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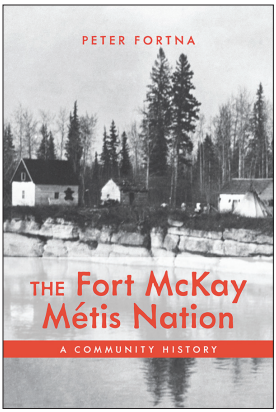

THE FORT MCKAY MÉTIS NATION: A COMMUNITY HISTORY

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Fort McKay, Treaty, Scrip and the Immediate Aftermath: 1899 to 1920

As the government came face-to-face with the communities in what was to become Treaty 8 territory in the late nineteenth century, it quickly recognized that the Indigenous people were organized in strikingly different ways when compared to the groups they had negotiated with for Treaties 1 through 7. Specifically, government officials explained that these northern groups:

> indulge in neither paint nor feathers and they never clothe themselves in blankets. Their dress is of the ordinary style and many of them were well clothed. In the summer they live in teepees, but many of them have log houses in which they live in the winter. The Cree language is the chief language of trade, and some of the Beavers and Chipewyans speak it in addition to their own tongues. All the Indians we met were with rare exceptions were professing Christians, and showed evidences of the work which missionaries have carried on among them for many years. Few of them have had children available themselves of the advantages afforded by boarding schools established at different missions. None of the tribes appear to have any very definite organization. They are held together mainly by the language bond. The chiefs and headmen are simply the most efficient hunters and trappers.[1]

The description of the people found in the Treaty 8 territory broadly demonstrates that, for the most part, all community members had a certain level of acculturation as they were heavily invested in the "bush economy" and had structured their lives accordingly. Families such as the Bouché–Piché–Tourangeau group, for over 100 years, had engaged in the fur trade

to a greater or lesser extent and had chosen to incorporate elements of Euro-Canadian, Dené, and Cree cultures into their own. Increasingly, they were adopting a semi-sedentary lifestyle where they would maintain temporary camps, but also increasingly setting building structures at what was become Fort McKay before 1899, with surveyor Donald Robertson noting that Chief Adam Boucher "had his residence there long previous to Treaty, in fact for 20 or 30 years."[2]

Recognizing this difference, the commissioners were granted broad "discretionary power as to including in the treaty those characterized as Halfbreeds, should they prefer being dealt with as Indians rather than as Metis."[3] Clifford Sifton revealed that it was practically impossible to instruct the commissioners to "draw a hard and fast line" between the Métis and the Indians, as most were closely allied in manner and customs.[4] Ultimately, he recommended that the commissioners be given considerable latitude to allow Métis who so desired to be treated as Indians to be taken into treaty, which "would be more conducive to their own welfare, and more in the public interest . . . than to give them scrip."[5] Opening the negotiation at the Lesser Slave Lake, Sifton reiterated in person that "Half-Breeds living like Indians have the chance to take the treaty instead, if they wish to do so. They have their choice."[6] This option helps to explain why the majority of the Bouché and Piché families, despite their genealogical background and involvement in the fur trade, would have been able to take treaty, while the Tourangeau family were able to take half-breed scrip.[7]

It also seems that Clifford Sifton and the government had ulterior motives for establishing separate Treaty and Scrip commissions. While Sifton recognized the close connections between the "Indians" and "Half-Breeds," he (as well as others in the government) saw Métis people as agitators who were disproportionately involved in the Riel Resistances on the prairies.[8] In 1886, the government had gone to great lengths to expel Métis people from Treaty Bands, and Sifton was concerned that if the "Half-Breeds" were not offered scrip, they would "use their great influence with the Indians as to make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to negotiate Treaty."[9] As such, the Government of Canada formed the Treaty 8 and Half-breed Commissions to travel to northern communities in the summer of 1899 to offer treaty and half-breed scrip.[10]

Needless to say, the government's process for categorizing Indigenous people through the commissions was less than perfect, and the reasons why people chose either Métis scrip or treaty were complex. Adding to the complexity was the fact that Catholic clergy, who often acted as commission translators, generally encouraged individuals to take treaty for fear that those taking scrip would not be given the ongoing assistance the clergy felt they needed.[11] On the other side were the scrip speculators who travelled with the commission and were quick to profitably convert scrip signatories' paper documents into money. The speculators were motivated to see people sign scrip and sell those scrip applications to them for a fraction of the document's value.[12] While undoubtedly both the clergy and speculators influenced individual decisions with regards to the taking of treaty or scrip, it is also likely that individuals had agency in the decision, some deciding to take the security that was offered through treaty, while others determining that money in hand was preferable to being paid a lesser amount annually (with yet others not understanding the process at all and signing their X where their advisor told them to).[13] It was within this setting that groups such as the Bouché–Piché–Tourangeau chose to take either scrip or treaty, and it remains difficult, if not impossible, to discern the specific motivations for how they came to their final determinations.

Unfortunately, few references describe the specific negotiations with the local "Chipewyan and Cree" at Little Red River or Fort McMurray.[14] Charles Mair's Treaty 8 memoir only makes passing reference to the commission travelling through Little Red River and Fort McMurray, and the official Treaty report explains:

> The Chipewyan and Cree Indians of Fort McMurray and the country thereabouts, having met at Fort McMurray, on this fourth day of August, in this present year 1899, Her Majesty's Commissioner, James Andrew Joseph McKenna, Esquire, and having had explained to them the terms of the Treaty unto which the Chief and Headmen of the Indians of Lesser Slave Lake and adjacent country set their hands on the twenty-first day of June, in the year herein first above written, do join in the cession made by the said Treaty and agree to adhere to the terms thereof in consideration of the undertakings made therein.

Figure 2.1
"Paying Treaty at Old Fort McMurray, 1903". C.W. Mathers. PAA B784.

> In witness whereof Her Majesty's said Commissioner and the Headmen of the said Chipewyan and Cree Indians have hereunto set their hands at Fort McMurray, on this fourth day of August, in the year herein first above written.[15]

After the presentation, Adam Boucher signed his X to treaty on behalf of the Dené families in attendance, including the Bouchers and Pichés.[16] It is unclear whether members of the Tourangeau family were at this meeting, but Jonas Tourangeau, along with many of his relatives, would take half-breed scrip three days later in Fort Chipewyan.[17] As will be shown below, the different designations seemed to mean little to the community itself, which continued to remain structured around the bush economy and to one another.

The Genealogy of the Fort McKay Métis After Treaty

In the time shortly after the signing of Treaty 8, Fort McKay saw a significant migration into the community, which notably increased membership, though importantly, all those who came were Indigenous and married into one of the founding families, becoming enmeshed in the local bush economy that held the community together. Neil Reddekopp hypothesizes that the in-migration could be attributed to the fact that it was becoming more difficult to procure furs close to Little Red River at the turn of the century. This, in turn, led Little Red River community members to expand their land use to the north, west, and south, which facilitated additional contact with Indigenous people in those areas.[18] At the same time, it seems as likely that the economic opportunities that came from the end of the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly and the improved regional transportation methods (specifically the shift from scow brigades to steam boats and railway that occurred between 1870 and 1920) led to the movement of Indigenous people to the Fort McKay region.[19] By the 1880s, competition in the region required HBC to establish a permanent post at Little Red River, and in 1899, there were at least three independent trading posts at Fort McKay.[20]

Brothers Narcisse and Emile Shott were two such individuals leaving Lac La Biche to trap and trade in the north. They both moved to Fort McKay in the early 1900s and would marry local women, joining the local kinship network and cementing their trading operations. Narcisse would marry Elizabeth Tourangeau, and they would adopt Henry Quintal (who would change his surname to Shott). Emile first married Alice McDonald, daughter of John McDonald and Josephine Cook of Fort McMurray.[21] Emile later married and had children with Helen Boucher, the daughter of Maurice Boucher and Angelique Kokan (and granddaughter of Jose Grande Boucher) in Fort McKay. Narcisse and Emile were the sons of the Louison (Shott) Fosseneuve, a man from Lac La Biche famous for his work with the Athabasca scow brigades in the late nineteenth century.[22] Emile is recorded in the Fort McKay Hudson's Bay Company Journal as having trapped and traded with Chysatum Piche, Elzear Robillard, and John Cowie up and down the Athabasca River in the early 1900s, having trading posts at Poplar Point, Jackfish Creek, and Point Brule.[23] Elzear Robillard seemed to have been his main partner, which was important as Elzear's stepson, James Robillard, married Rosalie Boucher, the first daughter of Jose Grande Boucher.[24] Emile, after marrying Helen,

Figure 2.2
Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort McKay. Photo by Karl Clark (1888-1966). PAA, PR1968.0015.

opened a store at Moose Lake and was remembered as "a travelling salesman; he sold flour, lard and baking powder by dog team."[25] Helen became a community midwife, helping with the birth of many, including Emmy Faichney (née Beaver).[26] One of Emile and Helen's daughters was Lina Gallup (née Shott), who is currently the oldest living Fort McKay First Nation member. Gallup has a number of grandsons and granddaughters who were members of the Fort McKay Métis Nation, including Billie Fortier, a lawyer acting for the Nation on various court cases before she, too, joined the Fort McKay First Nation. Her daughter, Soleil Cree Neufeld is enrolled as a member of the FMMN.[27]

The genealogical connections between root families continued into the twentieth century. For example, Narcisse Shott and Elizabeth Tourangeau's adopted son, Henry Shott, married Clara Boucher (great-granddaughter of Grand Jose Boucher).[28] She lost her status as a Fort McKay First Nation member after marrying Henry. Still, she went on to represent the Métis community in various official and unofficial capacities, most notably joining her good friend FMFN Chief Dorothy McDonald in organizing a community roadblock in 1983 (an event covered in detail below).[29] The three eldest sons of Ronald Quintal, the former president of the FMMN, are descended from the

Figure 2.3
Lina Gallup, Billie Fortier, Holly Fortier, and Soleil Cree Neufeld (Fortier).

Narcisse Shott family and include genealogical connections to the original Tourangeau and Boucher root ancestors.[30]

The Shotts were not the only brothers who moved and married into the community. Two other brothers were Alphonse and Modest Powder, who travelled north to Fort McKay in the late 1910s from Lac La Biche. While it is impossible to know the exact reason for their move, their grandparents, St. Pierre Lapoudre and Theresa Cardinal, were members of the Kahquanum Band at Beaver Lake before taking half-breed scrip in 1886.[31] The brothers were born in the 1890s and, therefore, were not able to take scrip.[32] Nonetheless, both were possibly looking to move to an area to avoid the increased scrutiny many in Lac La Biche were experiencing at the time.[33]

Modest and Alphonse Powder married into two key Fort McKay families. Modest married Helene Piché, the daughter of Chrysostome Piché and Louis Lemeg (possibly Lemaigre), and Alphonse Powder married Louise Boucher, the daughter of Maurice Boucher and Angelique Kokan. Like the Shotts, the Powder brothers continued the practice of single Indigenous men moving to different regions, marrying into the local population, and easily joining

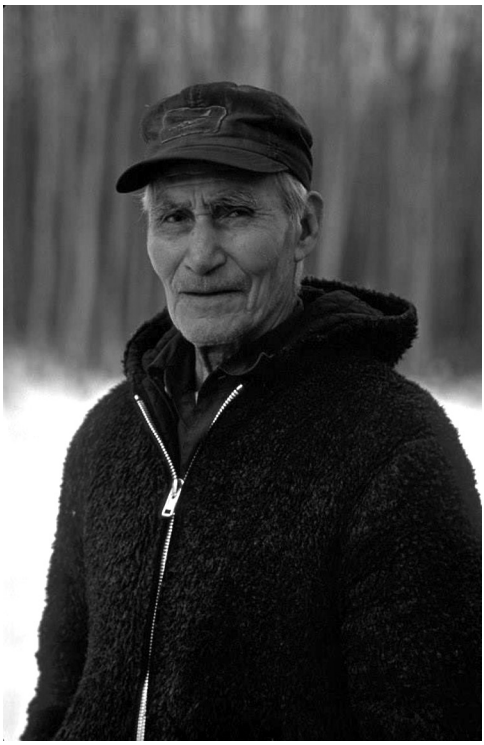

Figure 2.4
Modest Powder, circa 1980. Bill Jorgensen Collection. https://billjorgensen.zenfolio.com/p994248149

the new community.[34] In fact, both brothers became so important that they feature prominently in the later oral histories of Fort McKay, with Modest in particular being repeatedly mentioned as a key community Knowledge Holder in *There Is Still Survival Out There*.[35] Alphonse and Modest held traplines near Fort McKay (2324 and 1714) in the 1960s, along with Alphonse's son, Zachary Powder, who owned trapline 2155 from the 1960s until he died in 2020, which was then taken over by his daughter Lucy.[36] Zachary was also a founding member of the Red River Point Society (1972) and later the Fort McKay Métis Local 122 in the late 1970s (both organizations are described below).[37] Zachary was also interviewed for *Mihkwâkamiwi Sîpîsis: Stories and Pictures from Métis Elders in Fort McKay* in 2005, where he shared stories as a key Fort McKay Métis Knowledge Holder. Shortly after participating in the book project, Zachary learned that he could qualify for his Fort McKay First Nation status, and for housing, economic, and medical reasons, chose to join the band in the 2010s.[38] Several of his children and grandchildren remain

Fort McKay Métis Nation members with genealogical connections to the Boucher, Piché, and Tourangeau root families.[39]

Isadore "Lacorde" Janvier similarly moved to the region and married Mary Rose Tourangeau, Louis and Elisabeth Tourangeau's sister, in the early 1900s.[40] Isadore's grandfather was Pascal Janvier, a free trader who often travelled to Fort McMurray and Fort McKay before the turn of the nineteenth century.[41] The connection to Fort McKay may help explain why his grandson Isadore moved to the community.[42] Another reason may have been that Isadore's cousin, Catherine Janvier, married François Boucher around the same time.[43] Isadore, who like his father Joseph took the surname "Lacorde," could "speak English, French, Cree and Chipewyan" and worked with "the RCMP in Fort McMurray often serving as an Interpreter." The family divided "their time between their regular Fort MacKay home" and "Moccasin Flats in Fort McMurray," where they "would spend the summer living in a tent" working for the Northern Transportation Company Limited (NTCL), which operated a paddle wheeler on the Athabasca River.[44] By the 1950s, Isadore held trapline 1650, and his sons Ernest (Ernie) and McCauley held traplines 2455 and 2457, just outside of Fort McKay. Ernest played a key leadership role in a number of the early Fort McKay Métis organizations founded in the 1970s, including being a signatory on the community's Red River Point 1972 land lease.[45] He married Maggie "LuLu" Powder, the daughter of Alphonse Powder and Louise Boucher. This marriage genealogically connected the three root families yet again, as Ernest's mother was Mary Rose Tourangeau, and his grandmother was Isabelle Piché, while Louise was the daughter of Maurice Boucher, Joseph Boucher Sr.'s brother.[46] Ernie later passed his trapline down to his son Howard Lacorde, who remains a key member of the Fort McKay community and contributed to various knowledge-sharing projects including the Fort McKay Métis book project *Mihkwâkamiwi Sîpîsis: Stories and Pictures from Métis Elders*.[47] In the mid-2010s, Howard joined Fort McKay First Nation to receive housing and access to medical and dental care.[48] Howard's sister Margie Wood remains a member of the Fort McKay Métis community and was a founding board member of the Fort McKay Métis Nation. A number of the descendants of Isadore Lacorde are members of the Fort McKay Métis Nation.[49]

The Beaver–Faichney family originated from Felix Beaver, who similarly married into the Fort McKay community.[50] Felix was a Cree–Métis person who moved originally from the Chipewyan Lake region.[51] Felix's father, Julian

Figure 2.5
Ernie Lacorde with Alex Boucher circa 1980. Bill Jorgensen Collection. https://billjorgensen.zenfolio.com/p994248149

Beaver, used to guide scows down the Athabasca River, and it was probable that this experience acquainted him with the Fort McKay community.[52] By moving to Fort McKay, he was likely following the path of other future Fort McKay First Nation members, specifically the Ahyasou and Orr families who joined the Fort McKay First Nation in the 1920s.[53] As the Ahyasou and Orr families were members of the Bigstone Cree First Nation, their transfer to the First Nation was administratively simple. Felix Beaver did not similarly join the Fort McKay First Nation, likely because his parents, Julian Beaver and Augustine (Joustine) Cardinal, were not members of Bigstone Cree First Nation (though there is no evidence that Beaver or Cardinal took Métis scrip).[54] Nonetheless, Felix was welcomed to the community, marrying Marianne Boucher in 1933.[55]

Marianne was the daughter of François Boucher and Catherine Janvier, with François being an original Fort McKay First Nation member and Catherine, as noted above, being Isadore "Lacorde" Janvier's cousin.[56] Felix's marriage into the Boucher family and his language skills (he spoke Cree and understood Chipewyan) helped him easily become a welcomed community member.[57] Marianne and Felix lived at Jackfish Lake north of Fort McKay in the willows, where their first child, Emma, was born.[58] The Beaver family lived there until Emma was about five years old, when they moved closer to Fort McKay, likely so she could attend the recently constructed day school.[59]

Figure 2.6
Betty Ducharme, Marianne Beaver, Mary Beaver, and Felix Beaver with a collection of furs circa 1950. Barb Faichney collection.

Emma Beaver went on to marry white fur trader Ian Faichney in 1955, and they raised a ten-person family on trapline 2137.[60] Like Felix, Ian's marriage to Emma was welcomed into the community, and the Faichney family would go on to have a very influential role in Fort McKay's development. Emma became recognized as a key Knowledge Holder, a role she passed onto her daughter Barb.[61] Ian and Emma's son Roger became president of the Fort McKay Métis in the 1990s and 2000s, and their other sons Arnold, Brucie, and Glen took various leadership positions and managed the family trapline at different times.[62] Again, some members of the Faichney family chose to join the Fort McKay First Nation for housing, economic, and medical reasons, though Barb's daughter Janice Richards and Arnold's son Felix Faichney have both served as Fort McKay Métis Nation councillors.[63]

FIGURE 2.7
Marianne Beaver with her "pet wolf" circa 1950. Barb Faichney Collection.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Bouché, Piché, and Tourangeau families were well established at Little Red River with genealogical roots that extended back over 100 years, including French Canadian voyageur, Dené, and Cree ancestors. It seems likely that through much of the nineteenth century, the majority spoke Dené on a day-to-day basis, though most were increasingly adopting Cree as well, as it was the language of the fur trade.

In the first decades after the signing of Treaty 8 and the offering of scrip, a number of migrants, mostly single Métis working men, moved to the region, married local women, and integrated into the community. It is important to note that there is little evidence that any of these newcomers attempted to change the community in any meaningful ways; instead, they seemed to have adopted the community's languages and cultural norms as their own

and, within a single generation, were fully integrated into the Fort McKay community, with their children connecting into the local kinship network and adopting the bush economy.

The community's shared history, kinship network, and reciprocity were key to the development of Fort McKay and the bush economy, which provided for the whole community. By sharing the land and resources with fellow community members, welcoming newcomers who were willing to share, and largely ignoring external identities ascribed by the government (specifically "Treaty" and "Métis" status), the community was able to remain largely intact. By the 1960s, external pressures brought by industrial development and the government's unequal treatment of community members forced the community to "transition" into something new. This process was "frightening and disorienting promoting insecurity within individuals" and forced community members "more and more into a world which is heterogeneous, where emphases upon personal relationships are of lesser importance; where one does not have a personal knowledge of associates and co-workers, bureaucracies, government industry and assorted other impersonal entities."[64]

Before this forced adaptation, the community of Fort McKay remained deeply invested in the bush economy. This, along with close kinship bonds, facilitated reciprocal relations and provided a mechanism for the community to easily welcome newcomers who were willing to adopt the community's practices.