DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT:	HARRY TREMAYNE
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INTERVIEW LOCATION:	WILKIE SASKATCHEWAN
TRIBE/NATION:	METIS
LANGUAGE:	ENGLISH
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	03/30/84
INTERVIEWER:	VICTORIA RACETTE
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TRANSCRIBER:	HEATHER YAWORSKI
SOURCE:	SASKATOON NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOC. & BATOCHE CENTENARY CORP.
TAPE NUMBER:	#IH-SD.58
DISK:	TRANSCRIPT DISC #162
PAGES:	34
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- discusses the role of his family in the Riel Rebellion
- general account of his life

Victoria: March 30, 1984, I'm interviewing Harry Tremayne from Wilkie, Saskatchewan. Harry, could you tell me where you were born?

Harry: Born in 1910, September 2.

Victoria: And where were you born at?

Harry: Round Prairie, about 20 miles southwest of Saskatoon.

Victoria: And were your parents homesteading there?

Harry: Yeah, my father homesteaded there and a lot of other half-breeds homesteaded there.

Victoria: Do you remember any of the other people that homesteaded there?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: What were their names?

Harry: William Letarde -- the old man -- and his father William John Letarde who was one of the (inaudible), and old John Sangray, and many others that I don't remember right now, you know.

Victoria: Was it a sort of a Metis colony there?

Harry: It was sort of a Metis colony that they all homesteaded there.

Victoria: Where did they come from before they came to Round Prairie?

Harry: Oh, they came from Batoche, Saskatchewan.

Victoria: Was there any of them that came over from the States?

Harry: No. Not in that colony.

Victoria: What type of houses did you have to live in then?

Harry: They build log houses then.

Victoria: Was there running water?

Harry: No, they just made wells.
Victoria: How about electricity?

Harry: No electricity that time.

Victoria: How many rooms did the houses have?

Harry: Most of them had about three rooms, four rooms, some two bedrooms.

Victoria: Did they have wood or oil heat? What did they use for heating?

Harry: Wood.

Victoria: What kind of furniture did you have?

Harry: Well, they had furniture, but it seemed that some of these furnitures were brought from the east, you know, Ontario, like dressers, and tables and chairs, you know. And some people didn't have that many either, you know, so they made their own.

Victoria: Did you have a very big yard where you were?

Harry: Yeah, well yes. Well in fact my dad had 160 acres.

Victoria: Yeah, a homestead would have a big yard. And were there any white people that lived close around?

Harry: Yes. Towards Saskatoon.

Victoria: About how far away from your homestead did they live?

Harry: I'd say about five miles.

Victoria: Do you know what the term road allowance people means? They're called road allowance people.

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: What does that mean to you?

Harry: Well, that mean to build roads for transportation and that.

Victoria: No, but there are some that are called road allowance people.

Harry: Oh yes, I know what you mean. No, at that time they didn't because they were all able to purchase homesteads at $10. Yeah, they call road allowance people.

Victoria: Did you know any, you didn't know any, you know, like while you were growing up or when you were small?

Harry: I was small there, yeah. They all homesteaded around about 1910 there.

Victoria: So there was no homestead, or there was no road allowance people there where you were?

Harry: No, there was none. Everybody was able to get a homestead.

Victoria: Did you and your brothers and sisters have chores to do on the homestead when you were growing up?

Harry: No, that was too far back, we were only small kids.

Victoria: How about later on when you were growing up, like was

there work that you had to do at home?

Harry: Well, by 1913 my father moved back to Birch Lake and so that a lot of other people moved back to Birch Lake on account of World War One was coming up. So they went north there to look after their cattle.

Victoria: Was your dad born at Birch Lake?

Harry: My dad born at Fort Qu'Appelle.

Victoria: At Fort Qu'Appelle, eh.

Harry: Lebret.

Victoria: When you were growing up did you do any special things together, like camping, and hunting, and berry picking -- this type of stuff, you know, all your family together?

Harry: Yeah, we did that, yeah.

Victoria: Was there anybody that ever done any storytelling? Like any certain...

Harry: My grandfather, he did a lot of storytelling, William Letange.

Victoria: Can you remember some of the things he used to tell about?

Harry: Oh yeah.

Victoria: Can you tell me a little about what he told you?

Harry: Well, he told me over and over those stories, like he got married to this Melanie France, which was Louis Riel's niece. And then he said that in about 1885 there, just before March, they had them meetings there in Batoche and he was one of the delegates who went over to Poundmaker. And then finally he crossed the river at Fort Pitt and went to negotiate with Big Bear so that they would take arms against the government, so that they might have land rights. So he had then all the uprisings. Then he came back and then the Rebellion got started in 1885 in about March, I think.

Victoria: Was there some other things he used to tell you about the Rebellion that you can remember?

Harry: Oh yes, lots of it.

Victoria: Tell us more.

Harry: Well, after he came back. And then, he said, the Rebellion started and most of the white soldiers were, well naturally, led into a ravine there not too far away from Batoche and they were on each side of the ravine in the bush firing at the troops. And Gabriel Dumont was the general then.

And in fact one time there was a priest who was, had talked to them, and then he went to go and negotiate with the white troops and when he was crossing the South Saskatchewan River they shot him when he got to the bank -- that was Father Ouellette.

Victoria: What was his last name?

Harry: Father Ouellette.

Victoria: Ouellette.

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: Where was he from, did you happen to know, or did he mention it?

Harry: I believe he came from St. Albert, Alberta, to Christianize the... bless the wars on each side. He was blessing the wars on each side like, and the white troops side and the Metis side.
Victoria: Is there any other things that you can remember, things that really stand out about, you know, the Rebellion, or different things that he told you while you were growing up?

Harry: Well, he told me back stories right from the time when they were in Manitoba. They moved west up here. Yeah, he said there was a rebellion there before in 1912 [sic-1812]. And when the buffalo was sort of disappearing there they moved further west so they might get more buffalo, you know. And then they settled in what they call Batoche, Saskatchewan, they call it, because his uncle, my grandfather's uncle, his name was Batoche Letarde. He had a general store there he could sell hardware and groceries and clothing, and besides he done some trading. And my grandfather he used to do some trading with him from, with the Indians. Right from Batoche he went right as far as Lac LaBiche. Meantime he took the priest there to Christianize the Indians. Then on his way back, well, he made a lot of money for his uncle, but he was only working for wages at that time -- he was getting about $40 a month. So that was just before the Rebellion, and after that the Rebellion broke out.

Victoria: Was there very many of your relations that took part in the Rebellion?

Harry: Yes. My uncles took part, that (name), his father-in-law, he took part, and my grandfather and his brother Baptiste Letarde, they were in the Rebellion. And Toussaint Lussier... he wasn't too much related to them but it was a far distant cousin to them. And Refarge Riel was in there too, you know.

Victoria: Do you remember what some of them did? Like a lot of them were lieutenants and this sort of thing, a lot of them were scouts, some of them were... Do you remember what each one of them did during the Rebellion?

Harry: Well, my grandfather used to tell me, really, on his own side of the story, and when he went northwest through Battleford, to Poundmaker -- that was where Cutknife stands now -- and then from there on he went down to Fort Pitt and crossed there and he camped at the Fort Pitt North West Mounted Police their barracks. But they didn't know he was an Indian or half-breed because he spoke good French and they give him a horse and then he went on towards... Further on they told him not to go down there, it's too dangerous. But he went anyway because he was negotiating with Big Bear. So he got Big Bear to give him money to get his army started, so then he got Big Bear agreed, then he came back. He told him about what time the Rebellion would start, so Big Bear got ready for it.
Victoria: The other ones that were at the Batoche though, at the Rebellion, what did some of them do? Were they scouts for Riel, or...

Harry: Yes, there was... My grandfather was one of them, was a scout and a delegate. We call them delegates because they make deals with the other parties. And it was one of them who was Gabriel Dumont, that was his brother Eddie. He went out towards Fish Creek and got them going there. And at that time my father told me a lot of the stories, because he was in the Rebellion on the white side.

Victoria: You mean one was on the breed side and the other one was on the white side?

Harry: Yeah. Well, you see, my father was not married yet to my mother, you know, then, you know.

Victoria: What nationality was your father?

Harry: My father was half Irish,French, and Scotch.

Victoria: So whose side was he on?

Harry: On the government side, Canadian government. They were fighting in Fort Qu'Appelle. There was a battle took place there. Oh yes. And Joseph Tate had first started the first school house there -- my father used to go to school there -- a great big log house, school house.

Victoria: And okay, that was the one that was on the side of the government, Okay, who was on the Metis side now?

Harry: My mother.

Victoria: You mom. Okay, she was a Metis then?

Harry: Yeah, she was a Letarde.

Victoria: So after that they met and married after, eh?

Harry: In 1905 they got married, yes, at Medicine Hat. My father was then going up and taking on this cowboy business,

you know, rounding the cattle -- that's after the Rebellion.

Victoria: Is there anything else that you can remember of the stories that were told to you about the Rebellion?

Harry: Yeah, you caught me on a surprise, but sometimes I do remember these things, you know, yeah. But...
Victoria: Just anything that you can remember.

Harry: Yes, I think I could. Oh yeah, now I'm getting into something. Yeah, my grandfather said after the Rebellion they were going to hang some of these leaders in there, you know. So they took off for the States. And the women were driving the teams going across the prairie past to Regina and to Montana, but the men were riding horses and they were armed. They were travelling about, I'd say about 15 miles west of the travellers, the women travellers. George Nevarde led them to, was the leader to, he was a Frenchman, he led the women to the States. And just about close to the boundary my grandfather -- his name was Letarde, William Letarde, -- he says, "I'm not taking this no more," he says, "I got enough ammunition and everything," he says, "I'm going to go with my family." So he went there and he drove right into where his wife was camping, which is my grandmother -- that's Louis Riel's niece. He went there and he camped there and they were ready to pull out in the morning and the Mounties came. And so he took shield behind the wagon box and held up his gun and had them all disarmed. He got his wife to take all the ammunition and guns away from them. They got them throw the ammunition to the ground, and they were horses and he told them to return, to throw the arms away from them.

Victoria: What happened after that?

Harry: And then he was quite free to go across to the United States. He wasn't too far away from the United States, he was about five miles from the boundary, then he went across. And then the other guys they all came over and come to their families when they seen that he won the victory.

Victoria: Is there some of other things that you could tell us about it that you can remember?

Harry: Yeah, Gabriel Dumont he went to the States, you know. That was general then.

Victoria: Is that the same time that Riel was back over there?

Harry: Yes, that was the time. Well, Riel was in custody then at Regina. And Gabriel Dumont, he went up there he joined up with Buffalo Bill and showing western shows around through the States and through France. But my grandfather he was working right there in the States there. He joined up with the government and catching robbers, bank robbers. So he made quite a few there that caused a lot of robberies and finally he got a paper. They call that, I can't say that word, he got a paper from the government, United States government, amnesty,

or something like that.
Victoria: Armistice, like they, that's when they call a truce, you're talking about? When there's no more fighting between the two of them.

Harry: Yeah, between the...

Victoria: Yeah, I know what you mean, yeah.

Harry: He got that paper so he was able to return over back to Canada, and without the Canadian government taking him. He was suppose to report every month over to the States. After he had been tried in the United States. Toussaint Lussier went up there too.

Victoria: He was from Batoche too?

Harry: Oh yeah, he was one of the rebels, yeah. He was the strongest man in the northwest. You read about that.

Victoria: Why would they call him strong, though?

Harry: Eh?

Victoria: What did it mean he was the strongest man in the northwest?

Harry: Strongest man in the northwest. You'd be surprised, they said, what he could do.

Victoria: Like what? How did they mean? Was he strong like...

Harry: Very strong, stout, well-built man, and good at his fists, and wrestling.

Victoria: Oh, he was a fighter sort of.

Harry: Oh yeah, he was a real bully. Well in fact when he was in the States there, my dad was over there then, he was a young man and he was living with him, and two Norwegian guys came there -- they were Yankees -- they were going to rape his wife and he took one by the hair and hit him one and crushed the skull and it killed him. So dad told him, dad was already was a North West Mounted Police then. He had left Battleford and he told him, "You better report yourself because you're going to get in trouble." So he reported himself and he got off skin free because...

Victoria: Your dad was with the North West Mounted Police?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: When did he join the North West Mounted Police?

Harry: Eh?

Victoria: What year did he join? Were you born then?

Harry: No, no, they weren't married.

Victoria: Wasn't married yet, eh?

Harry: No, not married yet. He later met Mother in Lethbridge in 1905, but I believe it was 1995 [sic-1895] he was in the North West Mounted Police in Battleford. But his father was a North West Mounted Police in Fort Qu'Appelle before that. Yeah, he fought in the Rebellion, and then after that he...

Victoria: Was that the one that was on the government side?

Harry: Yeah. My father was taking part too on the government side, because he was already old enough to hold up a gun. At that time a boy at 9 years old can take up arms in the fort.

Victoria: How long was your father in the Mounted Police?

Harry: He was a Mounted Police here in Battleford for five years.

Victoria: All together that's how long he was in the...

Harry: Yeah, up to 1995 [sic-1895], then he went to the States for the round-up times, rounding up cattle. Then after that there was a great big snow fall in 1904 in Regina and Lethbridge and all over here, there was about 10 feet of snow, and a lot of cattle died. That was the end of the cowboy days. So dad went and worked in Lethbridge for firewood, you know, for people, and that's where he met my mother. That was in 1905 when they got married.

Victoria: Do you remember if your father, or your grandfather, or in fact any of the Metis people that you knew, you know, in those days, did they wear, you know, the Metis sashes and the Metis clothing?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: You know those big belts that they used to, big wide belts they used to have, they tied on the side.

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: Do you know if they wore any of those?

Harry: They all had them.

Victoria: They all did, eh.

Harry: They were fixed so they could have ammunition in them.

Victoria: How about the women, did they wear any Metis clothing? Like a lot of them wore the long dresses, you know.

Harry: They had long dresses right up to the ankles at that time.

Victoria: How about the moccasins and things, did any of your grandmothers, or mom...

Harry: They wore moccasins, yes.

Victoria: How about the men, did they too?

Harry: Yeah, they wore moccasins then.

Victoria: Did your mom or your grandmother know how to do beadwork?

Harry: Oh yes she did a lot of beadwork, a lot of tanning, yeah.

Victoria: What did they do, what type of things did they make with the hides after?

Harry: Well, I can't think of anything, but I know they made moccasins and chaps, couple of chaps, you know. And belts, these big belts they had around them, because they could carry their shells in there, you know, they were fixed for that purpose. And they made bands for the hat, beaded bands, you know, looked very pretty, you know. Gloves were made, with beaded gloves, yeah.

Victoria: Where you lived and in the community where your parents lived, did they all get together for social events, like dancing?

Harry: Oh yes, that was always well entertained. Dancing and old time music.

Victoria: Did they sing Metis songs back then?
Harry: Well mostly they sing French, they never mixed the language.

Victoria: Were the songs about some...

Harry: I know what you mean. Like Metis singing, you know, you think they might mix the Cree and French -- no, they didn't. It was straight French or sometime English.

Victoria: Did they sing about history though?

Harry: Eh?

Victoria: Did they sing about history, about, like when they sang a song, did they tell a story about something that happened, you know? Like it was sort of like Metis history, like if it was about the Rebellion, or maybe it was about something that happened when they were travelling, did they sing songs about this type of thing?

Harry: Not in that category.

Victoria: No, just straight French songs, eh?

Harry: Yeah. And, well some of them old-timers, they used to sing Indian songs. My grandfather sang Indian songs.

Victoria: You don't know what they were about though, you don't remember what they were?

Harry: No, I don't remember. Some were very good songs, you know.

Victoria: Did you learn any?

Harry: I had, me and my sister started to learn one but I forgot it now. It was a love song, yeah, it was a good song, yeah, it was well composed.

Victoria: What about Christmas, what was it like for you when you were small?

Harry: They never celebrate Christmas in those days. New Year's. All the Christmas was started... they commenced celebrating Christmas around about in the year of 1915, I think, but never before. And it was never celebrated much, Christmas.

Victoria: And New Year's what was it like?

Harry: New Year's was, well, they did... they went visiting one another and everyone held a party house, and that night there's a great big dance.

Victoria: Did they do much jigging?

Harry: A whole lot of it.

Victoria: What type of dancing?

Harry: Red River jig.

Victoria: Did your parents know how to jig?

Harry: Oh yes, yeah, my father was a good step dancer.

Victoria: Did you learn?

Harry: I'm a step dancer myself.

Victoria: How about fiddle playing?

Harry: Eh?

Victoria: How about playing the fiddle?

Harry: They were all fairly good fiddlers.

Victoria: Did you learn to fiddle too?

Harry: Yes, I play the violin, I play the accordian, piano. I play a lot of things, lot of instruments.

Victoria: Were there very many white people that lived in your community where you were raised?

Harry: Yes. A lot of them they married the half-breed girls and the boys married white women.

Victoria: So they got along good with each other?

Harry: They mixed up together, yeah.

Victoria: Do you remember anybody in your family or that you knew that used Indian medicine?

Harry: Yeah, that was well used. Most all the older women were herbists, yeah, because it wasn't too easy to get a doctor in those days, them early days. So a lot of these herbs were studied and were put to practise and they were really put to work. You hardly ever seen anybody have a cold them days, even 50 years ago, because they use sage and all these other nice medicines, you know. But they didn't use any of these imported ones.

Victoria: Did you see anybody that they had used it on?

Harry: Oh yes.

Victoria: Did you use any yourself?

Harry: I use regular sage, yes. I never know what a cold was.

Victoria: Were you ever around, like back in the time when there was, you know, there was usually an outbreak of real serious illnesses, do you remember any of them?

Harry: My grandfather told me there was one serious sickness, that was before the Rebellion, and it was the smallpox, and a lot of people died over that.

Victoria: Metis people?

Harry: Yeah, Metis people as well as the white settlers, because they pass it on to one another.

Victoria: What did they use for a cure, or did they try to cure them?

Harry: No, they never had anything to cure it. They had just to get well that way.

Victoria: How about tuberculosis, was it very common back then?

Harry: No. It was hardly known. It was hardly known.

Victoria: Have you ever heard of a sweat lodge?

Harry: Eh?

Victoria: A sweat lodge.

Harry: Oh yeah, I remember that. In fact I went into one myself.

Victoria: Did you?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: What was it like?
Harry: Yeah, I'll tell you how they made them. They made a little, like what you call them igloos the Eskimos make, but they made this out of stones and mud. And there was an air hole up above -- that's for oxygen -- and there was a big... They heated these stones they put them in there and then you get in there naked and you close everything up the little door, and then you pour that water on top of that stone and that cause steam. And that really took a whole lot of your, what's bad, poison, right out of you.

Victoria: So what purpose did they have? What did they use them for? Was it for religion or for sickness?

Harry: No, not for religion, just for sickness. That take away the elements from people. And nobody ever smoked too much those days either, very few, mostly the old-timers.

Victoria: Where did you use the sweat lodge at?

Harry: Lizard Lake, Saskatchewan. Dad built one there. He was a Irish man but he know what to do, because he associate with the Indians. He even could talk Cree, you know, a little bit. Yeah,e built one there and he used to put us kids in there.

Victoria: How old were you at the time?

Harry: Oh, I was 16 years old. That was in 1926. Yeah, I used to feel real good after I come out of there. I forget what he called it though, but it's kind of a place where you get all wet and steamy, then your given a towel to wipe your body right off and wrap in a blanket and go and lay down for a while, so they don't get a cold draft on their skin.

Victoria: Did you ever follow any of your Metis traditions, like after you moved away? Like, you know, eventually a person's family all grow up and they separate, eh. Did you keep on with your Metis traditions and that after you left home and were on your own?

Harry: Oh, some of it, yes.

Victoria: Do you still associate more with Metis people or with white people now?

Harry: It's even with me. White and Metis, it's all the same. I associate with anyone that has a good heart.

Victoria: Did you ever, were you ever denied a job because you were Metis?
Harry: No. Never.

Victoria: No discrimination of any kind?

Harry: There was no discrimination, no.

Victoria: So all the time that you were growing up then your family and yourself, you got along good with white people?

Harry: We all got along with the white people, yeah.

Victoria: So you're not uncomfortable at all when you go into stores, or talk to police, or judges, or anything like that, eh?

Harry: No.

Victoria: Where you lived when you were growing up, like when you were in a small community or small town, was your family treated fairly by the town authorities?

Harry: Oh yes, yes, they were always fair to us.

Victoria: Have you ever had any bad dealings or anything with government agencies like welfare, or police, or discrimination from business of any kind?

Harry: No, I'd never say that.

Victoria: Do you think that the church played an important role in your parents' life?

Harry: It did, the Catholic church, yeah.

Victoria: Was that while you were growing up?

Harry: While I was growing up, yeah.

Victoria: Was the church close around in your area where you lived?

Harry: Pretty well all the time yes, yeah.

Victoria: And did the priest, did he make house visits, like did he come into the homes and talk with the people?

Harry: In the year 1926 they did, but after that they never done that, no.

Victoria: Were you ever home when the priests came to your house to visit?

Harry: Yeah, I was.

Victoria: Do you remember what he talked about at any time?

Harry: Mostly catechism and saying mass at the house, and that was all there was to it. Take a little collection and away he goes. Used to drive a horse...

Victoria: They took collection up in those days?

Harry: Oh yes. Used to ask the people to come to our house and a lot of people came there and the church service was held there, and a collection was taken.

Victoria: Do you still go to church as often now as you did then?

Harry: I quit in 1934.

Victoria: Was there any special reason why you quit?

Harry: Yes. You might be surprised if I told you.

Victoria: Would you care to talk about it, do you want to talk about it?

Harry: Yeah, I wouldn't mind talking about it.

Victoria: Okay sure, go ahead then.

Harry: It's really interesting to me, you know. Well, I didn't believe in some of the doctrines they were teaching in there, because these things, and I investigated through the Bible, and I never found such a thing as hell fire and trinity and three gods in one, and this was all not in the Bible at all, so I decided I'd quit the church. And then the idea of taking collection always from the people, you know, and when I could read the scripture it says you'll receive free gift freely. Why should collection be taken I thought, so I quit it. Now I go right straight ahead and I read the Bible.

Victoria: That's a very, very interesting point. Do you think that the church helped Metis people like the Catholic church do you think it helped them when they had problems, or were in need of something?

Harry: They never did, no.

Victoria: Do you think that the church had more influence over the people, you know, in the old days than it does now?

Harry: They had more influence over the people in the older times, yeah, than this younger generation that I'm living in, yes. Today people are up to investigate, they want the truth. They don't just accept what is handed to them.

Victoria: When you were growing up did you have any livestock, did your parents own livestock and that?

Harry: Oh, my father had 50 head of cattle. Many a times he had 100 head before too. In 1905 he had 100 head, and when he moved back to Birch Lake in 1913 before the war he had 50 head, and then he didn't want to go to war so he changed his name to Ross. You might have heard that name before.

Victoria: Yeah I did, I was just...

Harry: That's why I was called Ross for a while, but I was a young boy then, I was only 5 years old, you know.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Victoria: Did it make a difference when he changed his name?

Harry: No, not very much. Nobody paid much attention to it.

Victoria: But how did it, when he changed his name, how did it keep him from having to go to war?

Harry: Well, there's a big difference between Tremayne and Ross. He was on the list, conscription list, under Tremayne. But then when he was Ross and then they were looking for him in Round Prairie, where he had homesteaded, now he moved over here and there was this Ross living there and Ross was not on the conscription list. So he got away from it. He was an old North West Mounted Police and he knew what to do.

Victoria: I see. Did your parents have a big garden back in those days?

Harry: Oh yes, there was a big garden always.

Victoria: And what all did they grow in your garden?

Harry: Eh?
Victoria: What did you grow?

Harry: Potatoes, cabbage, lettuce, pretty near all the vegetables you can think of -- there was big gardens always. My dad was a good hunter and he lived beside Birch Lake where he got all kinds of fish. The living was very good.

Victoria: So he fished too?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: And he got wild game?

Harry: Yes.

Victoria: How did you keep your meat back in those days, how was it kept?

Harry: Well, that time they used to slice the meat thin, maybe two, three women get together after the moose was killed and then they all get together and they slice it all together. And then after it's been sliced they put a tripod on like that and put poles, then they hung the meat there and make a fire underneath, smoked. They dried the meat. Kind of smoke dried. And then after this was taken out and when it's dry, well, it was put in bag so it was well preserved.

Victoria: Oh, so it lasted all winter, eh?

Harry: Same thing with fish.

Victoria: Was there ever a time that you can remember that your dad was unemployed, where he didn't have any work at all?

Harry: Not very much in those days.

Victoria: How about your aunts or uncles, or any other Metis people at that time, was there ever some of them that didn't have any work at all?

Harry: No, they always had work.

Victoria: They always managed to make a living, eh?

Harry: Yes.

Victoria: What was your first paying job?

Harry: Eh?
Victoria: The first job you ever got like...

Harry: Well, I was working as a farm hand, I worked for my father on the farm.

Victoria: How old were you then?

Harry: From 16 till I was 21.

Victoria: Was he paying you to work for him?

Harry: No, just helping him.

Victoria: How about the first paying job though, the first time you ever worked out and got paid?

Harry: Oh yeah, I went and worked for a farmer not far from

Biggar. Well he was giving me $30 a month and board.

Victoria: About how old were you then?

Harry: That was in 1929.

Victoria: And what were your duties, what did you have to do while you were working?

Harry: Plowing, harrowing, disking.

Victoria: Did he have livestock?

Harry: Some, he didn't have very much. Mostly he was a straight farmer, grain farmer.

Victoria: Was most of your work that you had, was it seasonal, or did you have steady work?

Harry: It was pretty well steady when I was working for the farmers, but then I went over to start carpenter work, you know, because my dad had trained me to be a carpenter. So I took on carpenter work and then I... that was a seasonal job. When I was doing carpenter work I work all summer and then get unemployment insurance after we get laid off.

Victoria: Was there lots of jobs for men and women, you know, Metis people, while you were growing up?

Harry: I could say there was a lot.

Victoria: There was, eh. So there was...
Harry: Not like today, but there was a lot then.

Victoria: So there shouldn't have been any reason why people weren't working, eh?

Harry: No, there was no reason why a person shouldn't work, because there's always work to be found there. Because the employment was really scarce in those days, yes, it wasn't hard to get a job.

Victoria: What do you remember about the schools you went to?

Harry: Well, I went to Wilson Lake school at Lizard Lake there from 1926. But I was in school before that in Battleford, North Battleford, but this was where we most of the time we were raised, you see. But I go to Lizard Lake school there, that school is still standing there today. Yeah, I went and seen it.

Victoria: What kind of things did they teach you in school?

Harry: Well they teach you grammar and geography, and arithmetic, reading, spelling.

Victoria: What were the schools like that you went in? Like

you said you went in Battleford, was there a difference between the one in Battleford and the one in Wilson Lake?

Harry: Oh yes, because that was a Catholic school I went in Battleford, yeah.

Victoria: What were your teachers, who were they?

Harry: They was nuns. Up in Lizard Lake there was no nuns, there was no religious school there, just everybody was equal there.

Victoria: In the Catholic school you went to, was there lots of rooms and lots of different grades or just...

Harry: There was different grades almost in every room, grade one, grade two, and three, four...

Victoria: All separated into different rooms?

Harry: Yeah, sometime maybe two grades in the same room, you know. They were separated that way, yeah.

Victoria: And how about Wilson Lake here, what was that like?
Harry: All in one grade, all in one room. From grade one to grade eight.

Victoria: And just an ordinary teacher out here at Wilson Lake?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: Were you allowed to talk Cree or French in either school?

Harry: Oh yeah.

Victoria: You could talk it if you wanted?

Harry: Oh yes. If you met one that could speak it, you see, and nobody ever said a word about that, no.

Victoria: Did you enjoy going to school?

Harry: Oh yes, I did.

Victoria: And you felt like you were comfortable, like you felt that you belonged, eh?

Harry: Yes.

Victoria: Did your parents encourage you to go to school?

Harry: Well my mother did, but my father wanted to take me off school, you know.

Victoria: Why did he, did he say why?

Harry: Yes. Farming is the only thing, he says.

Victoria: So he just wanted you to learn the trade of farming and that was it, eh?

Harry: Yeah. And I had a different thing in view.

Victoria: What did you want to do?

Harry: I wanted to become a lawyer. And he discouraged me from that because he wanted me to work on the farm.

Victoria: Were you ever taught anything about Metis history or Indian history, you know?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: Metis history in school?

Harry: Yes, a little bit in the Canadian history and the English history, yeah.

Victoria: What about Indian or Metis people?

Harry: Not too much, we just read about the Rebellion and that, you know, but we weren't teached too much what they were doing in that. But I got more out of my grandfather, you know, because he was there and he knows.

Victoria: So do you think that your experience at school was positive or negative?

Harry: I would say positive.

Victoria: So you think that it was good for you to have went to school, eh?

Harry: Very good.

Victoria: Do you know if your parents voted, or if there was a voting poll around where you, you know, where you lived when you were small?

Harry: Yeah. They had a Liberal there, they were very busy voting Liberal that time. That's the time Mackenzie King was voted in. Yeah, in the '20s, sometime the late '20s.

Victoria: And your parents, did they vote?

Harry: Took an active part in it, yeah.

Victoria: Oh they did, they were involved in politics, eh?

Harry: Yeah, most all the Metis took an active part in that.

Victoria: What did they have to do when the elections came?

Harry: Well, they were voting and taking pamphlets around.

Victoria: Oh, they went and talked it up...

Harry: Yeah. That's what I meant, they took an active part in it.

Victoria: What do you think influenced them to vote the way they did?

Harry: Well, they wanted the government, I guess, to suit them, you know, for the country, you know, for the needs of the people. That was their point of view when (inaudible).

Victoria: Did they ever come to your home when you were small to visit, you know, to talk about, you know, things politicians talk about?

Harry: Yes. Because we had Mackenzie King at our house one time, yeah. Because he came to Biggar that time, then he went to Leask, I think this was in the early '30s or in the '30s. But I told you the '20s there -- I think it's wrong. But there was voting before that anyway in the '20s too, you know, in the late '20s. Yes, we met Mackenzie King in Leask, Saskatchewan, that time.

Victoria: Do you remember some of the things he talked about when he came to the house to visit?

Harry: Well, he's going to create a better government for the people.

Victoria: He didn't say anything about promising Metis people land or anything like that? Or promising them anything?

Harry: No.

Victoria: What do you think that the Metis people in those days thought of politics?

Harry: A lot of them were very much interested in the Liberal system, you know, the Liberal policies, yeah, in those days. But until later days then some of them switch over to Conservative after that, you know, in the later years.

Victoria: Like after you grew up and that, did you vote the way your parents did?

Harry: Yes, 1937 I think I was a active member in the Social Credit government at the time Aberhart was in Alberta there, Manning won the election in Alberta that time. Aberhart was a Liberal leader.

Victoria: So you were active in...

Harry: In Prince Albert there, in that constituency.

Victoria: But did you vote the way your parents did while you were growing up, like while you were still around where they were, did their voting influence you? Like just because they voted for Liberal did you vote for Liberals too?

Harry: No, I start to investigate what the Social Credit had to offer. You remember, might remember that time they offered $25 a month for every individual, so I was kind of interested. And then I got busy trying to see if that government would get in, and had meetings on, and I was a little busy that time.

Victoria: Did you ever get your $25 a month?

Harry: And when Alberta government got in nobody got $25 a month, so I thought to myself, all these promises they never come through. So I quit government affairs after that all together. Yeah, I decided I'd never vote again.

Victoria: Do you think that the Metis people saw one party that was better than the other?

Harry: Oh yes.

Victoria: That spoke up more for the Metis people?

Harry: Yeah, they did that.

Victoria: What party was that?

Harry: Well, not too long ago you might have experienced yourself that Devine spoke on behalf of the Metis people quite a little bit.

Victoria: But back in the old days, was there one too that...

Harry: No, there was never anything that way, no.

Victoria: They never really got up and spoke for the Metis people, eh?

Harry: No, only for the people in general, you know, native and white folks.

Victoria: When you were growing up were you always aware that you were Metis people?

Harry: Not for a long time.

Victoria: Not for a long time, eh. How old were you before you realized you were Metis?
Harry: I think I was about 30 years old or maybe more. Oh I guess about 30 years old, yeah, in 1940.

Victoria: And you just then realized that you were a Metis person?

Harry: Yeah. I figured we're not all whites, you know. I

didn't think anything much of that, you know.

Victoria: What about your parents, was it about the same way with them?

Harry: Eh?

Victoria: Your parents...

Harry: Well, not my mother, you know. no, not my mother. She always call herself a Metis, you know, and of course we didn't know what that really meant, you know, I guess some kind of mixed person, you know. (both talking) You find that today, I'm telling you. I got younger brothers, my younger brother and my younger sisters they still don't know nothing about that really. They just tell you they're Canadian and that's all they tell you.

Victoria: So they don't distinguish (both talking)?

Harry: Yeah. We don't know what we are, they said.

Victoria: So they don't really distinguish it as being Indian ancestry at all?

Harry: No. (laughs) It's just my older brothers and older sisters, that's all. Around about, might say, half of the family.

Victoria: What language did you first start talking when you were growing up, like as a small child?

Harry: Yeah, that's one thing you ask. We spoke French, straight French. And my father said, "I don't like them Frenchmen. I don't want them to speak French," he says.

Victoria: So he didn't want you to talk...

Harry: He told Mother for us not to speak French. Then my mother used to hire French girls to babysit. They were both working in 1919, you know, 1918. And Dad started to hire Indian girls. "I'd rather hear them talk Cree than French," he said.
Victoria: So did you learn to talk Cree and French then?

Harry: Yeah, we talked Cree there, yeah.

Victoria: So you learned how to talk all three, eh?

Harry: Yeah. But of course I don't say we can talk it the very best even yet, you know, and there's a whole lot more to be learned. But I mean I think I can speak good enough to be understood, oh yeah.

Victoria: Do you remember the first Metis Society there was? I think back then it was called the Saskatchewan Metis Society.

Harry: The Saskatchewan Metis Society was started up around about 1936.

Victoria: That was the first one?

Harry: That's when I first heard about it, yes.

Victoria: Where were you living at the time?

Harry: I was staying with my grandfather in Baljennie and I asked him about that. He says, "We were the ones that were fighting in the Rebellion," he told me. And I asked him, "What is a Metis?" I says. "Well," he says, "a person mixed with the Indian blood," he says, "part white." "Oh," I said, "I thought they called them a half-breed." My grandfather laughed at me, "Not really," he says. "A half-breed is a woman, a white man and an Indian woman and the offspring is a half-breed," he said, "but then after that when they mix up together they're called Metis people." "Oh," I says. (laughs)

Victoria: Were you involved in that Metis Society back in those days?

Harry: No.

Victoria: Not very much?

Harry: No.

Victoria: Do you remember if they had a Local around where they lived, like when they organized through the province, like I don't know then -- now they are called Local, but I believe in those old days they were called Chapters. And then people they hold big meetings that everybody would go to those meetings. You never attended any of these meetings at all?
Harry: No, I've worked at the meetings, but I never went. The only time, my first time I ever registered was in Cando, when I came to Cando here in 19-- just five years ago. I went and registered as a Metis then because they told me I was one. (laughs)

Victoria: So you don't, you've never the name of Joe LaRocque, or Joe Ross?

Harry: Joe Ross, Joe LaRocque. I know about some LaRocque, my father talk about a lot, yeah, but Joe Ross... There was a John Ross.

Victoria: No, this is a Joe Ross. I believe he was a blind man and he, this would be in the '30s and '40s, and he was a member of the old Saskatchewan Metis Society. And he used to go around telling people about the Metis Society and that. And there's Tom Major and Joe McKenzie. And Solomon Pritchard. They were all, they were first members and probably held executive positions in the old Metis Society. So you weren't really involved in the Metis Society in them days, eh?

Harry: No. I know my grandfather, before they ever organized, he always told them to get together and organize, because he was the last rebel I guess to live then, you know.

Victoria: How old was he when he died?

Harry: He was about 89. I think he died in 1945. He had a lot of bullet wounds on his legs and his arms.

Victoria: So he had gotten shot a few times during the war then, eh?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: When you look back on your life, what type of a life do you think you've had? How would you describe your life?

Harry: I think I had a fairly good life up to this time.

Victoria: Was it interesting, satisfying, difficult?

Harry: Well, there was difficult times along the road, you know. There was a depression, you know, and I didn't enjoy that. (laughs) They were looking for work all over. That was in the '30s.

Victoria: So it was a life of work, eh?

Harry: Yeah, that was hard to find, work, yeah. Victoria: Would you say it was interesting?

Harry: It wasn't too interesting, you know, because at times you ride the freigh train and you have to go and look for work and you find nothing and the freight train is gone, you're going to wait for another train (laughs). That was no fun.

Victoria: But was it satisfying, were you satisfied with the way your life was?

Harry: The earlier life I was really satisfied, yeah, and then after that the depression was gone, you know. I really did well all the way through that time.

Victoria: Do you think that your life was better than your father's and your grandfather's?

Harry: I wouldn't say that.

Victoria: You think it was maybe harder?

Harry: No. They had easier time.

Victoria: They had a easier time, you figure, than what you did, eh?

Harry: Oh yes.

Victoria: Why do you think they had an easier time?

Harry: Well, I lived in part of that time, you know, I was a young man in the year 1931. We might work for a dollar a day, but at least we can buy butter for 10 cents a pound and eggs 10 cents, but today you might make more money today but how much you going to pay for your products. So actually it was more easier then than it is today -- I could still always say that yet. And actually the ones really to blame, I might say, is the employees by demanding more wages. So if you demand more wages you can't expect that commercialism has to rise also because that's what they are paying for -- the labor. They have to rise so...

Victoria: What is some of the things that have mattered most to you in your life, that you would say were very important things in your life?

Harry: Well, there's a lot of people don't agree with me on the point, but anyway I still continue to tell them about it, is that all the hopes I have is that it's God's Kingdom. That he will bring up things straight.
Victoria: So religion is one of the important things in your life?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: Is there some other things that you would say were important to you? Is there family or friends, certain people, or...

Harry: Well right now, you know, my family all growed up -- got nobody now, you know. At my age, when I'm just about 74, you know, actually I'm just living on, you might say. I'm not really living for anything any more.

Victoria: How about education, do you wish you could have gone to school longer?

Harry: This is something I always desired.

Victoria: What do you think you would have... Do you think if times would have been different that you would have become a lawyer like you wanted to?

Harry: Yes, my times would have been a lot better than what I am today, yes.

Victoria: Do you think that if life back when you were young, though, would have been different and you could have become a lawyer, you think it would have changed your whole way of growing up?

Harry: My whole way of life would have been changed, because I could have managed better in a lot of ways than the way I had been brought up with just a common education. Though I did educate myself quite a bit after that, you know. Lots of

people now comes to me to make, to apply for income tax, you know. I fill out applications and I was only in grade five. Just imagine.

Victoria: Self-education...

Harry: I self-educate myself.

Victoria: What do you think about the native people in communities nowadays? Do you think they have problems and needs?

Harry: Well, I might say it this way; they have problems yeah, but they cannot say that they're the only ones that have problems. Like you see the white people have problems too. I might say it's even on each side.

Victoria: About half and half.

Harry: We need something better for both Metis and the white.

Victoria: What do you think could be done to help?

Harry: Eh?

Victoria: What do you think could be done to help? I imagine when you say for the white and the native people you would be talking about the poor people, eh?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: Would you be talking about the poor whites and the poor natives?

Harry: Yeah.

Victoria: What do you think could make their life better? What could be done in the world to make their life better?

Harry: Well, some of the things I've learned from the Bible, it says that "all humans should be in subjection to superior authorities." That means we should be loyal to the one who is ruling the country. But if we start putting our position to the government that we have in existence at the present time we are actually asking trouble for ourselves.

Victoria: So you think that the government isn't responsible then, you figure, for the...

Harry: I don't figure the government is really responsible for all occasions that's taken place, you know, these events that's taking place, like strikes and so forth, you know. But I think if the people cooperated with the government they would really would make things a lot better.

Victoria: When you were young and you moved into, like into

this city, was this a big change for you? Did it affect your life in any way from being in a small town and moving into a city?

Harry: It didn't matter too much to me because I moved into Edmonton and that was a big city, you know. I lived there 25 years.
Victoria: Did you have a family then?

Harry: Yes.

Victoria: Did it affect your family in any way?

Harry: Yes, it did a bit. I was telling that I shouldn't have lived there. It affect my family because they were start getting in mixed up with the different environment, different society of children that take up drinking and that, you know. In fact I lost two boys over that drinking with the other boys, you know, and it does not necessarily mean native or white, we all practise the same thing. So it's better to raise a boy, any kids away from such a big place like that. I think I would have had a better life if I would have stayed away from the city, but I was mkaing good money there and that's what held me there.

Victoria: Yeah, I suppose being able to earn a decent living, you know, at this time would have had a big, you know, it really made a big difference on your family's life.

Harry: It was a big difference on my family's life. I think really, you know, it's better to live in a poorer life and bring your children up better. You would get more benefits out of that. Because money is not everything.

Victoria: Do you think that your life would have been different if you would have been born a white person or maybe a Treaty Indian?

Harry: I was born by a...

Victoria: Like if you were born white, like if you would have been born a white man or born a Treaty Indian, do you think your life would have been different than what it has been?

Harry: I don't say that, I don't think it would be any better or any worse, I might say that. Because it's in the, the way we live today, you see. The way things are going on the children are mixed up with it, and I was mixed up in a lot of these things too, you know. But not because I'm a Metis that I'm going to be better than the white because the Metis are doing the same thing and the white are doing the same thing. So where are you going to learn anything better if they're practising the wrong. The only thing is each man, each woman and man should make up their own mind to start a different life where they can make themselves better.

Victoria: If you had a chance to be born again, like if you

could be born all over again and start your life, you know, through again, what would you do different than what you've done?

Harry: I think mostly what I could say that I would like to start a better life than what I have experienced.

Victoria: Was there something, though, that you would have really changed that would have been different?

Harry: Oh yes, lots of things. Lots of things. Could change a lot of things. Because we've all been learning the hard way and the hard ways pass and it has affected your life, and you cannot really remend it.

Victoria: What do you think the future is going to be like?

Harry: Well, according to the way the situation is going between the governments of all the nations in the world, and even our government here, I don't think the situation is going to get any better. Rather it seems to me it's going to go from bad to worse.

Victoria: What do you see for the future? What do you think is going to happen?

Harry: Well, I think...

Victoria: Do you think there will be a war?

Harry: You might want to say there will a nuclear war -- no I don't think so. The nations in time will solve that problem.

Victoria: Do you think it's going to better, like for the younger generation now, do you think it's going to be better in the future or do you think it's going to get worse?

Harry: It's going to get worse in its present system of things, yeah. It's not going to get any better.

Victoria: How would you say its going to get worse?

Harry: Well, as a rule I always back myself with the Bible, you know, not religion. The Bible said that times are going to get worse towards the end of the present system of things, and these are the present system of things that we are living. We are living in this present system of things and it says so in the Bible. Many of the prophecies have already been fulfilled. You might say the League of Nations was a set up to bring about peace, and the Bible says it would go down, and it went down. And it said it would come up again and it come up again. So this book was written 2,000 years ago and then it predicts this future for us in this present time. How can we deny it? Our knowledge says that this is going to be destroyed again, and it says there is not going to be a nuclear war.

Victoria: Do you think that native people are going to be

better off, you know, in the future? Will they be better off in the country, or in the cities, or maybe way in the far north?

Harry: I think they would be better off in the country. Oh yes.

Victoria: How will they be better off in the country?

Harry: Well, you take the rent system, living quarters and that, you pay an awful price for it. You might make a lot of wages in town, yeah, but what are you paying -- you're paying a lot. You're not no further ahead. And you're in a wrong environment for yourself and your kids. So I think it's best they should find a place out in the country, in a different area where there is not so much active societies like that. Actually I believe that, in fact I could say that now but it's too late for me now. I'm not raising a family any more.

Victoria: Okay, thank you very much for the interview.

Harry: Yeah, you're welcome.

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