Here the young progressive citizens gather to debate the future of their people, plan community projects and serve to help educate their people in a "white" dominated world. Jimmy Favel is the guiding key along with Jimmy Durocher. This plain and pleasing building is a happy stopping place for the young adults who will soon inherit the community controls.



Metis Society Building



Convent and Hospital



Church Ile-a-la-Crosse



Senior Citizen – Mr. Malboeuf

A long and simple building houses the co-op store. A no-nonsense atmosphere suggests that as competitor to the "Bay", it means business. People-owned, little is wasted on the luxuries of dazzling the eyes of all beholders. Food, dry goods, hardware and conversation are the chief goods obtained. Here many come to meet with friends and neighbours or just browse while enjoying a sweet treat.

And that imposing and unconventional structure? The school is the community's life-blood. A new school designed by a Metis architect, Douglas Cardinal, now serves to lead the young to a more confident future. This year of 1976 is a first in many ways for the school. Grade twelve now allows the village children to keep the security and comfort of home while attending school. The school design now permits a more tangible arts program; a solid science program; music in a miniature concert hall setting; more student government programs and initiative; a pleasing and appealing resource centre, both audio and visual; and of course a warm atmosphere for learning of reading to mechanics. The circular design dispels the feeling of helplessness, of aloneness, of being boxed in. In all, it is worth the three and half million dollars it cost to construct. The future will eventually bear witness.

All is not work in Ile-a-la-Crosse. With the ideas, enthusiasm and efforts of Thomas J. Roy, the community's recreation director, the village often is kept happily involved in activities and sporting events. T. J., as he is usually called, directs the hockey and softball teams in their regular season play against other northern community teams. He has the use of an indoor hockey arena, curling rink, bingo hall and large playing fields. Hours have been devoted to the planning and co-ordinating of youth activities; and always an eye is kept open for new events to keep his community healthy and happy. T. J. has given an extra portion of himself to the town. He has planned, co-ordinated, advertised and worked the winter festival for the winter games, as well as the special Bi-Centennial Celebrations of July, 1976.

Canoe racing, long-distance running, outdoor dances, bingos, special events and a beer garden. Celebrate in style. Thousands come to pay honour and tribute to this special hour of Ile-a-la-Crosse. Riel would be proud of his growing "Metis Nation". Two hundred years! Sakitawak! Ile-a-la-Crosse! Who are you? What are you?

New homes, color television, education, the church, self government, locally controlled education, and of course those who practise the traditional life-styles of forefathers. Ile-a-la-Crosse is more than all of this. Ile-a-la-Crosse is a special place with a special past, looking for a special tomorrow. Sakitawak—two hundred years proud!



ILE A LA CROSSE CELEBRATES BICENTENNIAL

Courtesy "DENOSA"

VITAL MORIN – SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN

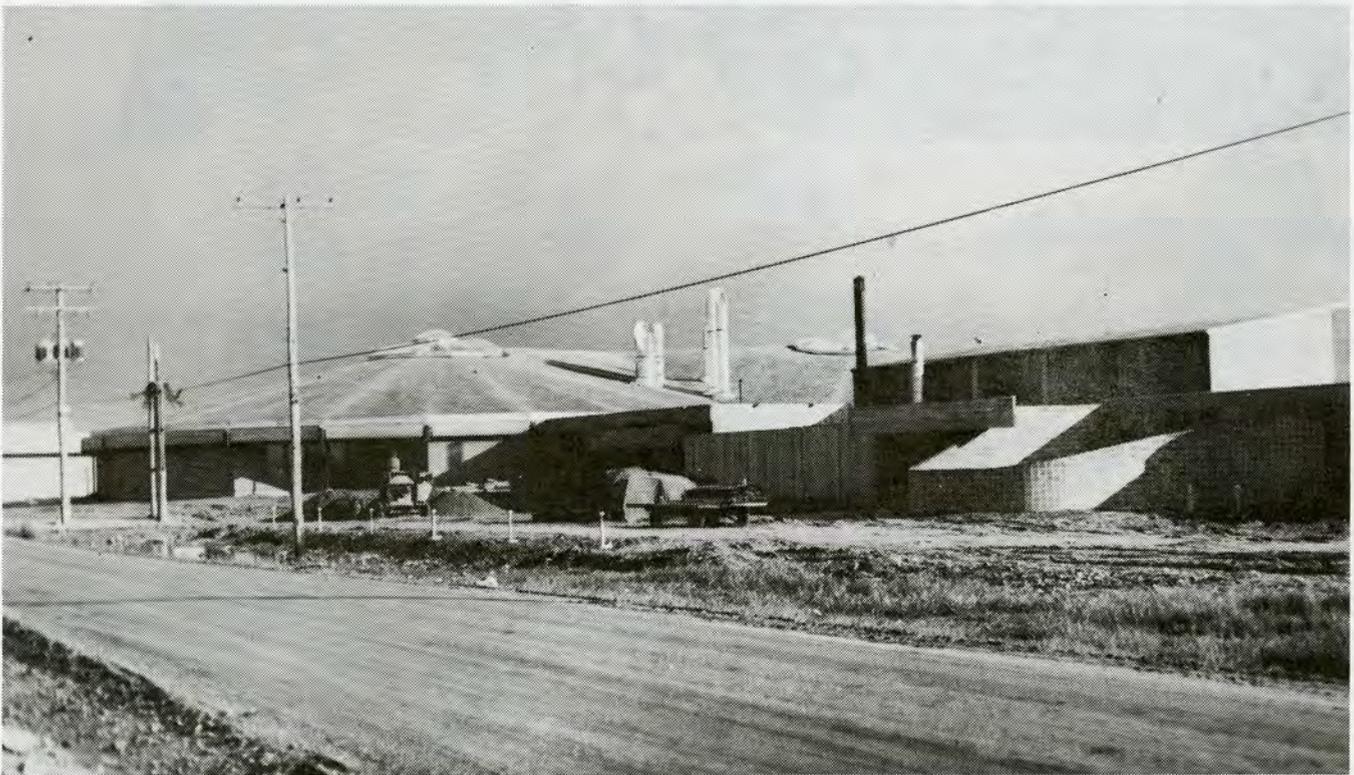
“We have a local board elected and looking after the total operation of the school here. There were a lot of meetings from the take-over. There was quite a conflict within the community. A lot of people thought that the local people would never be able to run their own school. But, the majority of the parents thought that the local board would run a better school.

“The school itself is going to be one of the best. With the new school and equipment, I hope it will impress the students that are attending this school and make it more interesting to them, so that they attend more regularly than they have been doing. We have a lot more to offer in the school now, than we’ve ever had before.

“By having the knowledge of what the kids at Ile-a-la-Crosse need as far as education is concerned, the types of programs, we would point these out to the type of teachers that would be able to teach these types of programs.

“Some of the things that the people thought should be taught here is our own culture, our own history. People were starting to lose interest in their own culture. These are the things we thought we could bring back and sort of keep the people aware of what they are and not lose it in the white society. We know for sure all our kids won’t become doctors, lawyers, and office people. There will always be a number of people who are thinking of going back to trapping and fishing, and try to do their own type of living that they have done before. These are some of the things we consider could be taught in the school. By having our own local board, a lot of these things can be implemented in the school.

“The students have to be prepared to take this kind of schooling or take the white man’s ways. In order to make kids interested in attending school, we have to make an interest inside that school.”



New School – 1976

ROY SIMPSON – A MEMBER OF LCA

"In 1960, I was put on the rate payers association. That was an elected body. It was a fairly limited body. We were under the jurisdiction of the Northern Administration District. We had a gentleman by the name of Bill _____, who was a government services man in Prince Albert, that used to come out periodically and sit with the rate payers association. We had five members on the association. Our positions were advisory positions. We advised the government services as to what might be needed in the community. This went on for four of five years.

"Then we graduated to LAC – Local Advisory Council. This was a step up. We had a little more say in what went on in the community.

"A few years later, we became an LCA – Local Community Authority. Our LCA has, definitely, more strength in the say of community handling and performance than previous boards. We have to make budgets every year. Money is allotted to us, so much for fire protection, so much for roads, street lighting, etc., all the services for the community. We've enjoyed good relations with government services people. They have respected our decisions.

"We are fast becoming closer to what we will have to graduate to next, the municipal level. Our settlement will then be called a village. There is only one drawback about going into villages and towns, the tax base will expand. I expect that within the next five years, we will be a village."



LCA – Local Community Authority

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Photos by the author, Robert Longpre: Pages 35, 40, 43, 44, 59, 60, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 72, 73.

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