

Verna DeMontigny née Fleury. (b. 1951)

Verna DeMontigny has made outstanding contributions to the preservation of Michif language and culture. She has taught the Michif language at all levels; from Aboriginal Head Start to high school, to Métis community groups and university level courses at Brandon University. On a regular basis she provides Métis cultural displays at events such as Winterfest held each year in Brandon. She is an accomplished weaver and demonstrates Inkle loom weaving of Métis sashes and hat bands. In 2018, the Manitoba Aboriginal Circle of Educators recognized this extensive educational work by presenting Verna the *Honouring Our Elders Award*.

Verna was born at Li Kwayn (The Corner) near Binscarth, the daughter of Jean-Louis Fleury and Marie Josephine Ledoux. Verna has one daughter, four sons and 10 grandchildren. Her paternal grandparents were William Fleury (b. 1859) and Cecile Julie Gendron (b. 1854).¹ Her maternal grandparents are Jean Ledoux and Veronique Lapointe. Her great-grandfather Alexis Ledoux (b. 1836) who lived at Duck Lake fought in the 1885 Northwest Resistance. The Fleury and Ledoux families were among the Métis families who lost their homes and lands at Ste. Madeleine, Manitoba during the government evictions in the 1930s.

Verna has operated her own business, Verna's Cleaning for ten years and also worked for Fleeceline Ventures and Cresting Unlimited (embroidery). For many years she worked in day care and personal care homes. She worked for the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) Southwest Regional office for nine years and retired in 2010.

In 2009, Leah LaPlante, the MMF Vice President for Southwest Region obtained funding from Heritage Canada to deliver a Michif Language Program in that region. Verna DeMontigny was coordinator of this program from 2010 to 2015 Verna organized and managed and taught in this program which delivered Michif language programs in six southwest Manitoba communities. These communities were; Brandon, Portage la Prairie, Minnedosa, Turtle Mountain (Boissevain), Binscarth and St. Ambroise. The model Verna developed was to teach two hours of Michif classes twice per week between September and March each year. Verna arranged for two Michif Elders, one to teach and one to assist in each location. Verna is also a visiting Elder for Assiniboine Community College. She hosted and taught two students in the Master-Apprentice Michif language program in 2017.

Verna also assisted Heather Souter and Nicole Rosen in developing the Michif language teacher's manual *Piikishkweetak aa'n Michif!* published by the Louis Riel Institute. Verna also contributed to an Olivia (Sammons) Cox journal article "Leaving Ste. Madeleine: A Michif Account", in the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2013: 149-164.

In the late 1990s early 2000s Verna DeMontigny was an Elder for the National Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures. Verna taught Michif at Aboriginal Head Start for over 15 years and taught Level I and Level II Michif at Brandon University from 2014 to 2016. For the last two years she has taught Michif as a credit course for the Brandon School Division.

¹ William was the son of Louis Fleury Sr. (b. 1820) and Marguerite Trottier (b. 1825). Marguerite was the daughter of André Trottier who was with Cuthbert Grant at the Battle of Seven Oaks. In the 1911 William, Cecile and their five children are shown on the census as Family # 25 in Township 18 (Ste. Madeleine).



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