

**AU NOM DU BON DIEU ET DU BUFFALO:
METIS LIVED CATHOLICISM ON THE NORTHERN PLAINS**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that Metis lived Catholicism was a tool of identity formation, resistance to colonialism, and political action among bison hunters of the northern plains in the long nineteenth century. The Catholicity of Metis bison hunters' quotidian is highlighted through the extensive Michif French written legacy of Turtle Mountain historian ChWeUm (William Jr.) Davis (1845-1937). Davis's biography anchors a Metis national memory, weaving stories and events from both sides of the Medicine Line. His life story and the religious experiences of his relatives come together to explain why some Metis people adhered to Catholicism and its practices. Sustained experiences of the divine helped Metis families adapt and resist the effects of settler colonialism on the northern plains, including the end of organized bison-hunting expeditions. This dissertation blends several methodologies – social history, biography, ethnohistory, and social network analysis from the digital humanities – to interrogate the history of Catholicism among Metis peoples.

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I dedicate this dissertation to all Michif/Metis people in the United States and their Chippewa-Cree relatives interested in this story. Big hugs to Jackie Trotchie and a thousand times marsi for all the work that you do preserving Metis history and culture, in Montana, and online. A gros marsi to the parishioners, clergy and teachers at St. Ann's Mission among the Chippewa and Métis in Belcourt, North Dakota for your warm welcome time and time again. Marsi to David "Doc" Brien, Nancy & family for all of your interest and assistance. *Que Li Bon Dieu vous bénisse*. Marsi to A.R. "Braids" LaFromboise for teaching me so much about the 1850s in such a short time. There is so much left to learn. Marsi to the Jerome family (Daniel F., Briget and Owen), for the great visits and for your ongoing cultural/historical preservation work in North Dakota. Marsi to Ella McLeod and family *pour le bon vin & la belle visite*. Marsi to Al Wiseman for your ongoing work on Metis cultural preservation in Montana. Marsi to all the Little Shell and Turtle Mountain people I visited and met over the years. If relatives find materials of interest in this text, get in touch and I'll happily provide any and all pertinent information.

This dissertation is written from the perspective of the colonizer. I am *Canayenne*, a French Canadian woman whose ancestors participated in the European colonial project in North America from the moment of their arrival to North America in 1662. I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, with whom I share a complicated relationship. My education in the settler colonial spaces of Ontario was in the French language until dropping out of high school. I say this for two reasons. First, self-location, an established practice in Indigenous Studies and anticolonial work, informs the reader. It situates where a work/an author comes from. Since outsiders increasingly

claim Metis identity, ambiguities are best avoided. Second, I choose to no longer be ashamed of overcoming adversity.

This body of work is the product of many years of mentorship from talented historians. I am forever indebted to Carolyn Podruchny, my doctoral supervisor, whose expertise and support brought me to Toronto. I am grateful to my supervisory committee members: Boyd Cothran and Roberto Perin. Thank you your many helpful suggestions over the years. I am also indebted to Nicole St-Onge and Brenda Macdougall for their unrelenting mentorship and support since 2010. I need to also acknowledge the invaluable guidance of historians outside the Ivory Tower, beginning with Nicholas Vrooman, whose mentorship and values deeply influenced this work. Thank you so very much, *pour tout!* A big marsi to Lawrence Barkwell for his many years of community-based research and outreach, which taught me a great deal. Institutionally speaking, many thanks to Gonzaga University's Jesuit Oregon Province Archives (David Kingma), the Montana Historical Society, the State Historical Society of North Dakota (Jim Davis), the Société historique de Saint-Boniface (Gilles Lesage), and Library and Archives Canada. I am grateful for York University's doctoral funding, for all my comrades at CUPE local 3093, especially the Chimneystack line (Strike to Win!), and for Scott Pope at CDS. *Merci aussi au Père P. Bernard Messier de la Catholic Chaplaincy at York pour votre ministère.*

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GLOSSARY (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

BUFFALO OR BISON?

This dissertation uses buffalo and bison interchangeably. I do so to reflect the current, scientific nomenclature of the species (*bison bison*) that became a central element of Metis economy in the nineteenth century, and the historical appellation (*buffalo*) that refers to the same animal. I alternate between the two terms because of established past precedents and because both English- and French-speaking Metis peoples used the word buffalo in the nineteenth century.¹

CANADIEN/CANAYEN

Continuing to privilege the historical language that people used to name themselves, this study refers to *Canadien* or *Canayen* (interchangeably) to mean a person of French ancestry born in North America exhibiting cultural traits distinctive from their progenitors in France. The term *Canadien* used in this sense has origins in the late seventeenth century. While *Canadiens* used the word to refer to themselves, outsiders relied on additional qualifiers, like *Canadien français*, in opposition to *français de France*. After the British Conquest of 1759-63, *Canadien français* became the antonym of *Canadien anglais* in the eyes of many.² To ensure homogeneity and clarity throughout this dissertation, I use *Canadien* or *Canayen* instead of other variants.

¹ Dale F. Lott, *American Bison: A Natural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

² Suzelle Biais, "Trésors de la langue française au Québec (XV)," *Québec français*, no. 60 (1985): 19–20.

INDIGENOUS

The word Indigenous is used throughout this dissertation to mean groups of people who predate European settlers in North America. This choice recognizes that certain tribal nations frown upon the Aboriginal label, and First Nations is a complicated Canadian appellation and therefore problematic for referring to Indigenous peoples in transnational, colonial contexts. The term Aboriginal has pejorative connotations since its etymology implies that the person in question is not (with the prefix “ab”) original, or not from the land. Aboriginal is also a legal category found in the Canadian Constitution to represent, “the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America.” Whenever possible, when not referencing primary source terminology, the following chapters will privilege words Indigenous peoples use to call themselves, such as Metis, Anishinaabeg, or Nehiyawak.³

MEDICINE LINE

I use the term Medicine Line throughout this research as a synonym for the international border that came to separate Canada and the United States. I do so, in part, because of recently lauded scholarship in Canada (Hogue, 2015), and because it helps reframe the forty-ninth parallel with Indigenous terminology. According to historian Tony Rees, “it was probably the Sioux who first began to use the term in the late 1870s after Sitting Bull and his people crossed into Canada following the battle of Little Bighorn ... the line was said to have ‘strong medicine’ since it seemed to have power to stop the pursuing U.S. cavalry in its tracks.”⁴

³ For a timely discussion on the word “Indigenous” in Canadian history, see: Brittany Luby, Kathryn Magee Labelle, and Norman, Alison, “(Re)naming and (De)colonizing the (I?)ndigenous People(s) of North America – Part I – ActiveHistory.ca,” 7 December 2016, <http://activehistory.ca/2016/11/renaming-and-decolonizing-the-indigenous-peoples-of-north-america-part-ii/>.

⁴ Tony Rees, *Arc of the Medicine Line: Mapping the World’s Longest Undefended Border Across the Western Plains* (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press 2007), 5.

METIS⁵

In contrast to definitions of Metis identity that rely on blood links to Indigenous and European descendants, this study characterizes “Metis” in three points: 1) self-identified as such; 2) part of an Indigenous community that claim them; and 3) exhibited a political affirmation of sovereignty through their actions, words, or their written records. Put another way, the definition of Metis used in this dissertation does not posit that it must connect to the so-called historic Red River community, although I study the past of people linked to Louis Riel’s Metis. This choice is rooted in two justifications. First, Metis peoples should be the ones to ascertain who is in their polity. Second, Father Georges Antoine Belcourt, long-time defender of the Metis nation, once observed for the United States government that the ancestors of the Metis in Pembina were from “the Stony Mountains of [*sic*] the Atlantic Ocean.”⁶ Belcourt stated the descendants of thirteen Indigenous bands (likely nations), were among the mixed-ancestry population of Pembina. To date, the historical diversity highlighted by Belcourt remains understated, and dismissed as insignificant.

⁵ This dissertation does not use an accent aigu (é) in the word Metis in order to include persons who spoke, French, English, Michif or other languages in its conception of Metis.

⁶ United States House of Representatives, “31st Congress, 1st Session House of Representatives. Ex. Doc No 51 - Pembina Settlement,” 19 March 1850, 40. Considering the sense of the sentence, a logical deduction may very well replace “of” with “to”, which then implies that the Metis nation’s origins are not solely located within the geographic landscape of the Red River. This definition of Metis nationhood is echoed in some of Louis Riel’s writings.

INTRODUCTION

On the mild and sunny morning of 11 April 1918 on the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians' reservation,⁷ one hundred Catholic believers in twenty-three cars from Bottineau, a settler community west of Turtle Mountain, crossed thirty miles into Indian Country. Settlers met locals in their *charettes*, or Red River carts, and assembled at St. Ann's church in Belcourt, North Dakota to ask for the help of Good St. Ann. Renowned healer in the Catholic faith, people sought the intercession of Jesus's grandmother for eight sick congregants. One of them was bedridden. After a day of prayer, the gravely ill believer walked out of the house of God unaided.⁸ A Metis man named ChWeUm Davis, former buffalo hunter and early historian of the Turtle Mountain region, recorded the event in one of his diaries, saluting "Bonne Sainte-Anne" for her help.⁹

This miraculous event was among a long line of heavenly intercessions influencing the worldviews, beliefs, practices, and histories of Metis men and women engaged in Roman Catholicism on the northern plains, from the early nineteenth century onwards. ChWeUm Davis preserved his intellectual legacy and memoirs in a political context fraught with Indigenous land dispossession.¹⁰ As nation-states advanced westward, Davis carefully recorded his life alongside Metis national memories, stories, dreams, impressions, and notable events, in a series of five small manuscripts left in the hands of the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND) in

⁷ Orris W. Roberts, "Climatological Data: North Dakota Section" (Bismarck, North Dakota: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Weather Bureau, April 1918).

⁸ William Davis, 'The William Davis Diaries, Book 1', n.d., 62–63, MSS 10035 Reel 5905, State Historical Society of North Dakota, (henceforth SHSND).

⁹ ChWeUm Davis is an alternative appellation to the name William Davis Jr. "Chi" is Michif for *petit*, meaning small, or little in English. William Davis Jr.'s Michif name means Little William to denote that he is the son of his father. Davis Jr., hereafter ChWeUm Davis, differentiates him from William Davis Sr., his father. Doc Brien, descendant of Davis and Turtle Mountain tribal member, provided the spelling of ChWeUm's name in 2016. For additional biographical information on ChWeUm Davis from historian Lawrence Barkwell, see: 'William 'ChWeUm' Davis (b. 1845) *The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture*, Gabriel Dumont Institute. Accessed 10 January 2015, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/14682>.

¹⁰ For a definition of the word Indigenous as it is used throughout this dissertation, see the Glossary preceding the introduction (page i).

1936.¹¹ The Professional and Service Division of the Works Projects Administration (WPA) and SHSND staff collected Davis's diaries for the Historical Data Project, part of the New Deal. Together they gathered oral interviews for its Pioneer Biography Project between 1936 and 1940.¹² Among the legacy of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the WPA Pioneer Biographies consist of interviews conducted by archivists travelling throughout the state. Interviewers arrived with prepared questions, asking residents about their arrival and settlement in the Dakota Territory. Answers provided accounts of economic, social, and cultural legacies. Among the pioneer interviews housed in the SHSND collections are the rich chronicles of ChWeUm Davis, his second wife Sarah Nolin, as well as many other Metis living in the United States.

This dissertation traces the life story of a devout Catholic Metis. William Davis Jr., known in Michif as ChWeUm, was born on 24 June 1845, in St. Boniface (Winnipeg), Manitoba to William Sr. *Kug-kay-dway-wash-kung* Davis and Marie Eno. As settler mentalities and actions solidified the physical frontier between Canada and the United States, colonist encroachment and imperial policies encouraged migrations of Metis families. Bison hunters from St. Boniface frequently crossed the Medicine Line while hunting. Many, like the Davis family, made their homes on the south side near Turtle Mountain.¹³ I situate Davis's mobility in transnational

¹¹ Although the notebooks are called "diaries," they served as a tool of remembrance of major events in Metis history. While recording the birth and death dates of Turtle Mountain community members, Davis also recorded major historical events, such as the Battle of Fish Creek and the birth date of Metis military leader Gabriel Dumont. The events listed in Davis's notebooks are short mnemonic devices that contain more fulsome stories.

¹² The SHSND, defines a "pioneer" as: "a person who was born before 1870 and who lived in Dakota Territory prior to the division into North and South Dakota, or considered the first settler in a township." See "State Agency Records – Historical Data Project Pioneer Biography #30529" <http://history.nd.gov/archives/manuscripts/inventory/30529.html> accessed 10 October 2014. The Works Progress Administration was later called the Works Projects Administration.

¹³ The Medicine Line refers to the 49th parallel, or the state border imposed on the North American territory following the advances westward of two competing nascent states. This dissertation conceives that its boundary reaches from the Rocky Mountains foothills to the Red River of the North, or the Turtle Mountain region. On the Davis family migration, see William Davis, 'William Davis Biographical File', 1936, 1, MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND. Major flooding in St. Boniface in 1852 drove the southward migration.

movements of Indigenous peoples. Mobility allowed Metis hunters and their kin to continue participating in the fur trade economy, as buffalo became increasingly scarce.¹⁴

Although archivists collected ChWeUm Davis's historical accounts in the 1930s, they continued to perplex folks well after that date. The WPA's historical data collection project wrapped up in 1940. After this, SHSND spent the next three years corresponding with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Boniface on the matter of the Davis diaries. Writing to Monsignor Antoine d'Eschambault on 21 May 1940, Ms. Florence Davis (no relation), a librarian of the State Library, hoped, first, to obtain a translation of the Davis diaries since they were deemed to be "neither in English, French, nor Indian."¹⁵ A letter from the following year acknowledged the increasingly lengthy Second World War, and requested the immediate return of the Davis diaries to North Dakota.¹⁶ While the archival materials were promptly sent back, the promised translation was not. Additional correspondence from 1943 indicates that Father Pierre Picton started the translation process, but his incomplete attempts were not sent to North Dakota.¹⁷ In this wartime context the last documented request for interpretation went unanswered. Consequently, the SHSND did not publish its biographical profile on Davis in its historical quarterly. Two translations exist in the manuscript file on ChWeUm Davis, but both are

¹⁴ Gerhard Ens, "After the Buffalo: The Reformation of the Turtle Mountain Métis Community, 1879-1905" in Jo-Anne Fiske, Susan Sleeper-Smith, and William Wicken, eds., *New Faces of the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the Seventh North American Fur Trade Conference* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 140. The last viable harvest of bison for Indigenous peoples in the northern plains happened in 1883. For more information, see: Dale F. *American Bison: A Natural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 179.

¹⁵ Florence H Davis, 'Florence H. Davis to Rev Antoine d'Eschambault, Tuesday 21 May 1940', 21 May 1940, 0001/4/101, Société Historique de Saint Bonifacé (henceforth SHSB).

¹⁶ Florence H Davis, 'Florence H. Davis to Rev Antoine d'Eschambault, Tuesday 1 April 1941', 1 April 1941, 0001/4/101, SHSB.

¹⁷ Russel Reid, 'Russel Reid to Rev Antoine d'Eschambault, November 10 1943', 10 November 1943, 0001/4/101, SHSB. For a longer analysis, see Émilie Pigeon, 'Lost in Translation: The Michif French Diaries of William Davis', *Findings/Trouvailles The Champlain Society*, accessed 21 September 2016, <http://www.champlainsociety.ca/lost-in-translation-the-michif-french-diaries-of-william-davis/>.

incomplete and inaccurate.¹⁸ The Société historique de Saint Boniface holds a small series of documents on William Davis Jr. The data is comprised of the requests sent to Father d'Eschambault from the SHSND between 1940 and 1943, a hand-written, partial copy of the five volumes in possession of the SHSND, and its English translation.¹⁹

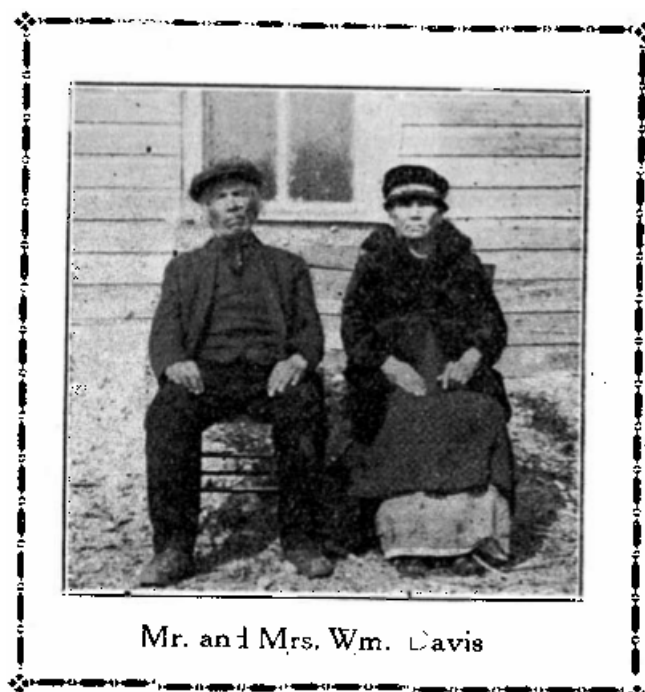


Image 1: William “ChWeUm” Davis and his second wife Sarah Nolin c. 1924.²⁰

¹⁸ The manuscript collection of the William Davis Papers kept at the SHSND two translations, one by George Will and another by Emily Olson. Will’s translation did not correctly identify key Michif terms like *taureau* or bull, which is a synonym for pemmican. Olson had more trouble understanding the language register used by the Metis buffalo hunter than Will. Although Will’s translation is more fulsome than Olson’s, neither are adequate for widespread use. See: William Davis Papers, A35 Box 1, SHSND.

¹⁹ The SHSB has no information about the acquisition of the William Davis diaries. The documents are part of a massive donation without provenance. It appears that the same person wrote both books kept in St. Boniface. When comparing the two diaries in Manitoba to Davis’ diaries kept in North Dakota, the handwriting is quite similar throughout the copies of the original materials held in Winnipeg. For instance, the microfilm version of the Michilimackinac Roman Catholic Baptismal Register kept at the Mackinac State Historic Parks was duplicated. The later version is a carbon copy of the first and both documents are listed one after the other on the microfilm reel. Father Pierre Picton likely copied the Davis diaries word for word, mimicking the handwriting and correcting spelling of the original source.

²⁰ Bateson, *A Great Faith Hath These People*. Photo by Howard Bateson at the St. Ann church in Belcourt, North Dakota. Marsi to the St. Ann Mission in Belcourt, North Dakota for the permission to use images from this publication.

THE WILLIAM DAVIS DIARIES

ChWeUm's documentary legacy gift to the SHSND is a rare and very early example of a Michif language written account. ChWeUm Davis was adept in French, English, Cree, and Chippewa, in addition to his native Michif.²¹ The SHSND labelled Davis's diaries as a "variation of French used by that [the Metis] ethnic group," which I understand to be Michif French.²² The Michif language has numerous regional dialects. Michif French is a predominantly French-based oral vernacular. Pamela Sing notes Metis use the term "Michif" to denote "any and all of the languages they spoke or continue to speak," but she distinguishes its many forms with either "French" or "Cree" qualifiers.²³ Some linguists affirm Michif is one language with "mixed" components, calling it "half Cree, half French."²⁴ Other linguists argue that Michif French is unique Metis French, distinct from varieties spoken elsewhere in North America.²⁵ Michif French travelled between St. Boniface and Turtle Mountain, 280 km south, as well as spreading in other directions.²⁶ Davis's diaries are a rare example of written Michif French predating its 1980s revival. A person fluent in Canadian French familiar with fur trade terminology would require no knowledge of Cree or Ojibwe (*nēhiyawēwin* or *Anishinaabemowin*) to understand Davis's rich historical legacy. The linguistic register of the author is in a familiar, or casual, range.²⁷ It reflects

²¹ Davis, "William Davis Biographical File," 1. "Chippewa" as stated in the biographical file of William Davis is called *Anishinaabemowin*. The Plains Cree language is called *nēhiyawēwin*.

²² Davis, "William Davis Biographical File." The quote is from a forward written by archivist Frank E. Vyzralek that precedes the microfilmed archival material.

²³ Pamela V. Sing, "J'vous Djis Enne Cho', La: Translating Oral Michif French into Written English," *Québec Studies* 50 (2010): 59. In this article, Sing distinguishes between the Cree and the French variations of the Michif language. The lack of Cree verb use in his diaries explains this decision.

²⁴ John C. Crawford, "What Is Michif? Language in the Métis Tradition," in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, 1985, 231–41; Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own the Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁵ Robert A. Papen, "La Variation dialectale dans le parler français des Métis de l'Ouest canadien," *Francophonies d'Amérique*, no. 3 (1993): 25; Sandrine Hallion Bres, "Similarités morphosyntaxiques des parlers français de l'Ouest canadien," *Revue de l'Université de Moncton* 37, no. 2 (2006): 111.

²⁶ Metis priest Father Guy Lavallée reported speaking it in Saint Laurent, Manitoba. Guy Albert Sylvestre Lavallée, *Prayers of a Métis Priest: Conversations with God on the Political Experiences of the Canadian Métis, 1992-1994* (Winnipeg: G. Lavallée, 1997), 1.

²⁷ Bakker, *A Language of Our Own*, 72.

the education Davis obtained from the Catholic missionaries in his youth both at St. Boniface and in the nascent Dakota Territory. The spelling used in Davis's diaries, although mostly phonetic, is consistent throughout the five books. My transcriptions of Davis's words are verbatim copies of Michif French. Translations from Michif French to English and any inaccuracies therein are entirely mine.

CATHOLICISM AS RESISTANCE/METIS LIVED RELIGION

Metis bison hunters practised a "lived religion" in which they expressed and enacted their Catholic beliefs outside the institutional control of the Church. The northern plains environment and Metis traditional lifeways shaped a unique expression of Catholicism. The most important aspect of bison hunters' lifeways and environment was their mobility. Entire families travelled seasonally to participate in months-long bison hunts, and they frequently moved to both escape the pressures of colonial settlements and to be closer to their main economic resource: the diminishing bison herds of the Great Plains. Constant mobility meant the Metis carried their culture with them, and could not be rooted to parishes, churches, and ecclesiastical jurisdictions. Believers needed priests willing to move with them. Clergymen who learned the languages of the northern plains and advocated for Metis interests became invaluable assets to the community. When priests were unavailable, laypeople became evangelists and disseminated Catholic teachings to their families. Metis lived Catholicism was flexible and responsive throughout the long nineteenth century.

This dissertation makes three inter-related arguments about lived Catholicism's impact on Metis bison hunters. Catholicism was a tool of identity formation, resistance to colonialism, and political action.

- 1) Identity formation: Lived religion fostered historical networks uniting Metis families with their relatives through Catholic sacraments. These networks were crucial to providing structure and support systems in a context of constant mobility. Studying networks of Metis lived religion provides insights on kinship creation, community coherence, and nation building at a time marked by settler states asserting their dominance on the prairies via military force. Kinship ties, religious behaviour, and common practices united the faithful from the Great Lakes to the Great Plains. As fur trade families moved away from settler encroachment and towards new economic opportunities, they carried their beliefs and political convictions with them.
- 2) Resistance to colonialism: The Catholic faith of Metis men and women provided a tool of adaptation, resilience, and healing. It constituted a medicine that could heal the traumas of colonial violence resulting from incoming settlers taking their lands and newly formed nation states pushing them out of the settlers' way. Paradoxically, Roman Catholicism caused profound trauma to some, yet became a way to recover from harm for others.
- 3) Political Action: Lived religion played an integral role enabling Metis families to create a socio-political space to develop a distinct Metis national polity, which became enshrined in a national memory. Metis lived religion fostered and carried Metis stories, memories and identity-forming events on the northern plains, an area spanning from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains, on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel.

Through identity formation, resistance to colonialism, and political action, Metis people's lived Catholicism became a central element of their social and political lives.

The term "lived religion" found throughout this study distinguishes the historical experiences of Catholicism as lived by individuals from the prescribed or expected behaviours

and ritualized practices of organized faith.²⁸ I use “lived” in lieu of “vernacular,” “popular,” or “folk” to describe the religious practices of people because “lived” holds less ideological weight in the face of Roman Catholicism’s prescriptions. “Lived” does not carry the negative connotations of the other terms. By moving away from a language presupposing an inherent hierarchy of beliefs and behaviours, “lived religion” effectively nuances the historical analysis of religious customs and rituals. As historians K.M. Schultz and P. Harvey note, the term “lived religion” is the evolution of social historians studying “religious experience [s].”²⁹ The events lived and recounted by Metis people transformed the political relationship between the Church and believers at the end of the American Civil War. Implantation of Catholicism among Metis peoples was more than a tool in the colonial assimilationist project. It became medicine for some, religion for others, and left its mark in the lived practices and rituals enacted by buffalo hunters and their descendants into the twentieth century.³⁰ The Catholic Church’s positions towards Indigenous peoples and colonialism shifted after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The magisterium then dictated that missionary work ought to ground itself in the cultures that welcomed them. Nevertheless, the genocidal legacies of the Catholic Church on the Great Plains, and its documented abuses of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit youth in Canada and in the United States are alive today. The Truth and Reconciliation Report in 2015 confirms that “thousands of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were subjected to spiritual, emotional, physical, and

²⁸ Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

²⁹ K. M. Schultz and P. Harvey, “Everywhere and Nowhere: Recent Trends in American Religious History and Historiography” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 1 (March 2010): 143.

³⁰ Leavelle notes “Most accounts of French-Indian encounters in the region... considered religion to be simply another weapon in the arsenal of colonial domination.” Tracy Neal Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 15.

sexual abuse in Catholic-run residential schools.”³¹ Despite these atrocities, many Indigenous peoples found power in Catholicism and developed ways to use their faith as a shield against colonialism. Metis lived Catholicism provided political empowerment for some believers.

Like all historical analyses, this work needs temporal boundaries. To follow the lived religion and life of ChWeUm Davis, this study begins in the eighteenth century, during the prelude to Metis ethnogenesis. First, the dissertation traces some of Davis’s ancestors from the Great Lakes to the Great Plains. It then follows the life story of the Metis buffalo hunter as he repeatedly crossed the Medicine Line, until his death on 26 January 1937, at the age of 92. The historical analysis of a long nineteenth century allows a fulsome evaluation of the changes and continuity in the relationship between Metis peoples and Catholicism. This dissertation contends that the Metis past cannot be adequately assessed in the confined borders of the modern nation states currently dividing North America. My scope is transnational, exploring the northern plains of the American Midwest and Canadian Prairies that became bordered lands.³² The study of this space reveals the ways in which Metis people negotiated a vast geography to their advantage, at times with the help of Roman Catholic clergy.

The role of mobility is a key conceptual consideration informing my work. Answering the call of the manifesto published by Stephen Greenblatt in 2009, this dissertation takes mobility literally by highlighting its historical importance for Metis families. The seasonal rounds of travels to wintering sites undertaken by Davis and his family, as well as the movement later required for his employment in realms other than the fur trade, are explored throughout the dissertation. The Davis diaries confirm the far reaches of Metis mobility and the development of

³¹ Canada and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 2015, 222, http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-7-2015-eng.pdf. Accessed 2 November 2015.

³² Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 816.

kinship networks. The sense of belonging between the Red River and the Rocky Mountains shared by Metis bison hunters shaped Metis national memory. Metis identities took root in many places throughout North America beyond the confines of the Red River. Communities grew and became nodes in a polyethnic network of relations with a diversity of religious beliefs, rituals, and practices.

METHODOLOGY

A wide range of interdisciplinary methods shapes my reconstruction of CheWmUm Davis's life, and the lives of other Catholic Metis. I investigate the lived religion of Metis men and women in a very long nineteenth century through the intersection of digital humanities, social history, ethnohistory, as well as micro and macro analyses. I ground this dissertation in an understanding of colonialism emphasizing settlers' active participation and political power, reinforced and disseminated across North America. I use the term "settler colonialism" to define the type of colonialism that Canadian and American settlers enshrined in their political institutions. Settlers came to North America (and elsewhere), imposed their way of life on the place, and did not leave. Because this dissertation crosses nascent nation-state lines, a transnational definition of colonialism captures historical realities shared by Canada and the United States.³³ Patrick Wolfe argues that settler colonialism's "inherently eliminatory" processes towards Indigenous peoples grew from a desire to legitimize newcomers' claim to pre-inhabited land.³⁴ Throughout the long nineteenth century, Metis lived Catholicism faced incursions of settler colonialism, especially its facilitation and legitimization of settler claims to (often unceded) Indigenous territories. By

³³ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

³⁴ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, no. 4 (December 2006): p. 387. To better understand how settlers and their societies justify their claim to Indigenous territory, see the compelling analysis of settler moves to innocence explained by Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor' *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): pp. 1–40.

centring analyses of settler colonialism on Metis historical articulations of lived Catholicism, this dissertation both acknowledges and curtails the oft-cited erasure of Indigenous peoples and sovereignties, an ironic byproduct of the settler colonial turn.³⁵

The Davis diaries, triangulated with parish records, local accounts, petitions, and government documents, help us reconstruct the religious social network of ChWeUm Davis that brought him into the world and nurtured his beliefs. The family network surrounding Davis in life and in devotion highlights the role of Catholicism in Metis communities and nation-building. With the advance of digital humanities, historians can interrogate big datasets through the production of visualizations. Elements of Davis's past are showcased in visual representations, or graphs, alongside a narrative of his life story, revealing new information about the vast and interconnected religious, political, and kinship networks of Metis peoples in the nineteenth century.

Networks can be human or otherwise. They can include biological entities (the food chain) or exist outside of the physical world (the Internet). Social networks, however, are comprised of human beings. They map ties, be they relational, professional, or economic, among people. Social networks have been at the core of historical research since its inception. Broadly speaking, networks represent associations uniting entities in a given space and time. Social relations, these building blocks of interactions, create communities who live, work, and exchange among themselves in both mobile and sedentary settings. Alongside other domains in the humanities, the field of history is benefitting from advances and developments in data modelling. The incorporation of digital humanities methods in historical studies allows its practitioners to ask questions of their data and use software to assist them in postulating theories that can be

³⁵ Corey Snelgrove, Dhmoon Kaur Rita, and Corntassel Jeff, 'Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–32.

tested via computer-generated models. Social network analysis (hereafter SNA) is only one of the many digital methodologies.³⁶

SNA presents a viable way to draw conclusions on a variety of social connections, from kinship patterns to community structure and labour groupings, through the production of graphs. Scholars working with historical SNA, such as Christina Prell, conceive of graphs defining these networks as visualization of the “social relations that knit together our modern world.”³⁷ Since SNA shows the links among individuals in a collective, sociologist John Scott recommends its use for relational data. Ideal datasets for SNA are comprised of information that reveals what Scott calls “the contacts, ties and connections, and the group attachments and meetings that relate one agent to another.”³⁸

While valuable to reconstruct family trees and kinship links in many societies, genealogical software is unable to represent visually community life as effectively as SNA.³⁹ Genealogical research standards are foundational tools, and have become integral to discussions on Metis identity.⁴⁰ The preponderance of evidence, which means that the primary source data collected is sufficient to generate a sound genealogical conclusion, is the unit of measure to test

³⁶ Jens Weber and Andreas Wolter, “ImpulsBauhaus in 3 Minutes,” 26 June 2009, <http://vimeo.com/5333614>. Weber and Wolter demonstrate a tactile model for historical social network analysis that combines databases of historical knowledge on past Bauhaus members and allows the people to tactually interact with the exhibit. See also the “Trading Consequences” project: <http://tradingconsequences.blogs.edina.ac.uk>. To learn some of the tools for digital humanities, see William J. Turkel (dir.), *The Programming Historian*, <http://programminghistorian.org/>, 2nd ed. NiCHE: Network in Canadian History & Environment (2012-07). Accessed December 12, 2015.

³⁷ Christina Prell, *Social Network Analysis: History, Theory and Methodology* (London: Sage Publications, 2012), 1.

³⁸ John Scott, *Social Network Analysis – A Handbook*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 3.

³⁹ The software used to develop the social network graphs found herein is called *visone*. It is a multi-platform, open-source, free of charge, and in perpetual development. For further information on the software, see <http://visone.info>

⁴⁰ The genealogical component of Metis identity resonates through the Métis National Council's guidelines for determining who is and who is not Metis in its statement on citizenship: “*Métis*” means a person who self-identifies as *Métis*, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic *Métis* Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the *Métis* Nation.” From Métis National Council “Citizenship,” *Citizenship - Métis National Council*, Accessed 12 August 2013, <http://www.metisnation.ca/index.php/who-are-the-metis/citizenship>.

genealogical methods.⁴¹ This approach to data collection helps collate the lifeway details of bison hunting families. Seeing this amalgamation of evidence in a single set of data allows for comparisons among all the actors present and for observation of collective behaviour by studying who associates with whom and why. Even so, pedigree charts have their physical limits.⁴² Once they grow too large, following connections between different families is difficult. To build the historical religious network of ChWeUm Davis, I reconstructed his genealogy using the information in his journals and the WPA interviews amassed by North Dakota archivists in the 1930s.⁴³ Next, I categorized vital statistics to produce the SNA graphs, including data from parishes and baptismal registers. Categorization offers a way to standardize information in a digital form. I accomplished this task with the *visone* SNA software. Data categorizations can harm Indigenous peoples, particularly when an outsider shapes representations of culture. Nevertheless, datasets relying on vital statistics allow researchers to somewhat distance themselves from their own biases; the historical subjects in this study provided the documentary evidence used to retrace their social movements and affiliations.⁴⁴

SNA creates an opportunity for historians to theorize on the nature of mobility.⁴⁵ For instance, we can assess the effects of proximity in terms of relative physical and/or social closeness or distance between individuals and their collective actions. SNA provides scholars

⁴¹ Brenda Dougall Merriman, *About Genealogical Standards of Evidence: A Guide for Genealogists* (Toronto: Ontario Genealogical Society, 1997) 13.

⁴² Raymond S. Wright, *The Genealogist's Handbook: Modern Methods for Researching Family History* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1995) 15.

⁴³ This dissertation used the software Reunion (v.10.0.6) to reconstruct buffalo hunting genealogies. Genealogical files were then exported (as Gedcom) and uploaded into SNA software automatically.

⁴⁴ Nancy Shoemaker reminds us that categories of analysis influence research outcomes and should be carefully selected when used in research. Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Clearing a Path: Theorizing the Past in Native American Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 67. Stepping away from Shoemaker's warnings about structuralists like Lévis-Strauss, my graphs and their categories pay attention to the changing contexts over time. Brenda Macdougall's investigation of the myth of Metis cultural ambivalence presents categories of analysis that are useful and relevant to the Metis worldview. See "The Myth of Metis Cultural Ambivalence" in St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall, eds., *Contours of a People*, 437.

⁴⁵ Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility*, 250.

with the means to evaluate group behaviours, including the role of family and connections in concerted political operations, such as the 1885 Metis Resistance.⁴⁶ To avoid repeating and perpetuating the biases and colonizing viewpoints of Roman Catholic missionaries, this dissertation hears the caution expressed by Jennifer S.H Brown and Elizabeth Vibert about using certain primary sources. Rooted in the ethnocentrism of its creators, documentary evidence “read beyond words” can unpack biases and avoid reproducing them in writing.⁴⁷ Adhering to the standards set by the once “new Métis social history” outlined by Diane Payment, the privileged approach to primary source investigation for this dissertation merges quantitative methods (SNA) with qualitative analysis.⁴⁸ To distance itself from the colonizer’s focus, this dissertation grounds its investigation on the written legacy and life arc of a Metis buffalo hunter.

According to scholar Catherine Richardson, Metis stories are an essential part of the Metis self. People ground elements of cultural well-being in their stories. These stories, in turn, have distinct historical contexts.⁴⁹ Davis preserved and passed along his stories to archivist Dana Wright in the 1930s, so they would be preserved, maintained, and disseminated into the future. Davis’s stories constitute evidence of a fulsome Metis Catholic devotional life that happened alongside, and well beyond, the bison chase. The methodologies deployed throughout this work do not erase the underlying Euro-centric assumption that inherently shapes the academic historical method.⁵⁰ The ethnohistorical narrative of ChWeUm Davis’s Catholic life story

⁴⁶ Émilie Pigeon (2015) Canadian Historical Association paper presentation, Ottawa ON “The Rise of Social Network Analysis and Its Imprint on the Past” argues that SNA can help explain why only some Metis buffalo hunters supported the 1885 Resistance using the case study of Norbert Welsh whose story was published in Mary Weekes’s *Last Buffalo Hunter*.

⁴⁷ Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds., *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, 2nd, ed., (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), ix.

⁴⁸ Payment, Diane. “*Les gens libres - Otipemisiwak*”, *Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1990), 19.

⁴⁹ Catherine Richardson, *Belonging Métis*, Vernon: (J Charlton Publishings, 2016) 18.

⁵⁰ Leslie Brown and Susan Strega, eds., *Research As Resistance: Critical, Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2005), 5.

comprised in the following pages provides historical contexts for Metis Catholicism as lived by bison hunting families. Considering Nancy Shoemaker's words of caution, particularly in light of my use of digital humanities, I carefully weigh the role of categories of analysis and their impact on understanding the past. Rejecting the application of archaic conceptual categories like primitive versus civilized, the digital analysis required the creation of analytical categories to filter through voluminous data. Becoming aware of universalizing categories' limits is a first step in correcting some of the biases that the results will undoubtedly represent.⁵¹ I am indebted to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who reminds academics that, "sharing knowledge is also a long-term commitment."⁵² All of the information comprised in this dissertation is readily available to all of ChWeUm Davis's many relatives on both sides of the Medicine Line, with forthcoming full English translations. I began returning this story to Turtle Mountain in the summer and autumn of 2016 during the annual novena celebrations and will continue to visit as long as I am invited.

SOURCES

This dissertation draws from a wealth of institutions in both Canada and the United States. In Canada, essential materials are at Library and Archives Canada (Ottawa), the Québec Archdiocese Archives (Québec), and the Société historique de Saint Boniface (Winnipeg). In the United States, the Library of Congress (Washington, DC), the Montana State Historical Society (Helena, MT), the State Historical Society of North Dakota (Bismarck, ND) and the Jesuit Oregon Province Archives (Spokane, WA) inform the bulk of the primary source data. This dissertation centres Metis voices in its use of primary sources and oral history. To move away from the exclusive focus on the individual, and towards a community history of Metis

⁵¹ Shoemaker, ed., *Clearing a Path*, 68.

⁵² Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 16.

Catholicism, digital humanities tests hypotheses with large historical datasets that combine vital statistics found in church registers with census data. I blend underexplored historical materials with digital tools to produce social network analysis graphs reflecting the communal lived elements uniting ChWeUm Davis and his relatives. In addition, to gain insights on the historical transmission of Catholic devotions, I link folklore, oral traditions, and material culture analysis. I consulted published primary sources, newspaper articles, diaries, oral testimonies, and genealogical reconstructions. I include select missionary accounts and correspondence throughout this work because these men witnessed Metis religious life and commented on its differences from their own practice. Relying on documentary records created by colonizers without immediately reproducing their gaze requires what historian Carolyn Podruchny called “see [ing] beyond their biases.”⁵³ Historians (including me) do not write pure, objective analyses, but rather, should strive for constant awareness of the race, gender, and class biases present in both historical evidence and in our selves.

Metis-produced historical insights are among the richest type of documentation available to scholars today. Published life stories in as-told-to literary works, such as Mary Weekes’ *The Last Buffalo Hunter, as told to her by Norbert Welsh* (1945), allow us to hear Metis voices directly. Weekes recounts the life story of buffalo hunter Norbert Welsh, born in 1845 “three miles up St. Boniface.”⁵⁴ Welsh’s life story was contemporary to ChWeUm Davis’s: Welsh left St. Boniface for his buffalo hunt in 1862 at the age of eighteen, whereas Davis was born into a life of buffalo hunting. While Welsh denounces the efforts of Gabriel Dumont and Louis Riel in the Metis Resistances, Davis records the events in his diaries without reproach. Comparing of the two men’s Catholicity highlights the diversity of Metis lived religion. Metis people did not have a

⁵³ Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 7.

⁵⁴ Mary Weekes, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1945), 13.

homogenous religion or singular belief. The experiences of Catholic Metis were not the same as those of other faiths, and individuals within these groups had different cultural and practical affiliations to Indigenous ceremony.

A similar life story to Norbert Welsh and ChWeUm Davis published in 1976 was Peter Erasmus's *Buffalo Days and Nights*. Born in 1833, Erasmus related his life to Henry Thompson, describing buffalo hunts, trading, and treaty negotiations as he interpreted for Cree chiefs at Fort Carlton. Erasmus's life also took him from the Red River westward, where he adapted to an environment transformed by settler colonial pressures.⁵⁵ We are fortunate to have a rare account of a female Metis, Victoria Callihoo, whose 1860 manuscript describes her first experience on the buffalo hunt at thirteen years of age. Unlike Davis, Welsh and Erasmus, she left from Lac Ste. Anne, in present-day Alberta, in the springtime. She accompanied her mother, a medicine woman "who set broken bones and knew how to use medicinal herbs."⁵⁶ Callihoo's account is much shorter than the three men mentioned before her. This brevity, and the rarity of her account, is a symptom of patriarchal society's tendency to erase and devalue women's work. Biographies of Metis men are plentiful.⁵⁷ This dissertation complements ChWeUm Davis's life story with the experiences of women in his life, including his second spouse, Sarah Nolin. It surveys the

⁵⁵ Peter Erasmus and Henry Thompson, *Buffalo Days and Nights* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1999).

⁵⁶ Victoria Callihoo, "Our Buffalo Hunters," *Alberta Historical Review* 8, no. 1 (1860): 24.

⁵⁷ For three examples of biographical works on Gabriel Dumont, see: Gabriel Dumont and Denis P. Combet, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires: les Mémoires dictés par Gabriel Dumont et le Récit Gabriel Dumont* (Saint-Boniface: Éditions du Blé, 2006); B.A.T de Montigny, "Biographie et Récit de Gabriel Dumont Sur Les Événements de 1885," in *La Vérité Sur La Question Métisse Au Nord-Ouest*, by Adolphe Ouimet (Montréal: s/n, 1889), <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/1517.html>; Charles Duncan Thompson, *Red Sun: Gabriel Dumont The Folk Hero* (Winnipeg: Self Published, 1995). For French language as-told-to biographies of Metis men, see: Auguste Vermette and Marcien Ferland. *Au temps de la Prairie: l'histoire des métis de l'ouest canadien racontée par Auguste Vermette, neveu de Louis Riel* (Saint-Boniface: Éditions du Blé, 2000) and Guillaume Charette. *L'espace de Louis Goulet* (Winnipeg: Éditions Bois-Brûlés, 1976).

everyday religion of both men and women in an attempt to increase the number of works that find gender to be a “useful category of historical analysis.”⁵⁸

ChWeUm Davis’s diaries resonate with William Whipple Warren’s *History of the Ojibway People*, first published posthumously in 1885.⁵⁹ Whereas Warren, son of an Anishinaabe woman and a white man, grounds his accounts in the history of Great Lakes Anishinaabeg, ChWeUm Davis wrote about their relatives, the Metis of the northern plains, as they chased the buffalo. Warren and Davis’s accounts connect via shared Great Lakes relatives and helps expand historical reasons why the Anishinaabeg and French became close allies in the eighteenth century, allowing for the eventual formation of a post-colonial Indigenous nation.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The central question of *why* certain Metis people adopted Catholicism and incorporated its practices into their daily lives remains unexplored by historians.⁶⁰ Though scholars began to answer the question in ethnohistorical and genealogical studies, this dissertation rigorously examines historical Catholic rituals among Metis peoples. Catholicism appeared amidst the Metis because of its long roots in the fur trade, connecting Great Lakes progenitors to prairie families. Kinship, lay baptisms, miracle cures, family rosary recitations, petition-signing, and repeated requests for regular access to clergymen linked the eighteenth-century Great Lakes Metis to the nineteenth-century Metis buffalo hunters of the northern plains. Besides beginning to answer *why* Metis peoples adopted Catholicism, this dissertation builds on a corpus of works produced between the eighteenth century and the present day assembling multidisciplinary Canadian and

⁵⁸ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053.

⁵⁹ William W. Warren, *History of the Ojibway People*, Borealis (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984).

⁶⁰ Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 130.

American sources, in French and in English. The following historiographical survey is organized in chronological and thematic order of publication. Due to space limitations, this literature review excludes certain titles, especially those not deemed critical for the conceptual framework of the dissertation. Because of the social history approach privileged throughout this work, Catholic Church histories and theological analyses do not feature prominently in this historiographical review. The investigation of Metis lived religion that follows is secular, focused on the people, their beliefs, their quotidian, and the Catholic practices that marked them along the way.

Religious hagiographies significantly influenced histories of Metis and other post-contact Indigenous peoples. French missionary accounts, correspondence, and journals were published in the seventeenth century primarily in the *Relations des Jésuites*. Some of the content described early religious syncretism in the fur trade. The *Relations*, however, functioned as a self-promotion tool to raise money, and reflected the cultural biases and expectations of the Catholic order. The Jesuits' successes in spreading so-called civilization were limited, and the *Relations* served the purpose of the institution more than they reflected reality.⁶¹ Nevertheless, their writings are among the earliest recorded evidence linking the descendants of the fur trade (later constituting the Metis nation) with Catholic religious practices.⁶² Church-sponsored documents are “hagiographies of state” that uncritically present state formation as a positive good.

French Canadian historians manifested interest in Métis peoples before English Canadians. Joseph Tassé's *Les Canadiens de l'Ouest* (1878) reads as an ode to the famous sons of *l'Amérique française*. French North America was the imagined place of francophonie in North

⁶¹ Carole Blackburn, *Harvest of Souls : The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America, 1632-1650* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 4.

⁶² For three twentieth-century examples see: Terence Kardong, *Beyond Red River: Centennial Book of the Diocese of Fargo 1889-1989* (Fargo: Richtman's Printing, 1988); Rev. Edmund R. Cody, *History of the Coeur d'Alene Mission of the Sacred Heart* (Kellogg Idaho: Progressive Printing and Supplies, 1930); and Louis Pfaller, o.s.b., *Father De Smet in Dakota* (Richardton North Dakota: Assumption Abbey Press, 1962). All three reference extensively the Metis in the United States but cast the missionaries among them in hagiographic light.

America, spanning the riverine routes of the St. Lawrence, Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri waterways. Tassé wrote a lengthy historical account of many Metis men's lives, including Louis Riel, *père* born at Île-à-la-Crosse in 1817. Tassé praised Riel Sr.'s role in contesting the Hudson's Bay Company's (hereafter HBC) monopoly on the fur trade and its effects on Metis and *Canayen* Red River inhabitants. The shared linguistic and religious heritage of French-speaking Metis and their French Canadian contemporaries manifests itself in the author's backing of the political, economic, and spiritual fight against *les Anglais*.⁶³ In the nineteenth century, Catholic clergy and their apologetics sometimes wrote about the Metis in affirmations of support towards the Indigenous postcolonial nation. At other times, Church officials reversed their position and denounced the Metis altogether. Following the events of 1885, Monsignor Vital J. Grandin, then Bishop of St. Albert, openly denounced Louis Riel *fils* and his supporters.⁶⁴ Other French Canadians examined their role in the junior Riel's execution, and whether local action or inaction in Québec and Ottawa led to the demise the West's francophone martyr.⁶⁵ As Roberto Perin points out, in the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church was very much divided in Canada.⁶⁶ Ideological differences between Irish and French Catholic clergy had real consequences for the political projects espoused by the Metis.

Early American turn-of-the-century accounts of the buffalo hunters in the northern borderlands captured some of the movements and political conflict arising from settler colonialism's encroachment on Indigenous territories. Transformations included religious syncretism among post-contact Indigenous peoples. The professionalization of historical

⁶³ Joseph Tassé, *Les Canadiens de l'Ouest*, vol. 2 (Montréal: Cie d'imprimerie canadienne, 1878), 361.

⁶⁴ Vital-Justin Grandin, *Le véritable Riel - Tel que dépeint dans les lettres de Sa Grandeur Mgr Grandin, évêque de Saint-Albert, du Revd. P André, supérieur des missions du district de Carleton, des Revds pères Touze, Dourmond, Vefreville, Moulin et Lecoq, missionnaires du Nord-Ouest, d'une religieuse de Batoche, etc. etc.* (Montréal: Imprimerie générale, 1887).

⁶⁵ Adolphe Ouimet, *La Vérité Sur La Question Métisse Au Nord-Ouest* (Montréal, 1889).

⁶⁶ Roberto Perin, *Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) 21.

production was in its infancy in 1884 at the birth of the American Historical Association.⁶⁷ Following this pivotal moment, historical societies sprouted around the country, especially in young states. Its members wrote the early histories of the American Midwest, including Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and North Dakota. Settlers formed institutions that collected stories and primary sources, and began to publish materials that fit within a larger American national narrative.⁶⁸ Turn-of-the-century intellectual production saw the advance of the settler-colonial state as a positive good. Historical understandings of the northern plains were limited to white settler experiences. For such authors, the North American past began with Europeans. Professor A.C McLaughlin at the University of Chicago mused “one might after all say that Dakota has no history.”⁶⁹

Despite McLaughlin’s 1906 statement at the SHSND’s annual meeting, published primary sources in its journal provide some insight into the religious life of mixed-ancestry descendants of Euro-American fur traders encountering and marrying into Indigenous families and developing distinct polyethnic cultures. Chronicles on religious practices of the nineteenth century described Metis habits and livelihoods.⁷⁰ Other institutions, like the Wisconsin Historical Society, published primary source materials (often translated from French into English), which later formed the basis of historical scholarship in the twentieth century. Such historical works were,

⁶⁷ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21.

⁶⁸ SHSND, ed., *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, vol. 1 (Bismarck: Tribune State Printers and Binders, 1906).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:54.

⁷⁰ This statement recognized that Metis ethnogenesis, or identity, developed in many different ways and in many different contexts throughout parts of North America. While Metis adherents of Roman Catholic beliefs in Lac Sainte-Anne (*manitow-sâkahikan*) in Alberta and those in Pembina in North Dakota were united by a common faith, they were distinct by their languages, the former speaking Cree, while the lives of the Metis of Pembina were heavily rooted in Michif French and *Anishinaabemowin*. The present study thus expands upon existing Metis studies by focusing the core of its work on the biography of a man who was recognized by settlers for his marks on the historical record as a pioneer of the state of North Dakota.

and remain, active agents of settler colonialism; they produced colonial knowledge and understandings of the past, whose legacies resonate in today's society.

Jean O'Brien's examination of local histories in New England made a compelling argument about the dangerous effects of claiming "firsts" and "lasts" in American society. It shapes collective understanding of the past. The historical narratives described earlier, anchored by settler history, erased the presence of Indigenous peoples from the past (and present) of various localities across the northern plains. Historical societies published narratives about the rugged settler, and his ability to colonize Indigenous lands. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot noted, historical knowledge production is "no less powerful" than violence and warfare.⁷¹ Early historical publications carry political weight. Historical knowledge production shapes *how* we remember the past. Boyd Cothran's study of the Modoc War highlighted the importance of markets of remembering, or the places and spaces in which we build, guide and commodify memory. They, too, are sites where power congregates.⁷² While recollections and analyses published in the early twentieth century provided insights on the past, reading them without a critical eye would be counterproductive to the goals of this dissertation.

CANADIAN HISTORY AND METIS PEOPLES

Research in this field began by investigating the relationship between the Canadian state and Metis families. Canadian historiography first incorporated Metis through the lens of violence by examining the narrative of their resistance to the encroachment of the nation-state on their traditional territories. Scholars of the Canadian state included Metis peoples beginning in the 1930s. Decades after Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis marked the American

⁷¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 2.

⁷² Boyd Cothran *Remembering the Modoc War: Redemptive Violence and the Making of American Innocence* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 14.

historiographical landscape and legitimized its colonialism of the northwestern plains, Canadian historians adopted some of its tropes.

Harold Innis's staples thesis (1930) conceived of the northwestern borderlands as a microcosm of the fur trade serving the advance of European settlement and economy. While resource extraction moved west via the fur trade, Innis saw in this staple economy the origins of the Canadian nation-state. Although Innis centres Indigenous labour in nascent nation-state economy, his analysis of Indigenous work ceased at the forty-ninth parallel.⁷³ The imagined border, a creation of Euro-American colonizers, was not reflective of Indigenous realities. Metis sovereignty, or those free traders and buffalo hunters who were their own bosses in the nineteenth century, were not a phenomenon limited to one side of the Medicine Line. Innis asserted that the northern portion of North America remained British because of the fur trade networks that penetrated the interior, which in his mind "pacified" Indigenous peoples. He believed Metis were "a unique thing which did not take place or happen in the United States."⁷⁴ This dissertation refutes both these assumptions by presenting the interwoven history of Metis people in the United States and Canada. Indigenous nations continuously resisted the advance of settler colonialism in their midst.

George Stanley's *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (1936) is among the earliest works analyzing Metis political history. Using a racialized hierarchy of personhood favouring white Anglo-Saxons, Stanley saw the 1885 Resistance as a contest between the "primitive" and civilization (the Euro-Canadian settler state). Though Stanley observed Metis peoples were "very religious and devoted their clergy," those of French descent were "indolent, thoughtless, and improvident, unrestrained in their desires, restless, clannish and

⁷³ Harold A Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10219095>.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 392.

vain.”⁷⁵ The racialized assumptions found in English Canada reproduced themselves in the French language.

Marcel Giraud’s 1945 ethnohistorical analysis *Le Métis Canadien : son rôle dans l’histoire des provinces de l’Ouest* contributed to the savage v. civilized trope. The two-volume study of biological traits makes overarching statements about people and nationhood. Limited by heavy reliance on reports by Catholic missionaries, Giraud misunderstood the legitimacy of Metis national claims by equating resistance to the settler-colonial state to biological determinism.⁷⁶ The racist tone and filters of Giraud’s writing on the Metis are denounced in contemporary scholarship. Giraud’s assessment of the Catholic religion as a pacifying force for Metis people is also contrary to the arguments in this dissertation, which show an instrumental adoption of rituals and beliefs, not an entity that controlled the Metis ethos. Giraud credits missionaries with the governance structures of the buffalo hunt, despite the evidence of hunters regulating and organizing their own strategies.⁷⁷ Both English and French Canadian historians subscribed to racist assumptions in their early studies on Metis peoples. Doing so helped justify the continued disregard of the Crown’s legal obligations towards Indigenous peoples.

In the 1950s historian W.L. Morton wondered whether the “rebellion” appellation was historically accurate. Because Riel did not lead a provisional government in opposition to another preexisting force: it was not a rebellion against the British Crown.⁷⁸ Although Morton’s ideological shift advanced the political analysis of Metis history, he remained true to his

⁷⁵ George Francis Gillman Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions*, 4th Ed. 1st published in 1936, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 8.

⁷⁶ Marcel Giraud, *Le Métis Canadien: son rôle dans l’histoire des provinces de l’Ouest*, vol. 1 (Saint-Boniface: Éd. du Blé, 1984), x.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ W.L. Morton, introduction to Alexander Begg, *Alexander Begg’s Red River Journal and Other Papers Relative to the Red River Resistance of 1869-70*, ed. W. L. Morton (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1956), 1. Note that Thomas Flanagan denounces the ‘resistance’ appellation in the preface of *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered*. 2nd Ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

contemporaries as his 1957 study of Manitoba spoke of “the persistent Scots and the insouciant métis.”⁷⁹ This language choice demonstrates an enduring assertion in a hierarchy of personhood in which the white Anglo-Saxon male is an ideal type.⁸⁰ Problematic racialized analyses on the events of 1885 continued. Desmond Morton’s *Last War Drum* (1972) described Metis peoples as “indifferent farmers” and “a little improvident” whilst simultaneously admiring the military abilities they acquired in the buffalo hunt.⁸¹ The 1960s civil rights movement eventually transformed the types of acceptable discourses on Indigenous peoples and their past.

Indigenous peoples issued correctives for the early decades of professional historical research by publishing their own accounts of encounters with the colonial past. Howard Adams’s *Prison of Grass* (1975) highlights the role of fur trade institutions in implanting white supremacy and the federal government’s use of historical narratives, specifically at the Batoche National Historic Site, to support the subjugation (by force) of Indigenous peoples.⁸² Reevaluating state-published Metis histories and the role of the Canadian government in state-sponsored violence significantly transformed historical production on Metis peoples.

In the mid 1970s, scholars shied away from the events of 1885 as their interest in the Metis nation diversified. John Foster expanded academic discourse on Metis families living outside the confines of the Red River valley.⁸³ Anthropologists like Joe Sawchuck linked the past of the Metis Nation to its mid-to-late-twentieth-century socioeconomic hardships, wondering

⁷⁹ W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 66.

⁸⁰ Sociologist Max Weber argues that the ideal type, a commonly shared conception, is made up of value judgements reproduced and disseminated through time. Comparisons of ideal types illuminates social phenomenon, such as how (and why) historians conceived of Metis peoples as inferior to white Anglophone settlers. See: Max Weber. *Essais sur la théorie de la science*. Translated by Julien Freund, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1965).

⁸¹ Desmond Morton, *The Last War Drum: The North West Campaign of 1885* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972), 6.

⁸² Howard Adams, *Prison of Grass: Canada from the Native Point of View*, 4th. (Toronto: General Publishers, 1980), 15.

⁸³ John E. Foster’s contributions are extensive. Early examples include “The Origins of the Mixed-Bloods in the Canadian West” in L.H. Thomas, ed., *Essays on Western History* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976) 71-80; John.E Foster, “The Métis: The People and the Term” *Prairie Forum* 3 no. I (1978), 79-90.

“why ... did these half-breeds born in eastern Canada not acquire a separate identity [like those of the west]?”⁸⁴ Jacqueline Peterson attempted to answer Sawchuck, arguing for a Metis Nation genesis in the Great Lakes region in 1978.⁸⁵ Historians then grappled with the question *en masse* bringing forth a new wave of analyses centred on Metis peoples. Meanwhile, the study of Metis religiosity honed in on Louis Riel, beginning with Thomas Flanagan’s 1979 monograph. Flanagan argued that Riel’s faith advocated Christian millenarian thinking, *similar to that of other nativist movements in the United States*.⁸⁶

By the 1980s, academic publications on Metis peoples blossomed into a field of its own. Production in English established a dominance that continues to this day.⁸⁷ In 1980, Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer S.H. Brown transformed the analytical lens of the historical Metis experience by focusing on the lives of women in the fur trade. Van Kirk showed how intermarriage led to the presence of mixed-ancestry women at fur trade posts and the tight-knit society of Red River. The arrival of white women in Indigenous spaces transformed the social hierarchy and the benefits that some of the daughters of the fur trade and their kin had come to enjoy.⁸⁸ Brown compared the experiences of fur trade life as lived by employees of the British-controlled HBC versus those of the Montréal-based North West Company (hereafter NWC) until the former swallowed the latter in amalgamation in 1821. Brown’s macrobiographical method inspired wide-ranging historical data collection tracing social relations that developed through time over a vast

⁸⁴ Joe Sawchuk, *The Metis of Manitoba: Reformulation of an Ethnic Identity* (Toronto: P. Martin, 1978), 23.

⁸⁵ Jacqueline Peterson, “Prelude to Red River: A Social Portrait of the Great Lakes Métis” *Ethnohistory* 25, no. 1 (1978): 41–67.

⁸⁶ Thomas Flanagan, *Louis “David” Riel: Prophet of the New World*, 2nd. 1st published in 1979 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 98. A few years later, Giles Martel published *Le messianisme de Louis Riel* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1984).

⁸⁷ Frits Pannekoek, “Metis Studies: The Development of a Field and New Directions,” in *From Rupert’s Land to Canada*, ed. Theodore Binnema, Gerhard John Ens, and R. C. Macleod (University of Alberta Press, 2001), 111–28.

⁸⁸ Van Kirk, *“Many Tender Ties”: Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, Man: Watson & Dwyer, 1980), 171.

geography.⁸⁹ Those aware of the importance of kinship networks became interested in building historical Metis genealogies.⁹⁰ Published compendiums and census indexes soon followed.⁹¹ Scholars also continued their research on the events of 1885. D.N. Sprague presented the 1885 Resistance as a direct outcome of state inability to meet the obligations of the 1870 Manitoba Act. Federal and provincial policies favouring settlers at the expense of Metis triggered a forced westward migration out of Manitoba. The conflict of 1869 remains unresolved.⁹²

Historical investigation of Metis religiosity increased in the 1990s. The five-volume series of *Western Oblate Studies* assembled scholars of Metis and Catholic Canada in a joint study of the West. John Foster's 1990 analysis of the relationship between bison brigade captains and Catholic missionaries acted as a roadmap for major questions underpinning the religious quotidian of buffalo hunters.⁹³ This dissertation emphasizes the plurality of religious experiences among Metis peoples, even in relatively small kinship groups. The straightforward division of Metis religious identities as either Métis Catholic francophone or mixed-blood Protestant Anglophone suggested by Frits Pannekoek in 1991 is too simple to account for the diversity in the daily lived rituals of Metis buffalo hunters.⁹⁴ While Pannekoek argues the churches and their clergy were "instrumental" in the Resistance of 1869, this dissertation contends Metis peoples

⁸⁹ Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996). xx .

⁹⁰ D. N. Sprague and R. P. Frye, *The Genealogy of the First Metis Nation: The Development and Dispersal of the Red River Settlement, 1820-1900* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1983).

⁹¹ Gail Morin, *Censuses of the Red River Settlement: An Index to Censuses for the Years 1827 ; 1828 ; 1829 ; 1830 ; 1831 ; 1832 ; 1833 ; 1835 ; 1838 ; 1840 and 1843* (Pawtucket: Quintin Publications, 1998); Gail Morin, *Chippewa Half-Breeds of Lake Superior* (Pawtucket, R.I.: Quintin Publications, 1998).

⁹² The Canadian government signed an agreement with the Manitoba Métis Federation in November of 2016 to negotiate the land claim provisions promised to Metis peoples in 1870. See: Kelly Malone, "We Are Coming Home Louis Riel: Manitoba Métis Celebrate Deal to End 146-Year Struggle - Manitoba - CBC News," *CBC News Manitoba*, 15 November 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/we-are-coming-home-louis-riel-manitoba-m%C3%A9tis-celebrate-deal-to-end-146-year-struggle-1.3852877>.

⁹³ John E. Foster, "Le Missionnaire and Le Chef Métis," in *Western Oblate Studies 1: Proceedings of the First Symposium on the History of the Oblates in Western and Northern Canada*, vol. 1, (Edmonton: Western Canadian Publishers and Institut de Recherche de la Faculté Saint-Jean, 1990), 117–27.

⁹⁴ Frits Pannekoek, *A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Pub, 1991), 33.

themselves used the Church as a political instrument. This study is indebted to historian Diane Payment, who exposed relationships between Catholic clergy and the Metis of Batoche (1870–1930). Payment noted a particular fondness among some towards nuns in Saskatchewan but adds that missionaries and Metis believers had irreconcilable differences.⁹⁵ In contrast, this study argues the conflicts between Catholic clergy were reconcilable: many descendants of Catholics in the 1800s are still Church members to this day.

Economic and social historians prepared the groundwork for studying Metis lived religion. Situated within Irene Spry's framework of "great transformation" of the Canadian west from the 1840s to 1890s, from an open commons to an enclosed land of private property, Gerhard Ens explores what he calls abrupt changes in Metis economies. Ens divided epochs as "Indian and pre-capitalist" and "European and capitalist." This dissertation agrees generally with his characterization, but recognizes the continuity and blending of the two.⁹⁶ Building on Ens, Ruth Swan charts Metis ethnogenesis as occurring "earlier and over a wider geographic area" than the Red River colony's vicinity.⁹⁷ I agree with Swan: Metis ethnogenesis connects to a very long nineteenth century that begins in the century preceding the Battle of Seven Oaks. Swan's work on the Pembina region sees the locality as a site of ethnogenesis, elaborating on the spaces where Metis nationalism took root. Historians Natalie Kermoal and Brenda Macdougall began to sketch *what* it meant to be a Metis Catholic in the contexts of Red River and Île-à-la-Crosse, respectively. Though neither explains *why* Metis families embraced Catholicism for centuries, they start to articulate a response by focusing on women and families.⁹⁸ Kermoal's investigation

⁹⁵ Diane Payment, "*Les gens libres - Otipemisiwak*", *Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1990), 113.

⁹⁶ Gerhard John Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 3–4.

⁹⁷ Ruth Ellen Swan, "The Crucible: Pembina and the Origins of the Red River Valley Metis" PhD diss. (University of Manitoba, 2003), 15.

⁹⁸ Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 130.

of Metis women in Manitoba in the nineteenth century considered them agents who influenced and preserved Metis culture, including adhesion to Roman Catholicism.⁹⁹ Macdougall analyzed the Cree worldview of *wahkootowin*, linking the interconnected nature of Metis life with celebrations of Catholic rituals and sacraments. Catholic baptism reinforced Indigenous kinship ties by establishing family relationships beyond those of mother and father.¹⁰⁰

Studies on the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and their interactions with Metis peoples provided significant insights about the role of the clergy among believers. Grounded in the perspective of the Church hierarchy and its documentary record, such works do not reveal the daily experiences of Indigenous believers. Robert Choquette conceptualized missionary efforts in military terms, arguing that the clergy's "conquest of liberation" narrative was a metaphor for the subjugation of Indigenous peoples.¹⁰¹ Raymond Huel describes the missionizing efforts of the Oblates in western Canada.¹⁰² Timothy Foran studied how the Oblates of Île-à-la-Crosse from 1845–1898 understood Metis, articulating their religious diversity.¹⁰³

A persistently cited difficulty for scholarship on Metis families is the geographic scope of their mobility. Although a transnational people predating the institutional establishment of nation states across the Medicine Line, Metis studies continued to suffer from Red River myopia.¹⁰⁴ The Metis nation is a legally recognized entity in Canada, and Metis people continued to maintain kinship links with folks south of the forty-ninth parallel. Scholars are increasingly accepting that

⁹⁹ Nathalie J Kermeol, *Un passé métis au féminin* (Québec: Éditions GID, 2006), 13.

¹⁰⁰ Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 152.

¹⁰¹ Robert Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995).

¹⁰² Raymond Joseph Armand Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996).

¹⁰³ Foran remarks that even though Île-à-la-Crosse was among the oldest Metis settlements in the west, "To the Oblates, however, Île-à-la-Crosse was not immediately recognizable as a Métis community. In fact, the term métis remained conspicuously absent from Oblate commentary on Île-à-la-Crosse until the mid 1870s." Timothy P. Foran, "Les gens de cette place' Oblates and the Evolving Concept of Métis at Île-à-La-Crosse 1845-1898" (Ph.D diss., University of Ottawa, 2011), 20.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur J Ray, *Telling It to the Judge: Taking Native History to Court* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 124.

Indigenous peoples in North America do not base their lives on Euro-American frontiers. Michel Hogue's investigation of the Canadian-U.S. border demonstrates it was a space of Metis sovereignty.¹⁰⁵ The 2012 edited collection *Contours of a People* by Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny and Brenda Macoudgall emphasized the importance of mobility that “establishes fixed communities.”¹⁰⁶ This dissertation expands the study of bordered spaces and its impact on Plains Metis bison hunters by investigating their lived Catholicism. The layered, plural, and contextual expression of Metis religiosity in the historical record illuminates the effects of state lines on Indigenous peoples.

Metis Studies in Canada are not limited to historical analyses of past events. Driven by contemporary sociological concerns, Chris Andersen challenges the racialization discourse, especially in the Canadian census and the Supreme Court of Canada—defining Metis personhood as a product of mixing two peoples—marginalizes their claims to sovereignty. This dissertation shares Andersen's definition of Metis, which links it with the “history, events, leaders, territories, language and culture associated with the growth of the buffalo hunting and trading Métis of the northern Plains.”¹⁰⁷ However, unlike Andersen, this dissertation acknowledges that much Metis ethnogenesis predated bison brigades and occurred in earlier fur trade contexts.

Although this dissertation focuses on Catholicism, it is keenly aware of religious and spiritual diversity among Metis peoples. Chantal Fiola's research on Anishinaabe beliefs revealed that although Louis Riel was a devout Catholic, he “was adopted by a Midewiwin family and became Midewiwin himself” whilst in the United States. Midewiwin is a practice in Anishinaabe

¹⁰⁵ Michel Hogue, *Metis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2015), 8. See also Adam James Patrick Gaudry, “Kaa-Tipeyimishoyaahk - ‘We Are Those Who Own Ourselves’: A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870” (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2014).

¹⁰⁶ Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall, *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility and History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 9.

¹⁰⁷ Chris Andersen, “*Métis*”: *Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 12, 24.

spirituality.¹⁰⁸ Metis lived religion manifests itself in a range of experiences, from Catholicism to Protestantism to Indigenous spirituality and ceremonies, and all variables in between. Historians of the Metis in Canada are presently revisiting the legacies of Christianity as colonialism on the North American continent, questioning why some Metis adopted Christianity despite it being the religion of their colonizers.¹⁰⁹ Jean-François Bélisle's and Nicole St-Onge's insight on the interconnectedness uniting the sacred and political among Metis people informs this dissertation.¹¹⁰

Metis Studies in Canada is presently burgeoning with interdisciplinarity. Sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers are engaging with historians, who are responding in kind. Historians are beginning to hear the critiques on their research methods coming from the field of Indigenous Studies. The contributions in the field made by Metis research organizations, namely the Gabriel Dumont Institute and its Virtual Museum, as well as the work of historians outside academia, such as Lawrence Barkwell, are invaluable. They bring to light countless family histories that would otherwise remain hidden in archival fonds and inaccessible to a wider public. This study is indebted to the biographical research undertaken by Barkwell on the Davis family, and generations of Metis historians who have been keeping the knowledge alive and preserving their patrimony. Discussions on the past of Metis families are also happening outside academic spaces, among Metis peoples themselves, in part because of the open access to information on the

¹⁰⁸ Chantal Fiola, *Rekindling the Sacred Fire: Métis Ancestry and Anishinaabe Spirituality* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 13.

¹⁰⁹ Justin Tolly Bradford and Chelsea Horton, eds., *Mixed Blessings: Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada* (Vancouver ; Toronto: UBC Press, 2016), 2.

¹¹⁰ Jean-François Bélisle and Nicole St-Onge, "Between Garcia Moreno and Chan Santa Cruz: Riel and the Métis Rebellions," in *Mixed Blessings: Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada*, ed. Justin Tolly Bradford and Chelsea Horton (Vancouver ; Toronto: UBC Press, 2016), 102–18. For another study on the legacy of Louis Riel exploring both his mythicized legacy in Canada, see Jennifer Reid. *Louis Riel and the Creation of Modern Canada: Mythic Discourse and the Postcolonial State* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012). See also Étienne Rivard, "Les Bois-Brûlés et le Canada français : une histoire de famille éclatée," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 24, no. 2 (2016) 55. Rivard argues French Canadian historiography 'divorced itself' from Metis studies.

Internet. Metis Studies in the United States are not yet as developed as their Canadian counterpart. Cross-border dialogue is ongoing and necessary.

METIS (OR NOT) IN THE UNITED STATES

Racial categories are rigidly enforced in both U.S. history and in law. The so-called “Black/White paradigm of race,” or often equating “non-white” with “African American” fostered research production excluding many peoples in the process.¹¹¹ Although U.S. historians of Roman Catholicism, such as Robert Orsi, propelled an ethnographic turn in American religious history, it focused on the devotional life of every day believers in immigrant communities.¹¹² This turn overlooked Metis peoples. Jennifer S.H Brown noted “Métis is not an ethnic term well-known in American history.”¹¹³ The study of polyethnic, post-colonial Indigenous polities did not develop a branch of its own in U.S. historical production. Reducing historical realities to false binaries, be they Black/White or reliance on the “Two Worlds” trope (of the savage v. civilized, for instance) edifies whiteness, a fiction in itself, as normative.¹¹⁴ The underrepresentation of post-contact Indigenous nations and their self-governance systems in historical analyses have serious repercussions in the U.S. Tribal peoples are denied federal acknowledgment of their indigeneity via criteria of racial purity (blood quantum), critiques of miscegenation, or settler-created state lines. As Kim TallBear argues, Native American DNA, a settler construct in itself,

¹¹¹ Juan F. Perea, ‘The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The Normal Science of American Racial Thought’ *California Law Review* 85, no. 5 (1997): 1213–58.

¹¹² Robert A. Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). For a study of Italian and Haitian immigrants and their devotion to the Madonna of Mount Carmel, see Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 2. ed (New Haven London: Yale Univ. Press, 2002).

¹¹³ Jennifer S. H. Brown, ‘Metis, Halfbreeds, and Other Real People: Challenging Cultures and Categories’ *The History Teacher* 27, no. 1 (November 1993): 19.

¹¹⁴ James Joseph Buss, and C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, Eds. *Beyond Two Worlds: Critical Conversations on Language and Power in Native North America* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014). Buss and Genetin-Pilawa note that binaries like the Two World trope are “a grammar for settler colonialism.” The effacement of complex Indigenous realities and their replacement with simplified articulations carry a heavy ideological weight and outcome for those it misrepresents.

does not predicate indigeneity.¹¹⁵ This dissertation asserts that the Metis Nation, a post-contact Indigenous polity, informs those unfamiliar with the complexities and nuances of polyethnic Indigenous nationhood. This identity, as Bonita Lawrence noted, is *Indigenous*. It is wholly distinct from colonial projects and its actors, “[mixed-blood Native people] come from Native families, that is, from families that carry specific histories, Native histories.”¹¹⁶ ChWeUm Davis’s writing articulated a *Mitis Canadien* identity, not that of a miscegenated *Canadien*. Davis’s history is intertwined with the stories of his Cree and Saulteux relatives. Other Metis histories are connected to the Dakota, or the Nakoda. Unlike Indigenous peoples who converted to Catholicism, Metis believers were often born into a Catholic sphere. The history of Metis peoples is often grounded in a “two cultures” analogy to interpret Indigenous encounters with Christianity.¹¹⁷ That analogy, however, is not suitable to gain a fulsome understanding of Metis lived religion.

Studies on the American West, Midwest, and Old North West all encountered individuals and communities involved in the lifeways and relationships that built the Metis Nation. A distinct historiography on Metis peoples in the U.S. emerged in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Following Canadian scholarship, it notes that the invisible line that separated the United States from Canada did not stop Indigenous nations from moving across it. An early example is Joseph Kinsey Howard’s *Strange Empire* (1952), which traced Louis Riel’s time in Montana leading up to the 1885 Resistance.¹¹⁸ In 1962, anthropologist Verne Dusenberry found compatibility

¹¹⁵ Kim TallBear. *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 5.

¹¹⁶ Bonita Lawrence, *‘Real’ Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004) xvii.

¹¹⁷ Michell Pensatubbee points out the ‘each foot in a different canoe’ analogy creates a false dichotomy in Joel W. Martin, and Mark A. Nicholas, eds., *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), xii.

¹¹⁸ Nicholas C.P. Vrooman, *The Whole Country Was ... One Robe. The Little Shell Tribe’s America* (Great Falls: Drumlummon Institute and Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana, 2012), 387.

between Cree spirituality and Roman Catholicism on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in Montana. He noted the Catholic Church's greater successes among Indigenous nations, especially Cree and Chippewa, were attributed to its ritualistic repetitions in celebrations of the Mass. Because Catholic priests interpret scripture, and membership in the faith did not require regular reading of the Bible, some believers and supporters found it more suitable to their needs than Protestantism.¹¹⁹ Studies of buffalo hunters in the U.S. focused on material and economic aspects of the hunt instead of their spirituality.¹²⁰ Equally important on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel, though, is *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* (1985), an edited collection by Jennifer S. H. Brown and Jacqueline Peterson. Renowned for invigorating and uniting diverse scholarly research on Metis peoples in Canada and the U.S., Brown's and Peterson's edited collection, now over thirty years old, opened the door to debates on the Great Lakes origins of Metis Nation. Dusenberry's contribution argued that although the U.S. government systematically refused to recognize Metis identity as Indigenous, the Montana Metis persisted in their self-affirmation and sovereignty.¹²¹ A decade later, Ens found that the end of the buffalo hunt at Turtle Mountain state officials were able to segregate Indigenous peoples onto reservations in the context of their economic distress and recalibration.¹²²

Lived Catholicism among ancestors of the Metis was born in Great Lakes fur trade forts and became a political force. Indigenous women repurposed Roman Catholicism, using their

¹¹⁹ Verne Dusenberry, *The Montana Cree: A Study in Religious Persistence*, 1st edition 1962 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 20–21.

¹²⁰ Mari Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters: The Story of the Hide Men* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 335. Sandoz notes that the "Most successful hunter of 1874-5 was Abraham Salois, a Metis whose total bison kills that year reached 600. Sandoz not cite a source for this information.

¹²¹ Verne Dusenberry., "Waiting for a Day That Never Comes: The Dispossessed Metis of Montana," in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985), 119–36.

¹²² Gerhard John Ens, "After the Buffalo: The Reformation of the Turtle Mountain Métis Community, 1879-1905," in *New Faces of the Fur Trade : Selected Papers of the Seventh North American Fur Trade Conference*, ed. Jo-Anne Fiske, Susan Sleeper-Smith, and William Wicken (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 139–52.

newfound faith to build networks amidst mixed-ancestry populations.¹²³ Catholicism shaped Metis political and commercial relationships in ways not intended by colonizers and missionaries. The descendants of the fur trade practised Catholicism in ways that scholars such as Keith Widder called “folk Catholicism” or a “casual attitude towards the church’s teachings.” I argue that lived religion did not react “casually” to Church teachings. Instead, lived religion was dynamic, instrumental, and political.

Catholics in the United States, including Metis peoples, suffered the ideological legacies of the Black Legend, or the belief that Catholic (Spanish) colonization was somehow worse, more genocidal and destructive, than its later English-American counterpart. Robert Fernández Retamar argued the Black Legend created the “White legend of the civilized West,” where the desecration of Indigenous lands, polities, and spheres of influence, was justified and granted newfound purpose.¹²⁴ The so-called Manifest Destiny is one such embodiment. As this dissertation demonstrates, Metis Catholicism was simultaneously a positive good and a phenomenon feared by some settlers.

U.S. historiography grappling with questions of Metis identity on the northern North American borderlands needs to consider the significant contribution of tribal histories to Metis experiences.¹²⁵ Tribal histories speak of Metis peoples in different ways. Whereas the focus of the first Turtle Mountain study was on the Catholicity of local families, a tribal history published in 1997 sets the story of the Turtle Mountain people in an Anishinaabe worldview. Patricia and Karen Poitra explain those enrolled on Turtle Mountain are “primarily members of the Pembina Band of Chippewa,” a polyethnic Red River based band that entered into treaty with the U.S. in

¹²³ Susan Sleeper-Smith, “Women, Kin, and Catholicism: New Perspectives on the Fur Trade,” *Ethnohistory* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 200.

¹²⁴ Roberto Fernández Retamar, “Against The Black Legend” in *Caliban and Other Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 56-60.

¹²⁵ An excellent example is Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, ed., *St. Ann’s Centennial: 100 Years of Faith* (Belcourt, ND: Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, 1985).

1863 at Old Crossing, in present-day Minnesota.¹²⁶ In contrast, the tribal history of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes addressed the hardship created by Metis hunting brigades on the livelihoods of other tribal peoples.¹²⁷ In the same analysis, readers are reminded the Fort Peck Indian Reservation also became the home to “Turtle Mountain Chippewa families,” further complicating questions of identity and belonging.¹²⁸ John Morrison Shaw’s 2004 PhD dissertation on the legal struggle of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa from 1795 to 1905 builds a chronology explaining how settler-colonial law led many Metis to become Turtle Mountain Chippewa tribal members and preserve their sovereignty.¹²⁹ Although the U.S. government did not believe that the Metis met the criteria of an Indigenous “identifiable group,” Metis peoples numerically dominated Turtle Mountain.¹³⁰ Martha Harroun Foster explains how and why people chose to ascribe to Metis identity in a state-created legal context that bestows “Indian status” with blood quantum: “webs of kinship connected these families, providing social and economic stability and a strong sense of who they were.”¹³¹ Exploring the relationships uniting renowned buffalo hunting surnames such as Wilkie, Ouellette, and Berger, Foster argues the networks woven by these families made them different from other tribal peoples. Catholic rituals and ceremonies such as baptism and marriage created networks of religion.

Nicholas Vrooman’s community-based study of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana situates the Metis among a polyethnic Indigenous world in which political relationships grew through kinship. Vrooman links the movement of voyageurs from Sault-Ste-

¹²⁶ Patricia F. Poitra and Karen L. Poitra, *The History and Culture of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa* (Bismarck: North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 1997), 4.

¹²⁷ David Reed Miller, ed., *The History of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, 1800-2000* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press: Fort Peck Community College, 2008), 43.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹²⁹ John Morrison Shaw, “‘In Order That Justice May Be Done’: The Legal Struggle of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, 1795-1905” (PhD Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2004), 26.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹³¹ Martha Harroun Foster, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 7.

Marie (Ontario) to their incorporation into Anishinaabe families in present-day Minnesota, Manitoba, and North Dakota, where some descendants became members of the federally recognized Turtle Mountain Tribe of Chippewa Indians. The U.S. government created the “plains Ojibwa” category to recognize “half-breeds” in their fold.¹³² The U.S. then used legal processes to cleave off Little Shell Tribe members from their Turtle Mountain relatives. Although the state of Montana recognized Little Shell Tribe in 2000, their effort for U.S. federal recognition continues to this day.¹³³ Literature on tribal recognition struggles is vast and transcends the fields of history, law, political science and anthropology.¹³⁴ The Little Shell Tribe, with members who self-identify as Metis, must prove tribal affiliation that fits within strict parameters determined by the U.S. government.¹³⁵ The tribe must also demonstrate they remained under a unified political leadership, although they are not concentrated in a unique geographic space.¹³⁶

¹³² Dr. Nicholas Vrooman communicated this information to the author in the summer of 2015.

¹³³ Jonathan Ambarian, ‘Little Shell Tribe Works to Revitalize Language’, News, *KPAX.com* | *Continuous News* | *Missoula & Western Montana*, Accessed 6 December 2016, <http://www.kpax.com/story/33687743/little-shell-tribe-works-to-revitalize-language>. Federal recognition attempts have been underway for close to forty years.

¹³⁴ Campisi highlights some of the common threads that tie the story of the Metis of Montana and North Dakota, sometimes known as Landless Indians, with the history of Indigenous nations who sought and who continue to seek federal recognition or tribal identity. See: Jack Campisi, *The Mashpee Indians: Tribe on Trial*. 1st ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

¹³⁵ Rachel Paschal notes “The number of Indian tribes that lack federal recognition is nearly equal in number to those that are recognized. The BIA has determined that the federal government has not formally recognized approximately 230 extant and functioning tribes. Many of these tribes are eligible for, and want, recognition.” in Rachel Paschal, “The Imprimatur of Recognition: American Indian Tribes and the Federal Acknowledgment Process,” *Washington Law Review* 66, no. January (1991): 209.

¹³⁶ Indigenous political governance determined how the United States entered into treaties with Indigenous nations. Witgen demonstrates that allied bands had “access to the western interior and access to the western Sioux bands” between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Kinship connections to buffalo hunting peoples (including the Metis) shaped diplomacy and helps explain why self-identifying Metis were included in the conception of “Indian” label the United States bestowed on the Turtle Mountain people. Michael J. Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). For a recent study of the effects of the Canadian-United States border on Metis (and other) peoples, see Benjamin Hoy, “A Wall of Many Heights: The Uneven Enforcement of the Canadian-United States Border” (Ph.D diss., Stanford University, 2015). Metis realities are explored in other places in the United States, namely in the Missouri river valley in Anne Farrar Hyde, *Empires, Nations and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860* (New York: Ecco Press, 2012).

Articulated through ChWeUm Davis's religious life story, this dissertation can be considered an "ethnobiography."¹³⁷ Davis's diaries propose a Metis narration of the North American past. His writings connect many nodes in the Metis network, forming "One [buffalo] Robe," a unified polity linking buffalo-hunting families, from the Rocky Mountains to White Earth, Minnesota.¹³⁸ This work complements and builds on microhistorical analyses emphasizing the importance of family relationships on the northern plains in the long nineteenth century.¹³⁹ Family connections sustained Metis peoples and anchored their religion.

ANTECEDENTS, ECONOMICS, AND ENVIRONMENTS

Ollivier Hubert's study of Catholic ritual in Québec highlighted how the Catholic Church shaped, used, and invested itself in the construction of identity through repeated practices. Hubert's focus on clergy is not repeated here, but his insights on the importance of the Catholic calendar in North America transcend the province of Québec.¹⁴⁰ Voyageurs introduced Roman Catholic rites and practices to their descendants and spouses from unions *à la façon du pays*. Podruchny's study of voyageur cosmologies explains how certain rituals became central among children of the fur trade. Ritual devotion to St. Ann, the patron saint of the voyageur, began with a stop at Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue church, on Montréal's west end.¹⁴¹ The church, which opened in 1686, became a site where voyageurs en route to the interior of the continent asked the mother of the Virgin Mary and grandmother of Jesus for protection on their travels from inclement weather. While *Canadien*

¹³⁷ Daniel M. Cobb, Kyle D. Fields, and Joseph Cheatle, "'born in the opposition' D'Arcy McNickle, Ethnobiographically," in *Beyond Two Worlds: Critical Conversations on Language and Power in Native North America*, ed. James Joseph Buss and C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 253–68. The authors call "ethnobiography" the blending of biography and ethnohistory. This dissertation adopts a similar framework for the historical reconstruction of ChWeUm Davis's past.

¹³⁸ Vrooman, *The Whole Country Was ... One Robe*, 387.

¹³⁹ Hyde, *Empires, Nations and Families*, 4–5.

¹⁴⁰ Ollivier Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel: la gestion des rites par l'Église catholique du Québec: fin XVIIe-mi-XIXe siècle* (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2000), 195–96.

¹⁴¹ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 55.

men made their way westward on trade routes established since time immemorial, they also partook in a ritual that mimicked the first sacrament of the Roman Catholic faith: baptism.¹⁴² The processions and pilgrimages that rooted themselves in Turtle Mountain and elsewhere were leftovers from the voyageur heritage of Plains hunters. As explained in later chapters, the Metis Catholic calendar, centred on organized hunting expeditions and widespread mobility, was distinct from the *Canadien* variety.¹⁴³

I draw additional insights on the voyageur past of Metis peoples from scholars calling for investigation of fur trade era religion. Gilles Havard describes the *Pays d'en haut*, or Upper Country, as marked by *métissage*, where two social spheres met and engaged in cross-cultural exchanges.¹⁴⁴ Havard does not equate *métissage* with the Metis nation, in part because his temporal scope ends in 1715. Nevertheless, for Havard, the *Pays d'en haut* became fertile ground for ethnogenesis.¹⁴⁵ Robert Rumily portrays the Metis as products of the NWC. Its *Canadien* labourers left their progeny and patronyms on the land.¹⁴⁶ More recently, Robert Choquette remarked that some Indigenous people “chose the path of dimorphism, that is to say electing both Christianity and the traditional ways.” Turning to Christianity was a strategic choice that afforded Indigenous people more means to survive the effects of settler colonialism. The *Canadiens* also privileged this strategy.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Ibid., 58–59.

¹⁴³ Jean-Claude Dupont and Jacques Mathieu, *Héritage de la francophonie canadienne: traditions orales* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1986) 14. The French Canadian Catholic Calendar has four seasons: 1) The winter celebrations (including Christmas, New Years, and Mardi Gras according to the authors) 2) Easter (from Ash Wednesday to Quasimodo Sunday, or the first Sunday after Easter) 3) the summer cycle (Saint-Jean Baptiste Day, Saint-Pierre and Saint-Paul Day, Assumption of Mary Day) and 4) autumn celebrations (Halloween (the Evening of All Hallows), the Day of the Dead, All Saints' Day).

¹⁴⁴ Gilles Havard, *Empire et métissages: Indiens et français dans le Pays d'en haut, 1660-1715* (Sillery, QC: Paris: Septentrion ; Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), 44.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 785–86.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Rumilly, *La compagnie du Nord-Ouest*, vol. 2 (Montréal: Fides, 1980), 277, 298. Examples of Metis names on contemporary United States maps include the Bottineau and Rolette counties in northern North Dakota.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Choquette, *Canada's Religions: An Historical Introduction* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), 135.

Interrogating the connections between the financial comforts and the spiritual life of Metis buffalo hunters, as they transitioned from their mobile lifeways to more sedentary pursuits in the late nineteenth century, reminds us of important contributions in labour and environmental history. Gary Gerstle linked economy and religion in his study of French Canadians in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. According to Gerstle, French Canadians distanced themselves from the Church, instead choosing to elevate their socioeconomic livelihoods via secular union life.¹⁴⁸ In contrast, the bison hunters in this study continued their affiliation with the Church, even after the devastation of 1885 and the so-called “breakdown of traditional relationships.”¹⁴⁹

Environmental and economic histories of the Great Plains¹⁵⁰ and American borderlands¹⁵¹ focus on the significant changes of the territory. Early scholars, especially Arthur J. Ray, analyzed the impact of the bison landscape on North American history. Indigenous labour, pre- and post contact with European colonizers, shaped both local and global economies. Ray explains how migrations, disease, population, and natural resource exploitation led to massive transformations, and the extinction of the bison led to starvation, dislocation, and dispossession.¹⁵² Scholars studying the disappearance of the buffalo as a sustainable food source blame overhunting and grazing competition from the thousands of horses belonging to Indigenous populations, as well as ever-increasing cattle owned by incoming settlers reducing significantly available grazing commons.¹⁵³ As the buffalo economy fell into ruins, state military

¹⁴⁸ Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 19–20.

¹⁴⁹ Raymond Joseph Armand Huel, “The Oblates, the Métis and 1885: The Breakdown of Traditional Relationships,” *CCHA*, no. 56 (1989): 20. Huel notes that after the events of 1885, the relationship between Metis peoples and Catholic clergy was forever changed and highlights evidence of Metis discontent.

¹⁵⁰ Geoff Cunfer, *On the Great Plains: Agriculture and Environment* (Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

¹⁵¹ Dan L. Flores, *The Natural West: Environmental History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

¹⁵² Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 228.

¹⁵³ Cunfer, *On the Great Plains*, 48–49.

force moved Indigenous nations onto reservations. Pemmican was a major staple in the dietary and economic livelihood of Metis peoples, and the decimation of the bison created dramatic changes to diets, as well as economic orientation and social organization.¹⁵⁴ Theodore Binnema provides a useful introduction to the diversity of human and political interests shaping the plains since time immemorial. According to Binnema, the landscapes and bounty of the earth created political allegiances and provided the possibility for the organization of large hunting parties.¹⁵⁵ Building on Binnema's work, James Daschuk argues that the endemic "alienation of First Nations from a viable economic base (...) and the imposed environmental constraints of the reserve system (...) played a key role in the decline of their health in the nineteenth century."¹⁵⁶ Well-being, health, and healing of the peoples who resided in the region begins with the land. When presenting the antecedents that led to the birth of Plains Metis buffalo hunters, environmental history considerations are central, as they too were key in aiding the genesis and development of this new, post-contact nation.

The study rests on the shoulders of giants. Centuries of publications, and dozens of scholars, influenced the historiographical underpinnings of my research on Metis lived Catholicism among bison hunting families. From the innumerable contributions in the growing field of Metis Studies, to works produced the subject of religion and the environment, to French-language sources printed in France and North America, I am indebted to the scholarship of those that came before me.

¹⁵⁴ George Colpitts, *Pemmican Empire: Food, Trade, and the Last Bison Hunts in the North American Plains, 1780-1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

¹⁵⁵ Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 35.

¹⁵⁶ James W. Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013), xi.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first chapter, “The Genesis of Buffalo Hunting Polities (1750-1820s),” establishes the religious antecedents of Metis families. Metis ethnogenesis began in the sphere of Indigenous governance ordering the Great Plains prior to the arrival of European settler colonizers. By situating ChWeUm in his kinship lineage, I start to outline the contours of Metis Catholicism and trace it back to the Great Lakes region. By signing petitions promising financial support for Catholic officials, and fostering a Catholic life with or without clergy, Metis peoples distinguished themselves from other Indigenous nations. Extracts of the Davis diary that predate his birth (1845), but are part of a Metis national memory, are explored throughout.

The second chapter, “Hunting with Christ: Metis Lived Religion on the Buffalo Chase (1800-1840s),” introduces the story of the *loup-garou*, a French werewolf, and its links to the religious life of the Metis in the Red River region. The chapter asks how and when Roman Catholic missionaries received their invitation to accompany Metis families on their buffalo hunts. I present the chronology of events leading to the first Catholic clergymen on the bison chase before introducing ChWeUm’s parents in greater detail. I outline their ties to Catholic political actions and mores predating the birth of their son.

Chapter 3, “Metis Catholicism in War and Peace (1840s-1851),” showcases the birth of ChWeUm Davis in the early summer weeks of 1845 and explains how he entered a Catholic sphere in infancy. After highlighting the political nature of Metis lived religion on the bison hunt, the chapter turns to two well-known missionaries, Fathers Georges-Antoine Belcourt and Albert Lacombe. I then examine miraculous events during the Battle of the Grand Coteau of the Missouri River. In the summer of 1851, a war party of Yanktonais (Sioux) estimated in the thousands attacked a Metis bison-hunting brigade of 300 people over the course of three days.

Metis hunters lost only one man in an event often described as “miraculous.” Since historiography lauded the role of Father Laflèche, missionary priest present among the hunters, I chose this event to interrogate the role of Metis lived religion at Grand Coteau.

Chapter 4, “Shifting Powers: The American Civil War and the Rise of Judas Priests (1851–1865),” demonstrates a transformation in the relationship between Metis peoples and Catholic clergy. The onset of the Civil War and the demographic changes it brought to the northwestern plains made some Metis people acutely aware that the Church hierarchy would not always advocate for their best interest. Using the label of “Judas Priests,” Metis people created a parable linking their experiences of the Civil War to Jesus’s life. This chapter marks the genesis of studies on Metis peoples in the American Civil War. Bison hunters like ChWeUm Davis found employment opportunities among U.S. military personnel, but their service on the side of the Union did not bring significant political advantages. Metis families continued to build kinship ties with other tribal peoples and developed survival strategies involving adoptions to help their polity thrive in times of warfare.

Chapter 5, “*Fini Letan de Levernement* (1865-1885),” follows the life of Davis as the buffalo hunt ceases to be viable for the safety and survival of his family on the Great Plains. After summarizing the changes and continuity driving missionary goals and Metis responses in the last decades of organized hunting parties, the chapter considers the impact of miraculous events in the 1870s. How did miracles influence adherence to Roman Catholicism? What was their role in the sustained participation in many rituals and prescriptions from clergy? Without ongoing support from laypeople, Metis believers themselves, affiliation with the Catholic Church could not have persisted in light of the betrayal of 1885.

The final chapter, “Lived Religion as Resistance (1885-1930s),” highlights the paradox between clergy response to the 1885 Resistance in the Canadian West and the rise of pilgrimages

to St. Ann on Turtle Mountain. Catholic officials denounced Louis Riel and his actions against the Canadian state. Nevertheless, the ritual calendar provided by annual summer pilgrimages to the grandmother of Jesus offered bison hunters a way to continue their yearly get-togethers and reconnect with one another through prayer in an economic climate marked by famine and ongoing epidemics. The Church served a new political role in treaty resolution attempts between the U.S. government and Turtle Mountain people. Simultaneously, Metis families persistently petitioned the Catholic hierarchy, advocating for their spiritual interests.

Summarizing major research findings, the conclusion of the dissertation reiterates its main arguments and supporting evidence. I follow the recap with reflections on the methodologies deployed throughout this work and the historical observations they bring to light. This interdisciplinary history of lived religion among Metis buffalo hunters, set in a very long nineteenth century, combines microhistory and digital prosopography. The narrative arc and life history of ChWeUm Davis enriches Metis historiography and illuminates the complex roles of Roman Catholicism in Canada and the U.S.

CHAPTER 1 THE GENESIS OF METIS BUFFALO HUNTING POLITIES (1750-1820s)

Kinship relations and mutual obligations united the foremothers and forefathers of the Metis Nation. Nevertheless, historians agree that no single moment marked the genesis of said Nation. Twenty-eight years ago, in a historiographical essay addressing the future directions of Metis Studies, historian J.R. Miller remarked, “if Red River myopia is being cured, it is not being replaced by excellent peripheral vision.”¹ Red River myopia occurs when conceptions of the Metis Nation centre on individuals attached to the Red River region, offering a limited view of diverse Metis lifeways. Sharpening the vision of Metis studies, this chapter situates the political and religious environment that welcomed ChWeUm Davis to the world in its geographically widespread historical context. Political will manifested itself in Metis people’s daily experiences of faith. Retracing the provenance of Catholic beliefs and devotion through genealogy, political actions, and everyday life emphasizes the long tradition of Catholic rituals among many Metis people. To highlight these roots, this dissertation deploys a historical analysis linking the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Doing so explores how Davis’s family and those like him simultaneously transmitted their beliefs, and expanded their kinship affiliations, via relationships sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church.

This chapter argues that a distinctively fur-trade-based Catholicism affiliated with Metis families began taking shape in the late eighteenth century. Growing and fostering family connections via Catholic sacraments, in other words, connecting fur trade families to Indigenous nations through marriage and baptism, then sustaining these relationships through time, is a distinctive element. In contrast, the *habitants* of the St. Lawrence Valley, by and large, did not build and sustain close bonds with neighbouring Indigenous nations. A central element of Metis

¹ J.R. Miller, “From Riel to the Métis,” *Canadian Historical Review* 69, no. 1 (1988): 14.

lived religion is its dissemination through laypeople, men and women alike. Four instances of Metis petition-signing highlight the political nature of their Catholicism. According to philosopher Jürgen Habermas, “the political” is shaped and defined by how a group distinctly conceives of itself in relation to others, and how it behaves to manifest its free will, or sovereignty. The voyageurs, merchants, and Metis who signed repeated petitions saw a specific need in their communities and behaved in ways fulfilling that need, based on their understanding of the religious and political worlds around them. Laypeople acted in concert to change their spiritual situation (with petition-signing) while also disseminating Catholic mores and rituals around them (such as lay baptisms). This “conscious (...) form of social integration” allowed the collective to validate their identities and desires through direct action, while simultaneously shaping a polity distinct from their Indigenous relatives and European ancestors.²

Metis Catholicism became increasingly distinct from the faith of its *Canadien* forefathers as it travelled to the open prairie. Lived religion connected the Great Lakes to the Great Plains via kinship relationships transmitting knowledge, customs, and rituals. Historical social network analysis (henceforth SNA) assesses the impact of Catholic behaviour through time. ChWeUm Davis’s family network imbued his life with beliefs and practices inherited from his ancestors. Buffalo hunters passed down Catholic teachings to their progeny. The Turtle Mountain

² Habermas, Jürgen. “‘The Political’ The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology.” In *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, edited by Judith Butler, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 17-18. Habermas writes: “From an empirical point of view, ‘the political’ at best designates that symbolic field in which the early civilizations first formed an image of themselves. From a historical point of view, ‘the political’ leads us back to the origins of state-organized societies ... in which social integration had been partly transferred from a kinship structure to the hierarchical form of royal bureaucracies (...) The ‘the political’ means the symbolic representation and collective self-understanding of a community **that differs from tribal societies through a reflexive turn to a conscious, rather than spontaneous form of social integration.**” (Emphasis added) This excerpt was included to highlight the racist civilized v. savage trope employed by Habermas in his definition of ‘the political.’ Instead of reproducing said trope, this dissertation acknowledges that ‘the political’ or, in other words, actions that affirm a collective political will and identity have been an active part of Indigenous societies since time immemorial. It is not indicative of a passage from one stage of so-called civilization to another, neither can it be said that Indigenous nations rely on ‘spontaneous’ integrations of it in their quotidian.

community continued its close affiliation to Catholic rituals and mores for generations, as evidenced by the ongoing celebration and devotion to the patron saint of voyageurs, St. Ann, persisting in the twenty-first century. Combining SNA and genealogical research revealed ChWeUm Davis's relations were connected to Fort Michilimackinac in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. Religion and political mores travelled from one generation to the next, as each moved into a new territory. An overview of the Catholic Church's historical implantation in the prairies lays the groundwork for the political realm that welcomed Davis to the world on his birthdate 24 June 1845.

CATHOLICISM ON FISH AND BUFFALO BORDERLANDS

Many centuries shaped the historical context of Roman Catholicism before it arrived onto buffalo borderlands. Institutionalized Roman Catholicism appeared on the Great Plains much in the same way it travelled throughout the so-called New World, as part of settler colonialism. Political, ideological, and racialized motives, anchored in expansionist desires, fed its growth.

Catholicism's colonial antecedents predate its institutional implantation on the northern plains by centuries. The fifteenth-century Doctrine of Discovery became the legal framework for colonialism in North America and beyond. Canadian and American law enshrined this tenet in the early history of both countries (1763 and 1823, respectively) to justify the ongoing land dispossession imposed on Indigenous peoples in both nascent nation-states.³

Historian Luca Codignola highlighted the sixteenth-century Council of Trent (1563) as a point of genesis in world Roman Catholic history. The reforms of Trent bore the fruits of what we know as Roman Catholicism today. In North America, the Council of Trent simultaneously

³ Jennifer Reid, "The Doctrine of Discovery and Canadian Law," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 30, no. 2 (2010): 335–56.

oriented the Church towards the mass conversion of Indigenous populations, and its centralization in Rome. The evangelization goal traversed the entire planet, reminding scholars that transnational contexts help explain localized behaviours.⁴ Adding to this context was the 1622 creation of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (*Propaganda Fide*). Founded by Pope Gregory XV as an arm of the Holy See tasked with coordinating missionary work, this body administered Catholic institutions in the whole of North America. It also offered the pope an avenue for the consolidation of his power. Historian Robert Choquette calls this process, “keeping in check the authority of lay patrons, usually the Kings of Europe.”⁵ Evangelization continued to be a pursuit of both Catholic kingdoms and the papacy, simultaneously seeking an increase of their influence throughout the territories they claimed. The King of France reinforced his influence over Church operations when he asked Rome in 1658 to create a diocese in North America. The new diocese transformed the status quo, replacing the Jesuits as administrators of the Catholic institution until Bishop de Laval’s nomination as the apostolic vicar the following year.

The year 1658 marked the first veneration of St. Ann, grandmother of Jesus and mother of Mary, on North American soil. Because the rapids below Québec City were especially difficult to traverse, sailors asked St. Ann to help them in their travels as they crossed them. The faithful built a chapel at this site [Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré], and reported miracles credited to the intercession of St. Ann by 1665. The first relic, or small physical remnant (bone shard) of St. Ann, arrived on the continent in 1670. Pilgrimages to venerate the grandmother of Jesus thus penetrated the lives of French Catholic settlers and their descendants employed in the fur trade.⁶

⁴ Luca Codignola, “Les premiers pas de l’Eglise dans les régions orientales de l’Amérique du nord,” *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 9 (2000): 133.

⁵ Choquette, *Canada’s Religions*, 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 126 For information on the pilgrimage to St. Ann among Metis people, see Chapter 6.

In 1674, the apostolic vicar became the Bishop of New France. Newly promoted de Laval described his ministry in terms emphasizing its youth. First established for the purpose of converting Indigenous peoples, the Catholic Church of northern North America soon reimagined its calling. Historian Lucia Ferretti noted the bishop and his affiliates turned their evangelizing work towards their own people: European settlers. After the anticipated Indigenous spiritual exodus from traditional spirituality to Christianity proved unrealistic, the Québec-based institution shifted its attention. In its stead, the Church began fostering the spiritual and demographic growth of French settler communities. The institution provided colonizers in their midst with religious surveillance, instruction, and prescriptions.⁷

Evangelizing for the purpose of converting Indigenous nations of North America to Christianity was a century-old practice before Frenchmen embraced it. Codignola notes that “saving” Indigenous nations was a priority among Catholic missionaries in North America beginning in 1610, when a priest was dispatched from France explicitly for that purpose. The apex of the early French proselytizing in North America centred on the conversion of Wendat peoples between 1632 and 1650.⁸ Theologian Orlando Espin notes those conversions, and the relationships born from such exchanges, “did not happen as a result of religious dialogue between equals.”⁹ Indeed, violence accompanying colonization in many parts of North America incited early converts to submit to the colonizers’ wishes.

Reactionary violence to colonialism in northern North America transformed and dispersed Indigenous nations. Missionaries’ so-called gains were lost following the destruction of Wendat villages through warfare in the mid-seventeenth century. European diseases and a series of

⁷ Lucia Ferretti, *Brève histoire de l’Eglise catholique au Québec* (Montréal, Québec: Boreal, 1999), 7.

⁸ Codignola, “Les premiers pas de l’Eglise dans les régions orientales de l’Amérique du nord,” 139.

⁹ Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997).

attacks by the Haudenosaunee destabilized the Wendat confederacy and began their dispersal throughout North America starting in 1648.¹⁰ Although missionary labour among Indigenous people slowed considerably thereafter, it did not cease completely. For instance, Catholic orders continued their work and published propaganda justifying their practices. The *Jesuit Relations*, which printed materials about its Canadian efforts between 1632 and 1672, are one such example.¹¹ Meanwhile, the institutional powers of the bishop grew with his ability to nominate and move parish priests at will. Parishes began to shape the core of New France's religious identity in 1664, when a parish opened in today's Old Québec. The tithe, a tax imposed on the faithful, called *la dîme* in French, financed the operations and growth of the diocese and its parishes.¹²

Long-established Indigenous trade routes over waterways transmitted reports of Catholicism's reach across the North American continent. While French missionaries, explorers, and their hired guides travelled the rivers used to build their commercial empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, news of their so-called discoveries were communicated to the head of the Church at Québec. Upon hearing of Marquette's voyage to the Mississippi River in 1673, colonial officials and clergy rejoiced. Bells rang in honour of the event, and a *Te Deum* was sung to commemorate the occasion.¹³ By 1724, fourteen parishes had taken root across the territory claimed by France. By 1759, that number had risen to 114.¹⁴ Although the institutional

¹⁰ Kathryn Magee Labelle, *Dispersed But Not Destroyed: A History of the Seventeenth-Century Wendat People* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 47.

¹¹ Havard, *Empire et Métissages*, 683. For a recent historical study of a sample of Jesuit Relations documents introduced and intended for an undergraduate audience, see: Allan Greer, ed., *The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000).

¹² Ferretti, *Brève histoire de l'Eglise catholique au Québec*, 22. Pay

¹³ The *Te Deum* is a Latin language song of praise used in contexts requiring special blessings. Its performance upon news of Marquette's travels to the Mississippi river are mentioned in D.M.A Magnan, *Histoire de la race française aux États-Unis* (Paris: Charles Amat, 1912), 67.

¹⁴ Ferretti, *Brève histoire de l'Eglise catholique au Québec*, 23.

presence of the Catholic Church began in the seventeenth century, a small number of clergymen became priests. Fewer than 200 men shared this role at any one time until the 1800s.¹⁵

Catholicism did not unite French and Indigenous peoples into a single nation in the way foreseen by Samuel de Champlain.¹⁶ As Gilles Havard remarked, religion was not a terrain of alliances between the French and Indigenous nations in the seventeenth century, unlike fur trade or military collaborations. Missionaries reported that in areas removed from sites of sustained colonization, such as the Upper Country, or Great Lakes region, adoption of Roman Catholicism by Indigenous peoples was not happening as it did in the St. Lawrence valley.¹⁷ They did not enjoy unanimous support among *Canayens* and French colonizers.¹⁸ As multiple generations of French immigrants became permanent settlers on the North American continent, they progressively shed their French (from France) identity in favour of a new, *Canadien* one by the turn of the eighteenth century.¹⁹ Although New France collapsed after the British Conquest, North America's Roman Catholic Church leaders did not abandon their colonizing goals of proselytizing Indigenous peoples forever. Consequently, Catholicism in North America turned inward until political circumstances enabled, *en force*, the conversion of Indigenous peoples *en masse* in the nineteenth century.

The British conquest of New France in 1759-63 affected the spiritual life of many. Military losses incurred gravely affected the Church's stronghold at Québec City. Clergy needed

¹⁵ Choquette, *Canada's Religions*, 192.

¹⁶ In an introduction for a 2004 history of Samuel de Champlain, then-mayor of Québec City Jean-Paul L'Allier writes: « Champlain était lui-même un explorateur audacieux qui avait compris l'importance des alliances franco-indiennes jusque sur le plan personnel: 'Nos fils marieront vos filles et nous ne serons plus qu'un peuple' avait-il dit au chef Capitala de Trois-Rivières. Quel beau projet! Toujours d'actualité d'ailleurs. » This comment showcases how the history of Champlain shapes identity in the present. Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois, eds., *Champlain: la naissance de l'Amérique française* (Sillery: Septentrion, 2004).

¹⁷ Havard, *Empire et Métissages*, 682.

¹⁸ Codignola, "Les premiers pas de l'Église dans les régions orientales de l'Amérique du nord," 141, 143.

¹⁹ Jacques Paul Couturier and Réjean Ouellette, *L'expérience canadienne, des origines à nos jours* (Laval: Beauchemin, 2002), 65.

to rebuild the assets it lost in the conflict. The Conquest stunted the growth of the Catholic institution until the nineteenth century. Religious congregations in British-controlled territory could no longer recruit new members. Robert Choquette determined the Conquest reduced the total number of Catholic priests by almost a quarter, leaving only 138 to minister in what became Canada.²⁰ The scarcity of clergymen created by the Conquest persisted well into the nineteenth century. Louis Riel senior, father of the famed 1885 Resistance leader, travelled from Île-à-La-Crosse, in present-day Saskatchewan, to Berthierville, Québec for his baptism, at the age of five years, and two months.²¹ Riel senior's family navigated a distance of over 4000 km on foot and by canoe to foster a formal relationship with the Catholic Church in September 1822. There were only three priests and a bishop in "the northwest," none within reach, which motivated the travels of the Riels.²² Such institutional weaknesses meant that laypeople were the main transmitters of Catholicism beyond the Great Lakes until the mid-nineteenth century. Believers often travelled to Lower Canada to maintain their good standing in the Church. They engaged in Catholic rituals and practices along the way, uniting Metis families in a common historical memory of ritual and belief. Without a sustained clerical presence, Metis Catholics relied on their own understanding of the faith and transmitted its tenets and practices to their progeny. The space of sociability provided by common rituals and practices among believers allowed for a shared identity centred on mobility, Indigenous kinship, and Christian beliefs.

²⁰ Choquette, *Canada's Religions*, 150.

²¹ L. prêtre Lamotte, 'Registre de baptêmes, mariages et sépultures de Berthierville, paroisse Ste Geneviève', 23 September 1822, Ancestry.ca collection, available online p. 40 of 59, Collection Drouin, <https://www.ancestry.ca/> accessed 12 December 2015.

²² Tassé, *Les Canadiens de l'Ouest*, 2:353.

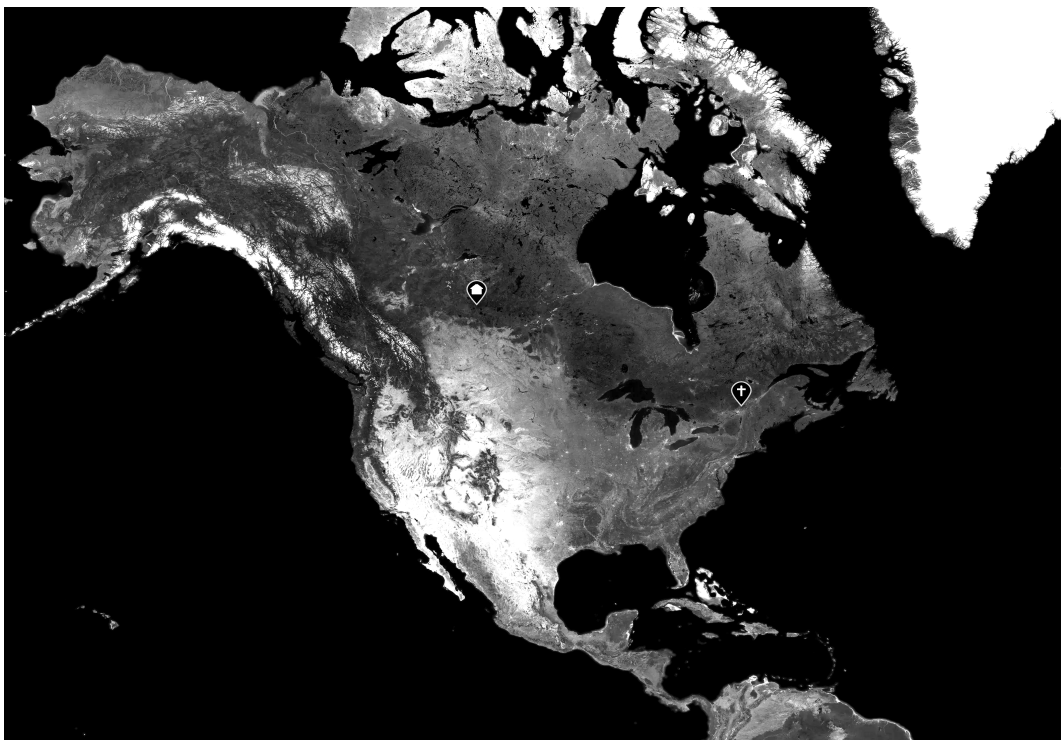


Image 1.1: Map highlighting the 4000 km separating Île-à-La-Crosse and Berthierville, the distance travelled for Louis Riel Sr.'s baptism in 1822.

Laypeople transmitted a belief system that sustained families on the northern plains. Roman Catholic rites implanted themselves in the Red River valley and beyond through unlicensed traders called *coureurs des bois*, and licensed traders and their servants, known as voyageurs. The majority of these men were *Canadiens*, from the St. Lawrence River valley, travelling into, and often remaining in, the North American interior.²³ Sustained contact between fur traders and Indigenous nations meant that such *Canadien* men lived in polyethnic milieus in the late seventeenth century for years at a time, as they increasingly ventured west of Lake Superior. During this period, some learned Indigenous languages and married into the tribes with whom they were trading, sharing their religious beliefs and practices with their families. Other voyageurs congregated at fur trade forts that formed the French riverine world, such as Fort

²³ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, xi.

Michilimackinac, situated on the straits between lakes Michigan and Huron, and would return to Montréal before winter.²⁴

The fur trade relied on free and unfree labourers. As Howard Adams remarked, slavery was another colonizing route used conjointly by settlers of New France and their clergy, both in the St. Lawrence valley and beyond. Children born to enslaved people automatically became the property of European owners. Owners of enslaved individuals baptized them, often by force, offering few means to refuse.²⁵ The French recognized that enslaved Catholics were citizens by virtue of the charter establishing the *Compagnie des Cent-Associés*. The charter associated citizenship with religious affiliation, and bestowed it to all Indigenous people who converted to Catholicism, leaving the door open for enfranchisement to those enslaved. In 1733, the French king refused to pronounce judgment on slavery in Canada, closing the legal loophole that gave citizenship to new Christians.²⁶ While settlers erected commercial outposts along established Indigenous trade routes, they imposed their symbols and rituals at every newly created European settlement, beginning with the two crosses of over thirty feet tall planted by Jacques Cartier in 1534 and 1536.²⁷

From the seventeenth century onwards, many children born of unions between European colonizers and Indigenous women were baptized into networks of Christianity intertwined with

²⁴ Robert Englebert, “Beyond Borders: Mental Mapping and the French River World in North America, 1763-1805” (Ph.D dissertation, history, University of Ottawa, 2010).

²⁵ Howard Adams, *Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization*, (Penticton: Theytus Books Ltd, 1999), 13–19. Adams notes that “by 1761 Indians constituted eighty percent of the Québec slave population. Moreover, the 7600 Indian slaves in New France accounted for ten percent of the colony’s total population.”

²⁶ Marcel Trudel, *L’esclavage au Canada français* (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1960), 101.

²⁷ The history of Roman Catholicism in North America reveals that the church’s method of implantation replaced or repurposed sites of Indigenous worship as a common practice that aims to incite people to convert to the newly implanted religion. For more information, see chapter 1 in Pierre Boglioni and Benoît Lacroix eds. *Les Pèlerinages au Québec*. Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1981. Jacques Cartier erected a 30-foot cross on Mi’kmaq territory known today as the Gaspé harbour July 24, 1534 and a 35-foot cross at the mouth of the St. Charles River in present-day Québec City on 3 May 1536. See: Jacques Cartier and Jean François de La Roque Roberval, *Voyages Au Canada: Suivis Du Voyage de Roberval: Texte Intégral*, Mémoire Des Amériques (Montréal: Agone, 2000) p.48 and p.115.

the commercial empire that gave them life. The outcome of these unions led to the gradual practice of a Catholicism that historians described as “folk,” due to its tendencies to loosely operate within the prescribed notions intended by clergy. As demonstrated by Susan Sleeper-Smith, Indigenous women founded and fostered Catholic networks of religion in which they disseminated ideas, trade goods, and kinship ties.²⁸ Indigenous women used and adapted a European belief system to suit their political and commercial aims. Roman Catholicism on the Great Lakes was interconnected with the fur trade enterprise that brought its forefathers to the region. Women lived Catholicism by becoming godmothers to dozens of children from various Indigenous nations. For instance, the Sainte-Anne-de-Michilimackinac parish register lists thirty-seven godchildren for Marie-Anne Fisher, née Lasalière (1790–1853). Her kin connections included links to the Odawa, Chippewa, Métis, and Dakota nations.²⁹ As active participants in Catholic sacraments, women expanded their kin connections and built lasting relationships with

²⁸ For examples of scholars who referred to Métis Catholicism as ‘folk,’ see: John Foster “Wintering, the Outside Adult Male and the Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Métis,” *Prairie Forum*, 19, 1 (1994), reprinted in Gerhard John Ens et al., eds., *From Rupert’s Land to Canada* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001) 186. Foster refers to the rituals and practices derived from Roman Catholic ritual in the North Saskatchewan River valley in the 1840s, prior to the arrival of missionaries in the region. In the Great Lakes context, Keith Widder used the same term in 1999 to refer to the religious practices that continued at Fort Michilimackinac, at the straits between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. See: Keith R. Widder, *Battle for the Soul: Métis Children Encounter Evangelical Protestants at Mackinaw Mission, 1823-1837* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999) p. 6. Susan Sleeper-Smith’s study of women in the Great Lakes associated the term ‘folk’ with ‘frontier’ when discussing Catholicism in: Susan Sleeper-Smith, “Women, Kin, and Catholicism: New Perspectives on the Fur Trade,” *Ethnohistory* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 423–52. Historian Brenda Macdougall also used the term ‘folk’ as the two noted authors before her when referring to Catholic or Christian religious rituals, but expanded the analysis of the daily spiritual practice of Métis people by the Indigenous (Cree) framework of *wahkotowin*, “the social and the religious, the material or living and the spiritual realms cannot be separated.” See: Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010) p. 131-132. Finally, scholars in the midst of synthesizing scholarship on Métis studies used the term ‘folk’ Catholicism in their discussions of fur trade families distinguishable by their religious affiliations. They relied on Susan Sleeper-Smith’s appellation of the phenomenon. See: Gerhard John Ens and Joe Sawchuk, *From New Peoples to New Nations: Aspects of Métis History and Identity from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-First Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016) p. 47, see also: Susan Sleeper-Smith, ‘Women, Kin, and Catholicism: New Perspectives on the Fur Trade’, *Ethnohistory* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 423–52.

²⁹ “Ste. Anne’s Church Register, rolls 1 & 2. Part One: Register of Baptisms 1695-1821.” Mackinac State Museum.

diverse Indigenous polities. This distinguishes their religious devotion from those of other believers on the St. Lawrence valley.

Roman Catholic rituals and practices arrived in the North American interior before missionaries formally implanted their institutions on Indigenous lands. Catholic ceremonies and sacraments performed by lay people, with or without the presence of clergy, marked the social environments and interactions of the fur trade. Catholic mores travelled westward into Metis buffalo-hunting communities before priests were dispatched beyond the Great Lakes. John Foster reported in 1994, “Among the distinguishing behaviours of some freemen descendants in the North Saskatchewan River Valley was the practice of a ‘folk’ Roman Catholicism which predated the appearance of Roman Catholic missionaries by more than half a century.”³⁰ The close examination of the voyageur ceremony called mock baptism by historian Carolyn Podruchny revealed that Roman Catholicism practised by these *Canadiens* took on new meanings in different places in the late seventeenth century.³¹ The voyageurs’ and *coureurs des bois*’ lived religion left imprints of Catholicism from the *Pays d’en haut* (Upper Country) to the *Montagne des Roches* (Rocky Mountains) and beyond. The tendency to turn to ceremonies, prayers, songs, and supplications, in times of difficulty, fear, or death were among common demonstrations of religiosity in historical records of the North American fur trade.³² Public demonstrations of devotion to Christian beliefs continued among their bison-hunting descendants on the northern plains.

Catholic rites and requests for special favours began upon the voyageurs’ departure from Lower Canada. During the first night of the voyage, fur traders camped on the western tip of the

³⁰ "Wintering, the Outside Adult Male and the Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Metis," *Prairie Forum*, 19, 1 (1994), reprinted in Gerhard John Ens et al., eds., *From Rupert's Land to Canada* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001) p.186.

³¹ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 58–89.

³² *Ibid.*, 80.

Island of Montréal, at St. Ann's church. Before continuing to their destinations, they prayed in the church, saluting the grandmother of Jesus. They asked for her protection throughout their voyage.³³ The Ottawa River was spotted with wood crosses marking the places where voyageurs passed away. Upon sight of the crosses, voyageurs removed their head coverings and recited prayers in memory of the deceased.³⁴ Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de La Vérendrye's repeated expeditions to the North American interior began with a Montréal departure in 1731. Fifty voyageurs went along, among whom twenty-four would remain in existing posts, while the balance ensured the party's push westward.³⁵ Such large expeditions included a continuous missionary presence, as attested by La Vérendrye's swift replacement of ill clergy.³⁶ When Church officials accompanied *Canadien* voyageurs on their travels, they instructed the canoe men on moral behaviour and the religious calendar. Priests imposed rituals of sung litanies and canticles while on water. On land, they organized public prayers morning and night, and held Mass whenever possible.³⁷ Priests wrote some of the melodies that entered the *Canadien* repertoire. Folklorist Madeleine Béland called one such example, *le Chrétien qui se détermine à voyager*, a sang catechism. First published in 1863, the song encouraged practices such as daily prayer, repentance, and religious devotion to the Virgin Mary. It also forbade the voyager from swearing, and falling for the many temptations of the devil.³⁸ The increased frequency and size of trade parties engaged in public demonstrations of Christianity left marks on the cultural

³³ Georges Dugas, *L'Ouest canadien: Sa découverte par le Sieur de La Vérendrye, son exploitation par les compagnies de traiteurs jusqu'à l'année 1822* (Montréal: Cadieux & Derome Libraries-Éditeurs, 1896), 205.

³⁴ Tassé, *Les Canadiens de l'Ouest*, 2:323.

³⁵ Dugas, *L'Ouest canadien*, 68.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁷ Guillaume Marcotte, "Intempérance et piété chrétienne : les voyageurs canadiens et l'implantation des missions catholiques chez les Autochtones d'Abitibi-Témiscamingue 1836-1863," *Rabaska: Revue d'ethnologie de l'Amérique française* 12 (2014): 67.

³⁸ Madeleine Béland and Lorraine Carrier-Aubin, *Chansons de voyageurs, coureurs de bois et forestiers*, Ethnologie de l'Amérique française (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1982), 93–94. The title of the song in question translates to "the Christian determined to travel."

landscapes of Indigenous nations. Ultimately, Roman Catholicism's adoption and transmission throughout Indigenous North America opened the door to, and accelerated the advance of, the demographic boom of Anglo-European settlers and legal processes that later shifted the balance of political power from Indigenous nations to colonizers.³⁹

Believers adapted their daily experiences of Catholicism to the landscapes of the northern plains. An account of Catholic rituals in bison-hunting country recorded by George Washington Kingsbury suggested that pemmican, the bison meat and fat-based foodstuff of the northern plains, sometimes replaced the traditional host in the celebration of Holy Communion during Mass. Kingsbury stated that since flour was not easily obtainable in the seventeenth century, the mixture of buffalo meat, fat, and berries were an adequate substitution.⁴⁰ His account allegedly dates from the seventeenth century. Because the author did not identify missionaries by name, this claim cannot be verified. The author reduced Indigenous nations' participation to the catchall "Indians," who remained otherwise anonymous. Another instance citing a replacement for Eucharist was published in the 1906 *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*. Written by Linda Slaughter, this chronicle illustrated instances of adaptive Christianity among Indigenous people and the clergy engaged in "civilizing" projects:

In the absence of bread, the priests who came from Minnesota and Canada before the establishment of missions on this side of the line, to accompany the half-breeds and natives on their annual hunts, used this species of pemmican as a substance [sic] for bread in the administration of the sacrament of holy communion while out on the prairies.⁴¹

³⁹ For two studies of the acceleration of settler colonialism aided by Roman Catholicism and the presence of French Canadian settlers in the Pacific Northwest of the United States and Canada, see: Melinda Marie Jetté, *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races: A French-Indian Community in Nineteenth-Century Oregon, 1812-1859* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015) and Jean Barman, *French Canadians, Furs and Indigenous Women in the Making of the Pacific Northwest* (Vancouver: UBC Press) 2015.

⁴⁰ George W. Kingsbury, *History of the Dakota Territory - South Dakota Its History and Its People*, ed. George Martin Smith, vol. 1 (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), 83.

⁴¹ Linda M. Slaughter, "Leaves from Northwest History," in *Collection of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, vol. 1 (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1906), 223.

In contrast to Kingsbury's anonymous recollection, Slaughter's informant, identified as Mr. Fred Girard, "had long lived among the Indians" and worked as an interpreter for the United States government at Fort Stevenson.⁴² Also known as Frederic Francis Gerard, he was a *Canadien* born near St. Louis, educated at Jesuit St. Xavier College (currently Xavier University) before venturing into the Missouri River fur trade at age nineteen.⁴³ After a first marriage linking him to the Sahnish nation, he sought baptisms for his three daughters. He became an interpreter at the end of his career after having mastered "Sioux, Arikara, and Chippewa, as well as French and English."⁴⁴ Slaughter's informant, Girard, was a practising Catholic. He noted that the cultural adaptation he witnessed differed from the prescribed ritual of the Church. Girard reminisced the people he observed were "half-breeds and natives." In other words, he broadly characterized a polyethnic group of individuals. Although published nine years before Kingsbury's description, Slaughter's account speaks of a later period than the seventeenth-century chronicle, since Girard was born in 1829. Slaughter's text included an explanation for the name of the Pembina area, also linked to Roman Catholic practices. She wrote:

In reality Pembina is an Indian word the meaning of which is "sanctified bread" and was given by the Sioux to designate the region between the Red and Dakota Rivers with those limits, at designated places, the Holy Eucharist was administered to the assembled on a multitude of occasions of hunting expeditions or of business conventions of the tribes. Thus the name itself perpetuates the memory of the good deeds of the brave priests who were the first to administer the Blessed Sacrament in the wilderness.⁴⁵

Kingsbury published an almost identical claim in 1915. His *History of the Dakota Territory* states:

The Dakota Indians are also said to have given the name to the country and that its meaning when translated is "sanctified bread" and was called Indian bread. Its use by the priests in administering the sacrament of the Last Supper was not uncommon.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ State Historical Society of North Dakota, "Set 5: Fred Gerard & The Fur Trade Biography Unit 3 North Dakota History Primary Sources," accessed 14 December 2015, http://history.nd.gov/textbook/unit3_comculcon/unit3_5_bio.html.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Slaughter, "Leaves from Northwest History," 222.

Another authority claims that Pembina is the French word for “high bush cranberry”, a fruit that grows wild in the country and is used with the buffalo meat in the preparation of “pemmican”. In either case the words “Pembina” and “pemmican” are shown to be related and their meaning explained.⁴⁶

Settlers continued to speculate about the origin of Pembina, attempting to give their historical narratives prevalence over Indigenous knowledge. As the Roman Catholic Church became aware of such historical assertions, its representatives sought to correct the suggestion linking the Holy Eucharist to the “Pembina” name.

Both the veracity of the claims published in 1906 and 1915 and their dismissal by the Catholic Church need to be critically assessed. Bishop John Shanley noted in a supplement to the yearly *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota* that clergy accompanied Indigenous peoples on the Plains until the late nineteenth century. Shanley remarked that “the name Pembina was in use long before mass was celebrated in this state. The name has no reference whatever to the Holy Eucharist, or to the sacrifice of the mass, or to anything Catholic. No Catholic has ever called the Holy Eucharist ‘blessed bread’ or ‘*pain béni*[sic].”⁴⁷ Settler speculation aside, “The Pembina Band . . . are called by the other Ojibways An-I-bi-min-an-i-zibi-win-I-ni-wug, meaning ‘The-high-bush-cranberry-river-men’ from the river of the same name, An-i-bi-min-an-i-zibi, The-High-Bush-Cranberry-River, the Pembina River.”⁴⁸ The Church official was correct in arguing that Pembina, pemmican, and *pain béni* shared no link, even though some settlers insisted on this assertion. Historian Ruth Swan’s thorough exposé on the

⁴⁶ Kingsbury, *History of the Dakota Territory - South Dakota Its History and Its People*, 1:83.

⁴⁷ Shanley, John Rev. “Collection of the State Historical Society of North Dakota,” 2:3–34. Appendix to Pt 1, Vol 2. Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1908, 32.

⁴⁸ Gilfillan, J.A. “Names of the Ojibways in the Pembina Band, North Dakota” in State Historical Society of North Dakota, ed. *Collections of the State Society of North Dakota*. Vol. 2. 2. Bismarck: Tribune State Printers and Binders, 1908.

historical origin and variations of the Pembina place named surveyed documentary records of the late eighteenth century, and reaffirmed its Anishinaabe past.⁴⁹

Church officials did not question the claim that their clergymen substituted the bread ingested during the sacrament of communion with pemmican. It is possible that lived Catholicism adjusted to local conditions changed aspects of traditional practice. Considering, too, the expertise of Slaughter's 1906 informant on the matter, it is likely that the rituals surrounding the Holy Eucharist adapted themselves to life on the Prairies, and, at times, relied on pemmican as a substitute for sacramental bread. Since certain historical accounts mentioning pemmican being used instead of consecrated bread predate the arrival of Catholic clergy in the region of study, priests could not have been the ones performing such rituals among the Metis and their kin. Consequently, the distribution of a substitution for the body of Christ likely occurred at the hands of laypeople. Historical examples of *Canadien*, European, and Indigenous laypeople in Catholic families confirm that many led or participated in rites usually reserved for the clergy, such as the performance of baptisms, marital unions, and catechizing neophytes.

North America has a long history of Indigenous men and women resisting and transforming the European political sphere using Catholic rituals to conserve, ameliorate, and expand their kinship networks.⁵⁰ For instance, Magdeleine Marcot, known in the Great Lakes region as Madame Laframboise, was a renowned trader and successful businesswoman. She selected and grew her family connections through the ceremony of baptism at Fort

⁴⁹ Swan, "The Crucible," 12–15.

⁵⁰ For examples of recent historical scholarship demonstrating how Indigenous people developed a practice of Roman Catholicism that served a dual purpose see: Émilie Pigeon "Vernacular Catholicism and the Fur Trade: Baptisms at Fort Michilimackinac, 1741-1786." in *De Pierre-Esprit Radisson à Louis Riel: voyageurs et Métis*, edited by Denis P Combet, Luc Côté, et Gilles Lesage, 105-24. Winnipeg: Presses Universitaires de Saint-Boniface, 2014. See also Leavelle, Tracy Neal. *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

Michilimackinac and its environs.⁵¹ Nevertheless, research for this dissertation did not uncover examples of laypeople performing Holy Communion, with or without pemmican. Girard's account of religiosity and its published variations, though, remain part of a long-standing expressed desire by Catholic faithful to have the regular company of a missionary priest among them and to continue living in accordance with the Catholic calendar.

Voyageurs and fur traders requested the presence of Catholic clergy through petitions delivered to various officials beginning in the eighteenth century. These petitions, along with the tradition of petition-signing among Metis people, created biased documentary records focused almost exclusively on the surnames of men. Since women were not fully actualized beings in the Catholic Church, or in nascent nation-states, they seldom entered textual evidence. Social network reconstruction partially fills the historical gap created by patriarchal definitions of personhood. Nineteenth-century petitions linked to the religious kinscape of ChWeUm Davis will be explored and reconstituted using social network analysis in chapters three and four.

PETITION SIGNING AND TRADITIONS FROM THE GREAT LAKES TO THE GREAT PLAINS: 1778–1823

As the fur trade spread throughout North America, so too did the paper trail that accompanied it. Travelogues preceded an increasing variety of documents, from parish registers to commercial data, to political writing and proclamations. While nascent nation-states imposed their imagined boundaries on the Indigenous lands of North America, Indigenous peoples used many methods of resistance to preserve cultural affinities, desires, and territorial claims. Political affirmation among descendants of fur trade fort residents in the eighteenth century began to take form in the practice of petition-signing. New research efforts and advances in the realm of digital humanities

⁵¹ Bethany Fleming, "Mediating Mackinac: Métis Women's Cultural Persistence in the Upper Great Lakes," in *Gender, Race and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas*, ed. Nora E. Jaffary, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 130.

enable us to trace the transmission of this direct action approach from the voyageurs of Michilimackinac to the Metis of Red River, and then south of the Medicine Line to Pembina. Comparing four petitions from voyageurs, merchants, and/or Metis people written between 1778 and 1823 highlights evidence of sustained political identity, action, and desire, on display in the lived religion of the signatories. In all four instances, the men (and a few women) who inscribed their names, or marks, on the historical record requested the presence of a Roman Catholic priest in their community. The goal of these petitions was, each time, to formalize ritualized practices facilitated by a missionary. Voyageurs and Metis hunters leaving their marks on political documents asked that a clergyman be sent to their location so they too could adhere to the Church's calendar and rituals. Signatories acted in response to the stories of their forefathers. Ancestors spoke of Jesus and powerful men wearing black robes.

The desire to practise the Catholicism of voyageurs, traders, and their families resonated with their Indigenous relatives. Metis spiritual want fostered their socioeconomic well-being, distinguishing themselves from their *Canadien* ancestors. Kinship connections between Indigenous nations assured individuals anchored in diverse communities to build reciprocal connections between godparents and godchildren. Godmothers assured such connections were strategic, and could bring about social advantages to both neophyte and godparent. Greater access to missionaries facilitated the deployment of women-led strategies of social cohesion and kinship growth. When women like Marie-Anne Lasalière (Fisher) became godmothers to dozens of children in under a decade, they did so not under the guidance of clergy, who were often absent from their lives.⁵² Godmothers volunteered for this important position because it became an important way to weave connections with the Indigenous nations around them.

⁵² "Ste. Anne's Church Register, rolls 1 & 2. Part One: Register of Baptisms 1695-1821."

The demonstrations of lived religion in these four historical affirmations of collectivity exemplify Habermas's ideal of "the political."⁵³ Metis believers began conceiving of themselves as a distinct polity. Petition-signing, then, was a manifestation of free will, or sovereignty. The voyageurs, merchants, and Metis who signed these documents saw a need in their communities, and turned to a direct, specific action to fulfil that need. Since women built kinship and commercial connections through the sacrament of baptism, for instance, a minister able to formalize and record the relationship was essential. Political strategies of resistance against colonialism were diverse.⁵⁴ Because Metis families were familiar with the governing structures of the fur trade, seeking out clergy to solidify and edify relationships intended to transcend into the business world showcases a distinct understanding of continuity and connection between religious and secular realms.

The kinship connections among the individuals who signed the four petitions in question are explored through baptismal registers, missionary correspondence, fur trade journals, and other primary sources, such as Davis's diary. When analyzed together, these textual fragments explain how the petition method of political action became privileged by Metis people and passed down in families. Ideas moved from one region to another with mobile fur traders and their progeny who sought clergy for their communities. Historical investigation of specific petitions revealed links between the late-eighteenth-century Great Lakes and events that marked the landscape of the Great Plains.

⁵³ Habermas, Jürgen. "'The Political': The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology." In *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, edited by Judith Butler, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, 17-18.

⁵⁴ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd ed, The New Critical Idiom (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005).

A petition sent by the “Inhabitants, Merchants and Traders of Michilimackinac” to Sir Guy Carleton in July of 1778 requested the guidance and regular assistance of clergy at the Straits of Michilimackinac, or present-day Mackinaw City, Michigan. Fifteen years after the capitulation of the French empire in North America, residents, including “inhabitants, merchants and traders” at the Straits between lakes Huron and Michigan, sent a list of subscriptions with the petition to the lieutenant governor of the Province of Québec.⁵⁵ It read:

The Inhabitants, Merchants and Traders of Michilimackinac have the honour of representing to your Excellency the considerable injury which the want of a Missionary occasions to the said place, for too long a time deprived of all spiritual help. . . . the honourable Major De Peyster by his love of justice, his severe exactness for military discipline, his indefatigable [sic] zeal to make peace and good order reigns among a people so different in state, condition, and character, prove to all, the advantages of which they would feel the full effect if a zealous priest would come to finish what is neither his state nor office. May our venerable Bishop then cease to alarm himself about the inconvenience, which might have happened in a priest without regular rule. The Honourable Major De Peyster, favourable to our request, for bad [sic] public gambling, which his successors consider it a duty to maintain. We have made a subscription sufficient for the wants of a true minister of Christ.⁵⁶

The promised money would defray the cost of the trip and necessities of a missionary to their parish of St. Anne for an entire year.⁵⁷ The petition acknowledges the support of Major Arent de Peyster, appointed to the command of Fort Michilimackinac in 1774. His authority required the peaceful cohabitation by inhabitants of various cultural backgrounds. The dozens of signatories to the subscription of the priest’s needs promised various sums of money, some for as long as ten years. Among them was Ezekiel Solomon, a Jewish merchant and trader whose French-speaking, literate, and Catholic spouse, Louise Dubois, later became a godmother of importance in the fur trade community. Ezekiel Solomon offered a yearly payment of fifty francs to the pool intended

⁵⁵ Choquette, *Canada’s Religions*, 150.

⁵⁶ Pioneer and Historical Society of the State of Michigan, ed., *Collections and Researches Made by the Pioneer and Historical Society of the State of Michigan*, vol. 10 (Lansing: Thorp & Godfrey, 1888), 186–87.

⁵⁷ Pioneer and Historical Society of the State of Michigan, ed., *Collections and Researches Made by the Pioneer and Historical Society of the State of Michigan*, vol. 10 (Lansing: Thorp & Godfrey, State Printers and Binders, 1888), 286–290.

for the missionary. While contributing to the advance of Catholicism on the Great Lakes, he remained an influential practising Jew in both Montréal, and later, in the United States, where he stayed until his death in the early nineteenth century.⁵⁸

Some of the people identified on the 1778 document promised funds proportional to their incomes. The Voyageur Contracts Database revealed that Etienne Campion was hired as a clerk for Alexander Henry and Company in 1761. He departed from Montréal for Fort Michilimackinac. He remained affiliated with the area, as attested by his request for a religious minister seventeen years later. His contract stated “*le dit commis sera nommé libraire au profit du dit sieur alexander et se forgera le metal chaud et serary leur en rendra cy compte exact aussy souvent que le dit sieur henry exigera.*”⁵⁹ Alexander Henry paid Campion 750 French francs for the year upon his return to Montréal. Campion’s fortunes in the fur trade improved as time passed. His successful commercial ventures in the late eighteenth century explain why, seventeen years afterwards, he promised fifty francs to help fund the requested missionary in 1778.⁶⁰

Campion’s brother Alexis’s *voyageur engagement* dated 15 July 1762, indicates he was hired for a return trip between Montréal and Michilimackinac. Unlike his sibling who enjoyed the advantageous rank of a clerk, Alexis signed a contract as a *milieu*, or middleman, for which he received 220 *livres* upon homecoming in Montréal, well before the canoe routes became impassable due to winter conditions.⁶¹ The milieu position was one of subjugation, both to the

⁵⁸ Émilie Pigeon, ‘Réseaux sociaux catholiques et construction identitaire dans les Pays d’en haut : l’exemple du Fort Michilimackinac à la fin du XVIIIe siècle’, *Francophonies d’Amérique* submitted for publication (2015).

⁵⁹ “Campion, Estienne - Voyageurs,” Voyageur Contracts Database accessed 17 December 2015, <http://voyageurs.shsb.mb.ca/>.

⁶⁰ “Biography – CAMPION, ÉTIENNE-CHARLES – Volume IV (1771-1800) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, accessed 17 December 2015, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/campion_etienne_charles_4E.html.

⁶¹ Société historique de Saint-Boniface, “Voyageurs Contracts Database - Alexis Campion,” accessed 17 November 2010, <http://voyageurs.shsb.mb.ca/>.

authority and knowledge of the guide and *bout de canot*.⁶² Alexis, who put forward the sum of twelve francs to the 1778 subscription, also pledged funds corresponding to his means. This pattern of donations repeated itself among the men and the single identifiable woman on the 1778 document. All appear to have promised amounts, or in-kind contributions, that equated roughly to their financial abilities.

Together, the sixty-nine petition signatories raised 2398 French francs. When this total is converted to present-day values, we see that the parishioners of the seldom-visited mission of *Sainte-Anne-de-Michilimackinac* pooled together approximately \$24,000 CAD.⁶³ Translating the original 1778 amount into contemporary terms allows the affirmation that the petition and subscription project had a significant worth to the community. The incredible diversity of individuals engaged in this political goal united French Catholics, English Protestants, a German Jew, Indigenous people, and mixed-ancestry fur trade descendants with a common objective. For some, lived religion marked their participation in this political project and affirmed their identity, expressing a clear desire for a continual relationship with the institution of the Catholic Church. Others who supported this goal believed it would be beneficial to their own, often commercial, purposes. The fur trade connections of the Catholic activism in the region informed its political

⁶² Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 40.

⁶³ To calculate the present-day approximate value of the funds raised by the Michilimackinac residents in their petition to Guy Carleton, I relied on the historical values presented by Robert A. Selig in *The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route in the State of Delaware, 1781-1783 – An Historical and Architectural Survey* (2009). Selig explains that one Franc was equivalent to 240 *deniers*, and that one £ Sterling was equivalent to 5562 *deniers*. Since the Michilimackinac subscription raised 2398 francs in 1778, following Selig's calculation, this equals to 575 520 *deniers*, which equals 103 ½ £ Sterling. To calculate the present-day value of this fundraising effort to gauge the community commitment to their priest, we inputted 104 £ Sterling in the *Measuring Worth* digital calculation tool. Using the retail price index, it determined set the net value of the 1778 currency to £11,800.00. Converting this data to American funds using the exchange rates of 16 December 2015, translates to approximately \$18 000 U.S.D or \$24 000 CAD. Dr. Selig's calculations are available online here: <http://www.w3r-us.org/history/library/seligreptde6.pdf> While *Measuring Worth* is not affiliated with any institution, all of the members of its advisory board are established scholars in various fields related to the topic such as economics and history. Their goal is to make historical data available to the wider public and allows anyone, be they academics or members of the public, to make their historical calculations of worth over time. Visit <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/> for more information. Accessed 15 December 2016.

purposes. The connection between spiritual beliefs and politics articulated in 1778 is not surprising. Its presence among the Metis echoes the political nature of Indigenous spirituality and legal traditions among Anishinaabe and Cree peoples, thus demonstrating syncretism between Indigenous and European landscapes of faith.⁶⁴

The inability to secure a clergyman did not defeat Michilimackinac residents. Eight years after this incident, another petition crafted from the Straits of Michilimackinac asked for a religious minister. This time, petitioners addressed themselves to the Bishop of Québec, Louis-Philippe-François Mariauchau d'Esgly. Dated 1786, the document featured the names of twenty-two people identified as voyageurs. A missionary priest by the name of Payet wrote the accompanying letter while in hiatus from his travels to the nascent city of Detroit. In a very different tone, and from a much more homogenized perspective than the previous attempt to secure a religious minister via state representative, the petition reads:

*Tous les citoyens et habitants de cette contrée se joignent ici sous le nom respectable de Chrétiens pour vous supplier unanimement de leur envoyer un sage Directeur pour les conduire dans la voie du Salut. L'innocence des enfants, la caducité des vieillards, le désordre même des plus vicieux sollicitent fortement votre charité pastorale en leur faveur.*⁶⁵

Unlike the attempt to secure a priest sent to Sir Guy Carleton uniting an interfaith group, the petition addressed to the Bishop of Québec brought together only Catholics and Christians. This episode contrasts with the religious will expressed eight years prior. The twenty-two Catholics and other Christians on the 1786 request did not list sources of funding from parishioners.

Nevertheless, the community assured the bishop they would provide for all of the missionary's

⁶⁴ John Borrows, *Canada's Indigenous Constitution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010). See Borrow's analysis of Anishinaabeg and Cree legal traditions for more information, 77-85.

⁶⁵ "Requête des voyageurs de Michilimackinac," 1786, Archives de l'archidiocèse de Québec Fonds États-Unis, AAQ7CM vol VI : 49.

needs, including passage into the region, housing, and food. The eleven years spent without a full-time priest negatively impacted the faithful's ability to live a full religious life. Some identifiable names on the list likely do not fit the definition of "voyageur" that historians use today. For instance, G. Cotté, or Gabriel Côté, was a *Canadien* merchant, and not a voyageur *proprement dit*. His 1778 licence allowed for "3 canoes, 34 fusils, 1200 pounds of gunpowder..."⁶⁶ In other words, he was not of the same socioeconomic background as the voyageurs he employed. His inclusion on the list shows that Catholic practice transcended class lines. This second demonstration of lived religion and political will articulated in petition form established a tradition. Although separated by eight years, both requests for a priest from the faithful of Michilimackinac at the end of the eighteenth century went unanswered.

The Conquest of Québec left its mark on believers in the Great Lakes. The head of the Church in Québec responded with silence to the 1778 petition and subscription list. Material losses incurred in the Conquest, coupled with diminished clergy effectives meant that Michilimackinac was not a high-ranking priority. The 1786 document confirmed this theory. It opened by informing the bishop that the voyageurs of Michilimackinac were without the care of a priest for eleven years, meaning that the last regular visits dated back to 1775. The *Sainte-Anne-de-Michilimackinac* baptismal register corroborates this fact by listing four identifiable christenings between 1775 and 1786, all performed by laymen instead of Church officials.⁶⁷ The 1786 petition also went unanswered, likely because the United States sought Fort Michilimackinac for its settler colonial project. Although the fort remained under British control until 1796, the Holy See was about to open the first diocese in the United States in Baltimore

⁶⁶ Charles Davidson Gordon, *The North West Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918), 28.

⁶⁷ Émilie Pigeon, "Vernacular Catholicism and the Fur Trade: Baptisms at Fort Michilimackinac, 1741-1786," 114. The parish registers used in the analysis are available at the Mackinac State Historic Parks. 'Ste. Anne's Church Register, Reels 1 & 2. Part One: Register of Baptisms 1695-1821.', 1821 1695, MF F.6 MAC, Mackinac State Historic Parks.

(1789). Since the availability of clergy suited for missionary work was scarce at best, the voyageurs of Michilimackinac were unable to obtain the religious minister sought in 1786. The absence of priests among heterogeneous fur trade populations created an environment that encouraged syncretism of Indigenous and European spiritual mores.

Comparing datasets between the *Sainte-Anne-de-Michilimackinac* baptismal register and Great Plains-based buffalo hunting genealogies offers insights on *how* the tradition of petition-signing, specifically involving Catholic clergy, was transmitted from one site and era of the fur trade to another. Alongside its travels, the political affirmations of Metis Catholicism continued. Indeed, twice between 1817 and 1823, Metis of the Forks (of the Red and Assiniboine rivers) and Pembina reproduced both the practice of petition-signing and the request for a religious minister. Each and every time, commercial interests were intertwined with their solicitation. While this connection was not overt, evidence based on the kinship-building practices of fur-trade families confirms the intimate link between godparents and access to Indigenous trade routes and markets.

Genealogical analysis and historical research on Metis buffalo hunters reveal some of the kinship networks uniting the Great Lakes to the Red River. Families became vehicles of transmission for lived religion and petition-signing. Polities, or Metis families sharing common political goals and aspirations – either in the Great Lakes fur trade during the eighteenth century or hunters of the prairie buffalo-hunting economy in the nineteenth century – shared economic goals, religious beliefs and family connections. All four petitions express a desire to maintain adherence to the Catholic calendar and its practices. Both Red River petitions (1817 & 1823) requested priests using the same reasoning found in the Great Lakes. In addition, two kinship landscapes bridge the petition-signing of Michilimackinac in the late eighteenth century to the family of ChWeUm Davis in the nineteenth century on the northern Plains.

To develop the image found on the previous page, I recreated the ancestral connections of ChWeUm Davis with the genealogical software Reunion v. 10.0.6.⁶⁹ Three GEDCOM files (meaning Genealogical Data Communication) were exported from the Reunion software. These datasets were then uploaded into the *visone* social network analysis software (v.2.16 at the time of writing). Merging three GEDCOM files into one created the social network shown in Image 1.2. The file in question consisted of ChWeUm Davis's genealogical tree, along with the line of his second wife, Sarah Nolin. It also incorporated Davis's Laframboise/Wilkie kin connection through his grandfather's second spouse, Betsey Josephte Mijakammikijikok La Sauteuse. Taken together, this information reveals that ChWeUm Davis has two connections to the Great Lakes fur trade via historical kinship.

Religious adherence and knowledge were passed down through generations. This transmission is apparent in the kinship relationships connecting Sarah Nolin's grandfather to the Great Lakes. Since Nolin's paternal grandmother, Marie Angélique Couvret, was baptized at Fort Michilimackinac in 1758, the graph on the previous page shows three generations of continued affiliation with the Catholic Church. Couvret appears in orange near the top right of the image, alongside her father, Joseph Couvret, who sought a baptism for his daughter. Angélique married Joseph Nolin in 1770, and the family moved westward until settling in the Red River area, where Sarah Nolin was born in 1852. Although twentysome years separate Marie Angélique's birth and the two petitions mentioned earlier, her presence in the baptismal register attests to her family's continued interest in seeking Catholic religious ceremonies, extended into the nineteenth century.

⁶⁹ By triangulating data from sources including the Works Project Administration, data from Davis and his family, Ancestry.ca records, the *Sainte-Anne-de-Michilimackinac* baptismal register, aforementioned petitions, and other primary source materials, we reconstructed the historical kinship connections visible in Image 1.2.

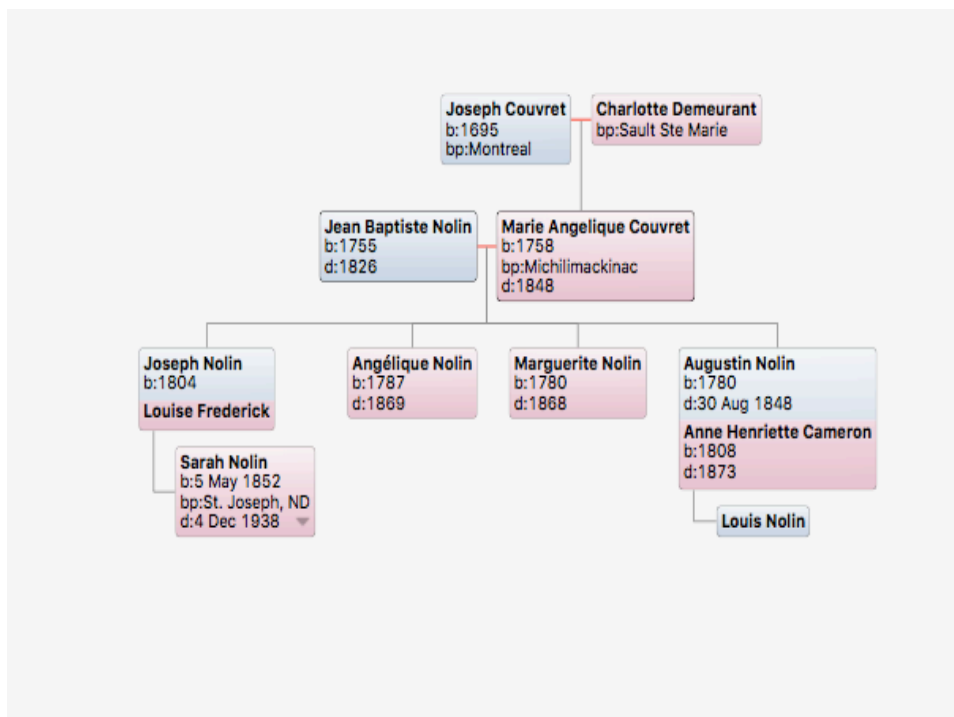


Image 1.3: Sarah Nolin’s genealogical tree reconstruction shows the kinship connections to her paternal grandmother, Marie Angélique Couvret.⁷⁰

To make the graph more visually appealing and easier to read, and to ensure it represents only the ancestors of Davis and Nolin, I excluded relatives born after 1850. The historical social network on Image 1.2 shows a slice of Davis’s kinship connecting him simultaneously to the Pembina/Turtle Mountain Metis buffalo hunters and to the Fort Michilimackinac mission. Microhistorical analysis and the digital humanities build a visible bridge of Catholicity connecting the eighteenth-century Great Lakes and nineteenth-century Great Plains.

After linking ChWeUm to the Great Lakes fur trade world through two generations of his second spouse, Sarah Nolin, Davis’s kin connections to the Wilkie and Laframboise families solidify his ancestral ties to the 1786 petition. As Image 1.2 highlights, Jean-Baptiste Fafard dit

⁷⁰Although genealogical tree visual representations were not the best medium for showing the clear origin of the kinship links between the Davis family and the events of the late eighteenth century at Fort Michilimackinac, this Image presents another view of the family tree in question and ChWeUm Davis’ link to the *Sainte-Anne-de-Michilimackinac* baptismal register. See “Ste. Anne’s Church Register, Reels 1 & 2. Part One: Register of Baptisms 1695-1821.,” 1821 1695. MF F.6 MAC. Mackinac State Historic Parks.

Laframboise pleaded with the Bishop of Québec to have a clergyman at the Great Lakes fort that became a long-time place of residence in 1786. It is impossible to determine whether the signatory was either Jean-Baptist *père* (b. 1735) or *fils* (b. 1764) although Jean-Baptiste (b. 1764) often added “*fils*,” meaning son, to his signature to distinguish himself from his father. No “*fils*” figures on the 1786 document, indicating the signatory was probably the father.⁷¹ This Jean-Baptiste in question was either Alexis Laframboise’s father, or his brother. Alexis’s first spouse, Marguerite Saulteux, and their first born, Joseph François Laframboise, cemented the kinship connections uniting descendants with other families associated with buffalo hunting in the nineteenth century. This connection persisted even though Alexis left Marguerite to seek out a second marriage to a merchant’s daughter born in Detroit in present-day Michigan. The child of Laframboise’s union to Marguerite Saulteux (or Chippewa/Ojibwa/Anishinaabe), a son named Joseph François, linked their family to that of a woman named Josephine Shawenaquah Assiniboine (Nakoda). The two married in approximately 1799, and so began the migration from the Great Lakes southwesterly into what became Minnesota and later, the Dakota Territories. The intermarriages in this instance further embedded the Laframboise descendants into a plurality of Indigenous nations. Fostering relationships with Indigenous polities via sacraments celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church provided the rituals and the occasions required to develop common political goals though shared religious beliefs. In so doing, Metis Catholicism stands out from the *Canayens*’ variety.

⁷¹ Another possible comparison between the two can be made when comparing the primary source 1786 petition with the entry signed ‘Laframboise fils’ in the parish register of *Sainte-Anne-de-Michilimackinac* from the same month. See : “Requête des voyageurs de Michilimackinac,” 1786. Archives de l’archidiocèse de Québec, Fonds États-Unis, AAQ7CM vol VI : 49. And “Ste. Anne’s Church Register, Reels 1 & 2. Part One: Register of Baptisms 1695-1821.,” 1821 1695. MF F.6 MAC. Mackinac State Historic Parks, 76.

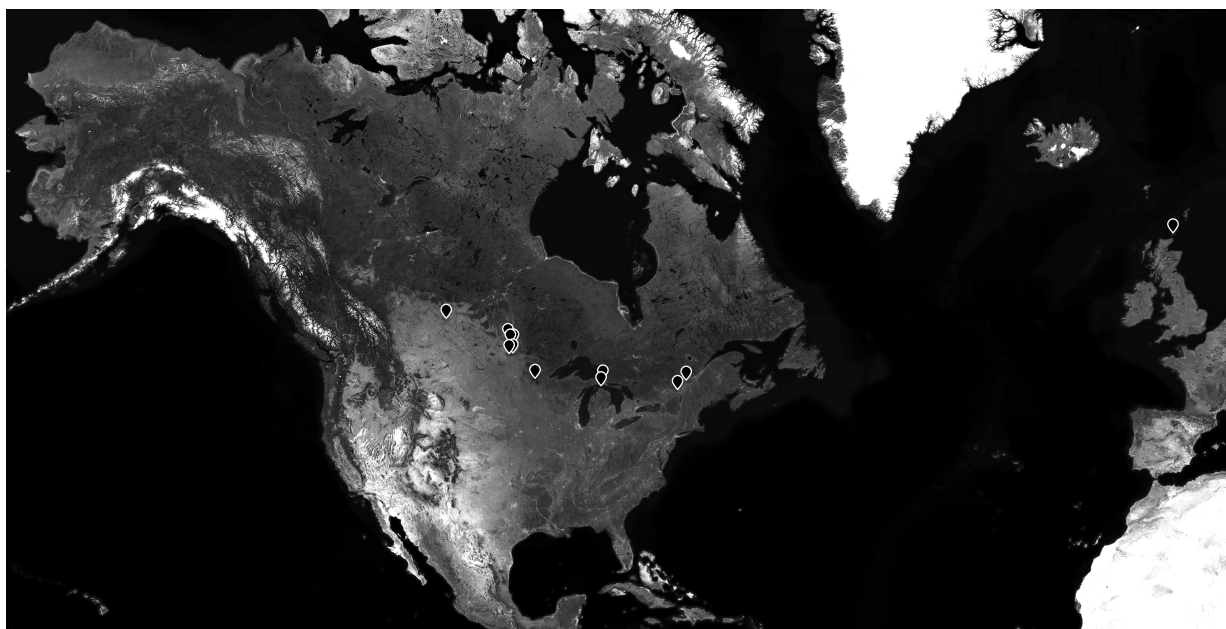


Image 1.4: Map of all the birthplaces represented on the historical SNA graph (Image 1.2)

Intermarriage united families across nations, languages, and generations. ChWeUm Davis connects to the Laframboise family through his kinship ties to the Wilkie family. ChWeUm's grandfather, Jean-Baptiste Davis, married Betsey Josephite Mijakammikijikok La Sauteuse after the death of Alexander Wilkie. La Sauteuse was perhaps better known as "veuve Wilkie," or the widow of Alexander Wilkie. The union between Jean Baptiste Wilkie, son of Betsy La Sauteuse, and Marie Laframboise in 1850, celebrated at Pembina, North Dakota, linked ChWeUm Davis to the Laframboise line and to the petition penned in the late eighteenth century. The connections between the Michilimackinac events and the Metis of Red River laid the foundations for a lived religion that relied on petition-signing. Furthermore, Metis families connected to other Indigenous Nations in Catholic sacraments like baptism and marriage. These connections fostered relationships that benefited bison-hunting parties by granting families safe passage on key territories. Maintaining peaceful relations on the northern plains was essential for Metis economic successes in the nineteenth century.

Two failures did not dissuade Metis believers from petitioning Church authorities a third time. Grace Lee Nute's *1942 Documents Relating to Northwest Missions 1815–1827* included a transcription of an 1817 request for a permanent clergyman.⁷² In contrast to previous petitions, this one came from Catholics residing at Lord Selkirk's settlement at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. A note from Samuel Gale, Lord Selkirk's attorney, introduced the document written by *Canadiens* and Metis.⁷³ The letter dated 29 January 1818, informed Bishop Plessis that:

... at the Settlement of the Red River in the summer of 1817, a number of the inhabitants consisting of Canadians who had long resided in the country, of Metifs, [sic] who had been born there and Colonists who arrived more recently, expressed their earnest wishes that a Priest of Roman Catholic Church should be permanently established in that country...⁷⁴

The petition repeated much of the pomp and circumstance found in the 1786 document. As was the case then, the final recipient would be the head of the Church in Québec. In presenting their motivations for the request, the inhabitants of the Selkirk colony stated there was an established Christian population, and that *Canadiens libres* (or “free” *Canadiens*) and the Metis were without religious instruction, or care, since their arrival. The document affirmed the petitioners firmly believed a missionary would improve the social order and sustain the happiness of their community.⁷⁵ Red River residents were certain that a Catholic priest could help them ensure peace and good governance in the region, and testified to this fact by putting their names to this list.

⁷² Grace Lee Nute, ed., *Documents Relating to Northwest Missions 1815-1827* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1942), 14–17.

⁷³ Bonenfant, Jean Charles. “Biography – GALE, SAMUEL (1783-1865) – Volume IX (1861-1870) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography.” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Accessed 21 December 2015.
http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/gale_samuel_1783_1865_9E.html.

⁷⁴ Samuel Gale, “Sam Gale to Rt. Rev. J.O. Plessis, 29 January 1818. Collection Belleau, SHSB.” 29 January 1818, Microfilm 219, p. 29.

⁷⁵ Nute, Grace Lee, ed. *Documents Relating to Northwest Missions 1815-1827*. Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1942, 15.

Of the twenty-one men who signed or marked the 1817 document, the presence of Jacques Hamelin *père* and Jacques Hamelin *fils* is especially striking. ChWeUm's first spouse, Euphrosine Hamelin, was born in the Red River colony in 1848 to a Jacques "Bonhomme" Hamelin and Marie Allary.⁷⁶ Euphrosine's grandfather was also named Jacques Hamelin, hence the strong likelihood that among the people listed on the 1817 petition, Metis men asking for a priest were related to the kinship network represented in Image 1.2.⁷⁷ Québec favourably received the third request, unlike its two predecessors. In April 1818, Québec Archbishop Joseph-Octave Plessis addressed the settlers of Red River in a pastoral letter asking them to welcome the two clergymen that would soon answer their request, and to treat them as "spiritual fathers."⁷⁸ In another letter from the same month, the Archbishop wrote to both future Red River missionaries, Joseph-Norbert Provencher and Sévère Dumoulin, giving them specific instructions. Their first focus was of a racialized "civilizing" nature. The newcomers were ordered to remove the so-called barbarism from the Red River valley's Indigenous communities. In other words, the first objective of the priests was not to answer the calls of the Red River inhabitants who requested permanent clergy among their fold. Instead, Dumoulin's and Provencher's first objective was to impose European mores on Plains Indigenous peoples who were not Christian, using methods the Church perfected over centuries.

After the success of the 1817 request, this political approach was attempted again. Metis people relied on the act of petition-signing six years later, when, this time, Pembina hunters south of the Medicine Line requested a priest to tend to their spiritual needs. Much like the petitions of 1778, 1786, and 1817, the 1823 document asked for a missionary. Once again, the request related

⁷⁶ Davis, William. "William Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire," n.d. MSS 10035 Reel 5905. SHSND.

⁷⁷ Nute, *Documents Relating to Northwest Missions 1815-1827*, 14-17.

⁷⁸ Joseph-Octave Plessis, "Lettre pastorale de l'Évêque de Québec aux colons de la Rivière Rouge, 26 April 1818," Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Documents 1818-28, Assumption Abbey, Richardton North Dakota (henceforth AA).

to the ability to foster and grow in Catholicism and its sacraments, including the gains foreseen with a regular access to baptism. Unlike previous attempts, Pembina residents addressed themselves to United States officials, south of the Medicine Line. Using the pretext of Major Stephen Harriman Long's expedition financed by the United States government to trace the line that would divide the Red River of the North, the Pembina hunters transmitted their wishes to the government. While mapping the forty-ninth parallel, Long recorded the following in his diary entry of 7 August 1823:

This Parallel crosses the river at a point below all the settlements of Pembina except a single house standing near the left bank of the river. The Inhabitants appeared highly gratified to ascertain that they were included within the U.S. Territory, and steps were immediately taken to make a representation to Congress in a respectful petition of their condition, views & wishes.⁷⁹

The 1823 document differed from its predecessors since it asked that both a representative of the Church, *and* an official from the state, be sent to Pembina to ensure the respect of Metis rights.⁸⁰ Metis hunters closely interwove political and spiritual interests. No longer was the request solely for the social peace and spiritual well-being of potential parishioners through the regular services and surveillance of a priest. The residents of Pembina wanted to benefit from the protections that accompanied the territorial claim made by the United States: "... praying to be secured in the possession of their property that they may be confirmed in their land claims; and that the rights and privileges enjoyed by citizens of the United States may be extended to them..."⁸¹

Political aims couched the latest manifestation of Metis spiritual will. The 1823 document from the Pembina Metis sought to secure a legal claim to territory increasingly claimed by settlers crowding lands east of the Mississippi River. Their request was forwarded to the United

⁷⁹ Stephen Harriman Long et al., *The Northern Expeditions of Stephen H. Long: The Journals of 1817 and 1823 and Related Documents*, Publications of the Minnesota Historical Society (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1978), 183.

⁸⁰ Hogue, *Metis and the Medicine Line*, 27.

⁸¹ United States House of Representatives, ed., "Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, Being the First Session of the Eighteenth Congress Begun and Held at the City of Washington,," 1 December 1823, 75.

States House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee. On 23 December 1823, the Committee in question, "moved [a motion] to be discharged from the consideration of the petition of sundry inhabitants of Pembina ... on the grounds that there was nothing in their petition upon which the Judiciary Committee could act; which motion was agreed to."⁸² Although the Judiciary Committee was tasked with dealing with matters pertaining to "state and territorial boundary lines," it could not grant the requests of the signatories who asked that a priest and judge be sent to them.⁸³ Although the petition of "sundry" was unsuccessful, it continued a historical trend of affiliating Metis people, lived Catholicism, and petition-signing. In 1825, Bishop Provencher denied his representatives had any involvement with the Metis request to the United States. The Church, uninvolved in this initiative, did not fulfil bison hunters' requests to the American government.⁸⁴ The collective will and political affirmation of Pembina's freemen drove the 1823 request for clergy.

The political conception and realization of petitions affiliated with Metis buffalo hunters has roots in the late eighteenth-century Great Lakes fur trade. As the historical kinship network of Davis attests, this phenomenon opened certain political avenues closed by the inequalities inherent in the structures of colonialism. Racialized and discriminatory practices, laws, and beliefs, influenced by the Doctrine of Discovery, limited options for children of the fur trade. Even so, the lived religion of Metis buffalo hunters created a space for subverting the European status quo through a well-respected and old system of acculturation. The Roman Catholic Church and its clergy became a vessel for Metis political will. As this dissertation demonstrates in the

⁸² "National Journal Extra - Dec 31, 1823 - No 1.," *National Government Journal* 1, no. 1 (December 3, 1823): 103.

⁸³ United States House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, 'About the Committee - Judiciary Committee', Accessed 22 December 2015, <http://judiciary.house.gov/index.cfm/about-the-committee>.

⁸⁴ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, "Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Octave Plessis, 12 June 1825." Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1825-6, AA.

following chapters, the lived religion of ChWeUm Davis in the mid-to late nineteenth century remained imbued with political affiliations and actions until he passed away in 1937.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SETS ITS SIGHTS ON RED RIVER

Following the establishment of the first episcopal seat in the United States at Baltimore in 1789, the nascent national border between the United States and British North America remained both in flux and porous in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Consequently, the religious instruction and missionary work in the Pembina region continued under the auspices of Québec and, later, St. Boniface. The Roman Catholic Church and its clergy increasingly formalized their relationship to the Great Plains following the creation of the Red River colony at the forks of the Assiniboine and Red rivers. The desire for an institutionalized Roman Catholic Church presence west of the Great Lakes was part of a response to the Second Great Awakening among European and North American Protestants.⁸⁵

Protestants marked revivals of faith with visible increases in religious practice, public meetings, and preaching throughout the continent. This phenomenon coincided with societal pressures among settlers to seek a purpose justifying their presence on Indigenous territories.⁸⁶ Although Catholic missionaries first crossed into the Red River region in 1811, the permanence of Catholic clergy on the northern plains began in 1818, one year after the petition of the Red River Metis. Upon receiving said petition, Joseph-Octave Plessis wrote in March 1818 that the request of the Red River population warmed his heart and that a future mission on the Great Plains could have considerable importance for the Catholic Church.⁸⁷ The year 1818 also marked

⁸⁵ Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest*, 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Joseph-Octave Plessis, 'Joseph-Octave Plessis to Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, 16 March 1818.' Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1818 18, AA.

the convention that set the frontier line between what became Canada and the United States at the forty-ninth parallel.⁸⁸ Roman Catholic and Protestant clergymen were competing for souls, converts, and devoted followers in territories that nascent Euro-American polities were seeking to annex. More souls meant a wider base for financing and expanding their operations.

Ultramontanism was a global ideological current in the Roman Catholic Church born, in part, as a reaction to late-eighteenth-century revolutions in France and the United States.⁸⁹ After experiencing significant material losses attributed to the close relationship between church and state during the French Revolution, the papacy sought to consolidate and secure its temporal power.⁹⁰ The rise of ultramontanism as a driving ideological force among the clergy responded to increasingly diverse national church traditions, coupled with states' embrace of liberal tenets, including the separation of church and state powers.⁹¹ Ultramontane clergy literally looked "over the Swiss Alps," or beyond the mountains, for direction, seeking guidance from Rome instead of from local, secular governing forces. Anxiety over ultramontanism became mainstream in Protestant-dominant nation-states who saw it as a threat to their survival. Historian Nicholas Vrooman reminds us that during the United States' "All Mexico" debates of the late 1840s, political leadership expressed fears that ultramontanism meant Catholic loyalty to a foreign head of state. Catholics' allegiance to the pope negatively influenced Washington politicians' "outlook of innumerable population groups, including the Metis of the northern borderlands and the Mestizo to the south."⁹² Indeed, ultramontanism was a form of Catholic colonialism that contributed to the creation, development, and growth of the order of Oblates of Mary Immaculate

⁸⁸ Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest*, 30.

⁸⁹ Choquette, *Canada's Religions*, 175.

⁹⁰ Terrence Murphy, 'Religion, Conflict and Consensus in the English-Speaking Colonies of British North America', *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 34.

⁹¹ Nive Voisine, "L'ultramontanisme canadien-français au XIXe siècle," in *Les Ultramontains canadiens-français*, ed. Nive Voisine, Jean Hamelin, and Philippe Sylvain (Montréal, Qué: Boréal express, 1985), 70.

⁹² Nicholas C.P. Vrooman, "Infinity Nation" (Unpublished, Helena Montana, 2010), 392.

in mid-nineteenth-century western Canada.⁹³ In that sense, it encouraged the advancement of an institutional body tasked with colonizing, claiming land, and transmitting specific religious prescriptions.

The ultramontanist brought to North America came from France. Jean-Jacques Latrigne carried its ideological currents to North America beginning in 1821, when he became an auxiliary bishop of the Québec Diocese in Montréal. With the help of European Catholic orders such as the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, ultramontane beliefs and practices spread throughout North America after the middle of the nineteenth century.⁹⁴ The influence of ultramontane beliefs, in conjunction with the Holy See's political expansion in the Great Plains, led to the establishment of travelling and sedentary missions among many Indigenous peoples' lands in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century.

Before the arrival of the Oblates in the 1840s, a shortage of Catholic clergy existed between the Rocky Mountains and Red River.⁹⁵ The Oblate and the Jesuit religious orders, preceded by only a few secular priests, formed the institutional structural basis of the Roman Catholic Church as it tried to expand its flock. Jesuit effectives suffered from the suppression of their order by the pope in 1773, seeking to diminish their influence in nation-states. The Jesuits were reinstated in 1814, after spending decades as secular clergy in North America.⁹⁶ In later years, the Oblates were concentrated in the northern Great Plains and Lower Canada while the

⁹³ Guy Laperrière, 'Vingt ans de recherche sur l'ultramontanisme', *Recherches sociographiques* 27, no. 1 (1986): 93. In contrast to the Catholic colonialism of previous centuries, ultramontane Catholicism emphasized the important role of local parishes and promoted festive demonstrations of religious life, such as pilgrimages,

⁹⁴ Voisine, "L'ultramontanisme canadien-français au XIXe siècle," 76.

⁹⁵ Choquette, *Canada's Religions*, 189.

⁹⁶ Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J. 1801-1873*, vol. 1 (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1904), 4. A secular, or diocesan priest serves under the leadership of a bishop in a diocese. A religious priest, in contrast, makes public vow to join and obey the rules of a distinct religious order, e.g. the Society of Jesus.

Jesuits returned to the western United States and to Upper Canada around the same time.⁹⁷ Before either order was active in the Red River region, Bishop Joseph-Octave Plessis dispatched thirty-two-year-old Joseph-Norbert Provencher and twenty-five-year-old Sévère Dumoulin to the area in the spring of 1818.⁹⁸ Dumoulin and Provencher, then secular priests, arrived at Fort Douglas on the evening of 16 July 1818. The fort governor Miles Macdonnell, whom Provencher described as Catholic, greeted them.⁹⁹ Both Provencher and Dumoulin began regular correspondence with their Archbishop upon receiving their assignments.

Plessis instructed the two men that their *first* priority was the erasure of Indigenous spiritual practices and livelihoods, which he called “barbarism.” This task highlighted the racialized hierarchy of cultures that fuelled their work.¹⁰⁰ Plessis’s list continued, telling the priests that their second priority should be the rehabilitation of bad Christians who adopted “savage mores” and return them to the acceptable settler behaviour. The third prescription to missionaries was to catechize, the fourth was to master Indigenous languages, while the fifth and sixth focused on the importance of baptism and of teaching religious mores to children.¹⁰¹ Plessis’s twelve points of instruction to the Red River priests shared an assimilationist nature. Their common goal was to rid Indigenous peoples of their spiritual traditions, replacing them instead with Roman Catholicism.

⁹⁷ Choquette, *Canada’s Religions*, 199.

⁹⁸ Luca Codignola, “Rome et les débuts de Saint-Boniface, 1818-1836,” *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l’Ouest* XXVII, no. 2 (2015): 180.

⁹⁹ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, ‘Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 21 July 1818.’ Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1818 50 to 51, AA.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph-Octave Plessis, ‘Joseph-Octave Plessis to Joseph Norbert Provencher and Sévère Dumoulin, 20 April 1818.’ Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1818 21 to 22, AA.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* The list of instructions to Dumoulin and Provencher from Archbishop Plessis had twelve items in total. The seventh asked that crosses be erected in all sites of importance for Indigenous peoples. The eight and ninth objectives involved preaching to Indigenous nations the so-called need to obey the nation-state, the Church, and its laws. The tenth objective of the priests was to maintain peace between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company. The eleventh and twelfth points on Plessis’s letter pertain to where his missionaries would take up permanent residence, and their behaviour whilst in the Red River region.

The two missionaries sent to Red River following the 1817 petition adhered to values that did not respect Indigenous spirituality or belief systems. Moreover, Plessis demonstrated ignorance of Indigenous laws and politics: for instance, when he stated Indigenous people should be taught the importance of governance.¹⁰² After all, *Romanus Pontifex* and *Inter Caetera*, two fifteenth-century papal bulls, placed Catholics at the top of a social ladder and classified all nonbelievers as uncivilized. Unpacking Plessis's claim indicates that Indigenous people did not respect *his* laws and prescriptions. Plessis sought to change behaviours but could not do so by force.

Discord between Church officials brewed in 1818. Clergymen argued over two potential sites for the centralization of religious authority. Missionaries favoured parish life and sedentary agrarian societies that complimented the settler agenda whilst facilitating the surveillance of their faithful. Located at the forks of the Red and Pembina rivers in present-day North Dakota, Pembina was a focal point in the trade between St. Paul, Minnesota and the northeast prairies.¹⁰³ European descendants acknowledged the site's importance by 1797. That year, Charles Chaboillez opened an outpost there. Father Julius M. Belleau, former pastor of the Assumption Parish in Pembina from 1934 to 1947, explained the site rested "on the south side of the Pembina River, where the Pembina Historical Park is now located."¹⁰⁴ Selected for its proximity to a departure point for the buffalo hunts on the Great Plains, this site proved to be an increasingly popular destination in the first years of the nineteenth century. In 1801-2 both the HBC and the NWC built trading posts in its vicinity.¹⁰⁵ The growing influence of European descendants and their commercial endeavours fostered competition for furs in the Red River region while

¹⁰²For a clear and concise look at the plurality and complexity of Indigenous legal traditions in Canada, see: John Borrows, *Canada's Indigenous Constitution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

¹⁰³ Sévère Dumoulin, "Sévère Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, Bishop of Québec, 8 January 1819." Collection Belleau, Microfilms 219, 106-107, SHSB.

¹⁰⁴ J.M. Belleau, "Brief History of Old Pembina," 1939, 6, 978.419.P369bb Pembina 1939 c.3, SHSND.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

discussions over the imagined frontier between British and American land holdings were underway.

Clergy on the upper side of the Medicine Line called for a mission farther north, less popular among local Indigenous groups, at the forks of the Assiniboine and Red rivers, or present-day Winnipeg (St. Boniface). The debate over the site of the Catholic Church's institutional establishment in the northwest was settled in a letter from Joseph-Octave Plessis, Archbishop of Québec, to Sévère Dumoulin.¹⁰⁶ Plessis wrote:

Il parait évident que l'établissement de Pimbina [sic] vaudra bien mieux que celui de la Fourche, sous tous les rapports, mais - 1) les propriétés de la mission sont à la Fourche 2) un traité dont vous n'avez peut-être pas connaissance, parce qu'il n'a été fait que le 20 octobre dernier entre l'Angleterre et les États-Unis donne à ceux-ci tout ce qui est au sud du 49 degré de latitude depuis l'angle du lac des Bois, le plus à l'Ouest jusqu'aux Montagnes de Roches.

Or, la Fourche est certainement au nord de ce degré, et il est probable que Pimbina en est au sud, par conséquent aux États-Unis et hors de ma juridiction. Voilà qui doit modérer votre ardeur, quoiqu'en vertu des pouvoirs reçus de Monseigneur l'évêque de la Louisiane je puisse vous autoriser, comme je le fais par la présente, ainsi que Mr Provencher et ceux qui se joindront à vous par la suite à exercer dans ce territoire.¹⁰⁷

The legal decision referred to in the letter was the Convention of 1818 between Britain and the United States. That treaty set out a joint British and American occupation of the Oregon Territory and Columbia District. It also formalized the rest of the border between the two colonial possessions at the forty-ninth parallel. Hence, Pembina could not be the site of an established Catholic Church controlled by Québec because it fell south of the forty-ninth parallel. St. Boniface would therefore become the headquarters of the Catholic Church in northwest British North America.

¹⁰⁶ Terrence Kardong, *Beyond Red River: Centennial Book of the Diocese of Fargo 1889-1989* (Fargo: Richtman's Printing, 1988), 15.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph-Octave Plessis, "J.O. Plessis to Sévère Dumoulin, 30 June 1819." Collection Belleau, Société historique de Saint-Boniface." Microfilm 219 pp. 130-131, SHSB.

This development surprised advocates of Pembina, since the site was more populous than the church at St. Boniface, situated roughly 100 kilometres north. The impact of this decision on the people of Pembina was profound. Although Pembina and St. Boniface were relatively close to one another, access to religious ministers by the faithful was now dependent on the good will of the British colonial authorities, or on the institutional development of the Catholic Church in the United States.

Twenty-seven days after the arrival of the two Catholic missionaries to Red River, they recorded seventy-two baptisms of children. A letter dated 12 August 1818 updated Archbishop Plessis on Provencher's and Dumoulin's interactions with the Red River community. Provencher complained of the lack of a thurible used in processions and during Mass to cleanse participants and objects. Indigenous peoples were familiar with the practice of using smoke to provide a sacred cleansing. Smudging was the ritual of the land, however, clergymen did not adopt it for their purposes.¹⁰⁸ Missionaries continued to report an increasing need to transform their practices to the living conditions of Red River. In August 1819, clerical correspondence lamented the absence of holy water fonts at the entrance of prayer spaces. Showing signs of adaptation, they acknowledged that any container capable of holding the blessed liquid solved their problem. Missionaries used tree branches to sprinkle holy water to purify the faithful and avoided burning incense until a thurible became available.¹⁰⁹

In September of 1818, Father Sévère Dumoulin and student catechist William Edge travelled from the Red River Colony to Pembina. There they found families from the Selkirk Settlement trying to escape the famine brought on by the repeated grasshopper destruction of

¹⁰⁸ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, to Joseph Octave Plessis, 12 August 1818, Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1818 54 to 55, AA.

¹⁰⁹ Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph-Octave Plessis, January 6, 1819, Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1819-16 to 20, AA.

their crops. Dumoulin met the Pembina community of “freedmen and hunters” on Christmas Day, likely after saying Mass, and suggested the institutionalization of the Pembina mission with permanent buildings.¹¹⁰ In the spring of 1819, Dumoulin began planning construction of a chapel measuring sixty by thirty feet, and a forty by twenty-seven foot presbytery, relying entirely on the help, money, materials, and labour of the local faithful.¹¹¹ Dumoulin estimated that the Pembina community of Catholics united 300 persons, including sixty children in school, some of whom could reportedly write by 1819.¹¹² By 1822, however, regular attendance in the summer time totalled only fifteen youngsters, and dwindled to four or five during the buffalo hunt.¹¹³ Without the sustained contributions of local hunters and their families, the nascent mission site would not have prospered. Provencher and Dumoulin wintered in Pembina in 1820. That summer, “another missionary, Father Pierre Destroismaisons, accompanied by a Catechist, Mr. Sauv  ,”¹¹⁴ replaced the two.

Throughout the early years of the Pembina mission, the local community of polyethnic believers who congregated in the region funded its operations since neither the HBC nor state government provided assistance.¹¹⁵ The lived religion of the Metis brought clergymen to the area to fulfil their spiritual needs following the petition of 1817. On 17 July 1822, after a swarm of grasshoppers claimed the crops at St. Boniface, the locusts headed south to Pembina and began to ravage that region’s gardens. Upon witnessing the arrival of the insects and foreshadowing destruction, the Pembina residents summoned their priest and asked him to intervene. In a letter

¹¹⁰ Belleau, “Brief History of Old Pembina,” 5–6.

¹¹¹ Catholic Historical Society of St. Paul, *Acta et Dicta: A Collection of Historical Data Regarding the Origin and Growth of the Catholic Church in the Northwest.*, vol. 1, 1 (St. Paul: The St. Paul Catholic Historical Society, 1907), 57.

¹¹² Kardong, *Beyond Red River*, 15.

¹¹³ S  v  re Dumoulin, “S  v  re Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, August 16, 1822”, Reel 1, Doc 1822 39, AA.

¹¹⁴ Catholic Historical Society of St. Paul, *Acta et Dicta*: 1:59.

¹¹⁵ S  v  re Dumoulin, “S  v  re Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 13 September 1822.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1822 52, AA.

dated 16 August 1822, Dumoulin reported to his bishop he would lead a procession to protect the local crops, which he did the next day.¹¹⁶

The faithful met Dumoulin in the field after having fasted and changed into their Sunday best. Believers walked behind him in what he described “*avec la plus grande religion.*” Their outdoor prayer and demonstration of Catholic devotion, according to the missionary account, pushed back the insects and saved the Pembina crops from destruction. Dumoulin concludes his recollection of the event by noting that throughout the summer, grasshoppers continued to fly above Pembina towards the prairies but skipped over their gardens, now graced with divine protection. The priest also lamented the longer distances required for finding the meat needed to sustain Metis buffalo hunting brigades, resulting from the insects’ direct effect on the bison herds.¹¹⁷ This answered prayer undoubtedly reinforced the faith of Pembina Catholics. The event shares many parallels with the locust invasion described in the Bible involving Moses, Pharaoh, and the swarm that covered Egypt in the Old Testament’s Exodus 10–19. Metis families exercised their spiritual beliefs in processions to protect their harvest, and consequently saved themselves from famine in winter months. Their supplication was answered and their crops spared from destruction. Metis lived religion echoed the experience of the Pharaoh, who demanded forgiveness and asked Moses to pray the locust’s departure from Egypt. After Moses begged for God’s intervention, the grasshoppers disappeared into the Red Sea.¹¹⁸

Stories about grasshoppers invading local crops that were prayed away are among the preserved folk tales of Manitoba. A similar event to the one reported above happened in Saint-Eustache parish, located fifty-five kilometres from present-day Winnipeg. There, under the guidance of Bishop Taché (sometime between 1853 and 1894), dressed in his sacerdotal robes,

¹¹⁶ Dumoulin, “Sévère Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 16 August 1822.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, AA.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Old Testament, Exodus 10:19

the locusts were prayed away. The locusts were convinced through prayer to jump into the Assiniboine River, and local crops survived.¹¹⁹ Metis requests for divine intercession in times of hardships happened often. Answered prayers were frequent as well. Metis Catholicism's accounts of miraculous events explored throughout this dissertation explain how religious devotion was able to heal and remedy difficult situations.

In September 1822, Provencher reported that Dumoulin was on a *mission ambulante* on the prairie with Pembina hunters. Metis and their relatives left the Pembina environs in large parties for security purposes, having experienced difficulty in their regularly scheduled expeditions.¹²⁰ The same month, Dumoulin recorded that the local population was unhappy at the prospect of abandoning their mission, but might have to do so for lack of food by the following spring. In addition, Dumoulin wrote that the HBC, enjoying its monopoly north of the forty-ninth parallel, forced Metis merchants out of business and took a greater percentage of profit than it had in previous years.¹²¹ In 1823, Joseph-Norbert Provencher travelled to Pembina as the Bishop of Juliopolis to inform the locals of the Church's decision to abandon the community since the HBC was closing its outpost. He invited residents to join him in St. Boniface. Some did so, while others left for St. François Xavier Parish in White Horse Plain (west of present-day Winnipeg along the Assiniboine River).¹²² Father Dumoulin returned to Québec the same year to pursue his work for the Church, having recorded 800 baptisms, 123 marriages and forty-three funerals in Pembina between 1818 and 1823.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Louisa Picoux and Edwige Grolet, *Légendes manitobaines* (Saint-Boniface, Man.: Éditions des Plaines, 1992)11-12.

¹²⁰ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, "Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 1 September 1822," Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Document 1822-50, AA.

¹²¹ Dumoulin, "Sévère Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 13 September 1822." Belleau Collection, Reel 1, AA.

¹²² Dennis King, *Joseph Norbert Provencher*, Manitobans in Profile (Winnipeg, Canada: Peguis, 1982), 23.

¹²³ Kardong, *Beyond Red River*, 16.

When clergy arrived on the northern plains, they found believers ready to welcome them on their own terms. Metis families did not abandon the Pembina site because it suddenly became the Church's will. In 1824, newly ordained Father Jean Harper reported that work at the Pembina school was "promising."¹²⁴ Missionaries Harper and Destroismaisons continued to visit the Pembina chapel periodically between 1824 and 1834. After that date, the site existed for fourteen years, even without a priest, since many Metis remained in the region.¹²⁵ Kin connections south of the Medicine Line helped families survive famine, flooding, and the ever-increasing encroachment of the HBC on the commercial gains of free traders.

The 1820s saw the creation of the St. Boniface episcopal district, with Provencher at its head beginning in 1822. After his promotion, Provencher maintained contact with the Holy See and European networks of information and influence. Historian Luca Codignola remarks that Provencher's literary interests travelled into the content of the education provided to Metis children.¹²⁶ During the 1830s St. Boniface, St. François-Xavier, and St. Joseph at Pembina grew into three sites of religious importance for Catholic Metis.¹²⁷

CONCLUSION

Metis people claimed a place within Indigenous governance structures of the Great Plains well before the establishment of settler colonial powers such as institutionalized Catholicism on their traditional territories. They did so by developing and maintaining kinship links with their relatives in other nations through the Catholic sacraments of marriage and baptism. Such connections encouraged socioeconomic well-being in the fur trade of the Great Lakes and the

¹²⁴ King, *Joseph Norbert Provencher*, 29.

¹²⁵ Kardong, *Idem*.

¹²⁶ Codignola, "Rome et les débuts de Saint-Boniface, 1818-1836."

¹²⁷ King, *Joseph Norbert Provencher*, 26.

northern plains among Metis families. Metis women created Indigenous kin and commercial networks that benefited their local economies in wholly distinct ways from European settlers. Some Metis families used overt political actions that reaffirmed their Catholic practices, such as petition-signing, to make themselves heard and incite change. The analysis of four interconnected petitions, all asking for regular religious services, reveals that political will manifested itself in a variety of ways.

When Metis people requested a priest, directed either from a church or a government official, they did so to improve their physical health, spiritual well-being, and material condition. The ideas, mores, and identities rooted in the late-eighteenth-century Great Lakes continued to articulate themselves into clearly established patterns that relied on intermarriage and Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Since numerous kinship ties united ChWeUm Davis's religion with his relatives, visual representations of these binding ties prove especially helpful in attesting to the continuity linking the social history of the Great Lakes and the Great Plains together. Forty-five years and no more than two generations separated the events of Michilimackinac (1778, 1786) with those of Red River (1817, 1823). The proximity of these periods and the family stories interwoven therein are worth highlighting.

Assessing lived religion's impact through the social network analysis of ChWeUm Davis's ancestral connections reveals that the distance affirmed by scholars between the Great Lakes fur trade populations and the buffalo-hunting *bona fide* Metis nation requires a fresh look. Metis lived Catholicism arrived in the Plains before Church representatives implanted themselves in the region for good. Metis hunters' daily spiritual needs and beliefs, in turn, facilitated the institutionalization of Roman Catholicism in the Northwest. Pre-established Metis lived religion, with its rituals, faith, and practices, motivated Catholic institutional growth on the Red River after 1818. The Church's arrival west of the Great Lakes began a long relationship with answered

prayers for certain residents of the Turtle Mountain region as highlighted with the 1822 success against the locust.

The next chapter examines lived religion among Metis buffalo hunters at the turn of the nineteenth century, studying the network of family, rituals, and traditions that welcomed ChWeUm Davis to the world. “Hunting with Christ: Metis Lived Religion on the Buffalo Chase (1800-1840s)” presents the social and religious sphere that brought Davis into the world, using some of the accounts left in his diaries to reconstitute his past. ChWeUm Davis dedicated part of his life to remembering events that shaped the Metis nation and the lives of their Chippewa-Cree kin, from Turtle Mountain (North Dakota) to the Milk River in Montana, and across the Medicine Line to Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Chapter 2 begins the historical reconstruction of Davis’s faith network. The visual reconstitution of Davis’s past continues to support the theory that political action, articulated in and through lived religion, united the Metis from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains and beyond.

CHAPTER 2

HUNTING WITH CHRIST: METIS LIVED RELIGION ON THE BUFFALO CHASE (1800-1840s)

Metis lived religion influenced the way men and women related to each other, to the land, and to settlers of other Christian denominations. In 1902, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, a Catholic ecclesiastical magazine published in Winnipeg, printed a conversation that allegedly occurred between Isidore Ekapow Dumont (1810–1885) and an unnamed HBC bourgeois. Oblate Jean-Marie-Joseph Lestanc, the article’s author, paraphrased Isidore, who was the father of the famed Gabriel, the military leader in the 1885 Resistance. Lestanc explained that the “*Mylords*” wanted to know how Metis people avoided disagreements about religion. Citing the variety of Protestant churches, administrators, and opinions, Dumont remarked:

Pour nous, Monsieur, c’est différent, chacun de nous connaît le pays avec toutes ses rivières, ses collines et ses montagnes ; chacun de nous est sûr de son chemin et nous ne pouvons pas nous disputer là-dessus que nous connaissons également notre route ; nous n’avons qu’à marcher et nous sommes sûrs d’arriver où nous voulons arriver. Eh bien ! Monsieur, pour la religion, c’est pareil. Nous sommes sûrs de notre religion, nous la connaissons et nous sommes sûrs d’arriver au terme du voyage : au ciel, si nous la suivons fidèlement. Parce que nous connaissons notre chemin ici à travers ces prairies, nous n’avons pas besoin de disputer entre nous pour savoir de quel côté nous diriger, nous n’avons qu’à marcher. De même, nous n’avons pas besoin de disputer sur la religion parce que nous la connaissons et la croyons tous également, nous n’avons qu’à la suivre, à bien la pratiquer et nous arriverons au paradis. Pour vous, Monsieur, excusez-moi, vous vous disputez sur la religion, parce que vous n’êtes sûrs de rien ; et, en suivant chacun son idée, vous êtes loin d’être sûrs de votre salut.¹

Like other Indigenous peoples, the Metis were renowned guides and expert hunters, who knew the land, its rivers, lakes, and mountains, and navigated them with ease. In a similar fashion, they affirmed their adhesion to Catholicism by allowing it to become an important part of their daily experiences and communal practices. Metis believers brought their faith with them throughout the northern plains. Dumont did not recognize any debate on religious beliefs among Metis

¹ Jean-Marie O.M.I. Le Stanc, “La foi de ‘nos gens’ les Métis,” *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol 1, no. 3 (mars 1902): 75–79.

people because the path to Heaven was evident to him and his Catholic relatives. The polyphony and discord present among HBC bourgeois on the topic of Christianity were ostensibly unknown to Catholic Metis. The Oblate priest's report remarked that the Metis were singularly attracted to Catholicism, and gladly followed the will of their priest, as long as he mastered the vernacular languages of the land. The veracity of the statement attributed to Isidore Dumont published in 1902 is questionable. Although the priest spent considerable time among buffalo hunters and their relatives, the colonizing agenda – as outlined in Chapter 1 – influenced historical representations of the Metis. Nonetheless, this account is helpful in situating the perspectives of priests towards Metis lived religion.

Adhesion to Catholicism helped foster Metis national cohesion. This chapter argues Metis worldviews and practices in the Catholic Church facilitated the development of a collective political identity that eventually articulated a national and historic self-understanding. The social cohesion articulated by Dumont among Catholic faithful facilitated an ideological coalescence that crossed into the political world. ChWeUm Davis's writings echoed this social cohesion. This chapter asserts that a unified Metis political will often manifested itself in direct response to prescriptions of Catholic clergy. When demands from priests conflicted with the best interests of Metis families, they voiced their position in a variety of ways. This chapter explains how lived religion anchored common actions that transcended into the political world.

Metis lived Catholicism differs from the beliefs and practices of French Canadians and other European Christians. To tease out religious and cultural differences between Metis and European Catholic life, this chapter closely examines early historical examples of lived religion in the Red River valley in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The chapter begins with the establishment of a Catholic calendar of celebrations among Metis the faithful. While clergy encouraged set days of worship, penance, and sacraments, priests adapted their calendar to suit

the needs of Metis believers. A unique Metis Catholic calendar emerged out of the first church-led celebration of Easter during the spring of 1818. Easter beliefs influenced Metis Catholicism and shaped its folktales. The most famous Easter story among Metis believers centres on a werewolf. Comparing *Canadien* and Metis oral accounts, this chapter outlines how *le loup-garou* became *LeRuGaRu*. Beyond the linguistic transformation from French to Michif, Metis families changed and adapted the content of Catholic folktales to suit their needs. *LeRuGaRu* became central to Metis Easter celebrations, reminding believers of their Catholic obligations. Metis variations of *LeRuGaRu* reflect some of the adaptability of Roman Catholicism to the northern plains.

The relationship between Metis people and Catholic clergy took time to develop. After Catholic clergy demonstrated to Metis believers that the Church could fulfill their needs, Metis families invited their priests on their hunting expeditions. The relationship between Metis and Church officials began with clergy affirming their superiority over Indigenous peoples, but shifted in the 1820s and 1830s to reach a mutually beneficial partnership. While missionaries gained access to Indigenous peoples and lifeways, Metis families acquired access and insights into the European political realm. The nature of the relationship between Metis families and Catholic clergy changed over time. The beginning of that story follows.

Western Christianity has long adapted and assimilated diverse rituals and customs into its fold. The religion's adaptive strategies explain, in part, the longevity of the Catholic Church institution. In the early nineteenth century, missionaries and everyday believers moulded their practices and rituals to the local environment. Indeed, because much as the production of hosts for the purpose of communion was impossible on the Great Plains before flour (and mills) were prevalent, pemmican was likely adopted as an alternative for the sacrament of Holy Communion. On 3 April 1819, Sévère Dumoulin, newly arrived to the Red River, wrote to Archbishop Joseph-

Octave Plessis, reporting on his progress at the Pembina settlement. In the midst of preparations for Easter, the missionary priest advised his superior he was adapting to the local conditions, which had a paucity of flora usually used in Church rituals. Dumoulin noted: “*Je vais faire demain la bénédiction des Rameaux, ou plutôt des branches de chêne, car il n’y avait ni olivier, ni palmier, ni cèdre, ni sapin... seulement du bois franc... Je suppose que c’est aussi bon !*”² Unable to find a more supple wood to distribute on Palm Sunday, which marked the seven-day countdown to Easter Sunday, Dumoulin used oak branches he blessed before handing them to believers during the Mass. Throughout the weeks preceding Easter, Father Dumoulin preached daily to the faithful that gathered to hear his word.³

The local significance of the plant species merits closer attention. The oak tree was prevalent in the Red River region, according to correspondence sent by Plessis to his superior in Québec.⁴ Oak trees once held importance in the Christian faith as sites of pilgrimage. Sociologist, historian, and Dominican priest Serge Bonnet reminds us that Christians have long traditions of religious journeys based in nature, such as the Oak of Mamre, also known as the Oak of Abraham: an oak tree where pilgrims congregated marked the spot where three angels appeared to Abraham. Churches were erected to transform certain natural religious sites and practices into sanctioned places of worship and to integrate them into the institutional structure of Catholicism.⁵ Dumoulin distributed the blessed branches in a special Mass. Metis believers brought the oak

² Sévère Dumoulin, “Sévère Dumoulin to Archbishop Joseph-Octave Plessis, 3 April 1819.” Collection Belleau, Microfilm 219, 125, SHSB.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 21 July 1818.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, AA. Provencher reported that oak, elm, ivy, and aspen bordered the Red River.

⁵ Serge Bonnet and Yann Raison du Cleuziou, *Défense Du Catholicisme Populaire*, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2015), 72.

home with them in processions commemorating Jesus's "triumphant entrance" as he crossed the gates of Jerusalem.⁶

The oak tree's revered properties transcend the so-called Western realm. Although Dumoulin did not specify which kind of oak tree he used, Indigenous nations in North America relied on the medicinal properties of the different oak types found throughout the continent since time immemorial. Indigenous peoples engaged in the species' management in a variety of ways to ensure the natural environment could supply them with food and remedies.⁷ Colonizers soon began to notice the curative abilities of the white oak, namely to help heal certain wounds.⁸ Dumoulin likely relied on the oak branches for lack of an alternative. It is possible he privileged the oak tree because of its numerous uses and its vernacular renown. After all, the tactic of finding, discouraging, and replacing Indigenous practices and beliefs with European rituals were part of a much larger dispossession process. Settler colonialism, in short, was not new.⁹ Indeed, throughout the history of Christianity, colonizers appropriated Indigenous meeting places and sites of spiritual importance when selecting landscapes to occupy.

Adapting Catholicism to the local environmental circumstances happened in French Canada as well. Long before missionaries entered the Red River region, priests blessed fir, cedar, and laurel branches for believers before Palm Sunday celebrations in the St. Lawrence valley. *Canadiens* believed that the branches gained special powers after the priest's blessing. Oral history of the *habitants* relates that burning the branches blessed on Palm Sunday could ward off

⁶ D. Gosselin, "Le dimanche des rameaux," *La semaine religieuse de Québec* 7, no. 32 (avril 1895): 373.

⁷ United States Department of Agriculture National Resources Conservation Service, "Indigenous Uses, Management, and Restoration of Oaks in the Far Western United States" (Washington: September 2007), 12.

⁸ Louis Nicolas et al., *The Codex Canadensis and the Writings of Louis Nicolas the Natural History of the New World = Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 298.

⁹ Patrick Wolfe's article on settler colonialism demonstrates how settler colonialism is tied to a "logic of elimination" which manifests itself in a myriad of forms throughout the world, but with a singular focus on territoriality, which requires persistent attacks and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. See: Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 487-409.

an oncoming storm.¹⁰ It is likely Metis families used the oak branches of the Red River in a similar fashion. They adorned homes, dressing up crucifixes hung up on the walls of those who had them. The first experience of Palm Sunday on the Red River began a unique material culture of Catholic devotion among Metis families. The pageantry involved in Palm Sunday influenced believers and incited their continued devotion to the faith.

Although the Metis of Pembina failed to secure a clergyman in 1823, they continued to seek out sacraments as much as possible. While Church officials believed they provided a service to society by elevating their inferiors, Metis believers maintained religious affiliation with the Catholic Church to influence its decisions.¹¹ When the Church announced its plan to abandon Pembina in 1823, some chose to head to *La Prairie du Cheval Blanc*, or White Horse Plain, following Cuthbert Grant's move to the area in 1824.¹² Priests transferred the St. Francis Xavier parish name from the closed Pembina mission to its foreseen replacement north of the forty-ninth parallel. Cuthbert Grant's kinship links to Pembina facilitated the migration of people refusing to return to the Forks, or present-day Winnipeg. Grant's sister, Marguerite (1789–1866), wedded Jean-Baptiste Poitras, cementing her ancestral connections to the Assumption mission in Pembina. The next generation of Poitras-Grant descendants married and baptized their children at

¹⁰ Jean-Claude Dupont and Jacques Mathieu, *Héritage de la francophonie canadienne: traditions orales* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1986) 38.

¹¹ Provencher reported in 1836 that the 1817 petition was triggered by Lord Selkirk and happened because it was easy to notice that the Metis and unnamed others that harmed Selkirk's colony were lacking principles and required instruction (my translation of: « *il ne fit pas difficile de voir que les métis et les autres qui avaient tant fait de mal à sa (Selkirk) colonie manquaient de principes et qu'il leur fallait de l'instruction.* » Joseph-Norbert Provencher, "Mémoire Ou Notice Sur L'établissement de La Mission de La Rivière Rouge et Ses Progrès Depuis 1818, Présenté À La Propagande Le 12 Mars 1836 Par J.N. Provencher, Évêque de Juliopolis.," *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections BX 1424 S25 C56, XXIX, no. 10 (1930): 231. Statements like these from clergy were common and reflect their racialized understanding of society.

¹² "Note sur la Prairie du Cheval Blanc," n.d., Fonds Paroisse Saint-Francois-Xavier, Transcription Baptêmes, Mariages, Sépultures 1834 au 17 janvier 1843 Chemise 0103-001, SHSB.

the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary church, formerly known as St. Joseph, Pembina.¹³ Even though clergy officially abandoned the Pembina chapel in 1823, individuals residing nearby forced clergy to react to their collective will. Priests continued to minister to the faithful there, despite institutional wishes to abandon the site. Metis families who refused to join their relatives at St. François Xavier illustrate how laypeople influenced the location of worship sites.¹⁴ Refusal to move and obey the will of the Church was a collective political choice, and its affirmation eventually forced the institution to cater to the demands of the Metis. Expressions of Metis sovereignty under the guise of lived Catholicism shifted, from petitioning to direct action. Scholar Ania Loomba remarks that resisting the effects of colonialism takes many forms. Resistance to religious teachings or authorities is not uncommon. Loomba explains: “Anti-colonial struggles ... had to create new and powerful identifies for colonised peoples and to challenge colonialiam not only at a political or intellectual level but on an emotional plane.”¹⁵ The common ground found in resistance to certain prescriptions of Catholicism helped shape spaces where socioeconomic, spiritual, and political interests coalesced within the Metis nation.

Catholic institutional settlement over the northern plains began when Québec sent two black robes there. Dumoulin and Provencher arrived in the Red River region in 1818 with a letter from the bishop of Québec addressed to the settlers of the Selkirk colony. Historian Mario Giguère argued that 1818 marks the beginning of travelling missions, or *missions ambulantes*, since the two priests sent to the Great Plains had no institutional spaces of their own and were, by

¹³ See 24 June 1850 for marriage of François Poitras and Magdeleine Fisher celebrated by Father G.A Belcourt. Georges-Antoine Belcourt, “Assumption Church of Pembina Record Volume 1,” 24 June 1850, SHSB Fonds Paroisse de Saint Joseph de Pembina, Boîte 1750, chemise 3077 1848-1854, SHSB.

¹⁴ Georges Antoine Belcourt, “Assumption Church of Pembina Record Volume 1,” Fonds Paroisse de Saint Joseph de Pembina, Boîte 1750, chemise 3077 1848-1854, SHSB.

¹⁵ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 155.

definition, itinerant.¹⁶ Provencher read the document aloud immediately upon arrival at the Red River. The Church official ordered those assembled to obey them and to behave with docility. Plessis told the colonists to embrace the newcomers as spiritual fathers, and explained that the missionaries were tasked with teaching about God, or catechizing to all peoples. The letter even stated the clergymen could speak to God on the faithful's behalf.¹⁷ ChWeUm Davis remembered the arrival of the two by writing, "*Les premières missions son tarivi a la rivière rouge de 16 de jeullet an 1818 Manitoba. Le rev père provencher qui a été monseigneur provenchi par la suite a St bonifase premier Eveque à la rivière rouge et la rev père joseph Norbert Séver Dumoulin.*"¹⁸

The cultural shock experienced by the two new arrivals to the Red River Settlement was profound. The Catholic priests immediately expressed concerns about the behaviour of their parishioners. After only one month in the colony, Sévère Dumoulin wrote to Plessis asking whether women should be allowed to sleep alongside their children if the children were under one year old. In an attempt to communicate resistance to his wishes, Dumoulin stated that local mothers warned him that babies spending the night alone would suffer greatly from the cold Prairie winter.¹⁹ The mere presence of this question in clergymen's correspondence highlights the gender-based scrutiny, criticism, and policing of Indigenous women's behaviour. Metis mothers expressed criticism and rejection of the clergymen's prescriptions is a clear manifestation of sovereignty. The supreme authority over the health and well-being of the family rested with the woman, not the priest. Metis pushback against Church desires in this circumstance is one example of how lived

¹⁶ Mario Giguère, "Les Missionnaires Sauvages: Roman Catholic Missionaries and La Mission Ambulante with the Métis, Plains Cree and Blackfoot, 1840-1880" (MA thesis, McGill University, 2009), 21. Giguère does not state when missionary priests began to accompany buffalo hunts. Evidence of the first buffalo hunt accompanied by a missionary was found in 1822 and is explained later in this chapter.

¹⁷ Plessis, "Lettre pastorale de l'Évêque de Québec aux colons de la Rivière Rouge."

¹⁸ William Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 2," n.d., 2, MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND.

¹⁹ Sévère Dumoulin, "Sévère Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, September 10, 1818," Belleau Collection, Reel 1 Doc 1818 69 to 70, AA. See also Corporation archiépiscopale catholique romaine de Saint-Boniface, Fonds 0075 Série Provencher, Correspondance, MSS Cahier E, p. 22-25 Ref 1935-1936, SHSB.

Catholicism allowed for a political expression that contested or disobeyed missionary wishes at times.

Song introduced Red River parishioners to Catholic rituals. Before they were able to build the chapels and presbyteries that would house them, missionaries started singing Mass every Sunday morning and vespers at night. Beginning a ritualized weekly practice of Mass and its commitments likely piqued the attention of certain locals, although the faithful present in what would become the parish of St. Boniface numbered too few for the priests' liking. Sensing that there would be more interest and demand at Pembina, missionaries began their trip south of the Medicine Line three weeks after arriving in Red River.²⁰ In a sensational example of self-aggrandizement, Catholic priests often unaccustomed to warm reception by those they came to convert remembered the "thousands" of Metis men and women waiting for their instruction.²¹ More accurately, Metis petitioners requesting Catholic clergy in 1817 stated that their number totalled between 300 and 400. Freemen and their families found themselves dispersed throughout many hundreds of leagues on the vast northern plains.²²

Metis families altered neither their quotidian nor their seasonal rounds, even though clergy preached sedentary lifeways. From Pembina, Dumoulin reported irregular attendance at his catechism lessons because the hunt occupied local kinsfolk. In the same letter, the missionary remarked that illegitimately married couples in Pembina sought to sanction their conjugality with the blessing of a priest. In other words, unions celebrated outside of the institutionalized sphere were invalid. Dumoulin, however, did not have the power to wed those that requested it without

²⁰ Sévère Dumoulin, "Sévère Dumoulin to Archbishop J.O. Plessis, 14 August 1818." Collection Belleau, Microfilm 219, 74, SHSB.

²¹ J.M. Belleau, "Brief History of Old Pembina," 1939, 3, 978.419.P369 bb Pembina 1939, 3, SHSND.

²² "Transcription de la Pétitions des habitants de la Rivière Rouge à Mgr Joseph Octave Plessis, 1817. " Belleau Collection, Reel 1 Doc 1815-1817 10 to 11, AA.

the prior publication of banns (public announcement of marital intent) required by the Church.²³ Exactly how many people petitioned the missionary for marriage ceremonies is unclear. The following month, Dumoulin reported that he only planned to recognize the union of “five of my freemen” (and their spouses) since he had difficulty convincing some to go through the necessary rituals required before the sacrament of marriage, such as catechizing and baptism.²⁴ This example shows that Metis lived religion did not always adhere to the prescriptions of institutionalized Catholicism since, at this time, not all husbands and wives rushed to formalize their relationships within the Church.

Metis parishioners sought out Church services shortly after its arrival on the northern plains. On 5 January 1819, Dumoulin reported fifty-two baptisms four months after his arrival in Pembina. He also blessed six country weddings for couples already prepared for the ceremony of marriage. Such individuals previously received all the preceding sacraments of the Catholic Church. The catechist and seminarian that accompanied him, William Edge, was teaching up to sixty children. Some of the neophytes included women that were sufficiently knowledgeable in Church history and practices to eventually become nuns.²⁵ Dumoulin asserted that whereas he ministered to 300 women, men and children at Pembina, Provencher’s work reached a mere fifty to sixty believers. This difference is explained in part because of the proximity of Pembina to the starting point of bison expeditions.²⁶ The less Metis hunters had to travel, the less of an expense the chase became on their collectively shared proceeds. As such, Pembina was better suited for a

²³ Sévère Dumoulin, “Sévère Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 5 February 1819.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1 Doc 1819 27, AA. The publication of marriage banns to the parish is a Catholic custom that predates the Council of Trent. For more information, see ‘Decree on the Reformation of Marriage’ in J. Waterworth, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent* (New York: Catholic Publication Society Company, 1848) 196.

²⁴ Sévère Dumoulin, “Sévère Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 14 February 1819.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1819 28, AA.

²⁵ Sévère Dumoulin, “Sévère Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 27 July 1819.” Collection Belleau, Microfilm 219, 132-133, SHSB.

²⁶ Dumoulin, “Sévère Dumoulin to Archbishop Joseph-Octave Plessis, 3 April 1819.” Reel 1 Doc 1819 33, AA

settlement than St. Boniface. Almost a year after his arrival Dumoulin reported another thirty-six baptisms of adults in Pembina. A first communion celebration followed these baptisms, then a marriage ceremony.

THE LIVED RELIGION OF EASTER

French-language historiography on medieval popular religion reveals an intimate connection between folklore and religious beliefs. According to historian Raoul Manselli, people seeking connections with the supernatural often embraced folkloric knowledge passed down through generations.²⁷ Maselli forewarned that popular religion's connection with folklore should ground itself within its historical context. In response to Maselli's advice, this chapter explores Catholic springtime, a season of the religious calendar that united Metis believers. Springtime rituals began with Ash Wednesday and ended the first Sunday after Easter. Families shared the folktale of LeRuGaRu, or loup-garou, a beastly creature frightening to adults and children alike. LeRuGaRu stories taught the Metis lessons about behaviour and Catholic obligations.

Catholic canon law prescribes a set schedule of sacraments to believers and consequences for those who failed to abide by them. While "the obligation to communicate [communion] was reduced in the ninth century to a minimum of thrice a year... Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas, the Easter communion being imperative, and no excuse allowed."²⁸ In other words, skipping the sacramental schedule was a serious transgression. Consequently, the lead up to celebrations marking the Resurrection of Christ is especially important in Catholic observances and beliefs. Missing institutional rituals for too long has serious effects, for it puts the faithful in peril of sin.

²⁷ Raoul Manselli, *La religion populaire au moyen âge: Problèmes de méthodes et d'histoire*, (Montréal: Institut d'études médiévales Albert-Le-Grand) 38.

²⁸ Citing Lyndwood's *Provinciale*, Reichel writes "Whoever does not confess to his proper priest once in the year, at least, and receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at Easter, let him be forbidden entrance into the Church whilst alive, and be deprived of Christian burial when dead." in Reichel, Oswald J. *A Complete Manual of Canon Law*. Vol. 1 The Sacraments. London: John Hodges, 1896, 123-124.

That same peril was cited as motivation for the request of petitioners writing to the head of the Church in Québec between 1778 and 1817.²⁹ The spring of 1819 marked the birth of Catholic Easter celebrations at Red River. The legacies of this institutionalization imposed strict behavioural guidelines on Metis people and their relatives. Metis oral history from the Turtle Mountain region shared concerns about the consequences of disobeying Catholic prescriptions, specifically pertaining to the forty days that precede Easter.³⁰

New practices blended with socioeconomic circumstances. Dumoulin instructed the local population about the importance of ritualistic privation of food, or fasting. The missionary highlighted in his correspondence that, alongside listening to quotidian preaching, the Pembina faithful, “fasted in general.” Some parishioners even reduced their consumption of food down to one meal per day as a mark of respect for Lenten traditions.³¹ Buffalo hunters and their relatives were accustomed to living through sustenance shortages at times when their expeditions were not fruitful, so to hear that the practice had godly connections would have been welcome. The action of fasting for forty days preceding Easter celebrations in Catholic traditions commemorate the forty days Jesus spent fasting in the desert. During this time, Catholics are supposed to abstain from festive activities, and promote penance, or the confession of sins, in preparation for the return of Christ in Resurrection. Fasting is the fifth commandment of the Church. Catholics must fast through “Lent, the Ember days, and vigils.” The faithful between twenty-one and fifty-nine years of age in good health reduced their food consumption to one meal and two snacks for the entire duration of Lent. Failing to abstain from eating during Lent was a deadly sin.³²

²⁹ Nute, *Documents Relating to Northwest Missions 1815-1827*, 15.

³⁰ Turtle Mountain Oral History Project Collection, 1980-1993. MSS 10645, SHSND.

³¹ Dumoulin, “Sévère Dumoulin to Archbishop Joseph-Octave Plessis, 3 April 1819.” Collection Belleau, SHSB.

³² Archidiocèse de Québec, *Le grand Catéchisme de Québec à l’usage de toute la province ecclésiastique de Québec.*, 5e ed. (Québec: J.T. Brousseau, 1854), 120. Failing to abstain from eating is considered gluttony in the eyes of the Church .

Lenten obligations were strict, and children often found them difficult to follow. Jenny Jeanotte Schindler shared an oral history, collected at Turtle Mountain in North Dakota by Nicholas Vrooman in the winter of 1989. Schindler's account is rich in the lived religion of Easter. Much like the prescriptions of the catechism, in her conversations with Vrooman Schindler recalled that during the Lent of her childhood, her family "ate poorly." Her relatives consumed a single meal a day, every day, between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. In addition to this privation, there were restrictions on behaviour. Dancing, visiting, and playing cards were all forbidden activities during Lent. Entire families gathered in their dwelling following their evening housework, and knelt to recite the rosary every night, with the father of the home leading the way in French. Schindler remembered:

But during Lent we weren't allowed to go anywhere. You did your chores, quickly the chores that were to be done, before supper. You came in, you had your supper, and if the men had more chores to do they went, well, right after we got through eating, before the dishes were done, everybody kneeled down and my father led the rosary. He was the head of the family, and he led the rosary and we answered in French... Every day during Lent, for forty days we did this. With everybody knelt down. And I remember I had a mischievous brother and he would pretend getting a cramp in his legs just to make us laugh. He'd go (makes face?), and papa would look at us with that look, you know, he'd look at us, oh, (...), he'd be praying, he'd raise his voice while he was praying, oh, we straightened up in a hurry.³³

Catholic families of Turtle Mountain such as the Schindlers used LeCoont of LeRuGaRu, or the folktale of the werewolf, to discourage their children from misbehaving during this time.

Resisting temptations in order to be Christlike was difficult, and youth were especially prone to break some of Lent's prescriptions. Jenny Schindler remembered that her mother told her LeCoont of LeRuGaRu, where a young man was fed up with the repetitive Lent nights. He lived in a multi-generation house. Schindler related:

³³ "Jenny Jeanotte Schindler 'LeCoont' French Stories. Turtle Mountain Reservation, North Dakota.," February 24, 1989, 3, 6. Nicholas Vrooman Private Archives (henceforth NVPA).

They said there was a woman that lived on this reservation years and years ago, and my mom told it seriously. Even after we were grown up. She said that woman lived on this reservation. But she had been an evil person, you know, doing evil things. In those days, you know, women didn't drink, they didn't smoke, they didn't do anything like that. Then men did, you know, but not the women, never. My mom won't even put a drop of liquor to her lips. And she told us that this story that she told us every Lent, she said this young man was playing cards—about a mile away [where] the neighbors lived—and every evening he'd hurry and do his chores and he'd run and go play cards til about midnight and then come home. So Lent came and, see our families lived together. Like Grandma and Grandpa were getting too old, take 'em into your home. We did that. Okay? And that's what they did. If an uncle died and left an aunt and her children, they were taken into the home, because there was no welfare in those days, see? There's no means of this woman supporting her kids in the wintertime from the ground. So, but they looked after one another. And then, well anyway, there's a whole bunch living in this two-room log house, Mom said. And this young man, he's about twenty years old, he said, I'm sick and tired of this staying home every night, he said, I'm going to go play cards tonight. ... Yeah, the grandfather, he said, no, he said, (...) that's bad, don't do that. He went anyway, he went to the neighbors, play cards long about midnight he was coming home, there's moonlight, he was walking home, pretty soon he saw like someone in the snow, scrunching snow, he heard someone following him. And he got kind of scared and he walked a little bit faster and this thing would walk faster, so he ran and this thing would run, so finally he just had to look, and he turned around he looked. And they say that LeRuGaRu was an animal like, if it were a dog, it would be huge, you know, and they always had fiery red eyes, that's how you could tell LeRuGaRu...³⁴

³⁴ Ibid.



Image 2.1: The werewolf's deliverance in Honoré Beaugrand's *Le loup-garou*³⁵

³⁵ Honoré Beaugrand, *La chasse galerie : légendes canadiennes* (Montréal: S.N, 1900), 51.

The beastly dog-like creature caught up with the wrongdoer, in this case, a local woman transformed into a dog from her human shape in the middle of the night. The frightened card player ran home as quickly as possible. Since the forewarnings of *musham* (grandfather) went unheard, the entire family would soon be at risk. Schindler continued:

and then they had so many people living in the house, there's beds everywhere on the floor, they had to make beds on the floor, because they had just two rooms, you know. So he crawled amongst the people and woke up all the people and these people saw this big angry dog, this LeRuGaRu coming in the house, so they were all backing away, and backing away and (...) slept in the other room. (...) Yeah, so I guess *musham* came and he had a block of wood and he said to make room for him, you know, the people to get away, so he went up to the Lerugaru and he hit the Lerugaru with the block of wood across the forehead and drew blood and before their eyes, the Lerugaru changed into a woman. And she thanked this grandfather for doing that. They said that that's the only if you draw blood.

Nicholas Vrooman: To bring them back.

Jenny Schindler: To bring them back as a human and she vowed that she would never be a bad person, an evil person again. And they said she lived on this reservation and she always had that big ugly scar on her forehead.³⁶

Many lessons drawn from LeCoont of LeRuGaRu have origins in the legends and stories passed down through generations of French settlers in North America. Historian Jean-Marc Moriceau's study on wolf attacks from the 15th to the 20th century argues werewolves are a fiction created by the imagination of rural uneducated people. According to Moriceau, in 1765 the bishop of Mende in France published a pastoral letter (*mandement*) explaining that the recent deaths of parishioners killed by wolves were demonstrations of God's providential wrath.³⁷ While giving divine purpose to wolf attacks, priests were careful to emphasize that *loups-garous*, or werewolves, were "myths." Moriceau argues the confusion between wolf attacks and werewolves arose

³⁶ "Jenny Jeanotte Schindler 'LeCoont' French Stories. Turtle Mountain Reservation, North Dakota.," 6 NVPA.

³⁷ Jean-Marc Moriceau, *Histoire du méchant loup: 3000 attaques sur l'homme en France (XVe-XXe siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 184.

because of fears about the unknown and incomprehensible. French communities thought they were under assault by werewolves because their death counts noted in burial records were high in number, creating a trauma shared between parishes.³⁸ The werewolf narrative gave a justification to casualties that could not otherwise be accounted for in a moral sense.

According to historian Natalie Zemon Davis, twentieth-century scholars of popular religion in the Middle Ages shared an interdisciplinary tendency of “distinguish[ing] between beliefs and practices that are ‘truly’ religions and those which are ‘superstitious’ and/or ‘magical.’”³⁹ Interviews conducted in the 1950s with two Turtle Mountain men, descendants of Pembina bison hunters named Joseph Gourneau and Louis Marion, reported that “belief in the rugaru was well known in the Turtle Mountains[sic] but that they were thought of merely as folk creatures.”⁴⁰ Anthropologist James H. Howard recorded this information and automatically categorized LeRuGaRu in the realm of the fantastic and impossible. Howard’s understanding, much like the critique of popular religion articulated by Davis, underplays the functional roles the story holds for Metis families.

Associating the *loup-garou* with magic and sorcerers continues in the twenty-first-century historian’s analyses. Arguing against the veracity of werewolves, Jean-Marc Moriceau notes that many rural peasants that bore witness to werewolves allegedly saw

³⁸ Ibid., 312.

³⁹ Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion’, in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Edward Trinkaus and Heiko Augustinus Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 307. My study of lived religion is what Zemon-Davis describes as ‘functional’ (311) which means I consider the many uses for LeRuGaRu stories in the lives of Metis bison hunters.

⁴⁰ James H. Howard, ‘Notes on the Turtle Mountain Plains-Ojibwa and Metis - Joseph Gourneau and Louis Marion’, 23 October 1952, MS 10061 A61 Box 2, SHSND.

people covered in a wolf's skin.⁴¹ While this may have appeared odd in the setting of rural France, in North America buffalo callers and “taunters” wore wolf skins to frighten the herds. These runners needed to master the mannerisms of the animal they characterized to trigger the desired effect.⁴² It is therefore quite possible that someone skilled in this practice could frighten and attack people while embodying a wolf. *Canadien* narratives on the topic highlight the importance of Catholicism as a tool to liberate a person trapped in a werewolf's figure. Believers ask for deliverance while reciting the Lord's Prayer when they say, “deliver us from evil.” Studying werewolf stories from the perspective of lived religion brings forth new conclusions. Catholic beliefs and practices were presented as lessons from werewolf encounters. LeRuGaRu stories taught lessons passed down through Metis and *Canadien* families and contained information on behaviours, expectations, and consequences.

Catholic clergy referenced the folktale in their own publications. Werewolves appeared in French settler documents by 1662. The *Jesuit Relations* describing the previous year reported Father Claude Dablon's mention of a frightening illness plaguing some of the Innu accompanying him on an attempt to reach Hudson Bay. Possibly a windigo episode, this affliction triggered an alleged desire for human flesh. The author characterized the sick, “*comme de vrais loups-garous*.” The only cure from the disease was death, and the priest assures his audience he would not have continued on without certainty of the divine purpose for his voyage.⁴³ Another werewolf sighting was published on 14 July 1766 in the *Gazette de Québec*. The article reported an animal on a

⁴¹ Idem.

⁴² Thompson, *Red Sun: Gabriel Dumont The Folk Hero*, 31–38.

⁴³ Compagnie de Jésus, *Relation de ce qui s'est passé de plus remarquable aux missions des pères de la Compagnie de Jésus en la Nouvelle France, ès années 1660 et 1661*. (Paris: Sébastien Cramoisy, 1662), 15.

mission. From Kamouraska, located on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, it allegedly crossed the waterway northward to Québec City en route to Montréal. It was a dangerous creature, comparable to a wolf in France, called the “beast of Gévaudan,” which had 115 kills to its name.⁴⁴ *Loup-garou* sightings penetrated the North American interior with voyageurs employed in the fur trade. Since there was no regular clergy in the Red River region until 1818, and their influence remained limited before the decline of bison herds on the plains, little to no censure occurred of LeRuGaRu accounts. Church officials were not able to challenge LeRuGaRu’s veracity until after government machinations imposed sedentary lifestyles onto buffalo hunting polities much later in the nineteenth century. The werewolf denial strategy used in France eventually reached the Red River region. There, too, priests denied the existence of the beastly creature, even though the stories encouraged proper Lenten behaviours. By highlighting some continuity and change between Schindler’s account of LeRuGaRu and some of the most renowned published versions of sightings in French Canada we gain crucial insights about the Metis lived religion of Easter and some of its roots.

Pamphile Lemay’s *loup-garou*, first printed in 1896, centred on two important Catholic celebrations: marriage and Easter. The objective of the story told to children is to instruct them about practices and observances of the Catholic faith. The *tale* presents a clear negative consequence for failing to observe their churchly duty. To avoid turning into a werewolf, Catholics had to regularly confess their sins and celebrate Easter by taking communion at Mass. Missing their obligation for seven years in a row ensured the

⁴⁴ Massicotte E.Z., *Moeurs, coutumes & industries canadiennes-françaises* (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1913), 23–24. The attacks referenced in France, however, were by a wolf in Gévaudan (*la Bête du Gévaudan*), which allegedly killed up to 115 people between 1764 and 1767. See: «Chapitre V: La grande affaire "La Bête du Gévaudan (1764-1767)" in Jean-Marc Moriceau, *Histoire Du Méchant Loup*.

certainty of conversion from human to wolf form.⁴⁵ Le May's publication focuses on a young couple that was waiting for the passing of Easter so they could marry. The husband-to-be disappeared on the night before his wedding, causing much worry in the community. He returned at two in the morning injured and allegedly unaware of his own whereabouts, and could not remember how his wound came to be. The couple was able to marry the following day, as planned.⁴⁶ The man who disappeared in the night had missed Easter celebrations for seven consecutive years. He was transformed into a werewolf the evening before his wedding, but a family friend saved the groom from this predicament, by making a sign of the cross on his forehead, chest, and shoulders, before wounding the man-beast with a small pocketknife.⁴⁷ Both LeMay and Schindler's recollections precede Easter celebrations, and the trouble in both tales began with a lack of adherence to Catholic prescriptions. As in Schindler's version, the beast was delivered in Le May's account by the drawing of blood. It, too, had fiery red eyes. Both attacks involved sinners caught forsaking their religious obligations during Easter. Both the *loup-garou* and LeRuGaRu were repentant for their behaviour.

LeRuGaRu stories shared in the days leading up to Easter catered to specific audiences. The two tales emphasize the locality of the sighting of the *loup-garou*/LeRuGaRu, and both catered to the young. Matilda Poitra, a Turtle Mountain Reservation resident interviewed in 1989, reiterated that LeRuGaRu stories were told to children. She described the creature in question as "a ghost during Lent." When asked to

⁴⁵ Pamphile Lemay, *Contres vrais*, Seconde édition, revue et augmentée (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1907), 323.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 334.

⁴⁷ The 'sign of the cross' is when a Christian takes his or her hand and touches (in order) the forehead, chest, left and right shoulder. It symbolizes Christian belief and 'Strenghtens . . . in temptations and difficulties' Catholic Church and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II.*, ed. Libreria editrice vaticana (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 521.

elaborate, she added that LeRuGaRu “... was nobody, just the old folks used to have a, scare the young people like that so they wouldn’t run around at night. (laughs)”⁴⁸ *Loup-garou*/LeRuGaRu tales, then, continued to serve as a tool of behavioural modification well into the twentieth century, even in instances when one altered the content to cater to an adult audience.

Unlike the stories presented so far, Beaugrand’s *tale* addresses a group of lawyers in Montréal. Beaugrand’s *Le loup-garou*, first published in 1892, includes two distinct encounters with werewolves. In the first chronicle, a man and his son named Pierriche Biendamour stumbled onto a group of twenty-five werewolves while on a boat on the St. Lawrence River at Lac St. Pierre: “*C’était une ronde de loups-garous que le diable avait réunis pour leur faire boire du sang de chrétiens et leur faire manger de la viande fraîche.*”⁴⁹ The devil summoned a large pack of werewolves that were keenly feasting on Christian blood and meat. Upon discovery of the werewolf pack, the father told his son to get him his blessed palm, his shamrock, and to dunk bullets in holy water to ensure their victory over the beasts. The young man could not find his father’s four-leaf clover, and he spilled the holy water before dipping the ammunition as requested. The father’s first attempt to shoot the creatures began with a sign of the cross, followed by inserting pulverized dust from his blessed palm and the rounds provided by his son. It was unsuccessful. Cursing “*les maudits*” (the damned) the boy’s father tried again to shoot at the creatures, this time using his rosary as ammunition. The rosary beads made the werewolves sick and they dispersed immediately. The wolves were not killed, however,

⁴⁸ Nicholas C.P. (Collector) Vrooman, “French Language Narrative Matilda Poitra,” 23 March 1989, Nicholas Vrooman Private Collection.

⁴⁹ Beaugrand, *La chasse galerie : légendes canadiennes*, 43–44.

because the man's prayer beads were not yet blessed, they did not have the strength necessary to deliver the beasts.⁵⁰

Metis and *Canadien* Easter folktales share interwoven elements. Beaugrand emphasizes the importance of religious paraphernalia required for the protection of oneself against werewolves. He also points to the critical role of consecrated, or holy, items in both *Canadien* and Metis cultures.⁵¹ Beaugrand's first example differs from the other *loup-garou* stories examined to date since it occurred on *La Toussaint*, or All Saints' Day (November 1), instead of during Lent preceding Easter. Although the people who confronted werewolves in this instance were not caught in the act of sinning, Beaugrand wrote about the importance of regular confession required to avoid a similar experience.

Canayen renditions of the *loup-garou* tale reference women in a wholly different manner than the Metis versions. The author of *Légendes canadiennes* described a second werewolf encounter, once again from the perspective of Monsieur Brindamour, *père*. On this occasion, Mr. Brindamour was courting an Abenaki woman who was not Catholic. He arranged a date with her on a Sunday at midnight. This fact implies that Brindamour sought out an amorous relationship outside of a Catholic marriage. Instead of meeting the intended lady, a werewolf with fiery-red eyes attacked him. This time the protagonist believed he had to use his knife and draw blood from the beast in the form of a cross-

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44–46.

⁵¹ Sherry Farrell Racette, "Métis Women," Reference, *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, (May 30, 2016), http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/metis_women.html. Farrell Racette notes that Metis women's dress became increasingly distinct in the late nineteenth century with the adoption and wearing of large crosses as symbols of their faith. Although Farrell Racette does not talk about the nature of these crosses, obtaining a blessing for such ornamentation is common among Catholics and would give the wearer the assurance that the consecrated item possessed spiritual powers.

shaped wound to the forehead.⁵² Going far beyond this, though, Mr. Brindamour cut off the front paw of the animal lunging at him. He kept the creature's extremity as a memento. The next morning, the paw turned into a human woman's hand. Brindamour assumed it belonged to the Abenaki woman he attempted to court the night before. The woman in question was never seen again.⁵³ This turn of event moves far away from the parameters of *loup-garou* tales intended to create fear and discipline in children. It carries gendered and racialized undertones prevalent in settler society.

French Canadian folklore often associated Indigenous peoples, both men and women, with what folklorists described as “sorcerers.”⁵⁴ Although Beaugrand's rendition features a woman, it diverges into sensational violence against a specific woman and is a demonstration of a widespread settler *ethos* towards Indigenous women. Indeed, Beaugrand explains that the protagonist in this tale decided to pursue a “pagan woman” against the advice of many in his community. From this perspective, non-Christian Indigenous women were portrayed as somehow dangerous to white settlers. The hierarchies of personhood established in the Doctrine of Discovery explain in part the *Canadien* settler's worldview, in which lack of adherence to Christianity was equated with a lack of personhood and sovereignty.⁵⁵ The fear of nature represented in Beaugrand's work is also notable. Beaugrand shaped *Canadien habitants'* settler

⁵² Beaugrand, *La chasse galerie : légendes canadiennes*, 50.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁴ Jean-Claude Dupont and Jacques Mathieu, *Héritage de la francophonie canadienne: traditions orales* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1986) 110.

⁵⁵ Reid, “The Doctrine of Discovery and Canadian Law,” 342–43. According to Reid, “The Royal Proclamation thus established as a principle of English colonial law key features of the discovery doctrine dealing with issues of sovereignty, title, and commerce. It was intended as a legal instrument for mediating tensions between First Nations and expanding colonial settlements; but while it defined the limits of settler encroachment on Native land, its clear assertion that the territories in question were ultimately Crown “dominions” effectively removed the issue of sovereignty from the conversation about land rights and Aboriginal title.”

mentalities and discriminatory beliefs about Indigenous peoples and lands, and transmitted them to French Canadian society through his tale.

Contextualization of Beaugrand's legend alludes to the historical underpinnings of violence against Indigenous women and girls in a Canadian framework. The myth of sexually available Indigenous women longing for the attention of white European settlers, as portrayed in Beaugrand's second *loup-garou* story, reinforces present-day risk factors that encourage the propagation of violence against Indigenous women and girls.⁵⁶ The *Canadien* legacies of the *loup-garou*, then, are more loaded than just tales told to children to get them to comply with adult wishes. The historical background of LeRuGaRu is complex. The *loup-garou* simultaneously ensured conformity of religious prescriptions, and emphasized an alleged intellectual poverty among rural folk that claimed to have witnessed the creature. In popular publications, *loup-garou* tale like Beaugrand's provided contextual normalcy for the abuse of Indigenous women by settlers.

In every account surveyed for the purpose of this investigation, a man fought and defeated the werewolf. Each folktale associated Indigenous bodies with werewolves, even though the origin of the story is traceable to France. LeRuGaRu/*loup-garou* tales influenced the Lenten practices and beliefs of both *Canadien* and Indigenous peoples across North America. Historian Carolyn Podruchny's comparative study of werewolf and windigos stories, both prevalent among, and connected to, Indigenous nations via fur trade *engages* provides insight on how stories were transmitted through time and space. Stories sometimes blended together, creating new tales and folk realities amidst a diverse

⁵⁶ Native Women's Association of Canada, "Fact Sheet: Root Causes of Violence Against Aboriginal Women and the Impact of Colonization," 2015, 1, http://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Fact_Sheet_Missing_and_Murdered_Aboriginal_Women_and_Girls.pdf. Accessed 12 June 2016.

group of people. According to Podruchny, the legends shared via oral tradition informed voyageur cosmologies, and eased experiences of workplace hardships and dangers. *Loup-garou chronicles* survived among the buffalo-hunting descendants of the fur trade because they resonated with local Indigenous stories.⁵⁷ LeRuGaRu continues to be a key figure in Metis oral traditions to the present day.⁵⁸ The transformation of the *loup-garou* into *LeRuGaRu*, and the Metis rejection of the sexually available Indigenous woman trope in Metis renditions, exemplifies how the collective mind reclaimed and repurposed *Canadien* folklore to suit its needs. This historical example is one of many expressions of sovereignty by Metis families.⁵⁹ By appropriating elements of *loup-garou* stories for themselves, families shaped a cultural universe of storytelling that was chiefly Catholic, but markedly Metis. Transforming the *loup-garou* into *LeRuGaRu* was political.

As historian Nathalie Kermoal remarked, Lenten practices transcended the forbidding of dancing and card playing in the evenings. When priests were present, they imposed strict guidelines regarding everyday clothing and modesty. Believers avoided food and water after midnight on a day when Mass would take place. The faithful needed an empty stomach as a demonstration of devotion to welcome the body of Christ. In addition, they followed local prescriptions of their missionary, and later, parish priest, such as the nightly recitation of the rosary as indicated in Schindler's recollection.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁷ Carolyn Podruchny, "Werewolves and Windigos: Narratives of Cannibal Monsters in French-Canadian Voyageur Oral Tradition," *Ethnohistory* 51, no. 4 (2004): 677–700.

⁵⁸ Maria Campbell and Sherry Farrell Racette, *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, Rev. ed (Saskatoon, Sask: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2010).

⁵⁹ Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 144. Deloria argued for the total sovereignty of tribes, which includes cultural sovereignty, or the right to create, dictate and shape shared practices and beliefs.

⁶⁰ Catholic Church and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 350. Line 1387 states: "To prepare for worthy reception of this sacrament, the faithful should observe the fast required in their church. Bodily demeanour (gestures, clothing) ought to convey the respect, solemnity and joy of this moment when Christ becomes our guest." The length of the fast was determined at a local level. Kermoal (192) indicates that it began at midnight on the day communion is set to take place.

link between rosaries and the power to disperse werewolves in Beaugrand's story reminds us that the religious material culture of believers was powerful and served as tools of protection. It gave the children a reason that they could concretely understand to sit through the half-hour (minimum) nightly family recitations. Jenny Jeanotte Schindler added:

(...) we were told that [given LeRuGaRu warnings], and then we were told that we couldn't dance, we couldn't play cards, you know, things like that because they said our Lord suffered for forty days and he had all kinds of temptations when he was out in the desert alone, and we shouldn't be tempted with things, and whatever. We were, it was a time for prayer and a time for sacrificing...⁶¹

According to Lawrence Barkwell, Darren Préfontaine, and Anne Carrière-Acco, Metis men and women sometimes turned to sage to replace *les rameaux* or the blessed palms distributed the Sunday before Easter. Any substitute for palm branches used this appellation (rameaux). The same authors noted that "to ward off thunderstorms, it was a Metis tradition to throw a piece of Rameaux in the stove," revealing a power bestowed upon blessed bits of nature shared by Metis and *Canadien* believers. Catholic traditions incorporated traditional Indigenous medicines like sage and oak. They were potent tools whose powers were relied on well after the celebration of Easter Sunday.⁶²

On Good Friday, Metis families spent the day "in mourning" for Jesus's death by crucifixion. Children were told to "sit quietly, nobody was allowed to whistle or sing."⁶³ The silence encouraged reflection on Jesus's suffering. The day required fasting with no meat allowed whatsoever, as was the case for every Friday – a day of penance in the

⁶¹ "Jenny Jeanotte Schindler 'LeCoont' French Stories. Turtle Mountain Reservation, North Dakota.," 6 NVPA.

⁶² Barkwell et al., *Metis Legacy*, 2:198.

⁶³ "Jenny Jeanotte Schindler 'LeCoont' French Stories. Turtle Mountain Reservation, North Dakota.," 7 NVPA. Although LeRuGaRu stories were intended to dissuade the youth from breaking Lent guidelines, Jenny Jeanotte Schindler confessed that she broke the guideline on dancing at the age of seventeen to attend a St. Patrick's Day high school dance. Fearing the worst, Schindler concluded, "I came to the dance, but you know, the next morning, I checked my legs for I don't know how long because we were told that if we danced our legs would dry up. They'd shrivel up if we danced during Lent. (laughs)"

Catholic tradition. Water played a significant role in Metis peoples' lived religion of Easter. Nathalie Kermoal explains that women collected water on Easter morning in local rivers and streams and saved it in vials for their homes. The harvesting of Easter water took place before dawn and was collected against the current. Much like holy water, Easter water cured the sick and safeguarded the faithful against illnesses and dangers.⁶⁴ Catholics trust that holy water, representing the sacrament of baptism, is a renowned tool of protection for peoples' souls and bodies. Its use by laypeople penetrated every day life, well after the end of the Easter celebrations. Believers carried home holy water because, in addition to curing the sick, it offered protection. It was even sprinkled onto fields to encourage nature's bounty and lead to a successful growing season that ensured survival during the winter.⁶⁵

Canadien and Metis Catholics shared a belief in the medicinal properties of Easter water. Both believed the water collected could not be stagnant. It had to come from a stream or river. Some even approached the water source by walking backwards towards it. In French-speaking Manitoba, Easter water healed throat aches and protected people against bedbugs.⁶⁶ Because Metis people had limited provisions of holy water, they collected Easter water as a substitute. Easter water was laypeople's version of holy water and served essentially the same purpose. In the absence of priests, Easter water gave widespread access to bottled medicine saved for later use. While only men (Catholic priests) could bless holy water, women harvested Easter water. Easter water collection provided women them with a role of prominence in the springtime celebrations,

⁶⁴ Kermoal, *Un passé métis au féminin*, 192.

⁶⁵ Theiler Henry, *Holy Water and Its Significance for Catholics*, trans. Lang J.F. (New York: Fr. Pustet & Co., 1909), 45–46.

⁶⁶ Jean-Claude Dupont and Jacques Mathieu, *Héritage de la francophonie canadienne: traditions orales*, 41.

particularly in the absence of a missionary. Metis obedience of Lenten practices and Easter traditions exemplifies communally agreed upon rituals and understandings. Mutually reinforcing a Lenten habit created a common social sphere among Metis Catholics that eventually transcended into political realms.

This historical survey of the lived religion of Lent revealed the influences and legacies that penetrated the Red River region and helped develop distinct customs and beliefs surrounding the celebrations of Easter among buffalo hunters. For Metis people who identified as Catholics, LeRuGaRu Coonts reminded them of their obligation towards the institutionalized Church. Stories influenced the behaviour of youth. Although LeRuGaRu accounts from Turtle Mountain shared many similarities with iterations from Canada or France, the Metis tales about the monster lacked the patriarchal and racialized characteristics predominant in Euro-American worldviews. For Metis families participating in its obligations, Lent was a time of unity and prayer. Comparing the *Canadien* and Metis versions of the story traces the long-lasting legacies of colonialism. Its consequences continue into the present day, especially for Indigenous women in North America. In addition, LeRuGaRu tales show us that dismissing werewolves as inventions of active imaginations or uneducated minds is wholly reductive, and misses underlying political expressions of community life. In light of the historical evidence and context of the Metis hunters' lives, LeRuGaRu stories could very well ring "true." A person wearing a wolf's skin was not abnormal in the days of buffalo callers and taunters, since it was a common tactic to get the herds to move. Hunting tactics and buffalo lifeways influenced the Catholic Metis families came to adhere. Whereas the *Canadiens* anchored their four

religious seasons on Catholic ceremonies, Metis summers created spaces for devotion on seasonal bison hunts.⁶⁷

HUNTING WITH CHRIST: INVITING MISSIONARIES ON THE BUFFALO CHASE

After a year and half of continual Catholic missionary presence in the Red River region, priests realized their efforts were not as fruitful as anticipated. On 30 January 1820, Dumoulin reported that he and his colleague were having little success converting “*les sauvages*.” This terminology reflects a clear hierarchical perception of the communities he ministered. Whereas he spoke of “Métis” or “*Canadiens*” when referring to Catholic freemen, Indigenous relatives of Metis people that were not Christians were lumped together as “*les sauvages*.”⁶⁸ The following year, Catholic officials remarked that the old Metis and *Canadiens* were “very poor Christians.”⁶⁹ He did not mean that they were not practising Catholicism, but rather, that they were not abiding by all the prescriptions of institutionalized Catholicism. In an attempt to increase their own relevance in the eyes of their superiors, missionaries lamented their faithful’s departure from Red River during hunting seasons. Yet, soon after the missionaries’ arrival, brigade leaders invited the priests on their biannual rounds, a tradition that disappeared once the chase was no longer viable due to the depletion of bison on the North American plains.

There are diverging theories about the first, distinctly Metis, buffalo hunt.

According to historian J.M. Bumsted, the year 1820 marked the first “organized buffalo

⁶⁷ Dupont and Mathieu, *Héritage de la francophonie canadienne: traditions orales*, 14.

⁶⁸ For a comprehensive analysis of how missionary priests used ‘les sauvages’ and ‘les Métis’ and how these concepts changed over time as a permanent clergy presence implanted itself in the community of Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan see: Timothy P. Foran, “Les Gens de Cette Place” Oblates and the Evolving Concept of Métis at Île-à-La-Crosse 1845-1898” (Ph.D University of Ottawa, 2011) particularly Chapter 4: “Les gens de cette place. Oblates and the categorization of indigeneity at Île-à-la-Crosse” 198.

⁶⁹ Thomas Destroismaisons, “Théo Destoismaisons, St. Boniface, to Bishop Plessis, 3 January 1821.” Collection Belleau Microfilm 219 (reel 1) 162, SHSB.

hunt.”⁷⁰ Bumsted’s explanation fails to note that Metis people’s expeditions followed the regulatory principles their ancestors used from time immemorial. Archaeological evidence currently dates such expeditions to at least 11,000 BCE.⁷¹ The ancient tradition of collective bison hunting over the millennia would have included specialists in medicine who cultivated relationships with the land and its flora and fauna to help the community with its healing and subsistence objectives. Metis ancestors began chasing the buffalo in large parties with their kin before their numbers required them to lead their own bands. Historian Michel Hogue sees distinct Metis bison hunting political entities forming by the turn of the nineteenth century.⁷²

My attempt to pinpoint the start of documented Christian missionaries accompanying Metis families brings us to 1822. In a letter dated 1 September 1822, Joseph-Norbert Provencher reported that his colleague, Sévère Dumoulin, was north of Pembina, “*il suit les Bois Brûlés qui désertent presque entièrement le poste quand ils partent pour la chasse, étant obligés d’aller par grosses bandes pour se mettre à l’abri des insultes des Sioux...*”⁷³ Dumoulin accompanied hunters who travelled together to protect themselves from conflicts with “the Sioux.” Provencher provided no additional information on the whereabouts of the priest or their behaviour with the Metis. Dumoulin reported in September of that year that spiritual matters at the mission were prosperous, but temporal concerns were not as successful. Yet, Dumoulin advised his superior that wildfires burned on the prairies that summer and that buffalo meat would consequently be scarce in winter. Dumoulin’s presence in the brigade yielded sufficient bounty for the

⁷⁰ J. M. Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars: The Founding of Western Canada* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Pub, 1999), 242. Bumstead does not cite his source for this information.

⁷¹ E. James Dixon, *Bones, Boats & Bison: Archeology and the First Colonization of Western North America*, 1st ed (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).

⁷² Hogue, *Metis and the Medicine Line*, 20–21.

⁷³ Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 1 September 1822.” Belleau Collection, AA.

Metis hunters that season, and so began the tradition of Catholic priests heading out on *la prairie*, accompanying Metis people and their families on the chase.⁷⁴

The relationships forged between the missionary and chief of the Metis buffalo hunt - someone elected every year upon commencement of the biannual expeditions - fostered mutually beneficial outcomes. Although the seasonal rounds had long taken place without clergy, according to John Foster:

[the priest's] presence was sought with apparently no effort spared to encourage him to accompany the hunt. The significance of this relationship, however, extended beyond the bilateral welfare it brought the two participants. It embraced the Church and the community. For the Métis of the Upper Saskatchewan District, it may have played a critical role in the evolution of *une nation*...⁷⁵

The next chapters explore the legacies of the relationships built up between priests and Metis buffalo hunters from the 1840s to the 1870s. The life story of ChWeUm Davis, Turtle Mountain hunter and historian, reveals that Metis people turned to their Catholic faith to reinforce and build their collective political identity. Metis lived religion created multiple avenues for political expressions of sovereignty. The power over deciding who accompanied Metis families on hunting expeditions was one such example.

Metis families first opened their bison-hunting collectives to Reverend Father Sévère Dumoulin. Dumoulin's ties to Pembina spanned the years 1818 to 1823, when the Archbishop of Québec ordered his return home and the closing of the local mission recently opened with the money and labour of the community. Dumoulin facilitated the 1822 miracle that protected Pembina crops from the locust (see Chapter 1), beginning many memories of divine intervention in Metis lived Catholicism on the northern plains. Dumoulin accompanied Metis on the buffalo hunt, in part, because of the demonstrated

⁷⁴ Dumoulin, "Sévère Dumoulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 13 September 1822." Belleau Collection, AA.

⁷⁵ Foster, "Le Missionnaire and Le Chef Métis," 117.

protection his work offered the locals. Dumoulin's successes in catechizing at Pembina were rooted in tangible demonstrations of divine intervention among the faithful of Red River. Four years after summoning religious ministers for themselves, Metis hunters and their relatives began to bear witness to the powers of the clergy. The scientific and medical knowledge of the missionaries had concrete applications in the well-being of Metis expeditions. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Metis families invited clergymen along on their hunting expeditions only *after* they proved useful to the collective. Priests lamented their lack of success among other Indigenous nations and had obtained opportunity to learn the Indigenous political order on the northern plains from Metis perspectives via repeated invitations on the bison chase. Since Metis families came to important decisions, like choosing a captain of the hunt, via a majority vote, it stands to reason that invitations sent to clergymen were an expression of the common will shared by Metis families, and therefore, inherently political.

The immediate gains obtained by a priest's presence on the buffalo hunt were threefold. First, Church officials provided spiritual comfort, which was especially important when facing the danger of death since the faithful wanted to ensure their entry into heaven and believed in the role of last rites. Second, the medical knowledge of missionary priests healed ailments, treated ills, and mended bones. This contribution was complementary to the Metis men and women, versed in local pharmacopeia, who traditionally occupied these healing roles. An additional curative power was advantageous on dangerous hunting rounds. In addition to the benefits of connecting with someone possessing this skill set, Metis families that welcomed clergy on their expeditions gained a cultural intermediary to both confront settler incursions and help repel attacks by other Indigenous nations. After all, when Dumoulin and Provencher arrived in Red River in the summer of 1818, they read a pastoral letter from Bishop Plessis informing the

inhabitants they spoke directly to God on the community's behalf.⁷⁶ God could be of assistance in protecting their relatives and proceeds of the hunt from their enemies, as well as from challenges in the natural world. Finally, with a clergyman in their midst, Metis families could orchestrate and sanctify godparent relationships between newborns and godparents. Such relationships, in turn, mutually sustained spiritual connections embedded in the fur trade.

Pembina remained an important place of worship notwithstanding Church efforts to abandon the site. Ruth Swan called Pembina “the crucible of Metis culture because people who lived there later dispersed and took the culture with them all over the northwest.”⁷⁷ In so doing, Swan emphasizes that a confluence of events and structures influenced Metis departures from Pembina and the subsequent dissemination of Metis identity throughout the Northwest. Pembina was certainly a crucible for Metis lived religion. Once Catholic clergy became aware of the many faithful, including potential neophytes, south of the forty-ninth parallel, priests engaged the local community in efforts to erect a first mission. This marked a change from the Church's original plans to focus on St. Boniface (in present-day Winnipeg). Missionary correspondence indicates that Metis people continued to reside in Pembina and required the services of clergy throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Swan referred to White Horse Plain, founded in 1824 by Cuthbert Grant, west of Winnipeg, as “Pembina II” since many families migrated north to Grant's new settlement.⁷⁸ St. François Xavier II would have been equally appropriate, since the mission on the American side of the forty-ninth parallel lost its name when Catholic officials decided to transfer it to the site along the Assiniboine River.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Joseph-Octave Plessis' letter addressing the Red River colonists states “Regardez-les comme vos pères spirituels, chargés de vous parler de Dieu et de parler à Dieu pour vous.” Joseph-Octave Plessis, ‘Lettre pastorale de l'Évêque de Québec aux colons de la Rivière Rouge, 26 April 1818’ Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Document 1818 28, AA.

⁷⁷ Swan, “The Crucible,” 307.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁷⁹ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Bernard-Claude Panet, 6 June 1829.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1829 7 to 1829 9, AA.

Because of White Horse Plain's proximity to St. Boniface, clergy continued providing religious services there. Instead of thinking of Pembina as a "crucible," the node and network appellation applied to the Metis by Mike Evans et al. in their exploration of kinship connections in British Columbia fits our analytical focus and methodological approach.⁸⁰ Pembina connects to other Metis communities via traceable, interconnected, family relationships that spanned a vast geographic area: from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to the interior along the Saskatchewan River, east to the Forks of the Red and Pembina rivers, south to the Missouri River, west to Willamette in Oregon, and north to Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories. Social network analysis (SNA) allows historians to visually represent the ties that bind Pembina into a broad cogent community spanning the whole of the northern plains.

⁸⁰ Mike Evans, Jean Barman, and Gabrielle Legault et al. "Métis Networks in British Columbia," in *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility and History*, edited by Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall, 331-67 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 334.

Despite the 1823 departure of European interests from the region, 300 people returned to Pembina from the buffalo hunt that August.¹ Many Metis families chose to stay in the vicinity of Pembina, and remained there until the reopening of the church site in 1848 by Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt. For decades after the 1820s, the Pembina River continued to serve as a meeting place for hunters who joined forces and travelled farther west to the Missouri River's banks and beyond as they sought out *la vache*.² Following Dumoulin's departure, Father Richard Destroismaisons proceeded to Pembina and accompanied Metis families on their expeditions between 1823 and 1827, providing part-time missionary care. Reverend Father John Harper alternated between hunts and Pembina between 1822 and 1831.³ A more detailed analysis on the role of priests on the chase and the Metis lived religion that sustained them is featured in Chapter 3 in the context of the Battle of Grand Coteau (1851).

Bison hunters were continually at the mercy of nature. In 1826, a flood interrupted missionary activities and regular church services. Since the region was already suffering from famine due to a poor winter hunt, the high waters transformed the demographic landscape for the worse. Weather made settlers leave the Selkirk Colony and hunters retreated to the buffalo hunt and away from their farms on the riverside. In a letter dated 15 July 1826, Joseph-Norbert Provencher reported that the Red River's waters rose by thirty or forty feet above its normal level. Five feet of water flooded the church and presbytery. Provencher wrote that the event

¹ William H. Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River, Lake Winnepeek, Lake of the Woods Performed in the Year 1823 by Order of the Hon. J.C. Calhoun, Secretary of War, under the Command of Stephen H. Long, U.S.T.E.*, vol. 2 (London: Geo. B. Whittaker, 1825), 44.

² Louis-François Richer Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851.," in *Rapport sur les Missions du Diocèse de Québec (Mars 1853)*, 10 (Québec: Presses à Vapeur d'Augustin Côté, 1853), 18. Laflèche's letter attests that the White Horse Plain hunters, whom he was accompanying on their summer hunt, met the Metis buffalo hunting brigades of St. Boniface and of Pembina on the banks of the Pembina River in June 1851. This is only one of countless examples of the continued importance of the Pembina area to Metis buffalo hunters, reinforcing its role as a hub for Metis mobility and cultural affirmation.

³ "Assumption of the B.V.M Pembina, N. Dak.," 1908, 2, Catholic Church, Diocese of Fargo Records MSS 10366 Reel 602, SHSND.

created a spiritual drought lasting eight weeks, during which the priests were unable to hold Mass in the chapel until they completed repairs.⁴ Months before the unexpected exodus, the Bishop of St. Boniface requested that the British Parliament facilitate the trip of Catholic clergy on HBC canoes, a privilege once commonly granted to them. He also asked for the re-establishment of the Pembina mission, even though it fell on American soil after the Convention of 1818.⁵

As the settler presence increased in the early nineteenth century, so too did settler-imagined territorial divisions. Missionary priests from St. Boniface were increasingly prevented from offering regular religious services to the people near Pembina due to ever complex settler borders and administrative divisions. Such creations set in motion behaviours that justified, motivated, or discouraged priests' actions. The bishop of St. Boniface's authority did not cross into Pembina territory, which fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Louisiana at that time.⁶ After 1823, institutional Church and political powers like the British-controlled HBC actively prevented clergy from regularly crossing the Medicine Line. While Metis families in Pembina requested continued Catholic services, outside forces interrupted their religious devotion.

Missionaries continued to accept the invitation of Metis families, instead of lamenting their departure for the hunt. Father Harper accompanied buffalo hunters – likely the Pembina, St. Boniface, and White Horse Plain brigades – for two months during the summer hunt of 1828. Provencher lamented that his underling spent his time “*sans faire grand bien.*” Harper allegedly did not “do much good” that summer. Metis families occupied by the bison chase, Harper argued, could not be taught all of the Church's prescriptions, prayers, and history required for adult baptism. Provencher hoped Harper would have more success instructing Metis families at their

⁴ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 15 July 1826.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1826-12, AA.

⁵ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph-Octave Plessis, 2 February 1826.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1826 4 to 7, AA.

⁶ “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Bernard-Claude Panet, 31 January 1827.” Belleau Collection Reel 1, Doc 1827-4 to 1827-5, AA.

wintering site at White Horse Plain than he did whilst on the hunt. He foresaw that brigade members would likely have more time to listen to the missionary within the confines of winter settlements. Provencher praised Harper for teaching Catholic values to women and girls. While on the long summer expeditions, women and young children stayed near the encampment, reflecting gendered labour division in the buffalo hunt, and listened to the priest.⁷ In the fall of 1828, White Horse Plain families and Father Harper held religious services in the chapel they built with local resources. St. François Xavier also housed a boy's school supervised by a former fur trade clerk.⁸ That same year Angélique and Marguerite Nolin, sisters from Pembina whose father had fur trade ties to the Great Lakes, left their family.

These two Métis women opted to become educators for their community after their father's passing. They headed to St. Boniface at Provencher's request to open and operate a girls' school in January 1829.⁹ Women like the Nolin siblings sought out positions of leadership for themselves in Metis lived Catholicism. The St. Boniface clergy had asked for their services for years. Delaying the invitation each time, Angélique and Marguerite Nolin finally travelled north only after the death of their father. Angélique Nolin's work in St. Boniface with Georges-Antoine Belcourt was essential in the development of Belcourt's Sauteux (Saulteaux or *Anishinaabemowin*) grammar. This book became the standard study tool of missionaries penetrating the Red River region in the 1830s.¹⁰ In 1831, an increasingly institutionalized Church

⁷ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, "Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Bernard-Claude Panet, 18 June 1828." Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1828 9 to 11, AA. See also: Émilie Pigeon and Carolyn Podruchny, 'The Mobile Village: Looking Beyond Patriarchal Myopia in Nineteenth-Century Plains Metis Bison Brigades', in *Unrest, Violence, and the Search for Social Order in Early Canada*, ed. Elisabeth Mancke et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Forthcoming).

⁸ Provencher, "Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Bernard-Claude Panet," 6 June 1829. Belleau Collection, AA.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Georges-Antoine Belcourt, "Georges-Antoine Belcourt to Joseph Signay, 17-18 December 1834." Belleau Collection Reel 1, Doc 1834 17 to 18, AA; Georges-Antoine Belcourt, *Principes de la Langue des Sauvage appelés Sauteux* (Québec:Imprimerie de Fréchette & Cie., 1839).

and a growing network of Metis laypersons worked collectively to ensure the propagation of the faith among their relatives.

DAVIS FAMILY CATHOLICITY IN THE 1830S

The expansion of institutionalized Catholicism among Metis communities by the 1830s marked the religious landscape of Jean-Baptiste Davis and “Betsey” Josephte Mijakammikijikok La Saulteuse, future grandparents of ChWeUm Davis. When Red River census takers interrogated the family about its members and belongings in 1831, the historical record created from that interaction noted the head of the household was forty-six years old. Davis lived with his spouse, two sons under sixteen, one daughter over fifteen, and two daughters under fifteen. The seven of them shared one house, two cows, three calves, four pigs and one canoe, all on three acres of land.¹¹ Many Metis remained affiliated with the Pembina region in the 1820s and 1830s, even though the missionary presence there was sporadic then. Those who decided to remain south of the Medicine Line did so to combat the famine, flooding, and the hardship that motivated emigration from the Red River colony. The increasing encroachment of the HBC on the financial gains of free traders alongside growing American commercial opportunities encouraged many Metis to remain in the vicinity of the mission erected by Father Dumoulin in 1818. Others decided to try to continue making their living farther north, in closer proximity to Selkirk settlers. Among the latter was Jean-Baptiste Davis.

Davis was born in what is now Canada circa 1785. Between 1830 and 1843, census takers repeatedly enumerated Jean-Baptiste’s religious affiliation as Catholic.¹² Jean-Baptiste and Josephte had three children who would become especially important in ChWeUm Davis’s

¹¹ Morin, *Censuses of the Red River Settlement*, 49.

¹² *Ibid.*, 50.

kinship network: Jean-Baptiste “Boin-ence” born in 1819; William *Kug-kay-dway-wash-kung* Davis born in 1823; and Catherine born in 1832.¹³ The Red River census of 1832 listed a Red River cart among the possessions of the Davis family. The following year, they had a stable and five acres to their name.¹⁴

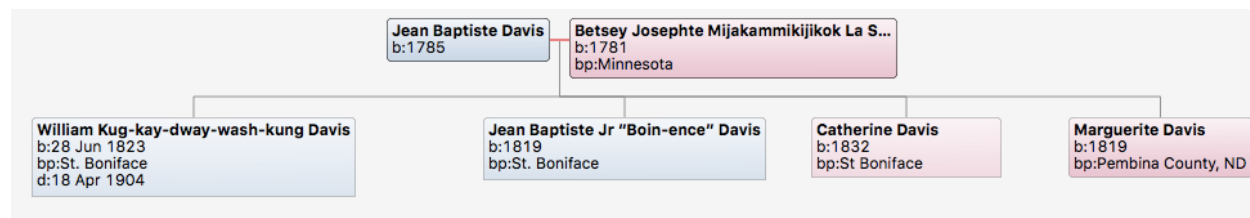


Image 2.3: Jean-Baptiste Davis, Josephte La Sauteuse and their children.¹⁵

The Davis family spent the 1830s working in agriculture and hunting, as evidenced by their possessions listed in the 1830 census data. The material culture recorded by census takers indicates they tended farmland in St. Boniface and raised a few animals. The Davis family remained mobile with a canoe, which enabled them to travel throughout the surrounding riverine territory, following seasonal rounds of hunting and agriculture. They traversed the land with their kin. After packing up their relatives and personal items, they headed out on the bison chase with their Red River cart. The mobility of Metis expeditions ensured their faith and its practices spread

¹³ There is considerable debate on the first name of ChWeUm Davis’ grandfather. His identity was listed as ‘David Davis,’ born in 1795 (ID 1044 in Table 1) in Sprague and Frye’s 1893 genealogy compendium. He is identified as ‘David’ in the St. Ann Centennial book published in Turtle Mountain, although this ‘David’ was born in 1773 in Upper Canada (314). Catherine Davis, Jean-Baptiste’s daughter, indicated that her father’s name was ‘Jean Baptiste, a French Canadian’ in her application for land or scrip in Manitoba. Consequently, since Catherine would have been the closest to the head of the family, and deducing from the few of Jean-Baptiste Davis present on the Red River census of the 1830s, it would appear that the information published both Sprague & Frye (1983) and the Turtle Mountain Centennial (1985) is incorrect. Catherine Davis was identified as ChWeUm’s aunt in his diaries, in which her nephew recorded the golden and diamond wedding anniversaries of his aunt Antoine Eno dit Canada in 1900 and 1910. Historian Lawrence Barkwell states that ChWeUm’s grandfather was called Jean Baptiste here:

<http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/14681> (Accessed April 23, 2016.) To view Catherine Davis’ application to Manitoba scrip of land, see: http://metisnationdatabase.ualberta.ca/MNC/Manitoba_Affidavit.jsp?recordId=622&recordTypeRaw=0004MA (Accessed April 23, 2016)

¹⁴ Morin, *Censuses of the Red River Settlement*, 49.

¹⁵ The persons represented in this image have primary source data attached to them. There may be missing persons in this representation that did not enter the limited scope of the documentary search undertaken for this dissertation.

far and wide throughout the North American prairies. Missionaries Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers stumbled onto Catholic believers and their descendants in 1838. As Blanchet and Demers attempted to reach “Columbia Country” via the North Saskatchewan River, they met Indigenous people whose Metis relatives previously instructed them in rituals and practices of the Catholic religion.¹⁶

While the Catholic faithful at Pembina partook in Church celebrations as they became available, the petition of 1823 presented in the previous chapter reminds us they remained unsatisfied in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Metis believers and their relatives elsewhere on the northern plains shared similar dissatisfaction. In addition to the penetration of secular clergy via the Red River route, a sustained Jesuit presence in the American West increased the availability of major Catholic sacraments for Metis people – such as baptism, confirmation and marriage. Although banned by the Holy See between 1773 and 1814, American Jesuits eventually settled in the Rocky Mountains, spilling onto the Northern Plains in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

As was the case for the Red River region, Indigenous laypeople laid the ground work for Catholicism’s institutional appearance west of the prairies. Jesuit Father Lawrence Palladino wrote in 1922 that Catholicism found its way into the Rocky Mountains via voyageurs from *Kahnawà: ke* (Kahnawake, Mohawk Territory). The *Kanien’kehá:ka* (Mohawk) remained where their *engagé* contracts took them and married with the Salish people of the Flat Head nation between 1812 and 1820.¹⁸ Metis hunters and traders began to live part-time in the region in the early 1810s because of their links to the North West and Pacific Fur companies. Intermarriage

¹⁶ Foster, “Le Missionnaire and Le Chef Métis,” 119–20.

¹⁷ Bertrand M. Roehner, “Jesuits and the State: A Comparative Study of Their Expulsions (1590–1990),” *Religion* 27, no. 2 (April 1997): 167–68.

¹⁸ L.B. Palladino S.J., *Indian and White in the Northwest: A History of Catholicity in Montana 1831 to 1891*, 2nd Edition (Lancaster: Wickersham Publishing Company, 1922), 8–9.

solidified commercial relationships among families of the Bitterroot Valley in what is now Montana. The Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Plateau collectively requested the presence of Catholic priests beginning in 1831. A total of four deputations made their way east to St. Louis to return with a “black robe.” The second attempt comprised a party of four.¹⁹ Among them was a *Kanien'kehá:ka* voyageur named Old Ignace La Mousse, a band leader whose devotion to Catholicism was transmitted to Salish peoples through kinship links and regular catechizing. Old Ignace instructed his brethren, “the principal truths and precepts of Christianity, the sign of the Cross, the Lord’s Prayer, and other practices of Catholic devotion.”²⁰ Old Ignace’s adherence to the religion continued when, in the summer of 1835, he accompanied a delegation of Flatheads to St. Louis where both his sons were baptized. La Mousse asked Bishop Joseph Rosati of St. Louis, the spiritual superior of Pembina, for a priest for his relatives. His request went unanswered. Old Ignace La Mousse was killed two years later on a third attempt to obtain a missionary.

In 1839, on a fourth attempt to secure a clergyman, the Salish peoples sent a party of two: Young Ignace and Pierre Gaucher. The pair met Jesuit Father Pierre Jean De Smet at Council Bluffs. They asked that De Smet aid their people, requesting his presence in the Bitterroot Valley so they too could access Catholic rituals and practices.²¹ De Smet wrote the two believers a letter of recommendation for Bishop Rosati in St. Louis, and sent them on their way. Jesuits began work in the region shortly thereafter.²²

In March 1840, the Salish warriors that requested De Smet’s presence escorted him over the prairies to Salish Territory in present-day Montana. More Jesuits priests soon followed.²³ The next year, St. Mary’s Mission in the Bitterroot Valley became another node in a network of

¹⁹ See Chapter 3 “A Romance of an Indian Mission” in Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J. 1801-1873*, 1:19–30.

²⁰ Palladino, *Indian and White in the Northwest: A History of Catholicity in Montana 1831 to 1891*, 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

²² Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J. 1801-1873*, 1:30.

²³ Wilfred S.J. Schoenberg, *Jesuits in Montana 1840-1960* (Portland, Oregon, 1960), 8–9.

worship accessible to Metis people.²⁴ By then, Metis hunters that requested clergy less than twenty years prior found themselves surrounded by a diversity of Catholic officials. As Jesuits settled in the Rocky Mountains and its foothills, they also quickly became involved in the lived religion of Metis buffalo hunters seeking missionary services.

Meanwhile, *Canadien* voyageurs and Metis alike continued to transmit their Catholicism as they travelled down rivers that criss-crossed the Great Plains or passed by on Red River cart trails. Catholic priests regularly employed *Canadien* voyageurs or Metis as guides and means of transport for their catechizing efforts. Consequently, missionaries believed they were in a position to closely oversee the practices of their spiritual charges. In reality, however, the power relationship was not yet one of dominance by the colonizers since the clergy could not survive without the protection and assistance of their hired men. Nevertheless, priests en route to fur trade outposts imposed a schedule of twice-daily prayer when on land, and constant religious songs, be they hymns or litanies that required a response from voyageurs, while in canoe.²⁵ Voyageur Catholic cultural mores spread upon rivers in the 1830s, when the HBC hired “trip men” on York boat brigades that supplied pemmican and other wares to fur trade outposts. As Gerhard Ens explains, these brigades were endogamous to the HBC’s commercial realm, formed by recruiting descendants of fur traders deemed well adapted to becoming intermediaries between their employer and Indigenous nations.²⁶

As Roman Catholic institutionalization grew on the Great Plains, Metis men, women, and children increasingly appeared in the religious records of the Church. Few sacramental documents of St. Boniface escaped the 1860 fire that destroyed much of the historical data on parish life. Still, hundreds of baptisms, marriages, and burials covering the years between 1825

²⁴ Ibid., 12.

²⁵ Marcotte, “Intempérance et piété chrétienne,” 67.

²⁶ Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 43.

and 1834 survived the blaze, preserved via hand-written copies of the damaged originals. These documents comprise some of the major data sets at the core of the social network analysis and genealogical reconstructions found throughout this dissertation. The salvaged register transcribed by Antoine Champagne, conserved in the Société historique de Saint-Boniface's library, provided key insights on the Catholic affiliations of the Davis hunters and their kin during the first half of the nineteenth century. A central aspect of Catholicism, according to scholars of religion, includes the reliance on priests to give them sacraments and mark the major events of life. These sacraments unified the family unit through the ritual of ceremony.²⁷ Metis people came together to participate in church-led celebrations of birth, love, and to memorialize the passage from one stage of life to another.

For instance, on 15 November 1829, Augustin Wilkie, son of Jean-Baptiste Wilkie and Amable Azure, was baptized in St. Boniface at the age of five. Father François Boucher, a new transplant to St. Boniface from Saint-François-de-Beauce, Québec, officiated the sacrament only three months after his ordination by the Bishop of St. Boniface, Joseph-Norbert Provencher.²⁸ The priest performed the ceremony under condition, which means the clergyman believed the neophyte could have previously received a baptism by laypeople. Augustin's godparents, Martin Jerome and Marguerite Nolin, thus sponsored the child into the Roman Catholic faith, which ensured an upbringing with the proper teachings, practices, and rituals associated with the stages of life in the Church.²⁹ Generally, the faithful performed lay baptisms on their children when there was no possibility for seeking the blessing from a priest. Midwives, fathers, and prominent

²⁷ Bonnet and Raison du Cleuziou, *Défense Du Catholicisme Populaire*, 22–23.

²⁸ Société historique de Saint-Boniface, "François Boucher," *Au Pays de Riel*, Accessed 21 February 2016, http://shsb.mb.ca/Fran%C3%A7ois_Boucher_SHSB055.

²⁹ Antoine Champagne, "Anciens registres de Saint-Boniface sauvés de l'incendie de 1860" (Saint-Boniface, Man, 1834 1825), 20, SHSB.

community members alike conferred the first sacrament to save a newborn.³⁰ The process ensured that if an infant died before being able to formally receive the religious ritual that binds the baby with a Catholic family, they would not be trapped in limbo (a state between heaven and hell).³¹

Metis people on the Great Plains participated in sacraments with increasing regularity in the 1830s. Some were busy catching up with the calendar of rituals and ceremonies to which they did not previously have access, since these ceremonies had to take place in a specific sequence. In other words, one could not marry a Catholic (in the eyes of the Church) without first being baptized, for instance. An attempt to catch up on lost sacraments saw the baptisms of two sixteen-year-olds: Louise Chalifoux, daughter of Michel Chalifoux and Isabelle Collin; and Geneviève Gladue, daughter of Charles Gladue and Marguerite Ross. On the same day, 4 April 1833, Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt baptized two babies, as indicated in St. Boniface's baptismal records.³² Following her baptism, Louise Chalifoux was thence ready for marriage, though it did not take place immediately, nor was it at the same place as her baptism. On 10 January 1841, Louise wed Jean-Baptiste Trottier, son of André Trottier and Marguerite Paquette dit St-Denis, at St. François-Xavier, White Horse Plain (also known as Grantown), in what later became known as Manitoba. The distance between the two sites of the Catholic ceremony in Louise Chalifoux's life attests to a newfound diversity of options for Metis people seeking the sacraments.

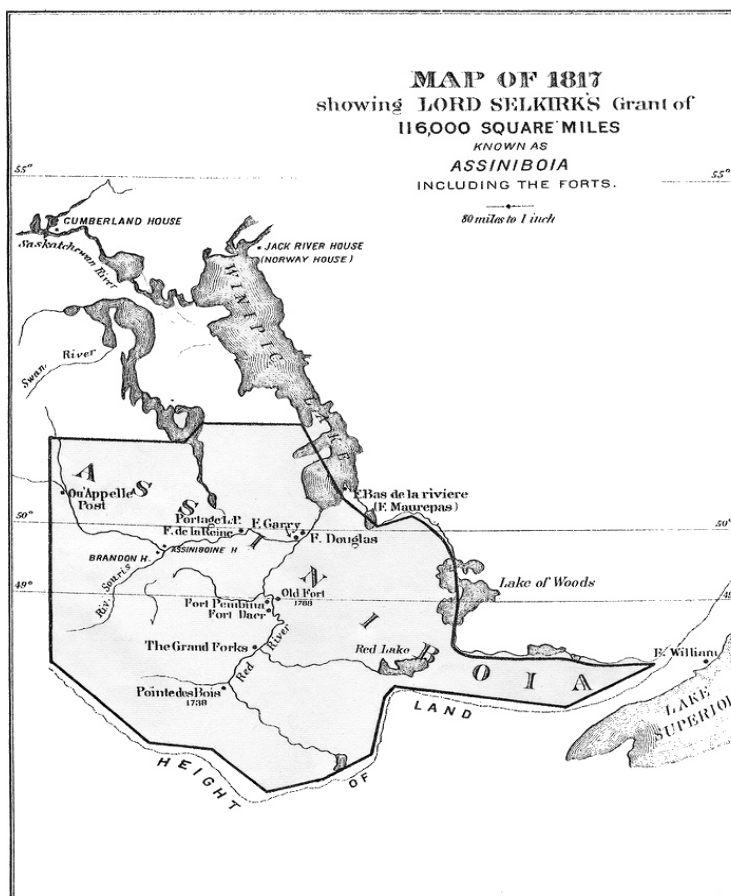
³⁰ The Catechism has a short formula for lay baptism that all believers can learn and use if need be. See: Archidiocèse de Québec, *Le grand Catéchisme de Québec à l'usage de toute la province ecclésiastique de Québec.*, 120.

³¹ The Catholic Church decided to abandon their belief in limbo when the International Theological Commission issued a statement in 2007. The souls trapped in limbo for 800 years were able to ascend to heaven when it was ascertained that such a state for newborns was not reflective of Jesus's teachings. For more information on the renunciation of limbo, see "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptised." Accessed 20 January 2016. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html. For more information on lay baptisms and conditional baptisms and their role in the fur trade, see Émilie Pigeon. "Vernacular Catholicism and the Fur Trade: Baptisms at Fort Michilimackinac, 1741-1786." 105–24.

³² Champagne, "Anciens registres de Saint-Boniface sauvés de l'incendie de 1860," 52.

The St. Boniface to St. François-Xavier parish migration indicated that population movements were happening, as the HBC was increasingly able to enforce its trade monopoly in the Red River region. In the years that followed the 1821 merger of the NWC and HBC into a single conglomerate of state-sponsored colonialism, the reinvigorated monopoly yielded jurisdictional powers unparalleled in colonial contexts. Blessed with a state-legitimized claim to the control of territory for the purpose of commerce, the HBC forever changed the livelihood of Indigenous peoples whose sovereignty over traditional lands was under threat as they produced so-called staples.

Image 2.4 Map of 1817 Showing Lord Selkirk's Grant³³



A decade earlier, in 1811, legislators assembled in London, England, to enact the provisions required to grant Thomas Douglas, the Earl of Selkirk, “the Upper Winnipeg Basin, to be known as Assiniboia, in absolute proprietorship.”³⁴ Bumsted called this process, “the basis for European settlement of the Canadian Prairie.”³⁵ Since the land transfer occurred without consultation of Indigenous peoples, it explicitly condoned dispossession of Indigenous nations by the British Crown with the Doctrine of Discovery, following the parameters set in the Royal Proclamation of 1763.³⁶ British interests chose the location for the Selkirk Settlement based on

³³ George Bryce, ‘The Five Forts of Winnipeg’, *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, CIHM 09753, 1885, 135–45. Plate III Map of Selkirk's Grant Sec II.

³⁴ Morton, *Manitoba*, 45.

³⁵ Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars*, 9.

³⁶ Reid, “The Doctrine of Discovery and Canadian Law,” 342–43.

ancient Indigenous patterns of settlement and land usage. This was an advantageous rendezvous site because of its simultaneous proximity to prairie and woodland ecology. The space, occupied for at least 6000 years prior to British interest in it, has a long social and political history.

Indigenous people relied on the bison ecosystem there, while maintaining access to game and plants predominant in denser forested areas. Moreover, Red River residents, situated at the fork the Red and Assiniboine rivers, lived in the heart of the North American continent, thus in the midst of Indigenous trade routes.³⁷ Nehiyaw, Anishinaabe and Nakoda peoples cohabited and intermarried in the Red River region, forming polyethnic bands.³⁸ Some bands developed kinship links to European descendants working in the fur trade. In the 1730s, French traders opened a fort in the area, solidifying their presence in the territory. In the decades that followed, European disease transformed the demographics of the river basin, shifting the balance of power until newcomers could install a permanent settler population in the region.

Selkirk settlers, originally a group of thirty-six Scottish and Irish labourers dispatched in 1811 that dwindled to eighteen by the following summer, the Selkirk settler numbers increased in quantity until triggered profoundly transformative changes to the livelihoods of local Indigenous populations. By 1818, the number of settlers at Red River had grown to 419, most of whom were seeking river access and acres to toil.³⁹ The Selkirk Settlement expanded to 2,247 people by 1831, and then doubled in size by the mid 1840s. This demographic increase created additional draws on natural resources needed to survive in the region, such as wild game, fish, and wood.⁴⁰

³⁷ Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 62–70.

³⁸ See discussions on the Cree-Assiniboine (*Nehiyaw Pwat*) confederacy in: Robert Alexander Innes, *Elder Brother and the Law of the People: Contemporary Kinship and Cowessess First Nation* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013).

³⁹ Morton, *Manitoba*, 46, 61.

⁴⁰ Irene M. Spry “The Tragedy of the Loss of the Commons” in Ian A. L. Getty and Antoine S. Lussier, eds., *As Long as the Sun Shines and Water Flows: A Reader in Canadian Native Studies*, Nakoda Institute Occasional Paper, no. 1 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), 208.

Settlers competed with Indigenous peoples for space. Newcomers squatted on land that had yet to be formally granted to the state and defended their claims with their numbers and violence. By overwhelming the region with settlers in later decades of the nineteenth century, colonial government and mercantile elites combined their interests to give the Canadian settler project legitimacy, by overwhelming the region with settlers in later decades of the nineteenth century. Metis hunters, in response, moved away from these new centres of state power and opted to maintain their liberty.

Most freemen and their families were increasingly unable to participate in the fur trade under terms advantageous to them in proximity to the Red River colony. Threatened by the violence of settler colonialism and by poor yields in farming, many Metis hunters moved away from the enforcement methods of the HBC and its Council of Assiniboia (created to manage Rupert's Land) in hopes of escaping its state-sanctioned dispossession. As the Selkirk Settlement swelled with European and Euro-American immigrants, Metis men and women experienced "push factors" (reasons to emigrate) from the settlement at Red River. Metis buffalo hunters found themselves increasingly unable to exist as "*hommes libres*," or freemen, in a society that imposed and policed rules, regulations, and values from the top down. This change forced some to move beyond the reaches of colonial subjugation for as long as possible.⁴¹

Government policies and the corporations they sponsored hindered Metis profits. Historian Gerhard Ens remarks that the HBC actively prevented what they considered illicit trade from doing too much damage to its own gains. The HBC did this through a variety of

⁴¹ One way in which the state and its regulations were imposed and transformed Metis society was the imposition of monogamous, heterosexual marriages on the Great Plains. Sarah Carter published a compelling study of this transformation resulting from the settler-colonial policies in 2008. See: *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008).

enforcement methods.⁴² While push factors north of the forty-ninth parallel convinced some to move away from the Red River colony, law-making processes on the American side of the line increased socioeconomic difficulties for Metis hunters and traders. First created in 1790 and renewed by the United States Congress ever since, The Indian Intercourse Act of 1834 hampered Metis people's subsistence south of the Medicine Line. The second section of the Act explicitly prohibited the trade of goods with Indigenous peoples by those without a licence. The cost for such a licence could not exceed \$5,000, and seldom fell below this amount.⁴³ For Metis people relying on trade for their economic survival, the high cost of permits, now \$4,000 more expensive than they were in 1790, put them of reach.

Since manifesting interest in western colonization, the United States government regarded the Metis as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, depending on the circumstances. At times, Metis families entered into a treaty with the American state as relatives of nations included into such agreements. In other instances, American lawmakers affirmed that Metis people were the product of so-called miscegenation, or the mixing of races, and therefore not "fully" Indigenous. Deeply affecting the economic and political dynamic at play, the 1834 Indian Intercourse Act states, "That no licence to trade with the Indians shall be granted to any persons except citizens of the United States."⁴⁴ This clause meant that Metis people, because they were considered Indigenous at the time and therefore, non-citizens could not access trade licences, even if they raised the \$5,000. Although treaties between the United States government and Indigenous peoples sometimes included provisions for those it called "half-breeds," such agreements automatically created a legal, cultural and geographic division between Indigenous polities. The

⁴² Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 30.

⁴³ 23rd Congress, 1st Session, 1834, "An Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse with the Indian Tribes, and to Preserve Peace on the Frontiers," in *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 - 1875*, Statutes at Large (Washington DC: United States Congress, 1834), 729.

⁴⁴ 23rd Congress, 1st Session, 1834, "An Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse with the Indian Tribes, and to Preserve Peace on the Frontiers."

1821 Fond du Lac (Lake Superior) treaty dispenses tracts of land for “half-breed” relatives of the Chippewa. In contrast, the 1828 treaty between the Chippewa at St. Peter’s River and the American government stipulated that the sum of \$100, 000 would be divided among “Chippewa half-breeds.”⁴⁵ The 1836 Treaty of Washington between the Chippewa and Ottawa nations and United States, ensured the “half-breed relatives” of those who signed treaty did not gain access to a reservation with their kin. Instead, Metis people included therein that were not listed as treaty recipients elsewhere would receive payment that extinguished their territorial claims to the upper and lower peninsulas of present-day Michigan.⁴⁶

The biography of Pembina chief Jean-Baptiste Wilkie attests to the impact of European and Euro-American settlers on the Metis ways of life. Wilkie operated a horse ranch in the 1820s at the site of present-day St. Vital, now a Winnipeg borough. He also served in the Red River Volunteers of 1835, a group of men who formed a local militia to protect the colony and its assets. Wilkie invested time, effort, and earnings in the Red River region. He collaborated with Catholic officials and facilitated the transmission of Catholicism to his children through the sacrament of baptism. Like many other Metis, Wilkie eventually deemed it more advantageous to move his kin away from the increasingly prohibitive terms set by the HBC.⁴⁷ As buffalo hunting families and polities reacted to the effects of settler colonialism on the territory they shared with their relatives, many continued to turn to the Catholic Church in times of happiness and sorrow.

Wilkie built tangible links to Church officials. Families needed access to religious services to ensure their spiritual well-being. Clergy, in turn, gained entry into Metis mobile

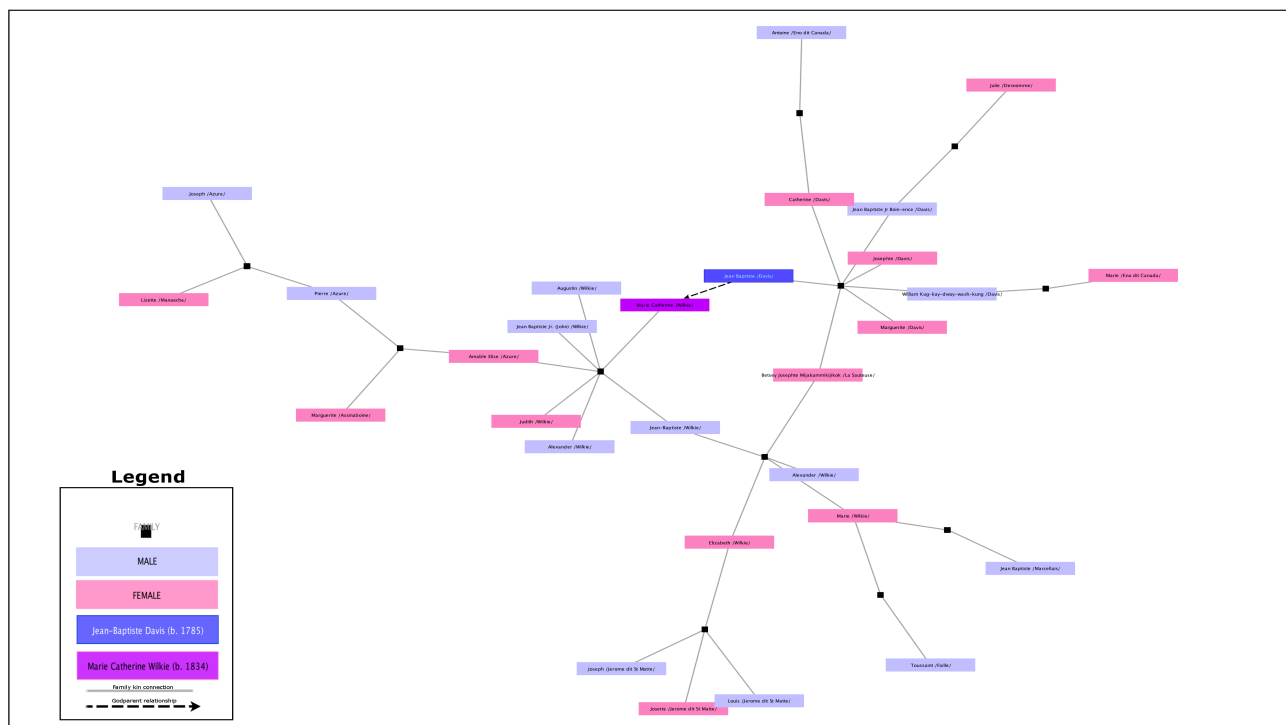
⁴⁵ United States Congress, *A Compilation of All the Treaties between the United States and the Indian Tribes Now In Force as Laws* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1873), 144, 150.

⁴⁶ Charles J. Kapper, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 453.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Barkwell, “Jean-Baptiste Wilkie (B. 1803)” (Louis Riel Institute, 2008), 2–4, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/07258.Jean%20Baptiste%20Wilkie.pdf>. Accessed 2 November 2015.

villages on the bison chase. The more families became unified through Catholic rituals, the more missionaries claimed to represent their interests before Euro-American political actors. This rapprochement between Metis peoples and clergy continued in the 1830s, crystallizing in the repeated assistance they provided to Metis petitioners to various branches of the United States government in the 1840s and 1850s.

Image 2.5: Baptism of Marie Catherine Wilkie and ties to the Davis family c. 1834.⁴⁸



⁴⁸ In this social network analysis graph, the Davis and Wilkie families are prominently featured. Only family members alive in 1834 are represented in order to focus on this particular moment in time. The graph shows how a godparent relationship between the Davis and Wilkie family connected another intersection of relation (kinship) uniting the two groups. As the social analysis of the religious kinship of the Davis family continues in later chapters, a second layer of connections, representing religious family ties, begins to transform the data visualizations of Metis genealogies. The godparent link between Marie Catherine Wilkie and Jean-Baptiste Davis show how this church-sanctioned ritual built and strengthened connections between families, therefore reinforcing and fostering an environment favourable to expressions of political will through the development of common objectives and goals. We did not represent the godmother relationship created in the same ceremony because we were unable to ascertain without a doubt the identity of Madeleine Azure, the woman who accepted to take on this role in Catherine Wilkie's upbringing. Limitations in historical data sadly transcend into very real and problematic limitations in data visualizations. With this word of caution in mind, SNA allows researchers the possibility of considering how relationships beyond those of blood kinship shape and influence community life.

An intimate look at a baptism ceremony sheds light on how Metis kin connections blossomed via Catholic sacraments. On 24 November 1834, Marie Catherine Wilkie was born. She was the child of Jean-Baptiste Wilkie and Amable Azure. The former was the renowned chief of the Pembina band, and the latter was the granddaughter of a voyageur from Québec residing in St. Boniface until his death in 1832.⁴⁹ Catherine grew up south of the Medicine Line. Her parents ensured a lifelong participation in Catholic sacraments, beginning with her baptism.⁵⁰ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, then Bishop of Juliopolis and head of the Church in St. Boniface, baptized Catherine the day after her birth. Catherine's godfather was Jean-Baptiste Davis (b. 1785) and her godmother was Madeleine Azure.⁵¹ Catherine's kin connections united Metis, Anishinaabe, and Nakoda nations. The Davis and Wilkie families became linked through marriage when Jean-Baptiste wedded Alexander Wilkie's widow, Betsey Josephte Mijakammikijikok "La Sauteuse." Bishop Plessis likely performed the sacrament welcoming Catherine to the Catholic faith himself because the baby was the daughter of buffalo-hunting high society. The shared kinship between the Davis and Wilkie hunters helps explain the motivations for their collective move from the Red River colony to Pembina in the 1840s and 1850s.

A month after the celebration of Catherine Wilkie's birth, correspondence from missionary priest Georges-Antoine Belcourt noted that to increase their conversion efforts, the clergy began to focus on an advent-themed Mass. The emphasis on outward demonstrations of faith encouraged others to join in celebrations. Belcourt noted the popularity of his ministry grew

⁴⁹ Champagne, "Anciens registres de Saint-Boniface sauvés de l'incendie de 1860," 39. Her marriage record (cited below) indicates that she went by "Catherine Wilky". Marie is often part of the baptismal name given to women, whereas men receive Joseph.

⁵⁰ Marie Catherine was married in the Church to Michel Gladue in Pembina in 1852 by Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt. See: Georges-Antoine Belcourt, 'Assumption Church of Pembina Record Volume 1', 14 August 1848, SHSB Fonds Paroisse de Saint Joseph de Pembina, Boîte 1750, chemise 3077 1848-1854, 67. Catherine Wilkie's funeral was at the St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church of Leroy, North Dakota on 19 November 1884. See: Gail Morin, *St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, Leroy, ND Baptisms Marriages and Burials 1870-1932* (Pawtucket, R.I.: Quintin Publications, 2000) 343.

⁵¹ Champagne, "Anciens registres de Saint-Boniface sauvés de l'incendie de 1860," 82.

so much that three priests worked “*au confessionnal du matin au soir.*”⁵² From morning to night, missionaries heard the confessions of the local population. In so doing, missionaries became increasingly familiar with the mores and practices of the Red River faithful as they prepared for Christmastime celebrations. Not all Church officials were able to tolerate the hardships of life on the prairie. Famine, danger, and the physical strength required to accompany buffalo hunting brigades were insurmountable obstacles to some.

Missionary correspondence related the difficult conditions shared by hunters and priests alike. In 1837, Charles-Edouard Poiré, who arrived in the Red River region five years prior, reported that the Red River colony would soon reap the economic rewards of Metis labour with an anticipated 700 carts loaded with the proceeds of the hunt. The bounty of the hunters would alleviate famine conditions that had once again been the norm due to a failed planting season.⁵³ Although priests were invited on Metis hunts, a warm welcome could not provide clergy with the comforts they had grown accustomed to at home. Some complained about the food served free of charge and criticized the lack of cleanliness in rural settings, especially in the mobile villages of the bison chase.⁵⁴

Catholic theologian Orlando Espin remarked that for many believers, a rapprochement between the temporal and spiritual worlds takes place when Church officials and their faithful share life’s poverty. Espin attributed this restoration of harmony, in part, to an interpretation of Jesus’s life “in which he is understanding as caring for and being in solidarity with the poor and

⁵² Belcourt, “Georges-Antoine Belcourt to Joseph Signay, 17-18 December 1834.” Belleau Collection, AA.

⁵³ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 4 August 1837.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1837 17, AA.

⁵⁴ Joseph Thibault, “Jean-Baptiste Thibault to Joseph-Norbert Provencher, 23 December 1844”, Belleau Collection, Reel 1844-45 to 1844-47, AA. Thibault writes: “*J’ai eu un peu à souffrir de la faim les premiers jours parmi ces gens-là. Ils sont on ne peut plus malpropre; ils ne me servaient que du poisson bouilli sans être lavé ni écaillé mais à la fin je n’en faisais plus de cas et je mangeais comme eux.*”

suffering, especially because he himself was a victim too.”⁵⁵ Living in famine and living in suffering was akin to living like Christ. Famine shared by bison hunters and clergymen brought them together on a common plane. Although suffering brought Catholic clergymen closer to following Jesus’s life, some expressed dissatisfaction with their work and begged to be reassigned closer to home. Correspondence from 1838 reveals that both Poiré, who accompanied hunters in 1837, and Belcourt, renowned for his years of service among Indigenous polities, asked to be temporarily discharged.

Poiré requested a hiatus from his labour to remedy with personal family matters. The priest’s relatives threatened to resolve an inheritance question in his absence if he did not return to Québec immediately.⁵⁶ Belcourt also appealed to be sent home around the same time. Bishop Provencher speculated in correspondence to Archbishop Signay that Belcourt likely would not come back to the Red River region following his trip to Québec. Provencher hypothesized that because Belcourt’s projects did not work out as planned, the missionary’s catechizing efforts left much to be desired.⁵⁷ While Signay believed long-term institutional survival and growth depended on relationships of mutual confidence between parish and priest granted Belcourt’s request for a visit to his home province. Belcourt was posted to the Québec community of St. Joseph at Pointe Lévis for one year.⁵⁸

Although both Belcourt and Poiré were granted their request for leave, Belcourt was the only one that returned to the Red River region. A letter from the Anishinaabeg located at St. Paul des Saulteux, also known as Baie St-Paul on the Assiniboine River, west of White Horse Plain in

⁵⁵ Orlando O. Espin, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism*, 28.

⁵⁶ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 13 August 1838.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1838 21, AA.

⁵⁷ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 6 August 1838” Belleau Collection, Belleau Collection Reel 1, Doc 1838-18, AA.

⁵⁸ Lucien Lemieux, “M Provencher et la pastorale missionnaire des évêques de Québec,” *Sessions d’étude - Société canadienne d’histoire de l’Église catholique* 37 (1970): 31–49.

present-day Manitoba, encouraged Belcourt's return. Belcourt opened a mission at Baie St-Paul in 1833 in direct response to the presence of English Protestant missionaries in the environs. Historian Nicole St-Onge explained that Baie St-Paul was an Anishinaabe settlement that became Metis approximately thirty years later.⁵⁹ Before this transformation, though, relationships between the local community and the Catholic priests were so strong that believers wrote two letters asking about their beloved clergyman, one signed by "*la patte de Loutré*" (the otter's paw). According to Bishop Signay of Québec, one letter addressed to him begged for the return of Belcourt in the name of Jesus Christ. The second letter, a copy of this document, was sent to Belcourt himself whilst in the St. Lawrence Valley.⁶⁰ The impact of the request was such that Belcourt came back to Red River, and eventually made his way south of the forty-ninth parallel to work with Metis people and their relatives. This historical moment arguably marked the beginning of a privileged relationship between Belcourt and certain Indigenous tribal peoples, explored in Chapter 3, which contextualizes his arrival to Pembina in 1848.

To expand his ministry among Indigenous people, Belcourt relied on religious material culture to bridge the spiritual and physical worlds. In a letter from Archbishop Signay dated 14 April 1840, the priest received a silver medal. The letter instructed the priest to give the medal "*à celui de vos Sauvages qui a été ou qui sera choisi pour chef en lui disant que son premier père fait ce cadeau pour qu'il soit le bon exemple à ceux de sa nation.*"⁶¹ Ideally, the medal should be bestowed after Mass celebrations. Evidently such material culture was so powerful that, by 1841,

⁵⁹ Nicole St-Onge, "Uncertain Margins: Métis and Saulteaux Identities in St-Paul Des Saulteaux, Red River 1821-1870," *Manitoba History*, no. 53 (October 2006), 2-10.

⁶⁰ Joseph Signay, "Joseph Signay to Joseph-Norbert Provencher, 18 April 1839. Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1839-17 to 1837-21, AA.

⁶¹ Joseph Signay, "Joseph Signay to Georges-Antoine Belcourt, 14 April 1840." Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1840-12, AA. My translation: The Bishop told Belcourt to give the medal to the chief among whom he ministered. The priest would grant the medal as a gift from their "first father," God. The receiver of the present (referred to as a "*sauvage*" in the primary source) would then hopefully lead by exemplary behaviour and demonstrations of religious faith.

Belcourt ordered 300 crosses and medals per year, noting the items helped distinguish Christians from non-believers.⁶² Missionaries encouraged and facilitated the propagation of material culture on the Plains, thus exercising their influence on Metis lived religion.

Besides fostering a material culture of lived religion, the increased linguistic fluency of Belcourt and a few clergymen in *Anishinaabemowin* and *nêhiyawewin* contributed to the evangelizing success in the Red River region. To facilitate the conversion of some and to foster the Catholicity of others, priests obtained additional powers negotiated with the Holy See. These powers allowed them to bless certain marriages in uncommon circumstances and to baptize people that may not otherwise have been granted entry into the Church. In an open acknowledgment that the buffalo hunt travelling missions served as conversion tools, Provencher wrote on 25 June 1840 that he had bestowed all of the powers he could on Belcourt to ensure the most success possible in his ministry.⁶³ Economic factors encouraged the continued presence of Metis families on firmly claimed American Territory. Although the American Fur Company was bankrupt by 1842, in 1844, one of its former associates, Norman Kittson, operated a lucrative trade post in Pembina, taking advantage of the growing border dividing the continent. Kittson built his wealth on the vestiges of the commerce facilitated by Metis families decades prior. In so doing, Kittson rooted the economic development of the region on furs supplied by a group of Chippewa and Metis hunters based in Pembina and the Turtle Mountain, eventually dominating the Red and Missouri river trades.⁶⁴

⁶² Georges-Antoine Belcourt, "Notes from different letters on different things on Mr. Belcourt 7 August 1840" Belleau Collection, Reel 1 Doc 1840-25, AA.

⁶³ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, "Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 25 June 1840" Belleau Collection, Reel 1, Doc 1840-16 to 1840-22, AA.

⁶⁴ Shaw, "'In Order That Justice May Be Done' : The Legal Struggle of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, 1795-1905," 120.

CONCLUSION

Metis lived religion was a mode of governance for buffalo hunters and their families. It created a calendar of events and a common social space for unified rituals and practices that are still very important to many members of the Metis nation today.⁶⁵ The legacies of the institutionalized transformations following the arrival of the Catholic Church in the Red River region imposed sets of heteronormative behaviours, encouraged permanent settlements, and discouraged Indigenous lifeways. Metis families resisted and pushed back against these prescriptions when they were deemed harmful to their collective well-being. Mothers informed clergy that sharing a bed with their babies in winter was essential for their survival, regardless of Church mores on modesty and behaviour. Metis sovereignty, entangled with Catholic rites and beliefs, did not follow Church prescriptions and wishes. Metis lived Catholicism articulated itself in and through acts of self-governance. Unable to live by farming alone, Metis families left the Church establishment they requested and helped build to continue participation in the bison hunt with their relatives of neighbouring nations.

In the 1820s, after missionaries concretely demonstrated their use to the local population as influential spiritual beings, they were asked to accompany Metis's bi- or tri-annual expeditions. Historical evidence notes the miraculous protection of the Pembina crops in 1822 triggered the invitation of Sévère Dumoulin. Once on the hunt, priests proved even more complementary to buffalo chase brigades. They offered spiritual safeguarding to the hunters. Missionaries facilitated continuous access to Final Anointing, therefore ensuring Metis people's state of grace, should they pass away accidentally, or from a skirmish with an enemy. Similarly, baptisms followed births, and marriages deemed in accordance to the prescriptions of the Church

⁶⁵ For an example of contemporary Metis lived religion via Catholicity and prayer, see: Lavallée, *Prayers of a Métis Priest*.

were blessed. Relationships between clergymen and Metis families that began in the Church penetrated into the settler political order in the 1840s. Continuous Catholic institutionalization west of the Great Lakes beginning in 1818 meant that daily instruction and Church ceremonies were increasingly important to the Metis lived religion of the buffalo hunt. The sacrament of baptism, as exemplified by Bishop Provencher's service, edified relationships born on the bison chase between the Church and Metis political leadership.

The first celebrations of Easter by Catholic missionaries highlighted the transformation of traditions to suit local circumstances and material culture. Easter also set the stage for a unique Metis calendar of Catholic devotion. Using oak branches instead of palms and relying on any receptacle to dispense Holy Water demonstrated the adaptability of Catholic rituals and officials. The transmission of ceremonies, beliefs, and practices from France, to New France, to the Great Plains studied through the lens of *loup-garou*/LeRuGaRu folktales highlight transformative processes in the social spaces imbued with lived Catholicism. The French patriarchal legacy of violence and dispossession found in *Canadien* versions of the story became egalitarian narratives on Turtle Mountain. Both maintained their purpose as tales told to children at Easter time to emphasize the very real consequences of failing to follow their religious prescriptions. The Church relied on LeRuGaRu as a mechanism of social control, yet Metis families reappropriated the *loup-garou* and made it their own. Rejecting the anti-woman and racist undertones of their French forefathers, Metis Catholics narrated *LeRuGaRu* in ways that benefited their families. A centuries-spanning analysis of werewolf stories and their propagation in the Red River region reveals that a phenomenon dismissed as peasant superstition curbed behaviour deemed sinful during Lent – such as card playing, dancing, and courting among young and old. It was the Metis, themselves, as active participants in determining their own destiny, who invited Catholicism and the clergy into their world as they filled a deep-seated need for a lived spirituality customized to

their distinct lifeways. Metis believers were sovereign, in their Catholicism, as on the northern plains.

Historical records providing evidence of Catholicism in the Davis and Wilkie families allow a better understanding of how godparent connections shaped community life among buffalo hunting polities. Building family networks through Catholic ceremony in this period carried the same advantages as the socioeconomic gains presented in Chapter 1. The data visualization undertaken with the help of social network analysis software demonstrates that the relationship of godparents, when overlapped with (blood) kinship, transforms itself and informs the structure of the historical social network. As Chapter 3 highlights, the continued presence of priests on the buffalo hunt, and their increased role as advocates for certain Metis polities, fostered feelings of community, belonging, and a culture of direct political action. In a very short period of time, the socioeconomic lifeway of Metis buffalo hunters, developed over generations of shared experiences, fell under perpetual threat of settler encroachment. The effects of this menace on the lived Catholicism of Metis families transformed how they practised their faith. Even so, as Ekapow Dumont remarked, Metis lived religion continued to take its guidance from the Catholic Church, ensuring Metis families had few spiritual conflicts between them.

CHAPTER 3

MIRACLES ON THE HUNT: METIS CATHOLICISM IN WAR AND PEACE (1840s-1851)

The institutional growth of Catholicism in St. Boniface during the 1830s solidified the Catholic Church's position west of the Great Lakes and had transformative effects on Metis lived religion. While laypeople continued evangelizing, as their ancestors had done for decades, Metis believers sought the presence of Catholic priests. The importance of St. Boniface as an institutional node in a network of faith continued to grow. Metis peoples and their religious requests travelled shorter distances than ever before to connect with Church representatives. A letter from Bishop Provencher in St. Boniface, dated 28 July 1841, addressed to the head of the Church in Québec, Joseph Signay, reported: "*un métis nommé Piché vivant avec et comme les sauvages est venu ici cette année du pied de la montagne pour voir les prêtres et tâcher de m'engager à en envoyer au secours des cris nombreux de ces quartiers.*"¹ Piché travelled from the present-day community of Lac St. Anne in Alberta, at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, a distance over 1400 km.

The material culture of the Catholic Church was disseminated throughout the northern plains and beyond during the 1840s. Although Provencher could not immediately commit himself to sending a priest to the "Rocky Mountain Crees" as Piché had requested, he finally did so in the spring of the following year. Before Piché returned west, Father Thibault gave the Metis man a pictorial education tool called a Catholic ladder: an image which represented the entire history of the Catholic Church, from the origin of earth and all its creations – including Adam and Eve – up to the 1840s. A series of dashes and dots on the ladder instructs believers on the route to heaven: "You must believe in the twelve articles of the Apostles' creed, observe the ten Commandments

¹ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, "Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 28 July 1841." Belleau Collection, Reel 1, 1841-15 to 1841-18, AA. Piché sought the services of a religious minister and forwarded a request for a priest on the behalf of his family. Once there, he asked that a missionary accompany him to catechize to his Cree relatives.

of God and of the church.”² Thirty-three dots represented the life of Christ, and dashes and branches symbolized the ideological differences, or schisms, that separated the Roman Catholic Church from Peter the Apostle. Territories deemed “Catholic” are enumerated. Each dash and every pictorial element serve as a mnemonic device for the longer story. The priest gave the Metis man a copy of the image to carry home and use to evangelize his relatives, until Church officials arrived.³

The Piché in question was Alexis Piché, an HBC guide known as the “chief of the Mountain Crees.” The Bishop of St. Boniface invited Piché to write to the Church that winter to provide more information about the “dispositions” of his people. Provencher made this request since he had to justify sending a priest to a group of “*inconnus*.”⁴ The Bishop dispatched Thibault because he could communicate in Cree, the *lingua franca* of the Rocky Mountain group. Piché agreed to accompany the missionary halfway to his relatives in the spring.⁵ In the month of June 1842, Piché did not write as planned for unknown reasons, but kept his engagement to meet the priest by sending a mail carrier on his behalf to accompany Thibault in his travels.⁶ Metis history remembers Piché as the person who brought clergy to Manito Sakahigan, a Cree lake that Father

² Pierre-Jean S.J. de Smet, *Letters and Sketches with A Narrative of A Year's Residence Among the Indain Tribes of the Rocky Mountains*. (Philadelphia: M. Eathian, 1843), 404 *Sketches with A Narrative of A Year's Residence Among the Indain Tribes of the Rocky Mountains*. (Philadelphia: M. Eathian, 1843), 404.

³ The history of Catholic ladders in North America begins with Jesuit missionaries who used instructional sticks of various colours used as a way to communicate notions of Christianity in the face of language and cultural barriers beginning in the 1640s. Father François-Xavier Norbert Blanchet's ladder is inspired by the Jesuit stick method. While evangelizing to the Indigenous peoples of the Oregon Country in 1838, Blanchet began working on a large stick, which he carved with a knife. Blanchet evangelized Indigenous peoples with a translator using lines and dots engraved into the wood as mnemonic tools. It was developed in collaboration with the Puget Sound delegation that had come to hear him, who asked for clarifications and addition to Blanchet's design. The ladder was later printed on paper and distributed to Indigenous peoples throughout Canada and the United States. See: Mark G. Thiel, 'Catholic Ladders and Native American Evangelization', *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 1 (2009): 49–70.

⁴ Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 28 July 1841” Belleau Collection, AA.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 2 January 1843.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, 1843-10 to 1843-12, AA.

Jean-Baptiste Thibault renamed in September 1843.⁷ The priest christened the site after his patron saint, St. Anne, and opened a Catholic mission there, which Steve Simon calls the “first in the Canadian northwest.”⁸

Piché’s request was made on the behalf of his family. Seeking out a priest this way required consensus and collaboration among community members who believed they could benefit from sending their political leadership to St. Boniface. With such successes, Metis laypeople became sanctioned teachers of the faith. They disseminated standardized curriculum from the Church to their families. Catholic instructions and the connections to the European political universe they carried facilitated the formulation of petitions sent to state officials that made an Indigenous claim to northern plains territory. Metis lived religion, then, articulated tangible political aims. Metis Catholicism forged a place where Metis peoples consolidated their demands of the U.S. state apparatus.

The Bishop of St. Boniface alleged Piché was supposed to write to the Church that winter to provide more information about the “dispositions” of his people. Provencher made this request since he had to justify sending a priest to a group of “*inconnus*.”⁹ The Bishop dispatched Thibault because he could communicate in Cree, the *lingua franca* of the Rocky Mountain group. Piché agreed to accompany the missionary halfway to his relatives in the spring.¹⁰ In the month of June 1842, Piché did not write as planned for unknown reasons, but kept his engagement to meet the priest by sending a mail carrier on his behalf to accompany Thibault in his travels.¹¹

⁷ Robert Beal, John E. Foster, and Louise Zuk, “The Métis Hivernement Settlement at Buffalo Lake, 1872-1877 An Historical Report Prepared for the Department of Culture, Alberta Government: Historic Sites and Provincial Museum Divisions” (Parks Canada National Library, April 1987), 64.

⁸ Steve Simon, *Healing Waters: The Pilgrimage to Lac Ste. Anne* (Edmonton, Alberta: Univ. of Alberta Press, 1995), 2.

⁹ Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 28 July 1841” Belleau Collection, AA.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, “Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 2 January 1843.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1, 1843-10 to 1843-12, AA.

Image 3.1: P.J. de Smet's Indian Symbolical Catechism (1843). This ladder was a heavily embellished version of Father Blanchet's 1838 creation, although most of its elements remain the same. Catholic ladders were especially useful tools for colonizers and evangelizers who wished to transmit the history of the Church to the present day. The mnemonic device and visual learning mechanism based on sticks and dots could be easily recreated anywhere.¹²



¹² Pierre-Jean S.J. de Smet, *Letters and Sketches with A Narrative of A Year's Residence Among the Indian Tribes of the Rocky Mountains*. (Philadelphia: M. Eathian, 1843), 404.

This chapter argues that Metis lived religion shaped a space of sociability on the move. Since clergy had limited access to mobile Metis families in the summer, some priests accepted the invitation of brigade leaders to join them on the chase. The Metis summer religious calendar centred on the bison hunt instead of on the parish-based celebrations of French Canada. Large familial get-togethers provided Alexis Piché and his contemporaries ample opportunity to use Catholic material culture to instruct their families in the basic history and tenets of the Church. Metis hunters carried all their material possessions with them between wintering sites and summer encampments in Red River carts. Bison hunters followed rituals and practices in times of war or peace, wherever *la vache* took them. Catholic beliefs shared by Metis families reinforced their need for peace and good diplomatic relations throughout the northern plains. As clergy increasingly accompanied Metis bison hunters on the chase, the manifestation of the sacred, comprised in the material culture of Mass celebrations, was all around them. It was embedded in the prairie they called home. Metis families held Mass and prayed wherever the buffalo roamed. This chapter examines how laypeople influenced the daily experiences of their Catholicism, from baptisms to near-death experiences, and assesses the sometimes-shared experiences of suffering among clergymen and believers. Metis families and their priests turned to religious beliefs and practices to get through unplanned difficulties. Warfare and bad weather became formidable opponents, often with very little forewarning. Numerous experiences of divine intervention help explain why and how believers came together to immortalize Father Belcourt's near-death in the winter of 1850 many decades later.

Metis believers participated actively in public religious ceremonies, while building increasingly complex relationships with visiting missionary priests. ChWeUm Davis was born in a network of belief informing and influencing his connections to Catholicism. Davis's relatives shaped encounters with the Church through their beliefs and practices. Beyond building social

and political cohesion, shared religious values provided an avenue for Metis well-being and health on the hunt. By situating the role of religion in the Battle of Grand Coteau, an event remembered for the miraculous escape of the St. François Xavier bison hunters, I consider the role of Catholicism in strategies of self-defence and healing. After this, the chapter presents the underlying influences of Catholicism in Metis self-regulation, or sovereignty, specifically regarding the crime of theft. Once again, we find laypeople shaped the physical expressions of religious beliefs whilst remaining on the move.

Catechists such as Alexis Piché were laypeople devoted to their faith. They taught those around them the concepts required for adult conversion, using material culture provided by clergy as educational aids. Catholic ladders offered a way to communicate religious knowledge in the face of language barriers. Preaching to one's family and relatives prepared the spiritual terrain of buffalo hunters and their kin and initiated them to the practices and rites of a priest. When Father Thibault arrived among the faithful in Manito Sakahigan who had requested his presence, he expressed surprise about what he found there. In a report to his superior, Thibault expressed satisfaction at the increased popular devotion triggered by Piché's initiative. Writing on 23 December 1844, he remarked that children as young as three years old recited the *Pater Noster*, the *Ave Maria*, and the *Credo* unaided. All the people Thibault encountered were reportedly able to explain the main points of the Catholic ladder.¹³ Thibault witnessed firsthand of lay evangelists. In addition to preparing their families for the arrival of priests, laypeople continued the work of missionaries after their departure from Metis wintering sites. Proselytizing of Catholicism to Indigenous relatives could impact family relations in myriad ways – and the negative legacies of this heritage should not be forgotten.

¹³ Thibault, "Jean-Baptiste Thibault to Joseph-Norbert Provencher, 23 December 1844." Belleau Collection, AA.

Priests under Provencher's leadership did not have the institutional powers to perform ceremonies in areas beyond the borders of their ecclesiastical province. Metis believers, on the other hand, criss-crossed the Medicine Line, unconstrained by the boundaries proposed by the Church. Consequently, the Bishop of St. Boniface waited until he obtained the blessing of Dubuque Bishop Mathias Loras before extending the reach of his men: "*à l'est par le Mississippi, à l'Ouest par le Missouri, à midi par l'État du Missouri et au nord par la ligne anglaise...*"¹⁴

This meant the Bishop of St. Boniface now had the ability, through the permission of the Bishop of Dubuque, to appoint priests to operate south of the Medicine Line, in the diocese of Dubuque.

Throughout the nineteenth century, priests relied on the hospitality of Metis believers to accommodate their travels. When Father Thibault returned to the present-day regions of Cold Lake and Lac La Biche, Alberta, in the winter of 1844, he used the house of a Metis named Janvier, which served as the priest's presbytery, chapel, and school for children. The material help, shelter, funds and collaboration of Metis families supported the work of missionaries throughout the northwest. Later on that trip, an eighty-eight-year-old *Canadien* from Montréal named J. Cardinal accompanied the priest on his rounds. The old man had married into a Cree family at Lac La Biche and remained there after his employment contract ended. Cardinal sought the priest's care for the forty families that lived around his own.¹⁵ Once more, laypeople were intermediaries, summoning the care of priests for their relatives whenever possible.

Metis labour and funds contributed to the institutional growth of the Catholic Church on the northern plains. The construction of large buildings adorning the Red River waterfront, including a stone cathedral erected in the 1830s, coincided with an increase of Metis people's participation in the sacraments during the following decade. The development of a bishop's

¹⁴ Provencher, "Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Joseph Signay, 2 January 1843." Belleau Collection, AA.

¹⁵ Thibault, "Jean-Baptiste Thibault to Joseph-Norbert Provencher, 23 December 1844." Belleau Collection, AA.

house, a *Soeurs de la charité* (Grey Nuns) convent, and a school for boys and girls marked the beginning of institutionalized education for local children by clergy – fully deploying the colonizing objectives of the Catholic Church.¹⁶ By June of 1845, the Grey Nuns had a total of eighty students under their care. The acculturation plan of the Catholic Church for the Indigenous peoples of the northern Great Plains was well under way.¹⁷

In 1831, Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt, a secular priest from French Canada arrived in St. Boniface. He chose a different route to disseminate Catholic education among Indigenous peoples. Belcourt spent the 1830s and 1840s opening and operating Catholic missions where he learned local languages with the help of Metis women like Angélique Nolin.¹⁸ By 1845, Belcourt could catechize in *Anishinaabemowin*. He was also invited to join the Pembina brigade of buffalo hunters on one of their expeditions that year. In 1848, Belcourt reopened the church founded by Father Sévère Dumoulin, aware of the importance of the site as a trading post, and of its much longer history as a meeting point for brigade departures. Belcourt's travelling mission marked a renewed interest by the Church institution in a region that never lost its appeal to hunters.¹⁹

Father Belcourt accompanied the Pembina hunters the same year ChWeUm Davis was born. Davis came into the world on 24 June 1845, either between hunting expeditions in St. Boniface, or while his parents travelled along a cart trail, not an unusual occurrence for families living on the move. His father, William "Leander" Davis Sr., known in *Anishinaabemowin* as *Kug-kay-dway-wash-kung*, and mother, Marie Eno, owned "five horses and five oxen, with the corresponding number of carts." Michel *Nubun-ay-gar-bon* Davis, ChWeUm's younger brother (b. 1852) recalled that his relatives travelled "three carts abreast."

¹⁶ Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest*, 81–82.

¹⁷ Joseph-Norbert Provencher, "Joseph-Norbert Provencher to Monsieur Dionne, 20 June 1845." Belleau Collection, Reel 1 Doc 1845-21, AA.

¹⁸ In this case, *Ojibwemowin* (or *Anishinaabemowin*) and *nēhiyawēwin*, also known as Ojibwa and Cree.

¹⁹ Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann's Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*, 29.

They hunted three times per season, focusing on male bison in June and July, and catching the cows, or females, after that.²⁰ The Davis family's journey on the prairie during the birth of ChWeUm may explain why no baptismal entry commemorates this event.²¹ Later in life, ChWeUm recorded in his notes the death of his uncle, Jean-Baptiste Boin-Ence Davis, his father's brother. Next to the date of passing in 1898, ChWeUm wrote "parain [sic]" or godfather.²² It is possible that a layperson, like his father, William Sr., performed a baptism ceremony for his son, ensuring the protection of his soul and welcoming him in a familial way into the rituals and practices of Metis lived religion. A priest, at some point in ChWeUm's life, could have formalized that lay ceremony by an institutionalized celebration of the baptism. Lay baptisms, after all, established kinship-building patterns for men and women of the Great Lakes fur trade in the eighteenth century, which extended to the northern Great Plains. The crossover between Metis political leadership and Metis religious leadership is a remarkable continuity in the historical nature of their faith.

Among Metis believers, religious convictions influenced political and economic decisions governing the hunt. In an interview by state historian Dana Wright in February 1932, ChWeUm Davis explained that, in 1846, he lived in a wholly Catholic sphere. Davis recalled that when he was a year old, his family travelled south from St. Boniface and then "west, on the north side of the Turtle Mountain" by present-day Whitewater Lake. The Davis family was on their annual summer expedition and found few animals at their usual location. Adding to the hardship of hunger was an episode of measles that killed many children. Quoting ChWeUm Davis, Wright recorded:

²⁰ Michel Davis, "Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire," 1938, Rolette County WPA Files Reel 2399, SHSND

²¹ It is possible that the baptismal data for ChWeUm Davis was destroyed in the 1860 St. Boniface cathedral fire since significant parish records data was lost to the flames.

²² Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 1," 11.

The party continued on to the west, crossing the Mouse River and camping on the Deep Creek. Everyone had the measles, big and little, 13 were buried in Fort Garry in one day. They grew so weak they could not travel or hunt. William Davis Sr. grew desperate and said “I am going home” this on account on Young Wm being sick and likely to die. He said, “I want to take him home to die, so I can leave his body by the church instead of on the prairie.” A brother, [of William Senior, Jean-Baptiste ‘Boin-ence’] said, “I am going too.” They all decided to go home.²³

For the Davis family in 1846, it was more important to be in the close proximity of clergy when facing death, rather than risk dying at a great distance from the Church. Religious desires and political will were intertwined in ChWeUm’s near-death experience and had serious financial repercussions for the Metis hunters. Metis religious beliefs about the consequences of dying on the prairie for their non-Catholic relatives are unclear in this episode. However, this event demonstrates a clear demarcation between the practices of Catholic and non-Catholic bison hunters. Once the hunters reached their destination, they tried to seek medical attention for young ChWeUm but the doctors were busy tending to white soldiers and could not help the sick Metis infant. Eventually, the Davis family learned that bouillon made with fresh meat could help the malady. After obtaining fresh meat from a Fort Garry soldier, likely through a trade of some sort, Marie Eno, ChWeUm’s mother, made bouillon and her son recovered shortly thereafter.²⁴ Although archival records do not confirm ChWeUm’s entry into the institutional Roman Catholic Church, this recollection, and the religious belief that surrounds it, centres his early life in its sphere.

LIVED RELIGION AND THE POLITICAL CHOICE OF THE HUNT

On the year of ChWeUm’s birth, the HBC attempted enforcement of a monopoly on the Red River fur trade. The HBC forbade the Metis from selling bison skins to anyone other than

²³ Dana Wright, “WD to DW 2/17/1932, February 17, 1932”, William Davis Papers, A 35 Box 1, Folder B 113 “Dana Wright’s Notes,” SHSND.

²⁴ Ibid.

themselves, prohibiting any transactions outside the HBC concern. This economic sanctioning put the spiritual well-being of Metis hunters in peril since the commerce ban meant families could no longer pay for the services of a priest with robes as they had previously done.²⁵ The HBC's policy prevented believers from paying Church officials for funerals, baptisms, and visits to their mobile parishes, which was part of their sharing and equity ethic. Metis hunters always divided the proceeds of their seasonal rounds evenly with their extended kin, and looked after widows and orphans. This ethic conforms to the Catholic beliefs on the necessity for the faithful to foster poverty of the heart, or disinterest in the accumulation of material possessions. The catechism asks adherents to imitate the poverty of Christ.²⁶ Parallels exist between Metis experiences of unjust persecution and Jesus's reliance on God throughout his life. The difficulties experienced on the hunt, and the central reliance on family networks to ensure health and safety during hunting expeditions, is not unlike the bond uniting God and His Son during Jesus's most trying time on earth.²⁷ Parallels between the story of Jesus and the lives of Metis believers provided tangible ways of understanding hardship and suffering. Raoul Manselli, a historian of popular religion in France in the Middle Ages concurs, noting the ideal of poverty in popular Catholicism "*s'enracine... dans une perception intuitive du souvenir du Christ dans le monde*

²⁵ James Reardon, *George Anthony Belcourt Pioneer Catholic Missionary of the Northwest, 1803-1874: His Life and Times* (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Company, 1955), 80.

²⁶ Archidiocèse de Québec, *Le grand Catéchisme de Québec à l'usage de toute la province ecclésiastique de Québec.*, 116. My translation of: "*Imiter aussi la pauvreté de Jésus-Christ, soit en souffrant celle où Dieu nous a mis, soit en nous privant de quelques commodités.*"

²⁷ Theologian Orlando Espin remarks that in Latino American popular Catholicism, Jesus "has come to be in solidarity with all those throughout history who suffer." in *The Faith of the People*, 72. Jesus made an offering to God: himself. This kind of offering translated and resonated with Cree culture. John Foster explains: "In a private conversation with a Cree elder, I have had the ceremony of the "Sun Dance" expressed to me in terms of the life story of Jesus Christ. It is significant that he saw his explanation of as indigenous to the Cree and certainly predating any historical contact with Euro-Canadians." See "Le Missionnaire and Le Chef Métis", in *Western Oblate Studies I: Proceedings of the First Symposium on the History of the Oblates in Western and Northern Canada, Faculté Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, 18-19 May 1989*, vol. 1, 5 vols, Western Oblate Studies (Edmonton: Western Canadian Publishers and Institut de Recherche de la Faculté Saint-Jean, 1990), Note 11, 120.

populaire.”²⁸ Metis families shared a common understanding of Jesus Christ’s life. This understanding, in turn, created a logical framework for the difficulties they endured. What more, syncretism with long-established Indigenous traditions about sharing and mutual support among the Anishinaabe and Cree peoples facilitated adhesion to Catholicism.²⁹

In addition to Metis connecting with the story of Christ, the political climate of 1845 united missionaries and Pembina families. The 1845 HBC provisions against the free trade of bison robes triggered a political *rapprochement* between clergy and believers. Belcourt revealed to his superior in Québec that he played a role in the coordination of a petition sent to the United States Congress on the behalf of the Pembina Metis. Nevertheless, Belcourt downplayed his participation and emphasized that a Red River cart caravan led by James Sinclair forwarded the document, which was signed by a majority of the locals to United States officials.³⁰ According to Oblate priest and historian A.G. Morice, the letter sent to American government representatives asked for “protection of their immemorial right to hunt and stating that they were ready to become American citizens and re-establish the Pembina Settlement.”³¹

Explaining off the record his motivations to provoke a population movement from St. Boniface to Pembina, Belcourt wrote on 1 August 1845, that United States officials informed the Metis, “*vous serez libre de chasser cet automne encore, mais pour la dernière fois. Si cependant vous désirez devenir sujets des É-U, la chasse vous restera libre à condition que vous*

²⁸ Raoul Manselli, *La religion populaire au moyen âge: Problèmes de méthodes et d’histoire*, 161-162. My translation : The ideal of poverty in popular Catholicism “roots itself in an intuitive perception of the souvenir of Christ in the popular world.”

²⁹ John Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 77-85.

³⁰ Georges-Antoine Belcourt, “Georges-Antoine Belcourt to Joseph Signay, 6 July 1846.” Belleau Collection, Reel 1 Year 1846 Descriptions, AA.

³¹ Adrien Gabriel O.M.I. Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada From Lake Superior to the Pacific (1659-1895)*, vol. 1 (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1910), 213.

vendiez vos vivres au gouvernement des É-U.”³² Undoubtedly Belcourt communicated similar information to the Metis hunters, encouraging them to sign the 1845 petition. Belcourt’s political project thus supported the sovereignty, or self-governance of the Metis hunters. Although Belcourt explained his position, Metis families did not take a firm position until they heard from United States officials for themselves.

Facing increasing threats and impediments such as seizures of goods, arbitrary arrests, and criminal convictions by British officials, many families saw immediate gains in moving south of the forty-ninth parallel. Metis families who made this decision heard the proposal of the American government for themselves. Captain Edwin V. Sumner, commander of the First United States Dragoons, was on a diplomatic mission to the Metis of Pembina. Historian Durwood Ball recently investigated this expedition as part of President James K. Polk’s national expansionist agenda. Ball described Sumner’s meeting with Metis council leaders in late July 1845:

He explained that their “incursions” were “violations” of U.S. “territory” and thus must end. Responding to Bruce’s and Chamber’s accusations, the Metis protested that “they had no idea of resisting the authority of the American government.” These savvy diplomats, while acknowledging their British status, argued that “they were only hunting on the lands of their Indian parents,” that their Canadian homeland lacked “game enough” to feed their families, and that this way of life, “followed from childhood,” was the only one they knew. Given those conditions, would the U.S. government overlook their hunting excursions south of the line? A mere captain of dragoons lacked the authority to grant extraordinary privileges. He kindly but firmly held the line: “All governments were rightfully very jealous on these matters.” The Metis offered another proposal: What if their people relocated “across the line”? The surprised captain instantly quashed the idea; offering the Metis any “inducement . . . to secede as a body” would be “an improper interference with the rights of their government.” Would the U.S. government grant a reprieve during which their people “could change their habits,” the Metis asked? This suggestion struck a chord. The captain later reported, “After due reflection, I advised them to address a letter to our government, asking *as a favor* that a

³² Belcourt, “Notes from different letters on different things on Mr. Belcourt,” 7. According to Belcourt, the Metis could freely continue hunting on American-claimed soil that autumn, for one last time. Should the Metis choose to become American subjects, however, they would be able to carry on as they always had, provided they sold their goods to the United States government instead of to the British-owned and controlled HBC.

year or two might be granted to them in order to give them a little time to commence some other course of life.”³³

Familiarity with petitions and settler border disputes encouraged Metis bison hunters to put their names on the request forwarded to the United States government. Unlike previous appeals to authority where Metis asked for a clergyman, this time they politicized their buffalo harvesting traditions, seeking to preserve them as long as possible. After petitioning the U.S. federal government, the Metis invited Father Belcourt on an autumn hunting expedition, which united families from St. Boniface, White Horse Plain, and Pembina. Metis leadership rewarded Belcourt’s strategic support of their collective political interests by inviting him to join their families on their fall bison chase that year. This request marked continuity in the practice of inviting clergy on hunting expeditions. As in 1822, Metis families only asked priests to live among them *after* they demonstrated their usefulness to the community.

Father Belcourt penned a letter to his friend Charles-Félix Cazeau on 25 November 1845 reporting back on his experience on the hunt. Belcourt wrote that brigades departed on 9 September 1845 from St. Boniface and White Horse Plain. He noted a total of 213 carts and sixty lodges, moving three rows wide. The priest compared the hunters’ travel to experienced sailors on vast seas. Belcourt catechized sixty-eight children daily. The missionary reported the Metis fed him the tenderest part of the animal, its tongue. Metis women feared Belcourt could catch the “*mal de bœuf*” or beef sickness, a stomach-ache triggered by a lack of familiarity with large bush meat, or big game. Belcourt reported two divine interventions, building on a tradition of miracles

³³ Durwood Ball, ‘Beyond Traverse Des Sioux: Captain Edwin V. Sumner’s Expedition to Devil’s Lake in 1845’ *The Annals of Iowa* 74, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 19.

and Metis lived religion. Twice fire menaced the hunting party, and both times God sent heavy rains that protected the Metis and their priest.³⁴

Belcourt attributed much of his success to his willingness to preach in *la langue du pays*. The priest provided spiritual counsel in *Anishinaabemowin*, which reportedly pleased the Metis a great deal. The missionary's linguistic skills explain why his presence was especially important for the Metis hunters and their relatives, particularly those with Anishinaabe family. Belcourt remarked that many people attended Mass daily, and, on Sundays, he usually provided ten to fifteen communions. This number is significant for a couple of reasons. First, it means that out of a recorded 309 Metis (men, women and children) only 3.23 percent or 4.85 percent took communion on Sundays, putting them in a very privileged position considering Mass was said in close proximity to the brigade encampment. Although these numbers are low, Metis lived religion was much more complex and widespread than official Church ceremonies, suggesting its continued syncretism with Indigenous spirituality at this time. Second, it is important to remember the Metis hunting party included sixty-eight children, constituting twenty-two percent of the brigade membership.³⁵ Consequently, the likelihood that children partook in the Eucharist celebrations was rather high.³⁶

³⁴ Georges-Antoine Belcourt, "Georges-Antoine Belcourt to Charles-Félix Cazeau, 25 November 1845." Belleau Collection, Reel 1 Doc 1845-36 to 1845-44, AA.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Archidiocèse de Québec, *Le grand Catéchisme de Québec à l'usage de toute la province ecclésiastique de Québec*, 79. Eucharist is among the three sacraments of "Christian initiation." Catholics believe in transubstantiation, the process by which the communion host and wine transform into the body and blood of Jesus Christ upon consumption. According to the nineteenth-century catechism, Mass is the sacrificial offering of the body and the blood of Jesus Christ to God, performed by the priest. Since the historical instruction document is organized in question and answer format, its twenty-first-century contemporary explains more in detail: "At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memory of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us" in: Catholic Church and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 334. Mass (and holy communion) were therefore daily celebrations that preceded the flag rising at the start of each morning. Mass was a sacrificial offering to God that served four purposes: 1) to show adoration of God, 2) to appease God's

Public demonstrations of religiosity, such as the celebration of Mass on Red River carts, as well as the political gains derived from Church affiliation, were of interest to non-Christian Metis hunters. Self-identifying Christians, moreover, were not all French-language speakers. Father Belcourt remarked that the Metis he accompanied in 1845 were used to hearing the word of God in French, but could not understand it. Belcourt's fluency in *Anishinaabemowin* and *nêhiyawêwin*, which he developed over his fourteen years on the northern plains, explained part of his success.³⁷ The Metis collective will that sought out Belcourt to protect their traditional governance structures and lifeways was a demonstration of his success as a missionary. The *rapprochement* created by the repeated ritual of Catholic ceremonies and sacraments translated into direct actions and expressions of Metis sovereignty.

FATHER BELCOURT'S PROMINENCE

The political advocacy of Belcourt on the behalf of Metis people increased as his work among them continued. In 1847, buffalo hunters faced repeated famine, arbitrary arrests, and seizures of their goods by HBC officials. In response, Belcourt sent a petition from 977 Metis to the Queen of England. In turn, the colony's governor George Simpson wrote to the Québec Archbishop asking for Belcourt's recall to Montréal, otherwise the "clergy of Red River would feel [Simpson's] resentment."³⁸ The Québec Archbishop agreed to Simpson's request. Before his departure, as a consequence of his political activism, Father Belcourt experienced arbitrary arrest by HBC officials, a fate experience by many of his Metis flock. Both Fathers Belcourt and Thibault were accused of smuggling pelts, the very currency they could no longer accept from

fury 3) to ask for God's graces and 4) to thank God for all of His doing. See: Archidiocèse de Québec, *Le grand Catéchisme de Québec à l'usage de toute la province ecclésiastique de Québec.*, 81.

³⁷ Georges-Antoine Belcourt, "Georges-Antoine Belcourt to Charles-Félix Cazeau, 25 November 1845." Belleau Collection, Reel 1 Doc 1845-36 to 1845-44, AA.

³⁸ Bishop Provencher to Bishop Turgeon, 14 June 1847 as cited by Reardon, *George Anthony Belcourt Pioneer Catholic Missionary of the Northwest, 1803-1874: His Life and Times*, 84.

their faithful. After British officials searched their possessions, the two missionaries were cleared of wrongdoing, and Belcourt returned to Montréal in the autumn of 1847 and remained there until the early spring of 1848. Meanwhile, Bishop Loras of Dubuque recruited missionaries for the American west, and Belcourt volunteered, arriving in Pembina on 1 June 1848, where he could continue ministering to his flock south of the Medicine Line, just out of HBC reach.

Throughout the 1840s, Metis families repeatedly turned to the Church to help them make sense of devastating disease and famine. Catholicity provided a narrative of reunification in the next life to rationalize the sudden passing of relatives in smallpox epidemics. ChWeUm Davis remembered the waves of sickness by name: “La grad maladi entre a la rivièr rouge le colara et la roujolle an jeullette an 1840, manitoba.”³⁹ “La picotte” or chicken pox killed his paternal great-grandmother Mijakammikijikok, known in missionary records as Josephte La Sauteuse, in the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Although over ten years separated ChWeUm Davis’s birth from the passing of his grandmother, her death, like many events of Metis national memory, was recorded in his notebooks.

Devastating waves of illnesses travelled throughout North America unbound by settler-created borders.⁴¹ Father Pierre Picton’s historical notes on the St. Francis Xavier parish, or the Metis settlement known as Grantown, speak of a smallpox epidemic that killed sixteen children there between 1 December 1843 and 26 January 1844.⁴² Such losses devastated families and prevented some communities’ participation in their seasonal hunting rounds. The spread of illness

³⁹ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 2,” 3. The great illness entered Red River in July 1840 in Manitoba, he wrote, identifying the ailments as cholera and measles, devastating local populations.

⁴⁰ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 1,” 99.

⁴¹ Noble David Cook reminds us that Indigenous peoples understood the link between European presence and the arrival of disease among their populations and that European priests capitalized on the devastation of epidemics among Indigenous peoples to further their own agendas. They did so by providing care for the ill and by attempting to curtail the authority of “shamans and native priests.” Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650*, (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 210-211).

⁴² Pierre Picton, “Épidémies,” n.d., Fonds Pierre Picton: Boite 78 Chemises 229-256 Dossier 4/229 Recherches généalogiques par localité Saint-François Xavier, SHSB.

and its ravages among Indigenous polities persisted in both cold and warm weather. Davis recorded the return of disease in the summer of 1846 in his journals, likely from information forwarded by relatives. He would have been one year old when: “La grand maladi entre à la rivière rouge le 8 de juillet an 1846.”⁴³ The 1932 interview between ChWeUm Davis and Dana Wright revealed the epidemic almost killed the Metis hunter that summer. The interview confirms that the short entry format privileged by Davis in his diaries served as mnemonic devices for much longer chronicles.⁴⁴

When individuals passed away, the pain of their death could be explained and made manageable with the promise of heaven. Catholicism framed death as a positive, a return to God’s side.⁴⁵ In the eyes of the priests, Metis relatives who had not converted to Catholicism, those who practised their traditional beliefs like the Anishinaabeg, for instance, would not be reunified with their Metis kin in the afterlife, unless they converted. This belief served a double purpose. First, it asserted Catholic heaven was the only afterlife. Secondly, it provided an incentive for conversion to Catholicism. To reach heaven one must “die in Christ’s grace.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that heaven is open to “... *ceux qui n’ont point offensé Dieu, ou qui, l’ayant offensé, en ont fait pénitence.*”⁴⁶

Catholic priests communicated beliefs about the afterlife to Metis people, increasingly transforming their approach to the hunt. As demonstrated by ChWeUm Davis’s near-death experience in 1846, being in proximity to Church officials was sometimes more important than carrying on with hunting traditions. In Metis settlements with churches equipped with a steeple

⁴³ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 1,” 5.

⁴⁴ Wright, “WD to DW 2/17/1932.”

⁴⁵ Catholic Church and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 418. See ‘The Christian’s Last Passover’ 1681.

⁴⁶ Archidiocèse de Québec, *Le grand Catéchisme de Québec à l’usage de toute la province ecclésiastique de Québec.*, 89. To access heaven, the faithful had to die without having offended God, and if they did so, via sinful gestures or thought, they required the presence of a missionary to do proper penance.

and bell, community members marked the death of their peers by the ringing of bells: nine times for a man and seven for a woman.⁴⁷ Metis beliefs about death and the afterlife created another incentive for families to request the presence of priests among their fold for their bison hunts. The absence of a priest to perform funerary rites might affect the departed's ability to enter heaven, which is why, at times, families brought their deceased back to their settlements or wintering sites.

The sustained presence of Father Belcourt among the Metis solidified his role as a political ally in the resistance methods hunters used against increasing state encroachment. Belcourt continued his political involvement on the behalf of Metis interests throughout the 1840s. In a letter dated 8 October 1849, Alexander Ramsey, Governor of the Minnesota Territory wrote to U.S. President Zachary Taylor's Secretary of State, John Middleton Clayton. The Governor acknowledged the "memorial sent ... by the half-breeds of the Red River of the North," was in fact a list of six grievances and demands to remedy them, accompanied by a petition of ninety-nine names gathered by Father Belcourt. Ramsey believed that only the direct intervention of then-General Ulysses Grant could improve the condition of the region. Citing the improper conduct of the HBC, Ramsey continued:

I deem it highly important to the development of the rest of that distant portion of our common country that the Indian title to a tract of country on the 49th parallel of latitude should be extinguished at an early day: here under the influence of our laws a community might be reared that would ever present a barrier against the encroachment of Her Majesty's subjects upon the hunting grounds of our half-breeds and Indians of which they now so frequently & so justly can claim.⁴⁸

Father Belcourt tried to secure protection from the American government for the Pembina Metis inhabitants south of the Medicine Line. He also facilitated the lives of the locals by getting a

⁴⁷ Kermoal, *Un passé métis au féminin*, 135.

⁴⁸ Alexander Ramsey, "Alexander Ramsey to M. Clayton, 24 October 1849.," October 24, 1849, MSS 20187 James Wickes Taylor Papers, SHSND.

threshing machine shipped from St. Paul by Red River cart and oxen. As the number of Metis families residing in the Pembina vicinity increased, so did the settler population. Belcourt's missive noted that there was no adequate conflict resolution mechanism in place to settle disputes between the Metis hunters and settlers. Belcourt and the ninety-nine petitioners believed American soldiers could protect the peace and their interests, particularly in light of the ongoing "violation of personal rights" against Metis families by HBC officials and British settlers.⁴⁹ Belcourt wrote the petition and list of grievances forwarded to the Minnesota Territorial legislature, and collected the names and marks of local bison hunters in agreement with its content.

The 1849 petition made six requests to United States officials. First, they argued the boundary line between the two nascent nation states was not "properly fixed" and the HBC used this fact to their advantage to seize the goods of the local populations under the guise of British law. Second, the document asked that the land "be sold to the end that strangers as well as natives may establish themselves permanently." The third item requested courts and civil officers to help maintain the peace. Fourth, Metis hunters demanded that the Americans forbid the British from crossing into United States territory for hunting purposes, depleting an increasingly sought-after natural resource. The fifth grievance cited the damages wrought by alcohol and asked for a moratorium on its sale to the local population by the HBC. Finally, Belcourt emphasized the need for what sociologist Max Weber calls the state's monopoly of violence.⁵⁰ Belcourt noted that the region necessitated a military fort and "several companies of soldiers" to keep the peace. The

⁴⁹ Pembina Half-Breeds, "Petition of the Pembina Half-Breeds to the Minnesota Territory Legislature," 1849, MSS 20187 James Wickes Taylor Papers, SHSND.

⁵⁰ Weber writes (translated from German to French) : « il faut concevoir l'État contemporain comme une communauté humaine qui, dans les limites d'un territoire déterminé - la notion de territoire étant une de ses caractéristiques - revendique avec succès pour son propre compte le monopole de la violence physique légitime. Ce qui est en effet le propre de notre époque, c'est qu'elle n'accorde pas à tous les autres groupements, ou aux individus, le droit de faire appel à la violence dans la mesure où l'État le tolère: celui-ci passe donc pour l'unique source du 'droit' à la violence. » in Max Weber, *Le Savant et Le Politique* (Paris: Éditions 10/18, 2005) 125.

names of ninety-nine buffalo hunters who signed the petition represented, “those of the principal hunters who have returned in advance of the main body and express the general and unanimous desire of all.”⁵¹ In other words, Belcourt’s actions were allegedly at the expressed desire of Metis hunters.

On Turtle Mountain, Belcourt is remembered for his participation in the ritual of building and planting large crosses in conspicuous places – a Catholic practice explained in Chapter 1. In January 1850, Belcourt, aided by unnamed Indigenous guides, reportedly planted a cross in the middle of winter on a high point on the mountain located eight miles, or twelve kilometres, northwest of present-day Dunseith, North Dakota. Anishinaabe people called the peak in question “*otaccamabiwin*” which, according to a commemorative plaque placed at the top of the butte in 1933, translates to “the place from which to see far.”⁵² Belcourt’s biographer, Father James Michael Reardon recorded the following narrative of the event:

He [Belcourt] was caught in a blizzard and floundered through the swirling snow until he came to a ridge of the Turtle Mountains, more than a hundred and thirty miles west of Pembina, where he sought shelter of a hill which broke the force of the gale. He burrowed into the snow bank and awaited the abatement of the storm. When it subsided, he found that he was at the foot of one of the loftiest peaks of the range which rose to a height of approximately three hundred feet above the plain. After a Mass of Thanksgiving for his safety on January 25, the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, he asked the guides to aid him in making a large cross which he ceremoniously planted on the summit of the hill which he named Butte St. Paul, dedicating it to the conversion of the Indians and making it a rallying centre for them.⁵³

Reardon did not provide a source for this account. A survey of Belcourt’s correspondence to Church officials during the winter and spring of 1850 makes no allusion to the planting of a cross in Thanksgiving after surviving a January storm because of shelter provided by the Butte. The

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See Image 3.3 on page 22 of this chapter.

⁵³ James Reardon, *George Anthony Belcourt*, 120–21.

evidence referenced by historian Lawrence Barkwell in his 2013 analysis of the event was an abridged letter from Father Belcourt to Bishop Loras of Dubuque dated 16 February 1850.⁵⁴ The February 1850 document cited by Barkwell was published in France in 1851. The twenty-third volume of the *Annales de la propagation de la foi* indeed includes correspondence from Father Belcourt to his superior, Bishop Loras. The dispatch relates the missionary's conversion work among many Indigenous peoples. Belcourt refers to the "*Montagne Saint-Paul*," his departure point for the Mouse River, where Metis families were wintering. During his attempt to reach the Mouse River encampment, Belcourt hid in the snow alongside an unnamed Metis guide and their dogs.



Image 3.2: Butte St. Paul cairn, July 2016, with the author in the foreground for scale. Landscape below to the left is present-day Manitoba, ten miles (16 km) away.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Photo by Dr. Nicholas Vrooman, 28 July 2016.

The missionary shielded himself from gale force winds and returned to his departure point of the *Montagne Saint-Paul* after being unable to reach his destination in wet clothes, and without food and shelter. In fact, Belcourt's letter makes no mention of either a thanksgiving Mass, or a cross planting as detailed by Reardon.⁵⁶ Instead, the priest and his Metis guide returned to the point of their departure to regain their strength and try again. The building of Christian visual markers necessitated the collaboration, labour, and resources of Indigenous peoples. Cross-planting, a strenuous physical activity, required a thawed ground so that a thirty-foot cross could be dug in and put in place. Consequently, the letter cited as proof of this event in January 1850 does not provide the evidence required to affirm without a doubt that Belcourt rechristened the Butte at that time.



Image 3.3: Butte St. Paul plaque, photographed by the author, July 2016.

⁵⁶ Oeuvre pontificale missionnaire de la Propagation de la foi, *Annales de la propagation de la foi: recueil périodique des lettres des évêques et des missionnaires des missions des deux mondes et de tous les documents relatifs et à l'oeuvre de la propagation de la foi.*, vol. 23 (Lyon: Éditeur des Annales, 1851), 301–19.

The Turtle Mountain people have a longstanding attachment to the site now known as Butte St. Paul. At the site of the 1933 celebratory monument built in the honour of Belcourt's cross, "two other crosses were erected ... one in 1884 by Father Brunelle ... acting probably on the suggestion of Father Malo, pastor of St. John, ... and another in 1906 by Father Andrieux, pastor of Bottineau."⁵⁷ The cairn built in the 1930s to commemorate the site of Butte St. Paul reportedly used pieces recuperated from the "original" Belcourt cross, found atop the peak, near the place where the monument now stands. Two old slabs of wood feature prominently above the plaque mounted in cross form among the stones. The material culture of this religious marker, its relation to the most renowned missionary of the Turtle Mountain, and the stories associated with its *raison d'être* are significant factors that help explain why the location continues to be a meeting place today. Believers appropriated Butte St. Paul for themselves and turned the location into a holy site, a place of repeated Catholic worship.

A historical account written by Charlie Cree Jr. collected in 1973 supports the assessment that Butte St. Paul's connection with Father Belcourt was created post-mortem. Historian Nicholas Vrooman, keeper of the account, situated Charlie Cree Jr. within the Pembina community in a February 2017 email to the author. Charlie Cree Jr., known as "Yetaweskiishick, i.e., Two Eyes, named after his great-grandfather Either Eye, or, Eyes in Front and Back, aka, Maskipitooon/Broken Arm son of Charlie Cree, Sr. (aka, Napasis, aka Little Boy, or, Young Man)"⁵⁸ recorded a hand-written "history of St. Paul hill" where he identifies the Catholic priest who christened Butte St. Paul for the first time: "This priest's name was Le par She nee in French. Le par She nee Bless the hill & he name the hill St. Paul butte. At that time, he told his

⁵⁷ Reardon, 202.

⁵⁸Nicolas Vrooman, email message to author, 2 February 2017.

Catholic people to set up a cross, and the people used poplar tree for a cross.”⁵⁹ Triangulating this information with the St. Ann parish history reveals *Le par She nee* was, in all likelihood, Father Joseph Choinière, a priest who resided among the Metis and Chippewa of Turtle Mountain during the first years of the twentieth century (1901–1905).⁶⁰ Father Choinière succeeded Father Malo on Turtle Mountain after the latter passed away in 1904. ChWeUm Davis also remembered Father Choinière, listing him in his historical enumeration of clergy between “Rev père Dupont” and “Rev père Ouillet.” Davis’s list began with Father Belcourt in 1852 and concluded in 1924, with Father L.A. Ducharme.”⁶¹ Charlie Cree Jr.’s recollection therefore situates the renaming of *otaccamabiwin* to the Butte St. Paul moniker between 1901 and 1904.

Tribute to Butte St. Paul has taken many forms. Turtle Mountain Catholics still travel to the Butte for prayer and rosary recitations in their celebration of the St. Ann novena today. Butte St. Paul is among the sacred sites recognized by the Turtle Mountain community. The faithful built the monument on Butte St. Paul in the 1930s. Wava Nostdahl Bergeron Bottineau remembered: “Each family, or an individual, had the privilege of hand-carrying a rock to the top of the Butte to be used in the work.”⁶² The publication celebrating the centennial of the St. Ann Catholic community states the cairn, “stands today as a symbol of the faith of the Chippewa and the faith of Fr. Belcourt of the people he so loved.”⁶³ Father Belcourt’s legendary actions in the midst of a dangerous winter storm is among the most visible markers of Metis lived religion on the Turtle Mountain today. Charlie Cree Jr. attended the 1933 ceremony with his wife and son Walter. He recalled:

I was there on that day which they had doings on top of the St. paul hill.

⁵⁹ Charlie Cree Jr., ‘History of St. Paul Hill’, 1973, Nicholas Vrooman Private Collection.

⁶⁰ Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann’s Centennial*, 34.

⁶¹ William Davis, ‘The William Davis Diaries, Book 3’, n.d., MSS 10035 Reel 5905, 47.

⁶² Waiva Nostdahl Bergeron Bottineau, “The Story of Butte St. Paul,” *Lake Metigoshe Mirror*, 6 December 2006.

⁶³ Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann’s Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*, 29.

A nice music was there on that day.
 It was a band from Rolla N. Dak.
 And also a good preacher, a Catholic prest was on top of the hill making a long speach.
 My wife + my boy Walter who pass away 2 years ago we were there.
 I remember I hitch a team of horses to go to that hill on that day.
 Many people were there on that day... Chippews always thought alot on that hill.
 I'll say it again, they would go there up hill to see far and pray.
 First was they look up to talk to spiret.
 Every time I go up on that hill I pray for my friends + ask for good luck from God.
 So that's why the people call the hill St. Paul butt.⁶⁴

Butte St. Paul was a sacred site for Anishinaabe families of the region long before Father Belcourt encountered the hill. The story of Butte St. Paul is an example of how laypeople and clergy partook in public displays of faith and helped transform the local environment in the process. At the same time, it is an appropriative practice within Catholicism that erases the original Indigenous sacrality of the land. The ceremonies at the Butte reminded the local population that the site was sacred. The history of Butte St. Paul is a testament to the historical importance of Father Belcourt, particularly for his political activism during the 1840s and 1850s on the behalf of the local Anishinaabe and Metis. It is also, in a sense, the recognition by Catholics of the sacredness of the land.

The connection between nature and the sacred rooted itself in the local crops grown by Metis families. In a letter addressed to his friend Charles-Félix Cazeau, Belcourt remarked that the agricultural bounty of Pembina included melons, wheat, potatoes, maize, and tears of Job. Metis families harvested the latter and transformed the dried beads into rosaries.⁶⁵ The priest assisted in the rosary construction process once the prayer aids were assembled. Belcourt then blessed and distributed the rosaries among parishioners. The transformation of tears of Job into rosaries allowed believers to fully participate in prayer. Metis families disseminated Catholicism

⁶⁴ Charlie Cree Jr., 'History of St. Paul Hill', 1973, Nicholas Vrooman Private Collection.

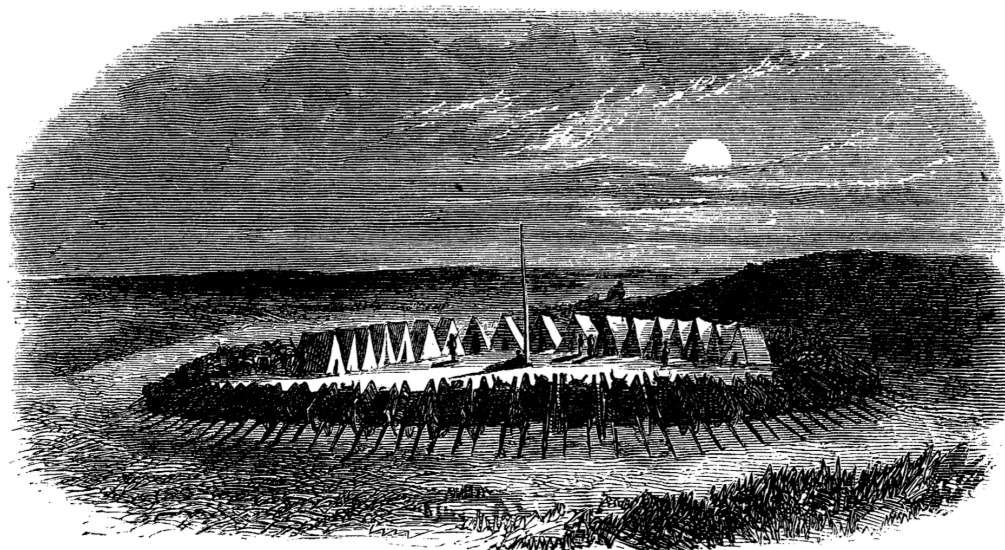
⁶⁵ Georges-Antoine Belcourt, "Georges-Antoine Belcourt to Charles-Félix Cazeau 21 September 1851," Belleau Collection, Reel 2, Doc 1851-15 to 1851-16, AA.

with every rosary produced in the Pembina region. Pembina believers carried the memory of Father Belcourt with them through the story and repeated public celebrations at Butte St. Paul. There, Metis Catholics, their Anishinaabe brethren, and settlers to the region all prayed together.

1850s bison trails transformed formerly sedentary aspects of Catholic sacraments. Mass became mobile to accommodate Metis hunting families. To make Mass attendance possible throughout the vast territories travelled during the summer months, the Catholic altar took up an entire Red River cart. In 1850, Father Albert Lacombe, who only recently arrived in the region, was familiarizing himself with the processes and protocols of the hunt. While preparing his mission cart, outfitted for the needs of Eucharistic celebrations, Father Lacombe hurt his right foot, which threatened his participation in the 1850 hunt. Father Belcourt tried to dissuade Lacombe from going to the prairie while injured, but Metis families insisted that the missionary presence continues as planned. According to an early twentieth-century Lacombe biography, the priest recorded that the Metis begged the *môniyâw* to come along.⁶⁶ Hunters assured Belcourt they would provide for the hurt man's needs. After all, Metis relatives had their own healers accompanying bison chase expeditions for as long as hunting had been central to their lives. Continued syncretism between Indigenous and European belief systems created a situation whereby missionaries openly relied on their spiritual charges.

⁶⁶ Katherine Hughes, *Father Lacombe: The Black-Robe Voyageur* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1920) 25. *Môniyâw* means "white man" in Cree.

On the eve of the departure, Lacombe summoned the hunting party for open-air prayer. He estimated between 800 and 1,000 carts were assembled, likely unifying the St. Boniface, Pembina, and St. François Xavier brigades, with well over 1,000 people. Together, with their wagons organized in a circular formation for nocturnal protection, they sang hymns translated from Latin to *Anishinaabemowin*. After reciting their prayers on the open prairie, the women and children retreated to their lodges while the men assembled in council. Using majority votes, the group elected a chief (Wilkie) and ten captains. Each captain then selected between ten and fifteen people in attendance to serve as scouts. Buffalo hunters agreed to their laws by consensus.



ENCAMPED FOR THE NIGHT.

Image 3.4: Metis buffalo hunting encampment drawing, 1859.⁶⁷

In her biography of Lacombe, Katherine Hughes relates that

The half-breed hunter Wilkie, who had been elected chief, rose at the close of the council and asked for the hunters' acceptance of these laws as a whole. This being done by a majority of voices the Chief declared solemnly: "If any among you do not approve of these laws, let him leave our camp and come not with us, for once we have set out together from this encampment no one will be free to separate from us." No man left the assembly; they silently approved of its laws. These

⁶⁷ "The People of the Red River," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 18, no. 104 (January 1859): 175.

related to the time and mode of chasing buffalo, to the patrol of the camp by the guards, and to the penalties fixed for the infringement of these laws.⁶⁸

The next morning, after an early Mass brought together the faithful, the hunting party departed at the signal of a guide's flag. As the hunters neared the first bison herd on their expedition, the priest recited an act of contrition to prepare the hunters for the possibility of death, blessing them with God's protection. The hunters bowed their heads piously to receive the missionary's prayer. After this pause from the action of the hunt, the chief cried, "*En avant !*" which signalled the beginning of the buffalo kill.⁶⁹ Women's labour was essential to the bison hunting expedition. Women and children accompanied hunting parties everywhere they went. Once hunters finished their work, women gutted the animals and began loading the meat and skins on Red River carts. Women and youth drove the carts back to their encampment and processed the animal for its parts. In peaceful times, when hunting expeditions went as planned, Catholic beliefs and devotion became increasingly important to Metis hunters, who believed the priest's blessing facilitated a fruitful, safe bounty.

After the bison chase, women began preparing the bison meat and hides. Sarah Nolin, ChWeUm Davis's second spouse, recorded the transformation process from bison to pemmican in great detail in her interview with Work Progress Administration (WPA). Nolin reported going on the buffalo hunt well over a hundred times, speaking of lifeways she learned in childhood. Once she cut meat from the buffalo carcass, Nolin hung it on racks to dry. The racks were made of poles were tied together in pairs to form an X shape, and women laid more poles atop those Xs. Women then placed their meat on poles and turned it several times daily. Brigade members packed away the meat overnight in buffalo hides, protecting it from animals. The drying took

⁶⁸ Katherine Hughes, *Father Lacombe: The Black-Robe Voyageur* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1920), 24–25.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

three or four days, and involved the building and maintaining of fires during the fly season.⁷⁰ After drying the meat, it was roasted on a grate placed atop a fire. Once cooked, the meat was pounded with a stone on a bison robe. Women's labour in the camp was divided into very specific tasks: some dried and roasted the meat, while others melted tallow bones to extract the fat. Women routinely kept the bone leftovers to use for fire fuel, especially during the autumn hunt. Some women prepared the hides and later sewed them into sacks to store pemmican. Women picked saskatoon berries and chokecherries while in season, and used used them for pemmican production. Berries were pounded into a pulp along with their seeds and dried. The fat, fruits, and meat were mixed together and put into buffalo hides that were then sewn shut. The Metis hunters called these *taureaux*.⁷¹ Pemmican supplied nourishment to fur trade operations across North America and provided the Metis with a regular income source.

Women's labour in the buffalo hunt was complex and essential. While men were away hunting, women ran the encampment and looked after the children and youth who were too small to accompany their fathers. ChWeUm was five years old in the summer of 1850. His age limited his contributions to the buffalo-hunting economy. Davis received daily catechizing from the missionary in their fold, along with his mother, Marie Eno dit Canada, and his siblings, Jerome (aged two), and Baptiste (aged one) preparing them for a life of Catholic practices and beliefs. Metis Catholicism was a family affair. Missionaries like Father Belcourt became embedded in the family histories of men and women such as ChWeUm Davis.

Metis lived religion in the 1850s continued to emphasize miracles, or divine intervention, resulting in the protection of their people and the advancement of their cause. The Battle of the Grand Coteau is a telling example. Remembered for the miraculous escape of Metis hunters from

⁷⁰ Sarah Nolin, "Mrs William Davis WPA Making Pemmican," n.d., 16–17, MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND

⁷¹ Sarah Nolin, "Mrs William Davis WPA Making Pemmican," n.d., 16–17, MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND

thousands of Yanktonais assembled for war on the banks of the Missouri River in present-day North Dakota, the Battle of the Grand Coteau is a *bona fide* legend.

THE MIRACULOUS BATTLE OF THE GRAND COTEAU (1851)

On 19 June 1851, a group of Metis bison hunters from St. Boniface joined a hunting brigade based thirty kilometres west in St. François Xavier (White Horse Plain along the Assiniboine River). The Davis family accompanied the St. Boniface party that year. The two groups met another from Pembina, 110 km south (at the North Dakota border), totalling 1,300 people, 1,100 carts, and 318 male hunters. They divided into three brigades, but agreed to join forces against any threat from the “Sioux,” or Dakota people, which comprises distinctive subgroups: the Santee, Sisseton, Yankton and Yanktonais.⁷² On 12 July 1851, whilst travelling alongside the Grand Coteau of the Missouri River, five Metis scouts spotted a band of Yanktonais. Three Metis scouts were captured (one killed and two escaped) warning the hunting families of the violence to come. On 13 July 1851, a group of 2,000 Yanktonais attacked the Metis brigades, but the next day retreated, ending the battle.

Many Metis present in 1851 shared their recollections of the event. According to Metis oral history *le vieux* Simon Blondeau, aged seventy-eight, reported to St. Boniface Bishop Adélarde Langevin on 8 March 1898, one of the escapees, James Whitford, a member of the St. François Xavier brigade, boasted about his risky exploit upon his return to the Metis hunters’ encampment. Whitford bragged to missionary, Father Louis-François Richer Laflèche, “*il n’y a pas un homme*

⁷² The Dakota people are part of a confederation called *Očhéthi Šakówiŋ*, or Seven Fires Council. The Seven Fires Council is known as the Great Sioux Nation.

comme moi.” The priest responded, “*tais-toi, remercie Dieu, c’est lui qui t’a sauvé.*”⁷³ This exchange problematizes the miracle of the Grand Coteau. Did the Metis precipitate their own safe return? Or were they rescued because of God’s intervention? Or was it their sheer skill as expert hunters of big game that saved them?⁷⁴ What role did Metis lived religion play?

The reconstruction of the battle that follows relies on six accounts from Metis people recorded at the time of the event, written down shortly thereafter, or transmitted through oral history. They include, in alphabetical order of surnames: “*le vieux*” Simon Blondeau (1827—?), a bison hunter with the St. François Xavier/White Horse Plain brigade; ChWeUm Davis (1845–1937), a bison hunter from Pembina and early Turtle Mountain historian; Gabriel Dumont (1837–1906), the military leader of 1885 Resistance, accompanying the St. François Xavier brigade; Jean-Baptiste Falcon (1826—?), leader of the St. François Xavier brigade; Isabelle (Fayant) McGillis (1838–1933), member of the St. Boniface brigade; and Jean Baptiste Laframboise (1806–1870), member of the St. François Xavier brigade.⁷⁵ In addition to six Metis testimonies,

⁷³ Pierre Picton, “Témoignage du vieux Blondeau, notes de Mgr Langevin : la bataille du Grand Coteau 13 et 14 juillet 1851,” 1937, Fonds 0001, boîte 6, dossier 211, SHSB. Whitford bragged there wasn’t a single man like him, to which the priest responded, “Shut up, and thank God, for He is the one who saved you.” (My translation)

⁷⁴ Recent historical investigation of the battle reveals that women’s contribution was central to the Metis victory. Parts of this chapter will be published in a forthcoming article on women’s experience in the Battle of Grand Coteau. See : Émilie Pigeon and Carolyn Podruchny (Forthcoming). ““The Mobile Village: Beyond Patriarchal Myopia in 19th-Century Plains Metis Bison Brigades” in Bannister, Mancke, McKim, See (Eds) *Unrest, Violence and the Search for Social Order in British North America and Canada*.

⁷⁵ For the accounts of the battle and biographical information on Jean-Baptiste Laframboise, Isabelle Fayant, and Gabriel Dumont (translated into English) see Barkwell, “Grand Coteau, Metis Veterans and Families.” Another account of Gabriel Dumont’s experience based Metis oral history is Charles Duncan Thomson, *Red Sun: Gabriel Dumont The Folk Hero* (Winnipeg, Self-published, 1995), 31- 38. The French language accounts translated in Barkwell’s research are: B. A. T. de Montigny, “Biographie et Récit de Gabriel Dumont Sur Les événements de 1885,” in *La Vérité sur la question métisse au Nord-Ouest*, by Adolphe Ouimet (Montréal: 1889). This source is a longer, French-language version of the English text attributed to the Belleau Collection (page 2 note 2) in Barkwell’s research. The other French-language source translated by Barkwell is Georges Dugas’s *Histoire de l’Ouest canadien de 1822 à 1869: Époque des troubles* (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1906). For the oral account left by Simon Blondeau, see: Pierre Picton, “Témoignage du vieux Blondeau, notes de Mgr Langevin : la bataille du Grand Coteau 13 et 14 juillet 1851,” 1937, Fonds 0001, boîte 6, dossier 211, SHSB. For the account by ChWeUm Davis, see: William Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 5,” MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND, 11-12.

two missionary accounts written in French were consulted.⁷⁶ Finally, I include historical content related by Metis men to Rudolph Friedrich Kurz, a Swiss artist and writer who travelled along the Missouri River in 1851, keeping a journal and drawing images of the people he encountered.⁷⁷ Kurz spent many months in Fort Union and became well acquainted with its local community, including Metis hunters. Historical evidence shows that in this conflict, and elsewhere, renunciation of violence, either under the guise of a diplomatic or a religious ethic, was a common thread among Metis people.

Metis families did not expect the Battle of Grand Coteau. The St. François Xavier brigade left on 15 June 1851 from their home on the Assiniboine River. After a four-day walk, the 200 carts joined the Pembina and St. Boniface groups, who were already assembled at the launching point for the hunt southwest of the Red River Valley. Combined, the parties had 1,300 carts ready to haul the year's bounty.⁷⁸ Two days later, on 21 June, the large hunting collective encountered bison, ending a period of forced fasting for the brigades. The Metis hunted and filled their carts with fresh meat, delighted to have a favourable start to the summer subsistence round. Laflèche remarked that the two groups counted 700 men, 200 of whom were Anishinaabeg (identified as Saulteux in his written account).⁷⁹ Women and children were present, inflating the numbers in the brigade. Laflèche did not count them, as he considered women passive witnesses to great masculine achievements. This seasonal trek marked the start of the summer hunting season,

⁷⁶ Albert Lacombe, "Deux lettres du P. Lacombe écrites en 1852," *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* 16, no. 5 (1 March 1917): 73–78; Louis-François Richer Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851" in *Rapport sur les Missions du Diocèse de Québec (Mars 1853)*, 10 (Québec: Presses à Vapeur d'Augustin Côté, 1853), 44–70.

⁷⁷ Rudolph Friedrich Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friedrich Kurz: An Account of His Experience Among Fur Traders and American Indians on the Mississippi and the Upper Missouri Rivers During the Years 1846 to 1852*, ed. by J. N. B. Hewitt, Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 115 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1937).

⁷⁸ Lacombe, "Deux lettres du P. Lacombe écrites en 1852."

⁷⁹ Louis-François Richer Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851" in *Rapport sur les Missions du Diocèse de Québec (Mars 1853)*, 10 (Québec: Presses à Vapeur d'Augustin Côté, 1853), pp. 54, 76.

where polyethnic bison hunters crossed the Medicine Line, met with their extended kin, and began their search for bison together.⁸⁰ Getting along with neighbouring nations was essential for the socioeconomic well-being of Metis families. Diplomacy among Indigenous nations ensured peaceful, profitable hunting expeditions.

Bison-hunting brigades from north of the Medicine Line joined their Pembina counterparts in a council to finalize their summer plans. Their prearranged gathering point was determined in advance. Historian Charles Duncan Thomson, commissioned by the Dumont family to write a biography of Gabriel, explains: “As had become common practice, the buffalo hunters from both sides of the border—from Red River, Pembina and White Horse Plains—met in Lodge Pole Valley, west of St. Joseph (present-day Walhalla, North Dakota), to choose their annual leaders.”⁸¹ This particular year, hunters elected Jean-Baptiste Falcon as captain of the St. François Xavier party.⁸² Jean Baptiste Wilkie, renowned captain of the hunt from Pembina/St. Joseph, led the combined group.⁸³

During the council meeting of the brigades, hunters decided, based on bad experiences in preceding years, not to let the “Sioux” penetrate their camps under any circumstances.⁸⁴ After hunting together for a few days, the brigades agreed to part ways, leaving the St. François Xavier group on its own, to maximize their potential bison yield for the summer. Splitting up was an insurance strategy: should a brigade encounter violence or theft on a large scale, some of their

⁸⁰ Barkwell’s 2015 manuscript *The Battle of Grand Coteau* explains this was “a battle between the Cut Head (Pabaksa) Yankton and a hunting group of the *Nehiyaw Pwat* (literally Plains Cree-Nakoda) alliance which was also known as the Iron Alliance. This historic polyethnic group comprised of Metis, Plains Cree, Plains Ojibwa (Chippewa), and Assiniboine (Nakoda or Stoney) peoples. Most of the hunters of this group were descendants of either Plains Cree, Assiniboine (Nakoda) or Chippewa parents or grandparents.” See Barkwell, “Grand Coteau, Metis Veterans and Families,” p. 1.

⁸¹ Thomson, *Red Sun*, p. 31.

⁸² His leadership was contested by Gabriel Dumont’s contributions to warfare. Francis Falcon, “Battle of the Grand Coteau with the Sioux 85 Years of Age This Coming July,” 23 May 1938, Belleau Collection, Reel 2 Slides 180-181, AA.

⁸³ Thomson, *Red Sun*, p. 31.

⁸⁴ Lacombe, “Deux lettres du P. Lacombe écrites en 1852,” 76–7.

relatives could share their bounty with the unfortunate victims. The biggest party, accompanied by missionary Albert Lacombe, travelled west to Dog Den Butte.⁸⁵ The smaller brigade, escorted by Father Louis-François Richer Laflèche, headed towards the Grand Coteau (the Big Hill), and reached their destination by foot Saturday evening. As soon as the hunters climbed over the first hill of the Missouri Coteau, scouts spotted a large encampment in the distance.

The missionaries' allegations that the brigade stumbled onto a war party by accident or misjudgement are false. Since the scouts prepared to open diplomatic channels with peace offerings, they were well aware that they were heading towards a large band of Yanktonais.⁸⁶ Metis buffalo hunters were proud of their expertise at reading the prairie. Explaining the deep roots of Metis geographical knowledge, Elder Gabriel Lafournaise dit Laboucane bragged to lost nineteenth-century surveyors about his connection to land: "*Messieurs, c'est mon pays ici. Je lis dans les prairies comme vous lisez sur vos petites machines et votre papier.*"⁸⁷ Lafournaise dit Laboucane could follow the landscapes of the plains like the surveyors could read words on paper. On 12 July 1851, the St. François Xavier brigade approached the Grand Coteau du Missouri, or the Missouri Plateau. Scouts were dispatched to gather information on the large encampment in the distance. The Metis found a defensible position and began setting up its carts in a circle for protection. Some of its ramparts were reinforced with pieces of buffalo meat obtained during their earlier summer hunt.⁸⁸ According to the oral history of the Falcon family, Metis scouts surveying the camp of Yanktonais were soon overtaken and captured.⁸⁹ The priest accompanying the brigade, Laflèche, recited evening prayers, and at some point in the night, the

⁸⁵ Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851," 54.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁸⁷ "Les Voix de la Colonie: Un ancien chasseur de buffalos. Noces d'or.," *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* 1, no. 8 (juillet 1902): 240.

⁸⁸ Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friedrich Kurz*, p. 191.

⁸⁹ Francis Falcon, "Battle of the Grand Coteau with the Sioux 85 Years of Age This Coming July," May 23, 1938, 1, Belleau Collection, Reel 2 Slides 180-181, AA.

lunar eclipse Laflèche predicted earlier darkened the prairie sky. The astronomical event was remembered in Metis oral history because it foreshadowed a calamity: it was an “omen of impending doom” according to the account of Isabelle McGillis (née Fayant).⁹⁰ Fayant was thirteen years old at the time. Although she accompanied the St. Boniface hunters, the celestial event was visible to all on the northern plains that night.

A group of Yanktonais approached the Metis shortly after capturing their scouts. Ten Metis horsemen rode up to intercept and engaged them in pipe ceremonies, respecting protocols of Indigenous diplomacy, which also ensured the visiting party did not get too close to the Metis encampment. During this exchange, the brigade learned that the Metis prisoners were alright—James Whitford, Jean-Baptiste Malaterre, and Jérôme McGillis (sometimes identified as “Macdalise”)—their captors fed them and kept them overnight.⁹¹ The Yanktonais promised the safe return of their detainees. In turn, the Metis pledged gifts of tobacco, gunpowder, and ammunition, sympathizing with the plight of settler encroachment on their traditional lands at an increasingly alarming rate.⁹² Bison hunters then learned that their opponents had over 600 lodges in their camp, with an estimated total of 2,000 persons.⁹³ In response to this news, Metis men, women, and children began to dig trenches under the Red River carts and continued reinforcing

⁹⁰ Melvin Beaudry, ‘Isabelle Fayant McGillis Eyewitness Account of Battle of Grand Coteau’, *Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture*, c 2000, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/11684>.

⁹¹ Picton, “Témoignage du vieux Blondeau, notes de Mgr Langevin: la bataille du Grand Coteau 13 et 14 juillet 1851.”

⁹² Laflèche, “Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851,” 57.

⁹³ Laflèche’s account states the Sioux had 2,000 people, or 600 lodges (p. 57). Lacombe, whose party met up with the White Horse Plains brigade after the two days of battle, estimated 800 lodges and 2,000 men (p. 76). When Gabriel Dumont dictated his memoirs to Ouimet, he was 51 years old. He stated that the Grand Coteau battle involved “1000 warriors.” The account attributed to Dumont in the Belleau Collection states that there were 3,000 warriors. Simon Blondeau’s account, as told to Mgr Langevin, reported 800 lodges of Sioux. The account published by Kurz after obtaining information from the Metis in the fall of 1851 reported 2,500 Sioux in 800 tents, with “another 600 farther back” (191). This extensive list of total number Yanktonais encountered by the Metis on July 12, 1851 highlights the fact that 1) all of these numbers are estimations and 2) Since the number of Metis soldiers armed with guns were estimated between 60 (Falcon) and 80 (Laflèche) this means that the ratio of brigade member v. Yanktonais in this conflict varies from 1:12 (80 Metis v. 1,000 Yanktonais) to 1:31 (63 Metis v. 2,000 Yanktonais) to 1:47 (63 Metis v. 3,000).

their defensive position throughout the evening hours. Laflèche spent the rest of the night hearing the confessions of the sixty to eighty men and youth preparing themselves for warfare and possible death. The next morning, 13 July, the brigade dispatched two men to inform the Pembina and St. Boniface group of their dangerous predicament and need for reinforcement.⁹⁴ Although Metis families adopted a defensive position, their ultimate hope was for a peaceful resolution.

Shortly after the departure of their envoys, the Metis encampment witnessed hundreds of Yanktonais approaching, with the three Metis prisoners in tow. In response, Laflèche comforted the Metis and urged them to pray: "*Courage, courage, mes amis ! ... Souvenez-vous surtout que Dieu est de votre côté et que vous avez un père dans le ciel qui voit combien est injuste l'attaque de ces gens contre vous. Battez-vous courageusement, c'est Lui qui vous commande de défendre vos femmes et vos enfants et de protéger vos vies.*"⁹⁵ It was during this Yanktonais mass movement towards the Metis encampment that James Whitford exchanged a few words with an English-speaking man, allegedly American, who urged the scouts to make a run for it, or risk certain death.⁹⁶

The unnamed American promised aid to the Metis by pretending to fire in their direction. One of the three scouts, however, did not have a horse capable of undertaking such an escape, and soon became the target of the Yanktonais in retaliation for the evasion. Jean-Baptiste Malaterre was killed, his mutilated remains displayed for all to see.⁹⁷ The getaway of McGillis

⁹⁴ Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851," 59.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 60. Laflèche reminded the brigade they had God's will on their side, telling them to defend their families with courage.

⁹⁶ Picton, "Témoignage du vieux Blondeau, notes de Mgr Langevin : la bataille du Grand Coteau 13 et 14 juillet 1851."

⁹⁷ Laflèche recorded the event in the St. François Xavier parish register as follows: "*Le 13 juillet 1851 Nous soussignés avons inhumé près de la Rivière des Chayennes le corps de l'infortuné Jean-Baptiste Malaterre, massacré le même jour par les Sioux. Il fut inhumé les pieds et les mains coupés, la chevelure levée, la cervelle répandue sur la terre et ayant dans le corps autant que trois coups de fusil, soixante-sept flèches et trois couteaux plantés. Furent*

and Whitford in Metis oral history recounts that he “was flying like a bird and (we) finally recognized it was James Whiteford [sic].”⁹⁸ The Yanktonais party continued its advance on the brigade encampment following this deadly exchange. The Metis ordered the Yanktonais to stay back, but the latter insisted on coming forward, under the pretence of “parlamenting” once again.⁹⁹ When it became evident that the Yanktonais would not back down, brigade members equipped with guns fired in self-defence to prevent the large party from overtaking their position.¹⁰⁰

Armed Metis split into two battalions, one tasked with the defence of the cart camp. The other group of armed men was on horseback, and divided into three lines of attack. Unarmed men and women also participated in the battle in a variety of ways. The Metis eventually pushed the assault away from their encampment.¹⁰¹ Cries of joy accompanied every shot fired.¹⁰² Laflèche hid in a pit dug out for him, reportedly praying to the God of armies and singing loudly.¹⁰³ Yanktonais and Metis suspended fighting on the first day when heavy rain and fog set in,

présents à l'inhumation Pascal Breland, Charles Montour.” My translation: on 13 July 1851, we the undersigned inhumed the body of the unfortunate Jean-Baptiste Malaterre near the Chayenne River, massacred the same day by the Sioux. He was buried with missing hands and feet, his head scalped and his brains spread out on the ground. He had in his body as many as three bullets, sixty-seven arrows, and three knives still implanted. Also present at the burial were Pascal Breland, Charles Montour.

⁹⁸ Falcon, "Battle of the Grand Coteau with the Sioux 85 Years of Age This Coming July."

⁹⁹ de Montigny, "Biographie et Récit de Gabriel Dumont Sur Les Événements de 1885," 172.

¹⁰⁰ Thomson, *Red Sun*, 35.

¹⁰¹ de Montigny, "Biographie et Récit de Gabriel Dumont Sur Les événements de 1885," 101–2.

¹⁰² Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851," 61.

¹⁰³ Lacombe, "Deux lettres du P. Lacombe écrites en 1852," 76. Although there is no Catholic God of armies, so to speak, Laflèche's comments are in relation to the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, (Psalm 25:8, Exodus 15:3, Isaiah 42:13, for example) God is associated with warriors and war and the justification for war is therefore sacred. American lawyer and biblical scholar Johathan Kirsch explains this phenomenon as follows: "Above all, the war of conquest and extermination is justified as a war on paganism. "You shall tear down their altars, smashed their images, and cut down their asherim" - that is the upright posts for living trees by which the Canaanite goddess Asherah was worshiped. Crucially, all of the acts of violence carried out by the Israelites are attributes of the god himself. Among the many titles and honorifics used to describe the God of Israel is Elohim, Yahweh Sabaoth, which is usually translated as "Lord of Hosts" but also means "Yahweh the God of Armies." Although the Soldiers of Israel actually will the weapons of war, they are encouraged to regard themselves as the instruments of the divine will: "the Lord your God," declares Moses, "it is he that fights for you."” See: Jonathan Kirsch, *God Against the Gods: The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism* (New York: Viking Compass, 2004) 66.

preventing either party from continuing the battle.¹⁰⁴ Metis families sang to remain awake through the night. By the evening of the 13th, the two men dispatched to seek help from the Pembina and Forks groups reached their destination and shared the bad news. Jean-Baptiste Wilkie's brigade met in council and decided to send reinforcements at dawn on their best horses while the rest of the hunters would begin walking towards the group under attack. Father Lacombe spent the night hearing the confessions of the men that would be dispatched in the morning. Metis hunters prepared for war much like they prepared for their buffalo hunts. Father Lacombe recommended a general fast for all present in his camp and promised two High Masses to God should the Metis escape unharmed.¹⁰⁵

Some Metis remembered the miraculous weather events on 14 July, specifically the heavy fog, which allowed the White Horse Plains hunters to move its camp southwest, following the Cheyenne River towards the Missouri Coteau, in the direction of the largest brigade. Members hoped the trip would increase the chance of a prompt reunion with their relatives, and provide them with much-needed respite.¹⁰⁶ After the fog lifted, however, the battle resumed and continued until mid-afternoon. Again, the Metis arranged their carts into a defensive circle formation, this time *à double rang*.¹⁰⁷

While certain oral histories credit the victory to Metis skill and marksmanship, others cite divine intervention for the outcome. The polyethnic brigade of hunters did not suffer additional human casualties besides Jean-Baptiste Malaterre. The Metis lost twelve horses and four oxen, which caused significant difficulty for the hunting party.¹⁰⁸ The Yanktonais allegedly attributed their defeat to the singing Manitou, or Father Laflèche. In this way, faith in appeasing Manitou

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 75.

¹⁰⁶ This is according to the oral history account of Gene "Chip" Lafromboise to Lawrence Barkwell on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota. See Barkwell, "Grand Coteau, Metis Veterans and Families," 33.

¹⁰⁷ Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851," 64.

¹⁰⁸ Beaudry, "Isabelle Fayant McGillis Eyewitness Account of Battle of Grand Coteau," 4.

is deeply Indigenous. Laflèche's presence convinced the Yanktonais to abandon the fight altogether, even though they greatly outnumbered the Metis.¹⁰⁹ A final skirmish erupted after another pretence of peace by the Yanktonais. When one last attempt to break the Metis cart palisade failed, the assault party began its retreat. Reinforcement via the Pembina and Forks hunters arrived forty-five minutes after the conflict's conclusion.¹¹⁰ Accompanying brigades rejoined their brethren under attack later that day. Relieved, families met in council that night, and agreed to continue hunting together, enjoying once again the safety of numbers.¹¹¹

Immediately after the violence subsided, Metis families attempted to reopen diplomatic ties with the Yanktonais. The Metis left a letter of apology written in English addressed "to the Sioux" at the site of the second day's battle, intended for the American that helped liberate Whitford and McGillis. He could act as a translator.¹¹² In the correspondence, brigade members denounced their own use of violence. Laflèche's recollection states that the attack was against the inclination of the Metis's hearts. The Metis described their victory as repugnant, and lamented that they were unable to peacefully proceed on their hunting expedition. Laflèche maintained the letter reminded the Yanktonais that the Metis often intervened to save their lives when they entered into conflict with their Saulteux (Anishinaabe) relatives: "*Chaque fois que l'occasion s'en est présentée, vous le savez, nous avons toujours tâché de vous prouver que nous étions pour vous de bons frères, espérant que vous auriez à la fin l'esprit d'en faire autant pour nous.*"¹¹³ Laflèche does not say explicitly why Metis hunters forgave their attackers. It is likely that Metis people felt sympathy for an Indigenous nation increasingly suffering from settler

¹⁰⁹ Falcon, "Battle of the Grand Coteau with the Sioux 85 Years of Age This Coming July."

¹¹⁰ Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851," 70.

¹¹¹ William Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 5," n.d., 11–12, MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND

¹¹² Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851.," 65.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 66. Metis treated the Yanktonais as "good brothers" despite the numerous violent attacks carried out on Metis families as recently as the spring of 1851. Laflèche's record of the letter stated that Metis families always forgave their brethren for such attacks.

encroachment on their territory. It is also possible that the two groups shared kinship bonds via intermarriage, although those bonds may not have been close enough to foster good relations. The three prisoners from the brigade encampment were sheltered in the lodge of Jérôme McGillis's acquaintance, indicating space for friendships between members of the two groups.¹¹⁴

The recollection of the letter left by Laflèche emphasized kinship using vocabulary rooted in a Christian religious framework. Laflèche did not mention the social responsibility acknowledged by the Metis hunters towards Yanktonais widows and orphans. Perhaps the priest did not find it important, or he did not listen to the request of the brigade chiefs who agreed to this provision in their council.¹¹⁵ The recollection emphasizes the existing kinship relations strained by violence. It concludes by crediting the victory to God's will and support, as evidenced by the single Metis casualty. The oral history account of the Laframboise family attributes the Metis success to the priest's communication with God via prayer.¹¹⁶ According to the victors, Yanktonais also believed that the missionary's prayers and "medicines" were too strong to defeat.¹¹⁷ Estimates of the Yanktonais casualties vary between eighteen and eighty.¹¹⁸ Metis belief in Roman Catholicism provided the faithful with the means to surmount what appeared to be an impossible situation. Prayerful families were afforded more political prestige as a direct result of their sacramental practices.

¹¹⁴ Picton, "Témoignage du vieux Blondeau, notes de Mgr Langevin : la bataille du Grand Coteau 13 et 14 juillet 1851."

¹¹⁵ Thomson, *Red Sun*, 38.

¹¹⁶ Barkwell, "Grand Coteau, Metis Veterans and Families," 33.

¹¹⁷ Lacombe, "Deux lettres du P. Lacombe écrites en 1852," 77.

¹¹⁸ Laflèche's 1951 letter states that there were 50 Sioux dead, 18 wounded, and 9 dead horses. (p. 69). In contrast, Lacombe states there was a total of 16 Sioux dead (p. 77). Dumont's accounts in *Red Sun* lists 18-18 Sioux losses (p. 37), whereas Kurz's journal recorded 80 dead men and 65 horses. Once again, the differences in interpretation indicate that there is not a set number. Whatever the losses, they were significant enough to trigger a withdrawal from the Metis encampment. This passage concludes the reproduction of an excerpt from: Émilie Pigeon and Carolyn Podruchny (2017). "Challenging Patriarchal Myopia: Women's Roles in Social Governance and Diplomacy Among Nineteenth-Century Plains Metis Bison Hunters" Bannister, Mancke, McKim, See (Eds) *Unrest, Violence and the Search for Social Order in British North America and Canada*.

Davis recorded his family's recollections about Grand Coteau, although ChWeUm was only six years old in the summer of 1851. The Davis family was among the St. Boniface and Pembina hunters, but ChWeUm was not an eyewitness to the battle, rather, he saw Metis relatives reunite after the fighting was over. He recorded the events in two of his five diaries. The details of one entry correspond closely with the historical accounts provided by eyewitnesses. Davis wrote: "1848 la grosse bataille de jense de la prairie du cheval Blanc sera contre que les gens de pimkina on partier pour la chasse de buffalo le 10 de juin le chef du camp était J. B. Wilkie."¹¹⁹ Despite the date being off by three years, additional details provided confirm Davis is referring to the Battle of Grand Coteau. Davis continued:

on raconte que les gens de pimkina partent pour la chasse de buffalo vers le 10 de juin ils voyaient des signes bien souvent qu'il y avait de la découverte et qui était leu enai et marchant quelque temps ils se coutraient avec les gens de la prairie du cheval blanc du long du grand coteau. ils se campèrent les deux camps proches à proches le camp de jense de pimkina était entouré de 60 familles et les gens de la prairie du cheval blanc
 Jeraï Madeline
 Jimmi Frizine B ? Malatré.¹²⁰

Although Davis's account acknowledges the death of Malaterre more so than the miracle, the religious underpinnings of this event merit further investigation. Missionaries believed Metis needed their presence.¹²¹ To build up credibility among polyethnic brigades, priests used scientific data to pacify and "prove" that their medicine, or their prayers and knowledge, were powerful. On the night of 12 July 1851, Laflèche forewarned his flock of an impending astronomical event. When the partial lunar eclipse began to cover the moon ten minutes before midnight, they had visual confirmation that Laflèche told the truth. The cosmic phenomenon,

¹¹⁹ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 5," 21. My translation: "1848, the big battle of the people from White Horse Plain, met up with the people of Pembina and left for the buffalo hunt on June 10. The camp chief was Jean-Baptiste Wilkie."

¹²⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹²¹ Foster, "Le Missionnaire and Le Chef Métis," 117.

where the moon becomes increasingly obstructed by the shadow of the earth, lasted three hours from start to finish.¹²² Laflèche recognized the influence that his prediction would have on the brigade in his 1851 narrative, and used it accordingly.¹²³

Hunters cited Catholic principles as part of their social organization. Nonviolence through diplomatic processes was a key element of the Battle of Grand Coteau. Their Catholic belief system may have persuaded the brigade members to forego revenge following the July 1851 attack. Lamenting violence and acknowledging that succumbing to it as a last resort was a common theme found across the written accounts and oral testimonies remembering the battle. In order for violence to be acceptable, it had to be for self-defence, and could not involve the accidental murder of innocents.¹²⁴ Although the brigade used a variety of tactics to fight back, violence was not always privileged. To give the St. François Xavier hunters an advantage over an opponent that outnumbered them twelve to one, songs and prayer, important performance of religious beliefs, were recited and credited for an eventual victory. The oral history of the Laframboise family attributes Metis success to the priest's communication with God via prayer.¹²⁵

The collective decision to refuse to further engage the Yanktonais following their retreat, even though reinforcements from the Pembina and St. Boniface brigades had arrived, is another historical example that stresses the importance of nonviolence in Metis strategies of self-preservation. Missionary priests credited themselves and their Christian pacifying influence for

¹²² National Aeronautics and Space Administration, "Javascript Lunar Eclipse Explorer for NORTH AMERICA, CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN," *NASA Eclipse Website*, accessed 23 April 2016, <http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/JLEX/JLEX-NA.html>.

¹²³ Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851.," 58.

¹²⁴ Vatican, "Catechism of the Catholic Church - The Fifth Commandment (Thou Shalt Not Kill)," *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, April 28, 2016, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a5.htm.

¹²⁵ Barkwell, "Grand Coteau, Metis Veterans and Families," 33.

inciting the Metis to return to the hunt and abandon plans of revenge.¹²⁶ Historical evidence attests to long traditions among Metis buffalo hunters privileging peaceful resolutions to conflicts to maximize potential bison yields and thereby ensure the subsistence needs of their relatives. Brigade members avoided participation in inter-nation warfare because it endangered their ways and means. Strategies of diplomacy among Metis buffalo hunters called for an overtly neutral positioning, intended to obscure kinship ties and obligation to their Plains-Ojibwa (Anishinaabeg) relatives. In a 1952 oral interview of Joseph Gourneau interpreted by Louis Marion, Gourneau recalled an encounter from his childhood:

Once, he and his father were travelling over the prairie in three Red River carts. They (the entire family) numbered only a few individuals. Suddenly two horsemen appeared on the horizon. When they came nearer, it was clear they were relatives. They stated, when they caught up with the party, that they were fleeing from a party of 40 Dakota, with whom they had recently fought a battle. The mixed-bloods gave these two Indians fresh horses and something to eat and they hurriedly rode on. A few minutes after they had disappeared from view, the Dakota war party approached. They asked for information concerning the Ojibwa, which was not, of course, given. After a few minutes they rode on, not molesting or threatening the party. Marion remembers his father commenting, "Poor devils!" in commiseration for the full-blooded fugitives.¹²⁷

Collaboration between relatives of different Indigenous nations demonstrated obligation towards kin, rooted in long-established Indigenous legal traditions. By providing their family members with fresh horses, Metis buffalo hunters were helping them escape, without taking an active role in the conflict. This strategy of avoiding violence wherever possible was an established governance model closely linked to expressions of lived religion. Diane Payment's study of

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ James H. Howard, "Notes on the Turtle Mountain Plains-Ojibwa and Metis - Joseph Gourneau and Louis Marion," 23 October 1952, 3, MS 10061 A61 Box 2, SHSND.

relationships between Metis and Catholic missionaries noted that while women prayed for peace, they also aided their husbands in their war efforts.¹²⁸

To help Metis families cope with the loss of life, be it caused by violent conflict or while hunting bison on the northern plains, they participated in Roman Catholic practices and ceremonies regarding death. The last rites for Jean-Baptiste Malaterre are mentioned in the testimonies of three people: Gabriel Dumont,¹²⁹ Jean-Baptiste Falcon,¹³⁰ and Isabelle Fayant.¹³¹ Laflèche notes that kin carefully collected bits of Malaterre's skin and bone from the ground and buried them with proper funeral rites along the Cheyenne River that night.¹³² Pascal Breland and Charles Montour witnessed the ceremony. Their names were recorded in the St. François Xavier register, along with details about the desecration of the deceased's body.¹³³ Many factors likely influenced the decision to bury him on the battlefield. The mutilation of Malaterre's remains, the timing of his death in the early weeks of the summer hunt, and the distance from White Horse Plain discouraged the Metis from transporting the deceased to the local parish cemetery. In so doing, Metis families broke with custom.¹³⁴ The priest laid Malaterre to rest in consecrated ground, even though he was not at home with his kin.

The accounts presented in this analysis highlight a common discomfort with the desecration of the deceased and the inability to bury someone whole. Metis individuals expressed their concerns about such behaviour in an 1858 treaty with their Anishinaabeg (Chippewa) relatives and "the Sioux." ChWeUm Davis, thirteen years old at the time, recounted, "the Sioux

¹²⁸ Diane P. Payment, "Un aperçu des relations entre les missionnaires catholiques et les métisses pendant le premier siècle de contact (1813-1918) dans l'ouest Canadien," *Études Oblate / Oblate Studies* 3 (1994): 148.

¹²⁹ Thompson, *Red Sun: Gabriel Dumont The Folk Hero*, 38.

¹³⁰ Falcon, "Battle of the Grand Coteau with the Sioux 85 Years of Age This Coming July."

¹³¹ Beaudry, "Isabelle Fayant McGillis Eyewitness Account of Battle of Grand Coteau," 3.

¹³² Laflèche, "Lettre de M. Richer Laflèche, Missionnaire à un de ses amis, le 4 septembre 1851.," 63.

¹³³ Louis-François Richer Laflèche, "Registre des baptêmes, mariages et sépultures, Saint-François Xavier, Volume 2 1844-54," 13 July 1851, Fonds Paroisse Saint-François-Xavier 1834-1883 Vol 2 1844-54, SHSB.

¹³⁴ Mary Weekes, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1994), 169.

were accused of raiding the Chippewa country, stealing horses, and sometimes scalping Chippewa people.”¹³⁵ According to Davis, the parties meeting for the treaty were “most concerned because the Sioux ‘made fun’ with the ‘meat’ (Scalping or other portions of the body).”¹³⁶ Seven years after the Grand Coteau incident, mutilation of the deceased was such a worry the topic arose in treaty discussions in hopes that it would change.

Concerns regarding the desecration of human remains and their power were communicated to children and youth to ensure they develop proper respect for the deceased. In 1989, Jenny Schindler (née Jeanotte) spoke to Nicholas Vrooman and shared the teaching she received as a child not to desecrate human remains. Schindler was warned that ignoring this teaching had very grave consequences. Her musham (grandfather) Houle related an experience from the buffalo hunt during which he saw a man lose his mind from playing with skulls on a battlefield. Elders cautioned against it: “And they told him don’t do that, that’s no right, that’s bad, that’s evil. He just kept doing it. And Musham said in the middle of the night he went stark-raving mad and they had to tie him up and bring him back to camp.”¹³⁷ This event and its lessons share many parallels with the importance of funeral rites in 1851 following the death of Jean-Baptiste Malaterre.

In another expression of lived religion, Metis hunters shared an abhorrence of theft. Stealing was grounds for disenfranchisement from a brigade of hunters. The faithful considered theft a grave sin. In a published interview, Gabriel Laboucane, born c. 1819, reported he dealt with horse thieves with nonviolence, using only dialogue to recuperate his property. When the Archbishop of St. Boniface asked Laboucane why he did not steal horses in return, Laboucane

¹³⁵ Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann’s Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*, 315.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Nicholas C.P. Vrooman, “JENNY JEANOTTE SCHINDLER PRIVATE ‘Le Coont’ French Stories,” 24 February 1989, 30, NVPA.

expressed horror at the thought of sinning. Wanting to understand the Metis's reasoning, the Archbishop stated: "*Mais... ce n'était que des sauvages !*" But ... they were *only savages!* This claim highlighted once again the Church's racialized hierarchy of peoplehood. It was acceptable to commit a sin and steal from some Indigenous people because they did not have the same rights and protections as Christians. Laboucane defied his Archbishop's sinful suggestion, reminding him that Indigenous peoples *were* people: "*Mais, mon évêque, des sauvages, c'est du monde ça !*"¹³⁸ Since relatives from other nations were people, they were *kin* and God's creatures, regardless of their relationship with Roman Catholicism, according to Laboucane.

Harper's New Monthly Magazine of January 1859 reported on settlers' travels along the Red River Trail (the Red River cart road linking St. Paul, Minnesota to Pembina). It described an unnamed Pembina Metis deeply offended that some in his community considered him a thief. This insult to his honour reflected both on his character in society and on the state of his soul as a sinner. The man in question tried to borrow a key, and the local trunk dealer refused for fear the Metis would not return it. The mere insinuation of being a thief was especially shameful in the context of the buffalo hunt. The eighth law of the 1840 Pembina hunt ordered, "Any person convicted of theft, even to the value of a sinew, to be brought to the middle of the camp, and the crier calls out his or her name three times, adding the word 'Thief' each time."¹³⁹

The punishment for stealing was an effective deterrent and ensured compliance with a mutually agreed set of practices, emphasizing the importance of the hunt to the collective well-being of Metis men, women, and children. The penalty for stealing was extremely high since it compromised the health and welfare of families. The seventh commandment, Thou shalt not

¹³⁸ "Les Voix de la Colonie: Un ancien chasseur de buffalos. Noces d'or."

¹³⁹ 'The People of the Red River', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 18, no. 104 (January 1859): 176.

steal, applies to “any form of unjust taking and keeping the property of others.”¹⁴⁰ It was possible to give reparation for theft by returning any stolen goods, according to the Church. As with Anishinaabe and Nehiyaw legal principles, there was a consensus among the faithful. The Catholic collective agreed to the terms set in Metis law. Indigenous law, much like the Catholic doctrine, has retributive and restorative provisions.¹⁴¹

The Battle of Grand Coteau’s religious history reveals a continued reliance on answered prayers and miracles, in times of war and peace. The presence of the priests among Metis people offered families the spiritual means required to surmount common obstacles in their lives, including skirmishes, injury, and death. Metis lived religion differed from the prescriptions of the Church hierarchy since it did not adhere by the same ranking of personhood adopted by European Catholics in the sixteenth century. It was also a faith lived on the move, in times of difficulty and hardship. Metis believers continued to catechize their relatives of other nations during their hunting expeditions. Mobility marked the Metis summer calendar of sacraments and celebrations. Hunts, blessings, prayers and Mass were intertwined and created spaces for the articulation of shared political goals. When missionaries advocated for Metis political goals, the relationship between the Church and its believers was strong.

CONCLUSION

Metis lived religion travelled across the northern plains on Red River cart trails. Expressions of Catholic faith among believers fostered a culture of understanding for suffering, conflict, and every day harvesting activities. As they hunted bison across the northern plains in the 1840s and 1850s, laypeople continued to influence the choices and allegiances of the Catholic Church and

¹⁴⁰ Catholic Church and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 579.

¹⁴¹ John Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*, 82, 85.

its priests. The religious underpinnings and traditions that became increasingly part of the Metis hunting rituals left a significant mark on Metis lives in times of war and peace. The shared experience of a miraculous escape from the dangers of warfare bolstered the power of the black robe in the eyes of many, but it also ameliorated the Metis nation's territorial claim to contested bison country. The religious convictions, actions and beliefs, as well, the commonly shared self-governance goals of Metis polities are present in primary source accounts of this event.

Oral history transmitted through Metis families and documentary evidence from the period highlights the important role of religious practices. Religious ritual prepared the faithful for the dangers of the battle and the everyday risks of death on the bison chase. Perils and violent encounters were not uncommon to hunting parties. Lived Catholicism offered Metis people a way to cope with the social, economic and spiritual difficulties appearing in their mobile lifeways. Metis lay evangelists saw St. Boniface as a site of importance, and travelled to it in search of clergy for the spiritual health of their relatives and improve their standing in the eyes of Canadian and American state officials. Missionaries relied on education and material culture, such as Catholic ladders, medals, rosaries and crucifixes a sentiment of belonging and obedience among their faithful. Certain Metis families, like the Pichés of the Cold Lake/Lac Ste-Anne area prepared their kin for the missionary's arrival. Laypeople taught prayers and performed ceremonies of baptism, when necessary. Metis lived Catholicism and its unifying rituals created a mutually beneficial circumstance for priests and bison hunters. The numerous lists of demands and supplications sent by Father Belcourt on the behalf of bison hunters sought concrete political gains for Metis families on both sides of the Medicine Line. In the 1840s and 1850s, Metis leaders relied on their relationships to clergy to address state officials and stake Indigenous title to the land. Metis Catholics articulated their political interests to governments, who promptly dismissed them.

Metis buffalo hunters gave labour and funds to Church officials, who in turn, provided believers with religious services and a unique Catholic calendar, longed for since the eighteenth century. Catholicism helped some Metis people make sense of the violence, disease, and famine, transforming their world and offered some relief from trauma. Before the disappearance of bison herds, Metis hunters' daily lives necessitated participation in Anishinaabe and Nehiyaw spirituality and ceremony. Metis relatives in other Indigenous polities accepted the syncretism of Metis religious and political practices. In the 1840s and 1850s, the Metis expressed their sovereignty and affirmed their political power by relying on traditional Indigenous avenues to reach peace. At the same time, Metis families used their Catholic connections to advance their claims in the increasingly Euro-American world. In the 1840s, certain Metis of the Red River region closely affiliated themselves with a political project articulated by Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt involving permanent settlement in the United States. Belcourt tried to improve Metis socioeconomic realities so they could survive ongoing HBC, British, and American encroachment.

Even though Belcourt returned to the east in 1859, the interactions ChWeUm Davis shared with him during the first fourteen years of his life were significant. Davis credited Belcourt with his ability to read and write. Literacy enabled Davis to leave a detailed study of Metis early history in Michif French for posterity. As showcased throughout this dissertation, Metis lived religion and Metis political affirmations are close bedfellows. Metis people found that Catholicism provided them with advantages on their bison chase expeditions. It also opened avenues for political discussions in which the voice of clergy served as vessels for Metis national will. The mutually beneficial relationship between Catholic missionaries and Metis hunters, which crystallized while seeking political affirmation from state officials changed forever in the 1860s. The balance of power shifted after the American Civil War in the favour of church and

government officials. The dismantling of overt political support from clergy towards Metis self-governance goals happened slowly, despite Catholicism continuing to be an organizing social force among many believers.

CHAPTER 4
TOWARDS THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR AND ITS “JUDAS PRIESTS” (1851–1865)

Unratified treaties between the United States government and Indigenous peoples are part of the northern plains’ historical legacy. In 1851, U.S. representatives travelled to the region to negotiate a treaty with the “Chippewa Indians of Red Lake and Pembina, for the purchase of their lands.”¹ The treaty included provisions for territorial cession and, in turn, the Anishinaabeg would obtain \$10,000 per year for twenty years, according to Father Belcourt. Metis relatives, called “Metis Saulteux” in Belcourt’s correspondence, would receive a one-time payment of \$30,000 upon treaty ratification.² The ratification process stalled in the United States Senate and the agreement crumbled. The Metis and Anishinaabeg residing in the boundaries of the Minnesota Territory remained without protection against settler encroachment, and without government reimbursement for their lands and ongoing territorial losses. The same year, the Sisseton and Wahpeton Dakota signed on to the Traverse des Sioux Treaty. Still, while Indigenous nations made treaties with the U.S. government, they continued their political relationships with one another.

Failure to ratify negotiated legal agreements sometimes happened at the request of state or territorial powers, as was the case with the rejection of eighteen California treaties in 1851-52.³ The government’s refusal to finalize some treaties and comply with their terms led to famine, sickness, and often death for Indigenous peoples who expected compensation for settler encroachment and the loss of their land. In 1851, ChWeUm was six years old. His notebooks recall a poignant moment as follows: “traiti de pai de Alexandre Rammizi avec les sauvage de

¹ “Treaty with the Chippewas of Pembina and Red Lake, September 20 1851.” Series M234, Reel 428 United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

² Belcourt, “Georges-Antoine Belcourt to Charles-Félix Cazeau 21 September 1851.” Belleau Collection, AA.

³ Suzan Shown Harjo, ed., *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States & American Indian Nations*, First Edition (Washington, DC: Published by the National Museum of the American Indian in association with Smithsonian Books, 2014), 3.

Pimbina le 30 de septembre an 1851.”⁴ Ramsey entered the historical record for his role in the land cessions of the Traverse des Sioux Treaty, not for his failure to uphold the Pembina Treaty. Ratified treaties could serve as tools of subjugation. Signatories of the 1851 Traverse des Sioux Treaty were defrauded “almost immediately” after endorsing it.⁵

This chapter argues that the American Civil War’s legal and political legacies, not the military conflict itself, forever transformed the mutually beneficial relationship shared by Catholic priests and Metis believers. Demographic change, facilitated by the violence of the Civil War and the 1862 Homestead Act, legitimized Indigenous land cessions and settler squatters west of the Missouri River. More central to this story, however, is Catholic Church officials’ acceptance of and collusion with the U.S. government power during the Reconstruction era, a period that is explained in greater detail in Chapter 5. The American Civil War, therefore, did not dramatically change Metis lived Catholicism as much as it negatively impacted Metis sovereignty in the long term. To understand the drastic transformation that affirmed the Church’s allegiance towards the interests of the American state in this period, the decade preceding and following the warfare, are key.⁶ The political and legal legacies of the Civil War, in tandem with the arrival of priests unwilling to follow pre-existing Indigenous diplomatic models, distanced certain Metis from the Catholic Church.

⁴ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 1,” 8. Davis wrote that Alexander Ramsey, then Governor of the Minnesota Territory, and the Pembina Anishinaabeg made a peace treaty on 30 September 1851.

⁵ David Martínez, “Remembering the Thirty-Eight: Abraham Lincoln, the Dakota and the U.S. War on Barbarism,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 13. Citing Roy W. Meyer, Martínez writes “Although treaty stipulations providing for direct payments for traders’ debts had been outlawed by Congress, a way was found to evade the letter of the law at Traverse des Sioux. Each Indian, as he stepped away from the treaty table, was pulled to a barrel nearby and made to sign a document prepared by the traders. By its terms the signatories to the treaty acknowledged their debts to the traders and half-breeds and pledge themselves, as the representatives of their respective bands, to pay those obligations.”

⁶ Pekka Hämäläinen, “Reconstructing the Great Plains: The Long Struggle for Sovereignty and Dominance in the Heart of the Continent,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no. 4 (2016): 481. This chapter is part of the reconceptualized ‘Greater Reconstruction (1845-1877) of the United States that encompasses “three wars (U.S.-Mexico, the Civil War and the War against Native America.”

As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, lived Catholicism allowed Metis families to adapt to a diverse range of hardships. This chapter begins by examining the influential role of natural disasters on Metis Catholicism. Roman Catholicism provided a social and mental space of understanding for calamities and the unforeseen. Catholic faith provided an avenue to comprehend and heal from collective suffering. Furthermore, Metis Catholic adaptation and resistance to settler colonialism was sometimes aided by the actions of priests. At the peak of its political ascent in the United States, Metis Catholicism, through the lobbying efforts of Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt, became a political strategy in direct communication with Washington officials. Belcourt tried to save the 1851 Pembina Treaty. The priest's advocacy on the behalf of Metis and Anishinaabe peoples ended when Belcourt was sent back to Canada for good in 1859.

Belcourt's departure marked the beginning of a major shift in the relationship between Metis believers and their priests. This chapter traces the genesis of transformed allegiances between Metis families and Catholic missionaries before and during the American Civil War. The military conflict did not change the religious beliefs and practices of many Metis bison hunters. It was the war's legacy—its policies and laws dictating the nature of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the United States government—that created a context in which Catholic priests began betraying Metis political interests. While warfare changed the demographic composition of the northern plains, Metis families and their relatives in other Indigenous nations continued to turn to traditional kinship-building strategies to ensure their collective safety and well-being. Nevertheless, the lead-up to American Civil War facilitated settler, government, and clerical transgressions of established Indigenous diplomatic protocols and treaties. The 1850s and 1860s marked a decided turn in the political fate of Metis families. The legal advantages promised to Pembina hunters residing south of the Medicine Line by Father Belcourt faded as settler-sanctioned war arrived on the northern plains.

The 1851 unratified Pembina Treaty episode exhibits tacit federal government recognition of Metis families. Indeed, the state included Metis people in the legal agreement of 1851, but not in the treaty-making process. Treaty observer Willoughby M. Babcock recounted that “There were present several hundred half-breeds—the actual occupants of the land in question, who were not slow to press their claims for compensation should the government agree to purchase it. The position of the United States, however, was that the land belonged solely to the Indians, and the half-breeds were thus barred from participation in the treaty council.”⁷ Although the document excluded the Metis from specific land provisions, the treaty spoke of Pembina and Red Lake Chippewa “relatives of mixed blood” having to settle their debts to Norman Kittson and neighbouring traders, for the sum of \$30,000.⁸ As Francis Paul Prucha noted, treaty-making in the United States functioned “in order to serve non-Indian interests.”⁹ Money promised to settle debts did not take into account the very tangible problem created by the coveted land cession. The 1851 attempt at treaty-making with the Pembina hunters brought no political resolve to the problems created by settler encroachment.

Government officials stalled Pembina Treaty developments because they were critical of its terms. Politicians thought they could wait and seize the Indigenous territory later for even less than what was being offered at the time. Another twelve years would go by before Ramsey, on the behalf of the American state, proposed treaty-making again to the Pembina hunters. Meanwhile, settler intrusion on Indigenous lands continued unabated. Some Metis survived hardships by turning to their faith. Believers such as François Desjarlais promised to patronize religious activities in exchange for security and good fortune. The St. Joseph parish register notes

⁷ Willoughby M. Babcock, “With Ramsey to Pembina A Treaty-Making Trip in 1851,” *Minnesota History* 38, no. 1 (1962): 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹ Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 199.

his desire to finance one High Mass upon his safe return home that year.¹⁰ Giving money to clergy for Mass intentions is a practice with antecedents rooted in the second century.¹¹ Although this kind of transaction was more common in honour of the deceased, believers could request a ceremony for thanksgiving whenever they saw fit.

Metis Catholics kept turning to their faith to make sense of hardships on the northern plains. In the spring of 1852, Red River floodwaters returned to St. Boniface and environs. The moment was recorded in Davis's diary: "La seconde grand hou haute entier à la rivière rouge le printemps 1852."¹² This second arrival of "high water" coincided with his family's crossing of the Medicine Line to take up residence in the United States. By the month of May 1852, water swept away houses on the banks of the Red River. Some Metis people lost their farms, animals, and equipment in the disastrous event. Church of England Bishop David Anderson witnessed the devastation and recalled a Frenchman's rationalization: "*C'est le Bon Dieu qui afflige.*" Some believed the flood was a manifestation of God's imposed suffering upon the land and its people.¹³ Scholars of popular Catholicism during the Middle Ages have remarked that unexplainable events, such as waves of devastating illness or weather calamities, often increased religious devotion. Historian Jacques Toussaert's study of religious sentiment in Flanders explained that some villages lost a third of their inhabitants to disease. Parishioners were in shock: their religious devotion and convictions may seem sensationalistic, yet they helped the faithful get through devastating plagues in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ Although the Metis faithful seem to have

¹⁰ Georges-Antoine Belcourt, "St. Joseph de Pembina, Registre B/M/S 1848-1854," 1854 1848, 53, Fonds Paroisse Saint Joseph de Pembina 1/1750/3076, SHSB. « Grande messe recommandée par François Desjarlais pour faire un heureux voyage. À mon retour je paierai. (livrée par Belcourt) »

¹¹ William Saunders, "Mass Intentions," *Catholic Education Resource Center*, 2005, <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/mass-intentions.html>.

¹² Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 1," 5.

¹³ Manitoba Historical Society, "Red River Flood - 1852," *Manitoba Pageant* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1966), <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/pageant/11/redriverflood1852.shtml>. Accessed 1 May 2015.

¹⁴ Jacques Toussaert, *Le sentiment religieux en Flandre à la fin du Moyen-Âge* (Paris: Plon, 1963) 510-511.

understood certain kinds of suffering as part of their religious devotion, there is no evidence, such as was the case for French believers, that weather-based tribulation, or the pain of disease, increased religious devotion. Instead, the ability to surmount hardships may have been rooted in Indigenous legal and spiritual orders. John Borrows notes in his analysis of Cree legal traditions that “since humans exist within the overarching natural law, they are counselled to observe other living things for guidance in practicing this law.”¹⁵ As such, floodwaters and grasshoppers alike taught lessons and provided ways of understanding the world for Indigenous peoples.

Natural disasters forced certain Metis families to respond to changing circumstances in their material wealth. The 1852 deluge was a significant push factor, inciting the Davis family and others like them to leave St. Boniface in search of greener, dryer, and more bountiful pastures. The high waters forced many Metis families to abandon their farms and crops, travel southwest, and rebuild.¹⁶ A major incentive for the Davis family move to Pembina was the presence of Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt. The priest’s repeated political advocacy on behalf of Metis peoples in the 1840s intertwined religion, socioeconomic prosperity, and traditional Metis lifeways. Although ChWeUm’s parents officially left St. Boniface in 1852, their names feature prominently on the 1850 U.S. census of the Pembina District in the Minnesota Territory. ChWeUm and his extended kin were on a long list of nineteen relatives present for the taking of the American census.¹⁷ They were counted alongside the white population of the region, in a political attempt to push the Territory closer to statehood by inflating demographic numbers. Once the goal of statehood was achieved in 1858, Pembina hunters became Indians once again for the purpose of government categorization. The separation instigated by the 1850 census, or

¹⁵ John Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*, 84.

¹⁶ Charlotte O. Van Cleve, ed., *The Martyrs of Walhalla; or Early Missionary Annals of Northern Minnesota and Dakota* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1890), 27.

¹⁷ State Historical Society of North Dakota, *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, 1:390 While some Davis family members remained in the United States, others, like William Sr’s sister Caroline, remained in Manitoba. The experience of the borderland was very much influenced by individual family circumstances.

the imaginary schism between the Metis and their “full-blood” relatives had lasting effects on tribal members and spearheaded debates about belonging.

Pembina hunters remembered Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt for embracing a different evangelizing approach than his peers in the Church. ChWeUm Davis recorded Father Belcourt’s arrival on Turtle Mountain: “Le rev père Gorges Antoine Belcout à bati une Eglise a St-Joe Wallaha N Dak Aou an 1852 premier Eglise a st Joe et premier pretre.”¹⁸ The church to which Davis referred replaced an earlier construction at Pembina, damaged by the spring floodwaters in 1852. To ensure the safety of the Pembina Catholic community, Belcourt chose a site on high ground in present-day Walhalla, forty miles west of Pembina. This new mission location did not appeal to everyone, since fifty families decided to remain behind. Belcourt then split his time between these two sites since his bishop could not send a second parish priest. The history of Pembina records a significant socioeconomic class divide between those who headed west to St. Joseph and those who stayed in Pembina: those without the means (the carts, horses, oxen) to move remained and “continued to survive on fish, as they always did.”¹⁹ Even so, St. Joseph, renamed Walhalla later in the nineteenth century, soon swelled to over 1,000 inhabitants and became a trading post of importance for Metis buffalo hunters and their relatives.²⁰ Its first church measured fifty by twenty-eight feet, and included a basement that housed the Sisters of the Propagation of the Faith, the makeshift religious order created by Belcourt.²¹ Belcourt tried to enforce a Catholic spiritual monopoly in the region. According to Presbyterians, the Catholic priest informed the local community that attendance at Protestant schools meant the Metis would be prevented from obtaining their last rites in the Catholic tradition. This sanction forced many

¹⁸ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 2,” 4. Davis wrote that Belcourt built the St. Joseph church at Walhalla, North Dakota in August 1852, acting as its first priest.

¹⁹ “Assumption of the B.V.M Pembina, N. Dak.,” 5.

²⁰ Van Cleve, *The Martyrs of Walhalla; or Early Missionary Annals of Northern Minnesota and Dakota*, 27.

²¹ Belleau, “Brief History of Old Pembina,” 10.

residents of St. Joe to comply with Belcourt's wishes and avoid the Presbyterian school altogether.²²

When ChWeUm and his relatives left St. Boniface for the St. Joseph mission site, they did so in hope of rebuilding as soon as possible. St. Boniface Metis moving south of the Medicine Line wished to re-create the French river lot system. Davis's WPA interviewer reported that:

It was arranged so that each family should have four acres of land in order that they might be sufficiently close together for protection against the Sioux, who figure quite prominently in Mr. Davis's stories. In connection with furnishing the information contained in the last preceding sentence, he mentioned the name of Father Belcourt, but did not make it clear whether Father Belcourt had made the arrangement mentioned above or whether it was made by some government agency located at St. Joe. The biographer received the impression that the arrangement had been made by Father Belcourt, whom Mr. Davis is very proud to have known and to have associated with.²³

It is clear from the biographer's perspective that Father Belcourt encouraged Metis buffalo hunting families to move to the United States. According to the church history of Pembina, North Dakota, when Father Belcourt arrived at St. Joseph after the flood, he immediately began promising land to Metis inhabitants. He "surveyed lots of land for seven or eight miles down the Pembina River, the lots being the same size as the Selkirk Settlement, each one a mile long and six chains wide, for the use of those who wished to settle on and cultivate and farm."²⁴ It is impossible to know just under whose authority Belcourt surveyed, and promised, land to Metis families. The potential motivations for following Belcourt's advice are clear. As evidenced by the Battle of Grand Coteau the previous year, bison-hunting brigades found safety in numbers and relied on the strategic advantages of living, working, and worshipping alongside one another. In moving south of the forty-ninth parallel, Metis peoples escaped ongoing economic pressures imposed by the HBC fur trade monopoly north of the Medicine Line. Only a few years prior, the

²² Van Cleve, *Ibid.*

²³ Davis, "William Davis Biographical File," 5.

²⁴ "Assumption of the B.V.M Pembina, N. Dak.," 5.

heads of ninety-nine Metis buffalo hunting families put their names on a list of demands addressed to the Governor of Minnesota Territory, asking him for assistance in keeping the peace.²⁵ ChWeUm wrote of the hardships created by the HBC monopoly back then:

La compagni de la bè du reson rendu sur la rivière rouge avec bien de la marchandise pour acheté les robe de buffelou et les pou de lop et les pou de renard et les pou de chien de prairi et les pou de castror et les pou de loutre et les pou de lousarvier et les pou de pècan et les pou dorse de fandan au mitise anglai et au mitise canadien dachète une seule pou de ses peltri si quqlqu'un a achete ses peltri margrai les défanse il sera enprizon di till car il terrai une loi et ausser il zouvai des solda pour leur forse et cela épeuran les mitise il nozaipas achété quelque choze même par marchi entre eu zotre ni avec les sauvage. La compagni vendai comme il voulai et il payai comme il voulait²⁶

In sum, a flood, economic hardship, future promise, plus a well-known and beloved missionary influenced the Davis family's decision to take up residence in the United States. Since, in Michif, *Latan de Levernement*, or wintering times persisted into the 1880s, the move south was not indicative of a desire for sedentary living. Instead, it marked the continuation of the family's participation in the buffalo hunt.

While the spring flood of 1852 forced many Metis to move south, conflict characterized the summer months. Increasing socioeconomic pressures caused by settler trespassers and declining natural resources led to more violence between the Metis and the Dakota. Davis's diary recorded that the Metis killed two Dakotas at the Grand Coteau of the Missouri River. In August 1852, a Dakota allegedly murdered Antoine Morin east of Devil's Lake.²⁷ In another chronicle for the same year, Davis wrote: "La grosse battalle dans le gran couteau. Mes mitise et les siou

²⁵ Pembina Half-Breeds, "Petition of the Pembina Half-Breeds to the Minnesota Territory Legislature."

²⁶ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 5," 2–3. My translation: The Hudson's Bay Company arrived on Red River with lots of merchandise to buy buffalo robes and wolf hides and fox hides, and prairie dog hides, and beaver hides, and otter hides, and (?) hides and bear hides, forbade the English Metis and the *Canadien* Metis of selling their pelts elsewhere. If someone sold their hides against the HBC's order, they would be imprisoned they said because they claimed it was law and had soldiers as their force, which scared the Metis. They did not purchase anything, did not ever trade amongst themselves or their relatives of other nations. The company sold goods at the prices it wanted and paid what it wanted for furs.

²⁷ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 2," 7.

pierre Ducept asouvé la vie au vieu Luca Lafarté le vieu Luca étai un grou sacreur dans sa peur il se recommande a Dieu. Baptist Davis a eu la jambe cassée par une bal par les siou an 1852.”²⁸ In this recollection, a man saved the life of another, in part because the latter apologized for his habitual swearing and submitted himself to God. Famous for his foul language, Lafarté put his safety in God’s hands, and owned up to his sin, hoping for God’s protection. Davis added that in this same skirmish, the Dakota shot Jean-Baptiste Davis, ChWeUm’s godfather, in the leg. In October 1852, the Metis chased two “Sioux” for thirty miles, Davis recollected, before Henri Poitras, a Metis buffalo hunter, killed one man, while the other reportedly died from fear.²⁹ Though Davis does not provide reasons for these violent encounters, they fit within the historical context of Indigenous peoples defending themselves from, and reacting to, settler encroachment on their traditional territories. Lived religion helped believers like Lafarté to get through violent events. Surviving a skirmish was a demonstration of God’s power. Lived Catholicism shaped behaviour (condemned the use of foul language) and created common grounds of understanding, or a decorum.

Metis social norms and lifeways were changing as rapidly as the environment around them. Although born just seven years apart, ChWeUm Davis and his brother Michel had wholly different experiences of the bison hunt. Born 2 November 1852 at the St. Joseph mission newly opened by Father Belcourt, Michel received his baptism on the day of his birth. Father Belcourt carefully noted that the wedding uniting William Sr. and Marie Eno dit Canada was legitimate in the eyes of the Church, meaning that the family had an established tradition of Catholic sacraments. Michel’s godparents were Michel Grandbois and Émilie Houle, a Metis couple from

²⁸ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 5,” 15.

²⁹ Ibid., 16. This is not the same Antoine Morin who worked for the HBC at Pelican Narrows.

the British side of Red River.³⁰ Although ChWeUm and Michel were only seven years apart, their lived experiences were vastly different because of the plummeting bison population. Michel reported to WPA interviewers that unlike his older brother, who started killing bison in the Dakotas at the age of eight, Michel's first kill in Montana dates from 1877, at age twenty-five. The decline in buffalo herds meant that Michel did not learn to handle a gun as a child, likely since the hunts were reserved for those with established skill. Apprenticeship was impossible due to the animal's increasing scarcity.³¹ ChWeUm reported in his interview that the Metis buffalo territory of his youth spanned "north to Winnipeg, east to the Red River, south to Devil's Lake, and west all the way to Montana. They rode horseback using Indian saddles. Their weapons were flintlock guns. Mr. Davis has killed 'not less than 2000 or 3000 buffaloes.'"³² The different experiences between the Davis brothers ought to be highlighted as part of the negative effects of settler colonialism on traditional Metis lifeways. The decline of bison herds forever transformed how Metis families raised their young.

ChWeUm Davis immortalized the year he shot his first buffalo (1853) with a diary entry about the Church: "Mort de Mgr provencher jeun 1853."³³ The death of Red River's first bishop marks a significant trend in data recording by ChWeUm Davis. Davis wrote down the death of notable clergy he encountered throughout his travels. The bison hunter recorded six missionary passings, notwithstanding repetitions, and a single birth, that of Rev. Father Patrick Beaudry, a Cree-Metis Oblate (1873–1947). Davis gave Catholic officials the same kind of attention to detail he provided for his immediate family and extended kin. The Turtle Mountain historian recorded the vital statistics for hundreds of people. The presence of priests and a bishop, interspersed

³⁰ Belcourt, "St. Joseph de Pembina, Registre B/M/S 1848-1854," 81.

³¹ Davis, "Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire."

³² Davis, "William Davis Biographical File," 4.

³³ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 2," 17.

alongside community members, indicates that they were, at the very least, important enough to the hunter to warrant remembrance. It also points to a continued affiliation of his relatives with the Church.³⁴

The Davis family chose to adhere to Catholicism in a context of religious pluralism. It was not the only branch of Christianity available to them, nor was it the sole spiritual option present among their relatives. A Protestant (Anglican) minister arrived in the Red River valley in 1819, one year after Roman Catholic priests settled there.³⁵ Protestant clergy distinguished themselves from Catholics, in part, by their reliance on English instead of learning and using local Indigenous languages.³⁶ This focus on English may have slowed their conversion efforts among French-speaking Metis, but it did not prevent Protestants from reaching many Red River inhabitants. Religious diversity was a significant element of buffalo-hunting polities. Historian Frits Pannekoek's data-crunching of 1849 Red River census reveals that only forty-eight percent of the Red River population identified as Catholic. The others presumably subscribed to Indigenous spirituality or some form of Protestantism such as Presbyterianism or Anglicanism.³⁷ Knowing oneself as Christian, or Catholic, however, did not preclude also practising Indigenous spirituality.

In light of this religious diversity, it is not surprising that, by the 1850s, Pembina, and later St. Joseph (Walhalla), attracted a Protestant mission. James Tanner, a Baptist minister's son identified as a "half-breed" by Linda Slaughter in 1906, requested a Protestant presence for the

³⁴ In addition to referencing Provencher, Davis's writings recorded the birth date and passing of Father Albert Lacombe, renowned for his missionary work in present-day Alberta. Davis also recorded the passing of Father J.A. Dupont, and Father Malo. William Davis, 'The William Davis Diaries, Book 1 p. 17, 30', n.d., MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND. See also Book 2, 18.

³⁵ Morton, *Manitoba*, 56.

³⁶ Choquette, *Canada's Religions*, 184.

³⁷ Pannekoek, *A Snug Little Flock*, 18.

area as early as 1849 following a visit to relatives in Pembina.³⁸ In 1852, the Baptist Society appointed Elijah Terry to evangelize the region. Reverend Alonzo Barnard accompanied Elijah Terry and planned to open a school there. On the morning of 28 June 1852, Terry died at the hands of “a party of Sioux” whilst “scor[ing] timber” to construct the missions and school.³⁹ According to Walhalla historian Diana Yeado, Barnard asked Father Belcourt for permission to bury the Protestant preacher on consecrated ground. The permission was granted, yet Terry’s final resting place would be in the cemetery section reserved for suicides, since the deceased was not Catholic.⁴⁰

Although Christian denominations were competing for souls on the Great Plains, solidarity in times of crises transcended religious creed. In 1853, Barnard returned to Walhalla to attempt his experiment anew, accompanied by Reverend David Spencer. Both men brought their spouses who met an untimely demise. Mrs. Barnard succumbed that October to consumption (pneumonia), while Mrs. Spencer died when gunfire erupted in her house on 30 August 1854.⁴¹ Settlers immortalized these moments and their various casualties under the Martyrs of Walhalla moniker. ChWeUm Davis confirmed the Dakota shot the missionary’s wife through the window “à traver du chasé a se fai tuez par les siou.”⁴² In 1888, a *Canadien* named Felix Latreille, who assisted with the 1854 burial, exhumed all the martyrs and reburied them in a newly established Presbyterian cemetery. Latreille’s wife, Marguerite Jolibois, an Anishinaabe woman, took care of Mrs. Spencer’s children after her death, while local women assisted in the preparation of her

³⁸ Slaughter, “Leaves from Northwest History,” 252.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁴⁰ Diana Yeado, ‘Walhalla Martyrs Story’, Municipal website, *Walhalla, ND Heart of the Rendezvous Region*, (Accessed 15 November 2016), <http://www.walhalland.org/martyrs.php>.

⁴¹ Harvey and Myrtle Dalzell et al., *Walhalla Quasquicentennial Anniversary* (Walhalla ND, 1973), 9.

⁴² Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 5,” 19. Davis wrote that the “Sioux” killed the woman.

remains for burial.⁴³ The social order of the northern plains sometimes united people across religious and ethnic lines, especially in times of sudden death or violence.

Throughout 1853 and 1854, in correspondence with American officials, St. Paul diocese Bishop Joseph Crétin advocated for the Metis society centred on Father Belcourt's initiatives with the Metis. Writing to Iowa senator G.W. Jones, Bishop Crétin indicated that Belcourt served as a blacksmith and carpenter to the people of St. Joseph. The Bishop credited the missionary with outfitting the region with its first flour and sawmills, and threshing machine, all "at his own cost and by his own industry." Such projects required both community support and labour, evidently provided, in part, by Metis hunters. Bishop Crétin asked for monetary aid, "commonly granted to those who cultivate the land among Indians."⁴⁴ Since the appeal went unanswered, the following year Bishop Crétin requested the same thing from George W. Manypenny, Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington. Noting that the American government funded a Protestant missionary to the tune of \$1,300 U.S.D, Bishop Crétin, requested money under the guise of the "temporal welfare" improvements. Bishop Crétin added that their Protestant counterparts took care of "only two children."⁴⁵ In contrast, Belcourt reportedly taught a total of ninety-three children in by 1854, including ChWeUm Davis, then aged nine.⁴⁶ All of Bishop Crétin's attempts at fundraising from American officials went unanswered. In 1854, Father Belcourt travelled to Washington to advocate on the behalf of the Pembina hunters *viva voce*.

⁴³ Van Cleve, *The Martyrs of Walhalla; or Early Missionary Annals of Northern Minnesota and Dakota*, 29.

⁴⁴ Reardon, *George Anthony Belcourt Pioneer Catholic Missionary of the Northwest, 1803-1874: His Life and Times*, 139.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁶ Daniel F Jerome, *The Trail of Misgivings: A Scourging Journey*, ed. Owen P Jerome (Minot, N.D.: North American Heritage Press, 2006) 54. Jerome cites a passage published in James Reardon, *George Anthony Belcourt Pioneer Catholic Missionary of the Northwest*, 142-143. That passage is attributed to the published 1854 address of Father Belcourt to the United States government in the 1906 (vol 1) *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota* however, the information about the number of children taught by Belcourt was not published in the 1906 document.

Belcourt's advocacy indicated the diversification of Metis political strategies to advance their interests. Hoping to resolve the unratified 1851 treaty with the United States government, Pembina hunters addressed government officials with a petition in 1852. This petition, sent to the President of the United States, "signed by over a hundred chiefs and great men of war," went unanswered. Two years later, on 20 November 1854, Belcourt presented a list of six major grievances from the Turtle Mountain Anishinaabeg and Metis to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Belcourt contextualized this political action by rooting it in past practices: his advocacy was the latest attempt to settle the 1851 treaty "as soon as possible."

Father Belcourt's political approaches to catechizing brought him closer to his parishioners. After learning *Anishinaabemowin* and accompanying Metis hunters on their bison hunts, Belcourt went to Washington on his way back to Canada in 1854. At the request of tribal leadership, the priest lobbied for Anishinaabeg and Metis financial support and acknowledgment of rights recognized by U.S. federal law.⁴⁷ Their six grievances were economic in nature and echoed the 1849 petition: the first point called for the settlement of the "half-breed relatives" among the Pembina Chippewa, ensuring their rights to the land. The second, third, and fourth grievances pertained to HBC and British settler encroachment, violence, and the whiskey trade. The fifth complaint sought to prevent future warfare, and the sixth asked for more funding for Belcourt's mission schools.⁴⁸ Catholic clergymen seldom advocated so strongly for the welfare of their parishioners. Belcourt's position set him apart from priests only interested in fulfilling spiritual obligations. Nonetheless, clergymen promoting the advancement of Metis interests were not making progress among state officials.

⁴⁷ State Historical Society of North Dakota, *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, 1:214.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:215–16.

In the mid nineteenth century, the American political climate was not favourable to Catholic interests. Scholars of Roman Catholicism have argued that anti-Catholic sentiments expressed by the Know-Nothing party in the late 1840s and early 1850s limited the political avenues opened to its priests. Thriving on anti-Irish xenophobia to increase their political power, Know-Nothings criticized, “Catholics as subservient to a foreign ruler, the authoritarian Pope of Rome, and thus revived from the Mexican War the familiar charge that Catholics could not truly be loyal citizens because of their religion.”⁴⁹ The presence of Metis Catholics in the Pembina region, therefore, did not appease the hearts and minds of United States politicians. Articulations of a proslavery empire in the American West followed the territorial gains of the U.S.-Mexico War.⁵⁰ The reality of mobile Indigenous nations competing for declining natural resources (e.g.: the bison) in the northern plains prevented the immediate expansion of slavery. The prelude to the Civil War and debates over the nature of settler colonialism in the American West fuelled violence on the northern U.S. borderlands, a region generally overlooked by historians studying this epoch.⁵¹

Indigenous peoples shaped the governance of the northern plains during the 1850s. By continuing to maintain control over the means of production, bison robes, and their trade, Metis families supported themselves in a rapidly changing socioeconomic context. The political volatility born from pressures of settler encroachment, encouraged by the American government’s desire to force Indigenous nations of the Plains into treaties, created dangerous conditions for Metis bison hunters. Even so, Indigenous peoples continued to resolve problems, form alliances, and negotiate as they had since time immemorial, in nation-to-nation agreements,

⁴⁹ William B. Kurtz, “Let Us Hear No More “Nativism””: The Catholic Press in the Mexican and Civil Wars,” *Civil War History* 60, no. 1 (2014): 19.

⁵⁰ Kevin Waite, “Jefferson Davis and Proslavery Visions of Empire in the Far West,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no. 4 (2016): 537.

⁵¹ With the notable exception of Michel Hogue’s *Metis and the Medicine Line*.

using established legal traditions.⁵² In the 1820s, Metis families formalized their links to the *Nehiyaw Pwat* Confederacy.⁵³ According to Nicholas Vrooman “The Cree, Assiniboine, Chippewa, and Michif came together at Buffalo Lodge Lake, in what is now northwest North Dakota, but then an open Indigenous buffalo pasture, to form one of the most significant alliances ever to occur in the centre of the continent.”⁵⁴ The partnership created in the 1820s was political, economic, and spiritual in nature. It unified the Metis with their relatives of other nations through ceremony. Metis hunters participated in these rituals despite their religious differences. Vrooman explains:

A “Thirsty Dance” was called where the ceremony would be given to the newcomers. The Ojibwa were *Midewiwin* out of the Woodlands, and the Michifs were Romish (Catholic) but now they also needed to have the “Medicine power” of the plains, their new home. Some were to take on both traditions inclusively, with many Ojibwa holding onto their *Midewiwin* well into the twentieth century and Michifs remains strong in their Catholicism.⁵⁵

Solidifying kinship links to other Indigenous nations through ceremony was a political action. Participating in the spiritual lifeways of Anishinaabe relatives offered Metis families diverse avenues for developing communal living strategies. By building connections with neighbouring nations, Metis hunters were better able to cope and react to the economic, military, and spiritual pressures increasingly transforming their lifeways. The 1820s event assembled 1,500 dancers in

⁵² Borrows, *Canada's Indigenous Constitution*, 19. Borrows reminds readers “Indigenous peoples have not generally acquiesced to the common law’s purported replacement of their laws.”

⁵³ The *Nehiyaw Pwat* translates to Cree-Assiniboine alliance. Both Nicholas Vrooman and Rob Innes have written extensively on the topic. See: Nicholas C.P. Vrooman, *Infinity Nation* (Unpublished, Helena Montana, 2010) and Robert Innes, ‘The Importance of Family Ties to Members of Cowessess First Nation’ (Ph.D dissertation, American Indian Studies, University of Arizona, 2007) as well as Robert Alexander Innes, *Elder Brother and the Law of the People: Contemporary Kinship and Cowessess First Nation* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013).

⁵⁴ Nicholas Vrooman, “Many Eagle Set Thirsty Dance (Sun Dance) Song: The Metis Receive Sun Dance Song” in Lawrence J. Barkwell et al., eds., *Metis Legacy: A Metis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*, vol. 2, 187-91 (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2001), 187.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:188. Vrooman reports Many Eagle Set’s Thirsty Dance (Sun Dance) song was given in ceremony to Tony Belcourt, the president of the Metis Nation of Ontario, in 2004 at the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation. The song was given by Francis Eagle Heart Cree, keeper of the song. Cree’s great-grandfather was Broken Arm, a close family friend of Many Eagle Set. Many Eagle Set, Broken Arm, and Jean-Baptiste Wilkie were all present at this event, the latter was ChWeUm Davis’s half-uncle through his grandmother’s second marriage.

“the largest ‘Sun Dance’ to ever occur in the Northern Plains.”⁵⁶ Metis families relied on traditional governance in 1851, attempting to “parlay” their way out of the Battle of Grand Coteau.⁵⁷ They continued to do so throughout the decade to resolve a series of conflicts among themselves, their Anishinaabe relatives, and the Dakota, who were all competing for dwindling natural resources. Peaceful relations were not always possible. In his WPA interview, Davis reported that the St. Joseph brigade had a “big fight” with the “Sioux” in 1858, while Metis families were in the midst of processing pemmican. A stampede of warriors overtook the hunters, costing the Metis “two hundred horses and thirty-three oxen.”⁵⁸ This devastating loss confirms that pre-established diplomatic ties did not always keep the peace. Davis reported that the human losses totalled seven for the St. Joseph brigade, and twenty-three or twenty-four for the Dakota.

Violent interactions were expensive and threatened the health of Metis bison hunters. Those without horses borrowed whatever animals they could, and the brigade attempted to resume its activities. Since combat had calamitous socioeconomic costs, Metis families tried to curtail its effects on the Plains. To do so, Metis families turned to treaty-making. Patricia and Karen Poitra’s *Turtle Mountain Chippewa tribal history*, published in 1997, explains how the 1858 Sweet Corn Treaty – orchestrated by the American government, the Chippewa (with their Metis relatives) and the Dakota – set territorial boundaries for cohabitation.⁵⁹ The treaty effectively recognized the Anishinaabe claim to 11,000,000 acres of land in North Dakota. After the Anishinaabeg and Metis opened diplomatic processes, they worked out terms for a hunting territory agreeable to all, therefore ensuring their profits and practices could continue as they had in the past, free of interference or violence. The Catholic Church tried to claim responsibility for

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:189.

⁵⁷ Gaudry, “Kaa-Tipeyimishoyaahk - ‘We Are Those Who Own Ourselves’: A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870.” See Chapter 4: ‘peace and friendship, which has so long knit our hearts together’: The Métis Diplomatic Tradition and the Indigenous Political System in the North-West.

⁵⁸ Davis, “William Davis Biographical File,” 6.

⁵⁹ Poitra and Poitra, *The History and Culture of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa*, 12.

the treaty, stating that Charles-Jean Antoine Mestre dit Lagrenade, the missionary priest who accompanied bison hunters that summer, facilitated the exchange.⁶⁰ In light of the detailed testimonies of eyewitnesses, and the lack of evidence from the Church, it is impossible to substantiate this claim at present.

While continuing to appeal to American authorities, Indigenous nations of the northern plains maintained diplomatic relations with one another. The end of the 1850s brought along a year of peace between Metis and Dakota. In the words of ChWeUm Davis: “an 1859 Lani de la grand pai a la petite hil au mort les métise et les siou”⁶¹ The two groups had prearranged to meet the previous year, outside of treaty-making spaces governed by United States officials. Material and human losses promoted these peace talks. Davis, aged fourteen, with already six years of experience as a bison hunter, attended this gathering. The Turtle Mountain community explained the diplomatic proceedings in their centennial anniversary publication. Citing William Davis Jr. (ChWeUm), it reads:

On the first day of the conference the bands rode out and met halfway between the camps. They were on horseback and fully armed, ready for battle, if necessary. They rode in parallel lines until they were about 100 feet apart. They then turned to face each other. After a few moments of silence a Sioux Chief slowly dismounted, accepted a huge peace pipe of catlinite (pipestone) from a warrior, stepped into the lane between the lines and invited the Metis leader to join him. The pipe was first presented to Chief John Baptiste Wilkie, leader of the mixed-bloods and after him the sub chiefs and headmen of the Sioux and the captains of the Metis puffed the pipe. When the serious matters were finished the two groups mingled freely to indulge in sports and trade, the latter consisting chiefly of barter for guns and buffalo robes and horse trading.

The next day the conference began. It was agreed that the unpleasant relations between the Chippewa (the relatives), the Metis and the Sioux were unnecessary and dangerous. The Sioux were accused of raiding the Chippewa country, stealing horses and sometimes scalping Chippewa people. The Metis were most concerned because the Sioux “made fun” with the “meat” (other portions of the body). The Sioux

⁶⁰ State Historical Society of North Dakota, *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, 1:220.

⁶¹ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 2,” 9.

charged that the Metis encouraged the coming of whites and the killing of too many buffaloes. But the line was fixed. It was to follow the Goose River from the mouth to the timber of the Goose where the river has three branches. From the source of the branches the boundary followed the stream to its mouth and continued to Dog Den Butte, from there it ran south to the Missouri River opposite the mouth of the Knife River.⁶²

Michel Davis, ChWeUm's younger brother, was also present at this event. He identified the site of the treaty near present-day Leeds, North Dakota.⁶³ Speaking through the pen of Oblate Father Charles Mestre whilst recovering from a double amputation, Father Joseph Goiffon, the invited Catholic priest, stated the Dakota sought peace with the Metis and their relatives because Americans made many promises they could not keep. The Dakota reported that 500 of their people died in epidemics, some of which they attributed to the clothes they purchased from settlers, undoubtedly influencing political proceedings. The episode featured a buffalo dance, followed by a prairie dog dance, uniting Metis and Dakota peoples in and through ritual. That summer saw no major violent conflicts between the two groups, who saluted one another as they travelled across the northern plains.⁶⁴ Continued Metis participation in Indigenous ceremony to build political ties exemplifies the lived Catholicism's syncretism on the northern plains.

Metis faithful felt responsible for the welfare of clergymen as much as they did for their own kin. Service to others, expected in Catholicism and in Metis life, was the norm. In the summer of 1860, Metis hunters continued their political traditions, accompanied by Father Joseph Goiffon. Pembina hunters met Dakota chiefs for a thirty-three-day gathering during which they concluded diplomatic terms for peace. The priest spent his time catechizing and prepared the

⁶² Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann's Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*, 314–15.

⁶³ Davis, "Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire."

⁶⁴ Charles OMI Mestre, "Charles Mestre to the Superior of the Great Seminary of Boues, France, 5 January 1861," Reel 2, Doc 1861-29 to 1861-45., AA.

children present for their first communion.⁶⁵ In October of that year, the missionary left the hunters to visit his bishop in St. Paul, Minnesota. Upon his return later that month, Goiffon, ill-equipped for the elements, was caught in a blizzard while on horseback. The weather conditions eventually killed Goiffon's horse, which the priest then used as shelter and for food. Goiffon ate raw horsemeat and wrapped himself in a buffalo hide inside the horse's carcass to survive the dangerous flurry. The next morning, the priest shouted for help.⁶⁶ A Metis named Pete Buie related that Goiffon froze in the "étang à Houle," located in "the northern part of the grand Marias."⁶⁷ After learning their priest was in dire straits, Metis people dispatched Joseph Rolette to the rescue, and he escorted Goiffon to St. Boniface for medical care. The time spent outside overnight resulted in the eventual amputation of the missionary's leg and foot, making him unable to accompany Metis brigades on hunting expeditions from then on.⁶⁸

The Davis family's Catholicism was decidedly political. Father Belcourt's presence south of the Medicine Line following the 1852 flood of the Red River incited many Metis to move. Political negotiations, treaties, and peacemaking remained imbued with distinctive aspects of Catholicism, such as prayer, miracles, and obedience to teachings about theft, death, life, and the afterlife. Metis families relied on their religious beliefs, convictions, and rituals to guide and advance their sovereign identity and actions, which included simultaneous participation in Indigenous ceremonies and petition-signing to lobby state officials for political change. Besides recognizing the advantages of fostering kin ties with other nations, Metis hunters also saw financial and social benefits in their adhesion to Catholicism. Lived Catholicism among Metis

⁶⁵ Belleau, "Brief History of Old Pembina," 12.

⁶⁶ Kardong, *Beyond Red River*, 30–31.

⁶⁷ J.M. Belleau, "Pete Buie's Relation - The Old Trail," 1848, 1/1777/3020 Ressources généalogiques - registres sacramentaux - Dakota du Nord Pembina 1858-1862, SHSB.

⁶⁸ 'Annals of the Propagation of the Faith', *Letters From the Bishops and Missioners Employed in the Missions of the Old and New World, and of All the Documents Relating to Those Missions, and to the Institution for the Propagation of the Faith* XXIII, no. CXXXIII (1860).

families in the early-to-mid nineteenth century created an avenue to affirm and negotiate a better socioeconomic standing for themselves with state and Church representatives. As settler colonialism and its processes transformed the geopolitical prairie landscape, Metis hunters remained able to express their sovereignty and their faith outside of spaces controlled by settlers, until losing the advocacy of clergymen. In addition to conflicts between Indigenous peoples and state actors, a new political circumstance accelerated the changes that forever marked the Great Plains: the American Civil War.

METIS BISON HUNTERS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

The Canadian settler project arrived in haste after the beginning of the American Civil War.⁶⁹ While the forty-ninth parallel served as a dividing line between U.S. and British-controlled territory from 1818 onwards, the invisible boundary became too porous for Euro-American elites. Following the secession of Confederate states from the Union and the start of war in the United States, Canada hurried its political claim to the territory north of the Medicine Line. Fearing an American or Fenian invasion would seize power north of the Medicine Line, officials penned the 1867 British North American Act.⁷⁰ The American Civil War accelerated the Canadian settler-state project, legitimizing its forced dispossession of Indigenous lands north of the Medicine Line. As historian James Daschuck recently demonstrated, famine and disease facilitated

⁶⁹ Lorenzo Veracini contends that settler colonialism is a distinct triangular system with metropolitan, settler, and Indigenous agencies at play. Lorenzo Veracini and *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 6. This dissertation maintains that, notwithstanding the colony of Newfoundland, British settler colonialism in the northern regions of the Americas ended in July 1867, when an act of British Parliament took effect and the Canadian settler project came to be. At that point, the locus of the metropolitan agency in the settler colonial system shifted overseas from London to Ottawa. Granted, the first British North America Act limited the Canadian state's sovereignty in some significant ways, but the law also clearly authorized a new system of Canadian settler colonialism. Section 91(24), for instance, assigned responsibility for all "Indians and lands reserved for the Indians" to the newly created federal government. The Canadian settler state assumed responsibility for management of all territory north of the forty-ninth parallel from the Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains. Thanks to Paul Aikenhead for this footnote.

⁷⁰ Claire Hoy, *Canadians in the Civil War* (Toronto: McArthur & Co, 2004), 371.

Indigenous territorial cession favouring the nascent state. Canada's founding fathers were well aware of the power of starvation and used it to subjugate Indigenous nations at the expense of human life.⁷¹

A lesser-known reality linked to this story is the long-term impact of the American Civil War and its Reconstruction policies on Metis families with long-term residences south of the forty-ninth parallel. How did they react to a declaration of war whose major fronts, although distant from their traditional territories, created a flood of refugees? What kinds of transformations to the social and religious spheres occurred in this period? ChWeUm Davis's account begins an outline of Metis experiences in the American Civil War. The rapid political, legal, and demographic shifts that occurred between 1861 and 1865 left their imprint on the region and its residents.

The American Civil War began in April 1861, but its direct impact on Metis Catholicism was slim. In contrast, the postwar changes uniting U.S. officials and Christian missionaries forever transformed the relationship between Metis polities and the Catholic Church south of the Medicine Line. ChWeUm Davis does not explicitly mention the Civil War in his notes for 1861. Still, the conflict is mentioned throughout his five manuscripts. Davis recorded employment opportunities provided by the war. While the Catholic Church condoned slavery in the United States as a god-given right, men like Davis often volunteered for military service not to stand against their Church, nor to take a moral stance against the enslavement of people. Metis men like Davis entered military service because of immediate financial need.⁷² As the American military built forts on the Great Plains to reinforce their control of Indigenous lands and Euro-American settlements, bison herds were declining at an alarming rate. The sudden settler

⁷¹ Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*, xix.

⁷² Kurtz, "Let Us Hear No More 'Nativism,'" 21.

demographic increases before the official signing of treaties restricted the movement of Indigenous peoples trying to assert their legal right to land.

In June 1861, in a sign of the of changing prairie political landscapes, Davis remarked that his Anishinaabe relatives performed their Sun Dance “a licar, Tonner N. Dak.”⁷³ The bison hunter noted that unlike in previous years, the ceremony of 1861 occurred away from traditional Sun Dance grounds for unspecified reasons. The summer of 1861 also saw the visit of Bishop Thomas Langdon Grace, newly consecrated head of the St. Paul Diocese in Minnesota. The Dominican priest travelled via land and water, from St. Paul to the little wood church at St. Joseph built eight years prior. Bishop Grace reported a population of over 1,000 people he called “Canadian Half-Breeds” who resided in the town and its vicinity. He officiated at the sacrament of confirmation for forty-five worshippers. For this occasion, parishioners sung hymns in *Anishinaabemowin*, accompanied by a melodium, an organ-like musical instrument powered by pedals.⁷⁴ The people confirmed by Bishop Grace in the 1861 ceremony were likely youth or children. There was no list of their names, as is often customary, in the St. Joseph parish register. Confirmations were family events. Kin accompanied the forty-five celebrants on this special day. The Bishop lauded St. Joseph as the location that “has more the appearance of a town than any place we have seen since leaving St. Cloud.”⁷⁵

While it was a time of religious devotion and growth for some, for others the American Civil War signified a renewal of interest in treaty-making with Indigenous peoples. The conflict’s

⁷³ William Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 3,” n.d., 21, MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND. Tonner is likely Towner, ND.

⁷⁴ Catholic Historical Society of St. Paul, *Acta et Dicta: A Collection of Historical Data Regarding the Origin and Growth of the Catholic Church in the Northwest.*, 1:178–79. The celebration of confirmation is a renewal of the sacrament of baptism. It is a second profession of faith by the believer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that for adults, baptism immediately precedes confirmation, while children experienced their confirmation after they reach the “age of discretion.” Laying the foundation for confirmation entailed confessing their sins and undertaking preparations by studying Catholic teachings and engaging in prayer. See: Catholic Church and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 329–31.

⁷⁵ Kardong, *Beyond Red River*, 26.

resolution would determine whether the settlement model of the American West would include slavery. Michel Davis's recollections note that his family, like many Metis and Anishinaabeg, including Turtle Mountain Chief Red Thunder, made their way to Grand Forks in 1862 as a prelude to the Treaty of Old Crossing in 1863. The treaty was derailed when Red Thunder raided unnamed freighters passing nearby. Settler goods were redistributed among the Turtle Mountain people.⁷⁶ At this point, the Pembina Chippewa had waited over ten years for their anticipated 1851 treaty ratification.

The same year Pembina hunters worked towards treaty-making with the U.S. government, Metis heads of families turned to petition signing once again. Three years prior, in 1859, the Church transferred Father Belcourt from the United States back to Eastern Canada, and posted him to the Maritimes, where he remained until the end of his life. In 1862, sixty-one petitioners from St. Joseph requested the return of their beloved priest. Addressing the Archbishop of Québec, dozens of men asked that Belcourt be sent back to them, even though St. Joseph and Pembina fell under the jurisdiction of the St. Paul Diocese, created in 1850. The plea marked the second time in fifteen years laypeople asked for Belcourt's return. For many Metis Catholics, the loss of Belcourt was an injustice and a political affront. Citing Guillaume Charette's manuscript relating Louis Goulet life story, historian Sherry Farrell Racette noted some Metis "attributed the [1860] burning of the St. Boniface Cathedral and other misfortunes as punishment for the treatment of Belcourt, and the closure of the mission at St. Joseph."⁷⁷ Father Jules Belleau of Assumption Abbey investigated the history of Belcourt's departure for his study of Pembina's

⁷⁶ Davis, "Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire." Supplement, 26.

⁷⁷ See note 28. In Sherry Farrell Racette, 'Sewing for a Living: The Commodification of Métis Women's Artistic Production', in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, ed. Myra Rutherdale and Katie Pickles (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 43.

past. In 1939, the North Dakota priest collected the deathbed testimony of Mrs. Catherine Gina Rondeau (née Bellegarde). Rondeau lived with Belcourt in the 1850s. She explained:

I lived in the house of Fr. Belcourt at St. Joseph, now Walhalla. I was about 9 years of age when I came to live with the nuns, there I saw Father Bellecourt many times. He worked very much. I was in his convent for 5 years. I am an Indian, or half-breed an orphan. I was 11 years old when Fr Belcourt left St Joseph. There were 5 sisters in his order of nuns, called nuns of the Propagation of the faith. They lived under the church... Fr Belcourt had a brother of the Holy Family of [Belley] with him named Bro Dosithe [sic], who fell in love with a novice nun called Catherine Lacerte, who he married later on, a breed girl.⁷⁸

Historians acknowledge that hard evidence about the inner workings of Belcourt's unorthodox education plans are difficult to find.⁷⁹ The motivations of the Church hierarchy to ultimately transfer Belcourt out of Pembina remain hidden.

Relying on Metis testimonials instead of Catholic archives allows for a more fulsome analysis of the Metis response and feelings towards Belcourt's departure. Information provided by Metis informants can be triangulated to assess their accuracy. The Brother identified by Catherine Rondeau was Pierre Curtaz, known as Brother Thimothé. Brother Thimothé arrived to the region from France in November 1854. Twentieth-century correspondence between Father Antoine Deschambeault of St. Boniface and Father Belleau of Assumption Abbey about this event states that in June 1861, Brother Thimothé was asked to leave his community and married "Caroline Henaud, at St. Joseph of Pembina."⁸⁰ Rondeau continued her recollection:

Father Bellecourt [sic] was loved by all. Often the Indians came to see into the windows of the basement of the church... Father Bellecourt left on account of troubles and gossips made by two of the younger nuns. It happens so: these nuns named Catherine Lacerte and Madeline Kline went out at night with the brother Dosithe [sic],

⁷⁸ J.M. Belleau, "Mrs Catherine Rondeau's Testimony on Fr. Belcourt," 8 March 1939, Belleau Collection, Reel 2, Documents 1847-2 to 1847-3, AA.

⁷⁹ Sherry Farrell Racette, 'Sewing for a Living: The Commodification of Métis Women's Artistic Production', 21.

⁸⁰ J.M. Belleau, "Study on Brother Thimothe Brother of the Holy Family of Belley France, Companion of Father Belcourt," August 1853, Reel 2 Doc 1855-4, AA.

and went to dances. Father Bellecourt found out and came very angry to the convent. He took a post of the railing off the stairway and gave these young girls a good spanking. Then sent them home. They then talked against him, and said he had got them alone in his rectory and had made some love to them. The people did not believe them. These accusations were carried to Bishop Taché of Saint Boniface, who sent the priest to inquire. No one would say anything against Father Bellecourt. All were very surprised when he wrote he did not come back! Never heard anything against him. He was not grouchy, not hard, not angry! Kind and used to work very late at night. Making door sashes and windows for a living... Sisters lasted three years in all—made a petition to have father Bellecourt back! All signed—Madeline Kline never went back to church. There girl married a Protestant in Winnipeg and died insane. Catherine Lacerte was 18 years old when she came back from Montréal or father Bellecourt had sent her and Marie Martel to the Grey nuns with Sister Francis Xavier for a year of training.⁸¹

Catherine Rondeau's testimony absolves Belcourt of alleged sexual misconduct. Elements of Rondeau's account were later published in the centennial anniversary publication of the Fargo Diocese. Belcourt reproduced European standards of discipline. Corporal punishment in North America is part of colonialism's legacy. Historian Robert Trennert remarked "the use of corporal punishment in Indian schools stemmed from European traditions imported to America." Corporal violence "promot[ed] the discipline necessary for assimilation."⁸² As such, Belcourt's use of violence remains part of the societal status quo. Rondeau stresses that Belcourt was "loved by all," and local families refuted the accusations made against him. The Metis attempted to convince the Church to send Belcourt back to their parish by sending a petition to the Québec Archdiocese. Believers felt let down upon learning their beloved priest would not return.

Notable discrepancies exist between Father Belleau's and Catherine Rondeau's analyses of Belcourt's departure. First, if Caroline Héneault and Brother Thimothé married in Pembina, no entry marks this event in the St. Joseph parish register in 1861, or any year following. However, in 1870, Father Jean-Marie Lafloch baptized Marie Sophie Curtaz born of the legitimate union

⁸¹ Belleau, "Mrs Catherine Rondeau's Testimony on Fr. Belcourt."

⁸² Robert A Trennert, 'Corporal Punishment and the Politics of Indian Reform', *History of Education Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1989): 595–596.

between Pierre Curtaz and Caroline Héneault (Eno dit Canada).⁸³ The nuns who went out dancing with Brother Thimothé suffered a violent punishment for their breach of Church protocol and their participation in worldly entertainment. The Fargo Diocese's historical report of the event notes that Belcourt's superiors removed him to end local gossip. Benedictine priest Terrence Kardong writes:

The Métis women were naturally lively and full of fun. To leave them in the midst of the home communities, where partying and play were major part of the lifestyle, was to overwhelm them with temptation. Not all of them resisted, and that was where Father Belcourt went into action. With his customary impetuosity, he simply whipped three of them like delinquent children and expelled them from the convent. When the girls return home, they needed to save face, so they told their parents that Belcourt had sexually assaulted them. The parents complained to Father Goiffon at Pembina and he reported the event to Bishop A.A. Taché of St. Boniface. After an investigation of some sort, which turned up nothing really sinful in Belcourt's conduct, the Bishop determined it would be best for all concerned if father Belcourt would leave the settlement immediately... Once he [Belcourt] arrived back in eastern Canada, he appealed to the new Bishop of St. Paul, Thomas Grace, for reinstatement, but was refused.⁸⁴

Although Belcourt was no longer in Pembina after 1859, the community was not without a Catholic priest, as had been the case in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Instead, the central grievance of Metis petitioners in 1862 focused on the linguistic needs of their relatives.⁸⁵ Petitioners asked for Belcourt's return, specifically because he could speak their

⁸³ Jean Marie La Floch, 'Registre des Baptêmes, mariages et sépultures de la mission de St. Joseph Diocèse de Saint Paul Minnisota, Territoire de Dakotah 1870-1888', 15 November 1870, 3, Fonds Paroisse Saint-Joseph de Leroy (Dakota du Nord) Registre de mariages BMS 1870-1873 Dossier 1750/3080, SHSB. Caroline Eno was ChWeUm Davis's aunt in law. His uncle, Antoine Eno married his aunt (brother's sister) Catherine Davis in 1850.

⁸⁴ Kardong, *Beyond Red River*, 27.

⁸⁵ 'People of St. Joseph, Pembina to Pierre-Flavien Turgeon, 19 February 1862. Belleau Collection, Assumption Abbey.', 19 February 1862, Belleau Collection, Reel 2, Doc 1862-101, AA. The petition reads: "Meeting held at St. Joseph, in the year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, we the undersigned pray Your Lordship, if possible in any way, to grand us Rev. Geo Ant. Belcourt, who has heretofore exercised on the ecclesiastical functions. Many poor families are deprived of the Sacraments on account of the difference of language, which language is not understood by the present priest."

language, unlike the priests sent as temporary replacements, such as Joseph Goiffon and Jean-Marie Lestanc, both of whom were French-born.⁸⁶

Belcourt's departure tainted the political relationships between Metis families and clergymen. Missionary correspondence highlights strife between Metis families and Father Jean-Marie Lestanc. The priest's letter to Archbishop Taché warned that Charles Grant was an active agent of Father Belcourt, or a secret collaborator working to undermine St. Boniface's influence in the region, and would somehow facilitate Belcourt's return to the United States. The missionary called Grant "*un homme à double et à triple face*," or double or triple-faced man. Lestanc provided no clear evidence to back his claim, besides the fact that he and his family members were listed on the petition addressed to the head of the Church.⁸⁷ Mistrust between priests and Pembina hunters eventually spread outside of the Red River valley. The Church's decision to remove Belcourt to the Maritimes impeded Metis sovereignty. Bison hunters could no longer count on the political assistance of clergymen, as they did a few years prior. The sixty-one names requesting Belcourt's return confirms that the community believed Belcourt's removal was unwarranted.⁸⁸ Increasing disapproval of decisions made by the Church hierarchy began to shape how some Metis people related to the priests among them.

ADOPTIONS IN WARFARE: THE U.S.—DAKOTA WAR OF 1862

Traditional Indigenous adoptions played an integral role in the building and shaping of obligations between nations. Metis families proposed to adopt the orphaned children of the 1851 skirmish and claimed responsibility for the widows created during the battle. They did so to

⁸⁶ J.M. Belleau, "Mrs Catherine Rondeau's Testimony on Fr. Belcourt, March 8, 1939," Belleau Collection, Reel 2, Documents 1847-2 to 1847-3, AA.

⁸⁷ Joseph Jean-Marie Lestanc, "Jean-Marie Lestanc to Alexandre-Antonin Taché, 18 February 1862," Belleau Collection, Reel 2, Doc 1862-100, AA.

⁸⁸ "People of St. Joseph, Pembina to Pierre-Flavien Turgeon, 19 February 1862," Belleau Collection, Reel 2, Doc 1862-101, AA

strengthen their relations to the Yanktonais, and thereby minimize the probability of future violence. The United States—Dakota War of 1862, an event intimately tied to the American Civil War and the settlement of the West, was another historical example of a *rapprochement* between Metis and Dakota families. Dakota individuals relied on their kinship links with the Metis to ensure the safety of their young during the violence. While American soldiers rounded up Dakota people, many attempted to flee north across the Medicine Line. The United States government ultimately hung thirty-eight men in its largest mass execution of Indigenous peoples in North America. Dakota women and children also suffered greatly during and in the aftermath of this event. Interdisciplinary scholar Leo Omani relays that families were rounded up and forced to march “from the Lower Sioux Agency to a concentration camp at Fort Snelling.” Dakota oral histories remember the difficulties and the loss of life that happened in transit.⁸⁹ This conflict, like countless other encounters between settlers and Indigenous peoples, was attributed to treaties “born in fraud,” or secession treaties that, because of Euro-American deception, created unfavourable terms for the Dakota, further straining Indigenous—settler relations.⁹⁰ According to Native American Studies scholar David Martínez, when President Lincoln “spared the lives of more than two hundred condemned Dakota prisoners of war,” he approved the murder of thirty-eight people on the same basis of evidence. Lincoln’s goal was to appease the anger of Minnesota settlers specifically, and American settlers in general.⁹¹ Lincoln’s intention, then, was not to follow the rule of law, but rather, to bolster and edify pro-settler policies like the Homestead Act during wartime.

⁸⁹ Leo J. Omani, “A Written Response from Canada,” *American Indian Quarterly*, Empowerment Through Literature, 28, no. 1 (2004): 283–88.

⁹⁰ William E. Lass, “Histories of the U.S. - Dakota War of 1862,” *Minnesota History* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 47.

⁹¹ Martínez, “Remembering the Thirty-Eight: Abraham Lincoln, the Dakota and the U.S. War on Barbarism,” 6.

The U.S. —Dakota War began as a consequence of broken treaty promises by the government and the suffering it imposed upon Indigenous peoples. Punishment for the uprising born of famine and distress was swift and unforgiving. In addition to the killing of thirty-eight people, the United States government rendered all previous Dakota treaties null and void. It did so when it passed the “Act for the Removal of the Sisseton, Wahpeton, Medewakanton, and Wahpakoota Bands of Sioux Dakota Indians and for the Dispossession of their Lands” in March 1863. Settlers placed bounties, or cash rewards, on the heads of Dakota people (including women and children) in Minnesota. The situation created an exodus of Indigenous families fleeing for their lives.⁹² As Andrew Jackson had done in the southern Appalachian region with the Cherokees three decades earlier, the federal government once again disregarded its own laws and used its military force and to take land from Indigenous peoples.⁹³

To escape settler-sanctioned violence, some Dakota travelled north of the Medicine Line or into neighbouring states. Others attempted to protect their young by placing them in the care of Metis families. Dakota people believed their children would be safe there, and would continue their upbringing in an Indigenous buffalo-hunting culture. Frank Jetty, the son of a “French-Canadian hunter and trapper and ... a Dakota Indian” was involved in such an adoption story.⁹⁴ Jetty explains that when the war began in 1862, his father fled to Fort Ridgely, and his mother took him and his sister to her Dakota relatives.

Myself, aged 6, was adopted by Moses Azure and his wife, Leocadie Martelle. She had been educated by Rev. Father George A. Belcourt for the sisterhood... Moses Azure’s brother Antoine adopted my sister Josephone, my sister aged 9, but the next

⁹² Mary Beth Faimon, “Ties That Bind: Remembering, Mourning and Healing Historical Trauma,” *American Indian Quarterly*, Empowerment Through Literature, 28, no. 1 (2004): 238–51.

⁹³ Steve Inskeep, *Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and a Great American Land Grab* (New York, New York: Penguin Press, 2015).

⁹⁴ Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 271.

year she ran away to her mother. My sister left during the night to follow her mother to the camp after her mother visited her.⁹⁵

The Jetty adoption was the result of a group decision between adults. He was among fourteen children, ten boys and four girls, all “half-breeds of the band,” given up for adoption to the Metis by Dakota fearing American soldiers would kill their families. Not all of the adopted youth wanted to stay with their new kin, as evidenced by Josephone Jetty’s running away in the middle of the night. Others, like Frank Jetty, remained in Metis communities for the rest of their lives.⁹⁶

Relying on adoption as a survival strategy increased because of the rapid influx of European settlers on the northern plains. The Homestead Act passed in late winter of 1862 sanctified the white settlement of the West. The law’s effect signified to Americans that the West was “theirs” to take. This land-based incentive intended for yeoman farmers (white settlers) promised 160 acres to those able to “improve” it in five years’ time. Scholars of the American Civil War acknowledge the conflict, the laws passed in its midst, and its soldiers, facilitated the rapid subjugation of Indigenous peoples and their lands.⁹⁷ The military protection requested for St. Joseph and Pembina residents, first demanded in 1849, came in the form of Fort Pembina, erected in 1863. ChWeUm Davis recorded this transformation on the landscape as follows: “an 1863 le gouvernement a fai batier un fort a pimбина.”⁹⁸ That same year, the United States renewed their attempt at treaty-making with the Anishinaabeg of Pembina and Red Lake, as Davis relates, “Le traité de la riv rouge le 2 oct 1863.”⁹⁹

Ella Hawkinson explains that the Treaty of Old Crossing, provided land allotments of 160 acres to “each male adult half-breed or mixed-blood who adopted the customs of civilized life or

⁹⁵ Ibid., 269.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 271.

⁹⁷ Aaron Sheehan-Dean, “The Long Civil War: A Historiography of the Consequences of the Civil War,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 119, no. 2 (2011): 124.

⁹⁸ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 2,” 15.

⁹⁹ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 1,” 5.

became a citizen of the United States and homesteaded the claim for five years.”¹⁰⁰ The problem with this clause was that Metis people were not granted 160 acres of land next to their Chippewa relatives. Without monetary support, farming implements, or arable land, families faced a catch-22 situation: abandon the Indigenous buffalo hunting lifestyle and risk certain famine, or effectively lose federal recognition of their Indigeneity in the treaty provision. Although Father Belcourt organized the Metis of St. Joseph in French-style river lots and brought a grain mill to Walhalla a decade before the Treaty of Old Crossing, Metis people could not retain the territorial claims they had made. Instead, the U.S. government forced families to comply with the land allotment its surveyors deemed best. As historian Sarah Carter argues, “non-Indian economic interests” drove federal policies regarding Indigenous peoples both in Canada and the United States.¹⁰¹ The terms of the 1851 unratified treaty were null and void. In sum, the 1863 the treaty was a cession of 11,000,000 acres. Nicholas Vrooman explains:

Both Pembina chiefs, Red Bear and Little Shell, signed the treaty. Of the seven Pembina Chippewa warriors who signed the treaty, two were of mixed descent: Joseph Gourneau and Joseph Montreuil, both ancestral men of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana.¹⁰²

While the American Civil War transformed itself from a battle to save the Union into a conflict over emancipation of enslaved peoples, Indigenous dispossession and losses accelerated throughout the Western Plains. The Treaty of Old Crossing and the Homestead Act during the American Civil War significantly impacted Metis political lifeways during the American Civil War. The Union government simultaneously appealed to north and south settler interests via continued cessions of Indigenous lands. Because the American legal codification of “half-breed” was not considered fully Indigenous, Metis people were treated differently by the U.S.

¹⁰⁰ Ella Hawkinson, “The Old Crossing Chippewa Treaty and Its Sequel,” *Minnesota History* 15, no. 3 (1934): 294.

¹⁰¹ Sarah Carter, “Two Acres and a Cow: ‘Peasant’ Farming for the Indians of the Northwest, 1889–97,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70, no. 1 (March 1, 1989): 27–52.

¹⁰² Vrooman, *The Whole Country Was ... One Robe. The Little Shell Tribe’s America.*, 146.

government. According to the state, the Metis could not access the same treaty provisions as their Chippewa kin. Throughout the Civil War years, buffalo hunters found employment as scouts, guides, and freighters among white settlers to supplement seasonal rounds of a dwindling natural resource. This revenue also made up for ongoing exclusion from the treaty making in the early 1860s. Metis mastery of languages indigenous to the plains and European tongues allowed them to provide security to trespassers onto the northern prairie. Metis families added to their income with short-term contracts when not otherwise occupied by bison expeditions. On such trips, settlers paid the Metis for safely escorting them along cart trails. The tumultuous decade of the 1860s is best remembered for the shift in the relationship between Catholic clergy and Metis people.

METIS POLITICAL WILL AND THE RISE OF JUDAS PRIESTS

When clergy worked explicitly against the political interests of the Metis, feelings of betrayal inevitably emerged and grew among the faithful. Some believers perceived such treachery in biblical terms. After Father Belcourt's departure from Turtle Mountain, certain missionaries became known as so-called Judas Priests—synonymous with the treason of Jesus Christ.¹⁰³ In Luke 22, Judas embodied Satan and evil. Although he was one of the Twelve Apostles, Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus by handing him over to the temple authorities as soon as the opportunity arose. The Metis understood the Church's refusal to return Belcourt as a first betrayal. Local superstitions declared that God Himself acknowledged the Church's wrongdoing by burning the St. Boniface cathedral in 1860. Before 1860, Roman Catholic priests often sided with Metis

¹⁰³ Thompson, *Red Sun: Gabriel Dumont The Folk Hero*, 7. Thompson relates that, in an oral interview with Gabriel Yellow Sky Dumont on Rocky Boy Reservation in Montana (1994): 'later the Judas Priests never stopped eviscerating and denigrating the Natives and they continued to try to prevent them from dirtying the racial purity of the French. The English-speaking Scots were just as bad if not worse.'

interests. The contrast between the way Metis faithful perceived figures like Belcourt and the language used to describe Father Alexis André, for instance, is stark.

In the biography commissioned by the Dumont family, historian Charles Duncan Thomson explains that the appellation of Judas Priests is rooted in the way Oblate Father Alexis André handled himself while accompanying Metis bison hunting parties in 1863. Although the priest was young and unfamiliar, he felt competent enough to meddle in established protocols in ways that endangered Metis lives and threatened the health and well-being of their relatives. Thompson explains that approximately forty miles south of Devil's Lake, on the Jacques River (now known as James River), a Metis brigade led by Jean-Baptiste Wilkie crossed paths with General Alfred Sully. The way the missionary handled himself in this encounter was contrary to long-established parameters of Metis diplomacy. Thomson writes:

Like a king child, or a cavalier in a French court, Father Andre rode forward to meet the general. And, after a deep bow, sweeping off his hand until it swept the ground, Andre offered the services of the [Metis] to join the American military to slaughter the Sioux. The inexperienced priest didn't have the authority to commit them to kill their relatives or to die while killing tribes with whom they had peace treaties. Father André's misguided, deadly intrusion explains why some began to despise Catholic priests.¹⁰⁴

According to Thompson, André thus broke the agreement concluded the previous year by Gabriel Dumont. Dumont was able to establish this peace because of his sustained kin ties with the Pembina and Siouan peoples. His marriage to Madeleine Wilkie, daughter of the renowned chief of the Pembina Band, Jean-Baptiste Wilkie, elevated his social standing. This link proved especially potent and explains Dumont's political power in the region among neighbouring Dakota bands. Furthermore, Dumont's mother, Louise Laframboise, was the daughter of "Josephine Shawenaquah Assiniboine," tying Dumont to Nakoda kinsfolk south of the Medicine

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 70.

Line. Dumont's connection to prominent women opened doors of influence. The Dumont and Davis families became closer relatives through the celebration of the wedding between Gabriel Dumont and Madeleine Wilkie at the Assumption Church in Pembina on 7 September 1857.¹⁰⁵

Thompson remarked that established Metis diplomatic protocols prohibited Father André's initiative. Since Metis hunters had a treaty in place with the Sisseton Dakota, Gabriel Dumont could not idly allow their slaughter and subjugation by American forces. Consequently, Dumont encouraged the resistance of his brethren and prepared to assist them in battle. Nevertheless, the arrangement struck by the missionary had immediate effects: "thousands surrendered, and hundreds were hanged[sic]; but worse, even, the peaceful Sioux were shoved onto reserves, forced to give up their horses and weapons (...)"¹⁰⁶ The disintegration of traditional protocols at the hands of a stranger had devastating consequences for the bison hunters and their relatives. The encounter with General Sully resulted in the killing of many Dakota people, creating a group of orphans taken under Metis care. Metis families adopted the children and the elderly, forever strengthening their kin ties, and their obligation to look after the young and the old, through warfare or famine, as per tradition. Necessity, the mother of invention, prompted the Metis to find creative ways to take care of relatives. Gabriel Dumont's father, Isidore Ekapow, sold his family farmland on the Canadian side of the line to survive on the proceeds of the sale.¹⁰⁷

Metis oral history applied the Judas Priest label to non-Catholic Christian, missionaries as well. Since Father Belcourt dissuaded Metis people from attending Protestant school in the 1850s by threatening to refuse the sacraments, it is not surprising that the Walhalla Martyr incident,

¹⁰⁵ Belcourt, "Assumption Church of Pembina Record Volume 1," 179.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *Red Sun*, 71. Thompson adds: "It was because of this disservice and its resulting slaughter that Andre became known as the Judas priest. And after eighteen sixty-three, Andre and any other priest or minister who mislead or who was untrustworthy was called a Judas priest. There were a lot of Judases and they seemed to bedevil the natives for another hundred and thirty years."

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

described earlier, happened as a direct consequence of a failed buffalo hunt. Indeed, according to Charles Thompson, Dakota hunters asked that Protestant missionaries accompany them on their 1852 expedition, perhaps envious of the perceived advantages of the priests' presence among Metis brigades. The Dakota summer hunt was unsuccessful. Metis recollections indicate that, because the Protestant missionary presence did not ameliorate the Dakota hunt, hunters killed the priest among them. Some Metis became increasingly reluctant to befriend Protestant missionaries after this event, in fear for their lives.¹⁰⁸ The Judas Priest appellation travelled further west where it linked Protestantism to the memories of Gabriel Dumont. Reverend James Nisbet, a Scottish member of the London Missionary Society in Saskatchewan recalled, "Gabriel told [Nisbet] to remember the natives were extremely civilized and were afraid of lowering the standards of the area by admitting in Judas Priests."¹⁰⁹

The Judas Priest label originates in Metis understandings of the past. The designation is also a metaphor for the legacies of church-run residential, or boarding, schools, in both Canada and the United States. Metis scholars and experts on the historical and inter-generational consequences of church-run education for Indigenous children in the nineteenth century remarked:

One of the most controversial education practices of the church-run schools was the attempt by the church to obliterate the culture of the Métis by substituting their Michif language for that of what is now the French Canadian language. They deemed the Michif language inferior to the formal, universal textbook French taught in schools throughout the world.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 79.

¹¹⁰ Larry N Chartrand et al., *Métis History and Experience and Residential Schools in Canada* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2006) 15.

Respect of Indigenous languages and traditions were not among the objectives set forth by the governments who financed church-run schools. Assimilation into European society was the explicit goal of educating Indigenous peoples, as made clear by the Bishop of Québec's instructions to Provencher and Dumoulin in 1818. While Belcourt was willing to learn Anishinaabemowin and teach children in that language, his method was not the societal norm in the nineteenth century. During the later decades of the nineteenth-century, government policies increasingly removed Metis and Anishinaabe children from their homes in Canada and the United States in what Turtle Mountain tribal member Daniel F. Jérôme described as "the trail of misgivings—a scourging journey." In the 1870s, government officials could deny rations to parents that refused to send their children away.¹¹¹ The political tactics used to compel Indigenous families to part ways with their children, as well as the cultural losses suffered because of assimilation, contributed to the Judas Priest framework of understanding. By translating their experiences of disloyalty into biblical terms, Metis Catholics further identified with the suffering of their saviour, Jesus Christ.

Despite being let down by clergymen on several fronts, many Metis families continued their relationship with the Catholic Church. The Bishop of St. Boniface held a position of privilege in the Council of Assiniboia and affiliated himself with the Metis cause of 1869-70. The Union métisse St-Joseph commissioned a history of its people in the early twentieth century, attesting to the "tacit or active" backing of the Church for the political vision articulated by Louis Riel. Indeed, supporting Metis demands in the first Resistance created mutually beneficial circumstances for both the Church and Metis political interests.¹¹² While political proximity to

¹¹¹ Daniel F Jerome, *The Trail of Misgivings: A Scourging Journey*, ed. Owen P Jerome (Minot, N.D.: North American Heritage Press, 2006) 81.

¹¹² Auguste-Henri Trémaudan, *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l'Ouest Canadien* (Montreal: Éditions Albert Lévesque, 1936), 295.

priests had some benefits for Metis sovereignty, these advantages would end in the United States with the advent of Ulysses Grant's Peace Policy a few years after the conclusion of the Civil War. In contrast, preserving the linguistic and religious rights of Metis people in light of the Canadian nation state's claim to Manitoba offered the institutionalized Church power it could not otherwise obtain in that region. The enshrined linguistic and religious protections in the Manitoba Act of 1870 could, arguably, be the product of Metis lived Catholicism.¹¹³ While the Bishop of St-Boniface appealed for clemency for the Resistance leadership before Canadian government officials, he stood to benefit from the outcome of the Resistance movement. Metis people became aware in the 1860s that Church interests diverged from theirs, sometimes with costly consequences. Many bison hunters nevertheless continued to associate with missionary priests, partly because they still recognized their religious importance, and because of their influence and access to settler political power.

Bishop Vital Grandin, Father André, and Father Végreville organized petitions signed by Metis peoples sent to Ottawa in 1875, 1883, and 1884, respectively.¹¹⁴ Gerhard Ens and Joe Sawchuk argue that the clergy's approach to education effectively pathologized the Metis in the Canadian West, creating an underclass to elevate, in the eyes of the state.¹¹⁵ Priests criticized Metis families for not "adapting" to civilization, yet proposed "civilizing" projects where clergy subjugated the Metis (economically and socially) instead of making them active participants in

¹¹³ The Manitoba Act of 1870 was recently used as the basis for a legal challenge claiming French-language rights in Alberta. The Supreme Court of Canada's ruling in *Caron v. Alberta* interpreted the constitutional question as follows: "The purpose of the *1870 Order* was simply to effect the transfer of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory to Canada. To the extent that an historic compromise was reached to entrench legislative bilingualism as part of the annexation of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory, it was entrenched in the *Manitoba Act, 1870*, and **not elsewhere**." (Emphasis added). See: *Caron v. Alberta*, 2015 SCC 56, [2015] 3 S.C.R. 511, 2015, (Can) <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/15629/index.do> Accessed 7 July 2016.

¹¹⁴ Trémaudan, *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l'Ouest Canadien*, 295.

¹¹⁵ Gerhard John Ens and Joe Sawchuk, *From New Peoples to New Nations: Aspects of Métis History and Identity from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-First Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016). See Chapter 10: St. Paul des Métis Colony 1896 to 1909: Identity as Pathology.

their own political destiny. Whereas Father Belcourt lobbied on the behalf of Metis and Anishinaabe interests, Father André spoke *for* them. This position does not negate or erase the complex relationship Metis people entertained with their priests over the decades. Although Father André deceived Dumont in the 1860s, the buffalo hunter sought the blessing of a Black Robe before returning to the Saskatchewan River with Louis Riel in 1884 — an episode explored at length in Chapter 6.

Metis families came to understand the betrayal of settlers much as they understood their suffering through pain and famine. The Judas Priest appellation and its legacy informed Metis families in the later decades of the nineteenth century. As the political advocacy of the Church became increasingly disadvantageous to Metis people, some kept their distance from its priests. At times, Church officials infringed upon traditional Indigenous governance models. Missionaries also often assessed the best way to obtain monetary profit from the labour of Metis families. Metis rejection of Catholic priests was not outright. Clerical missteps did not affect everyone, and people changed their views depending on their individual circumstances. Until the mid-to late twentieth century, Catholicism remained closely affiliated to ideological conceptions and descriptions of Metis identity.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the Catholic Church ceased advancing Metis political interests in the United States after the American Civil War.

CONCLUSION

ChWeUm Davis's experiences during the American Civil War period included the loss of a beloved missionary and a variety of employment opportunities. As the American Civil War neared its conclusion in the early months of 1864, during Davis's yearly *hivernement* on the buffalo hunt, he recorded the following entries:

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 211.

1. Janv an 1864 N Dak Je été engagé par le gouvernement pour amener le rev père Andri de la rivière à souri à St Joe Wawalla a 4 piastre par jour
2. Mars an 1864 N Dak je été engagé au gouvernement pour aler mener 11 homme de pimkina au Fort Abre Combri a 10 piastre par homme en revena je amener 10 charge de previzion a 5 piastre par 100 Livre¹¹⁷

ChWeUm was a young man of nineteen, already with years of experience travelling across the northern plains. On the return trip he escorted ten loads of provisions on a Red River cart wagon train, a task that paid five dollars per 100 pounds of cargo. The expert guide, freighter, interpreter, and Metis buffalo hunter diversified his employment in the context of the Civil War. As the Union army marched towards victory, thousands of people fled its carnage. Scores headed north and west onto and beyond the Mississippi and Missouri rivers using all means of transportation, in search of new beginnings. Many sought the promised El Dorado of the Montana Gold Rush.¹¹⁸ After his winter employment in early 1864, ChWeUm returned with his family to St. Joseph. The Davis family then headed to present-day South Dakota in search of buffalo. According to Michel, who was eleven years old at the time, his relatives stayed near the newly built Fort Wadsworth. There, the young Michel found employment: “he got two dollars a day for helping to put hay up. The Sioux were always hanging around and it was hard to get anyone to risk going out to work in the open. His father always kept the gun handy in those days.”¹¹⁹

Although the American Civil War changed the northern plains demographic landscape, it did not subjugate Metis peoples. According to Joseph Laframboise, another Pembina hunter

¹¹⁷ William Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 2," n. d., 33, MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND. The American government hired Davis in January 1864 to accompany Father Alexis André, the so-called Judas priest at the centre of the Metis political betrayal, from the forty-ninth parallel at the Mouse (Souris) River to St. Joseph for four dollars a day. Davis did so without protest, without recording any additional information on the event. In March of the same year, the Union government hired Davis again, this time to guide eleven men from Pembina to Fort Abercrombie, a dangerous journey of over 320 kilometres.

¹¹⁸ Jack Holterman, *King of the High Missouri, The Saga of the Culbertsons* (Helena Montana: Falcon Press, 1987), 149–50.

¹¹⁹ Davis, “Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire.”

interviewed in the 1930s, it was still possible to hunt and trap around St. Joseph in 1864. Buffalo grazed approximately sixty miles west. In addition to this means of sustenance, some Metis, like Laframboise, made money by picking up buffalo bones on their Red River carts. The bones were later sold and transported to large industrial centres and used as fuel to burn. Laframboise brought the bones to Pembina, where they were hauled away in Red River *charrettes* to St. Paul.¹²⁰ Although Davis was not a soldier in the Civil War, the conflict significantly shaped his life. Remarking on the postbellum transformations of the Plains, ChWeUm's younger brother Michel revealed the period was unsafe for tribal peoples: "when the war was over and the soldiers came to Walhalla Dak Territory the Indians skipped across the line into Canada."¹²¹ The end of the conflict marked unprecedented demographic movements of settlers looking for their piece of land in the American West. Joseph Kinsey Howard described the dangerous newcomers as follows: "These men from the south whom the Indians called the Long Knives were as certain as Americans have always been that their political system was divinely ordained, beyond criticism, and adaptable to all places and peoples."¹²²

The American Civil War marked the beginning of a transformation in the relationship between Metis people and the Catholic Church. Even so, Catholic beliefs and practices remained with Metis families. The end of the war ensured that the American West did not become a territory for enslaved peoples. Instead, settlers and their cattle overtook the northern plains. The arrival of priests unwilling to engage in pre-existing Indigenous diplomatic models changed the perception of some Metis individuals towards the Church and its officials. The postwar context placed the Church in a position of subservience to an increasingly powerful American

¹²⁰ Frank O'Leary and Joseph Laframboise, eds., "WPA Files - La Fromboise, Joseph, Pembina County Walhalla," 1934, MSS 30529 Reel 2399, SHSND.

¹²¹ Davis, "Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire."

¹²² Howard, *Strange Empire*, 26–27.

government. State power affirmed its presence on Indigenous lands via military force. In a political climate long hostile to Roman Catholicism and its agents, military service did not enable Catholics, including the Metis, to gain acceptance into American society.¹²³ Some Metis believed that military service would increase the likelihood of favourable government recognition, but special treatment did not come about in ChWeUm Davis's story. A political shift on the northwest plains, articulated by an increase in the political power of Christian churches, happened as the U.S. government passed on their control of Indigenous nations to Protestant and Catholic clergy. Grant's Peace Policy after the Civil War, decidedly transformed Metis peoples' relationship to the Catholic Church. As explained in the Chapter 5, ChWeUm Davis and his kin remained free to travel the vast prairie landscape on both sides of the Medicine Line until the end of the buffalo-hunting economy in the 1880s. Catholic priests in the United States, however, no longer overtly supported Metis political claims. Nonetheless, Metis believers continued to demarcate themselves from their relatives of other nations with public displays of faith, prayer, and Catholic celebrations.

¹²³ William B. Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union: How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America*, First edition, The North's Civil War (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016) ebook 2679/5616.

CHAPTER 5: FINI LETAN DE LEVERNEMENT (1865-1885)

As the buffalo herds of the northern plains dwindled in the late nineteenth century, Metis bison hunters faced rapid changes to their means of subsistence and traditional occupations. Almost simultaneously, following decades of mutually beneficial exchanges, Catholic Church officials and Metis peoples developed divergent ideological and political objectives. This chapter argues that Metis lived religion helped sustained believers such as ChWeUm Davis through the end of the bison hunt. Despite famine, natural disasters, and numerous instances of warfare, Metis families continued to believe in Catholic teachings and adhered to them as best they could. ChWeUm Davis's life story exemplifies that, despite the deep transformations in the political relationships uniting Metis people and clergymen of the Civil War era, Pembina hunters continually sought sacraments, built churches, and lived their beliefs on the northern plains. As theologian Orlando Espín notes, "the experiences of the Divine claimed by the believers ... ultimately explains why people believe."¹ This chapter explores why Metis families continued to have faith during an epoch marked by the end of a lifeway: the last buffalo hunt.

This chapter surveys the historical experiences of bison-hunting Metis in the last viable decades of communal hunting on the northern plains. I divide the exploration in three parts. The chapter begins with an examination of the general trials of Metis families between 1865 and 1885 to assess shared experiences across vast geographies and demonstrate that adherence to Catholicism persisted through resistance against Canada specifically, and the effects of settler colonialism in North America more broadly. The chapter then analyzes ChWeUm Davis's encounters during the last two viable decades of the buffalo hunt. The biography of Davis's lived

¹ Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People*, 91.

religion offers insight on how families negotiated and lived with the Church's expectations of obedience to its laws. ChWeUm's experiences with difficulties and the divine explain why he considered himself a Catholic. After bringing the Davis experience to the forefront, this chapter considers the many historical examples of Metis lived religion found in U.S. archives throughout the north-west. Lived Catholicism manifested itself in church building, fundraising, and miraculous escapes from certain death. It continued as the political opportunities of collaboration between the Church and Metis families became fewer and farther between. After losing their lifeway, their mobility, and some of their political leaders in the failed 1885 Resistance, many Metis families continued to affirm their Catholicism.

THE CHANGING LIFEWAYS OF METIS FAMILIES

At the end of the American Civil War ended, the settler colonial transformation of the West continued in earnest. Catholic missionaries visited American military forts to evangelize and to fundraise among Metis families to sustain their institutional operations. Father Jean-Baptiste Genin wrote to Archbishop A.-A. Taché of St. Boniface, advising him of solicitation efforts at Fort Abercrombie, nearly 200 kilometres south of Pembina. The Fort oversaw the banks of the Red River. The so-called "Gateway to the Dakotas" housed encampments of 100 Metis families. Genin informed his superior that the Metis hunters at Fort Abercrombie promised one buffalo robe per family to help the Church. Genin estimated the value of the hide at approximately ten dollars, for a total potential subscription of \$1,000. He then calculated that a similar amount could easily be solicited from Metis encampments elsewhere on the Plains, proposing to his Archbishop a source of income for the Church based on Metis traditional labour. Genin noted women over nineteen years of age could produce two pairs of moccasins (*souliers*) a year. Each

pair, with a value of two dollars, would generate additional money.² Men and women shared the task of fundraising for the Church, although the work of preparing the hide and moccasins, arguably more time-consuming than the hunt itself, fell to women. Most families did not generate enough financial gains through their traditional hunting operations to readily carry currency with them.

In the years that followed the American Civil War, some priests became less receptive to the invitations of their parishioners. Father Genin wrote that “Shitak, Antoine Ouellette,” identified as a Metis from Devil’s Lake, requested the priest come visit his family. The bison hunters lived in an encampment four miles from Fort Abercrombie, where they built eighty cabins, which constituted their wintering site. The letter does not indicate whether the missionary made the trip requested. Given that the central focus of Genin’s correspondence was on land and money acquisition for the Church, it appears unlikely the priest incurred additional expenses associated with the winter visit since it would not have immediately yielded tangible fundraising.³ The year 1868 is remembered in American historiography for the Treaty of Fort Laramie between the United States government and the Oglala, Miniconjou, and Brûlé Lakota, as well as the Yankton-ai Dakota and the Arahapaho tribes. Roman Catholic history of the region, in contrast, focuses on an event that happened before the treaty and its land cessions. At the end of winter 1867-68, Father Genin reported his experience among 900 Dakota and an unknown number of “Catholic half-breeds.” On 4 March 1868:

I distributed forty-five first communions, blessed the waters of the lake and changed its name to St. Michael’s lake. For that ceremony we went in procession upon the lake after mass singing Indian Catholic hymns. Our procession was headed by the banner of St. Mary Immaculate, the cross, and a bell, which was continually rung. After our return from the lake to the place where mass had been celebrated, we

² Jean Baptiste OMI Genin, “Jean-Baptiste Genin to Alexandre-Antonin Taché, 17 December 1867” Belleau Collection, Reel 3, Docs 1867-31 & 32, AA.

³ Ibid.

stopped near the Silver springs, and the large cross, some thirty feet high, made of good white oak, was solemnly blessed, after which we started again to take the cross to the Heart where it now stands. The crowd listened reverently to the first sermon ever preached on the “devil’s heart” and then all united in prayers at the foot of the cross. Since then the bluff is called the Sacred Heart.⁴

The number of people taking communion gives a sense of the size of the gathering of Metis believers. In a letter sent to his Archbishop on 2 April 1868, Genin remarked that the Metis in the vicinity of Fort Abercrombie spent their winter hunting bison on the Cheyenne River.⁵

Addressing his superior, Genin reported that communions increased to seventy-three from forty-five, a change explained, in part, by the inclusion of the hosts distributed among the faithful of the fort. Father Genin also noted he baptized thirty neophytes.

Although local family visits occurred less often, priests continued to evangelize and transform the physical environment around them. Repeating a long-established Christian custom (see Chapter 1), Father Genin selected a bluff for planting a cross located 1.5 miles (2.4 km) from present-day Tokyo, North Dakota, on the Spirit Lake Sisseton Wahpeton tribe’s reservation. Genin chose the highest point of the area to plant a Christian place-marker. According to the WPA’s Federal Writers’ Project, “for the Sioux, [the location] was a traditional meeting place to discuss war, hunting or other ventures and their name for it, in translation means centre of the region. Any promise made by an Indian on this hill is said to be sacred and must be conscientiously fulfilled.”⁶ Genin chose the place for his landmark to Christianity because it was a renowned gathering place for the Dakota. The priest’s reference to the sacredness of any promise made by Indigenous peoples at this location assumes the site could encourage subordination, and therefore assist the Church’s conversion goals. As French popular religion

⁴ State Historical Society of North Dakota, *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, 1:235.

⁵ Jean Baptiste OMI Genin, “Jean-Baptiste Genin to Alexandre-Antonin Taché. 2 April 1868.” Belleau Collection, Reel 3, Doc 1868-32 & 33, AA.

⁶ Workers of the Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of North Dakota, *North Dakota: A Guide to the Northern Prairie State* (Fargo: Knight Printing Company, 1938), 265.

scholar Gabriel Le Bras noted, crosses imposed a judicial change in the land. The object's blessed status meant that anyone who destroyed or desecrated it was guilty of profanation.⁷ Genin remarked that the Metis hunters did not stay in the region much longer, recalling the treaty signed between the United States government and the Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota effectively removed Metis encampments from the vicinity, enforced via military threat of violence.⁸ Government policies and the U.S. Army now determined where the Metis could stay.

North of the Medicine Line, political circumstances for Metis families were also tense. Although the years 1869 and 1870 were a time of political affirmation and direct action for Metis families north of the Medicine Line, not everyone could return to the vicinity of the Assiniboine and Red rivers to support Louis Riel. In a context of increasing hunger and illness, many chose to remain where they were, provided they could feed their relatives. For example, the Davis family, though originally from St. Boniface, did not return to actively engage in the political project of legally recognizing Metis peoples in Manitoba. The writings of ChWeUm Davis in general, and his representations of Riel specifically, supported the Metis political project articulated in Canada. Davis's journals show that the Metis national memory he recorded lived and thrived on both sides of the Medicine Line.

Metis families continued reacting and responding to rapidly changing socioeconomic context as the United States government reformed its Indian policy. President Ulysses Grant made good on his 1868 campaign promise to purge the Indian Office of financial and ethical abuses against Indigenous peoples. The problems that created unratified and unfulfilled treaties between the U.S. government and Indigenous nations in the 1850s continued in the next decade. Grant believed, like other reformers, that good Christian men would not succumb to moral

⁷ Gabriel Le Bras, *Études de Sociologie Religieuse* (New York: Arno Press, 1975) 95.

⁸ Genin, "Jean-Baptiste Genin to Alexandre-Antonin Taché. 2 April 1868."

failings like fraud, and therefore, a *rapprochement* of church and state was in order. This *détente* effectively “placed Indian Reservations under church control.”⁹

The shift in U.S. Indian policy benefited the Catholic Church’s political standing with government officials. Priests in designated “Catholic” reservations obtained the funds they had requested and could now choose Indian agents themselves, instead of being forced to contend with an agent chosen by American officials.¹⁰ With a Catholic Indian agent at the helm, requests and decisions once dismissed under the guise of anti-Catholicism now flowed through official channels. The Catholic Church, after all, was a much older institution than the United States, and thus better equipped with the bureaucracy required to administer Indian Affairs than its recently founded Protestant counterparts. Ulysses Grant’s Peace Policy solidified the political control of the Catholic Church over Indigenous bodies with its designated Indian Agencies. Treaty-making ended in the United States in 1871. In contrast, Canada began its numbered treaties processes the very same year, offering Metis families a new political avenue to navigate.

Before the Catholic Church was granted political control of selected Indian reservations in the United States, it worked to protect commerce on the northern plains. In March 1868, Father Jean-Baptiste Richer reported to Archbishop Taché that he stopped a robbery organized to raid foodstuffs from Antoine Blanc Gingras, a renowned Pembina trader whose post is now a protected historic site in North Dakota. The missionary discouraged the local population from their planned raid and informed Gingras, which, in turn, encouraged Gingras to be more generous towards the Church. Gingras subsequently shared his pemmican provisions with the institution in exchange for the information provided. Father Richer informed Archbishop Taché that many families ate one meal a day, or less, and often went to bed hungry. The priest feared what would

⁹ Robert H. Keller, *American Protestantism and United States Indian Policy, 1869-82* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

happen if famine continued and implored God to assist the Metis.¹¹ The desperation felt by many was so strong that some disregarded Catholic teachings on theft. Metis families needed new strategies for coping with their dire socioeconomic reality.

Clergy openly criticized some survival strategies practiced by people on the northern plains. Negative depictions of Metis women in missionary correspondence were a common occurrence at the time. In response to the hardships of famine, Father Genin lamented the fact that families “sold their daughters” to American soldiers to gather some funds and the means to survive. The clergyman allegedly convinced two women engaged in sex work to reform their lifestyle, and adhere to the prescription of the Church. When the two women stood before the parish during Mass, the priest absolved them of sins. Leaving sex work allowed the women to take communion and re-enter a blessed state of religion. Their father was denied the same treatment. Genin explains that because the patriarch chose to sell his daughters into prostitution and failed to repent for his sins, the priest cast him out of the Church, denying him access to the sacraments.¹²

The public performance of guilt and forgiveness is important in the Catholic faith. The need for a confession at least once a year before Easter, as noted in Chapter 2, is a social ritual of submission to the clergy, providing priests with intimate insights into the lives of their parishioners. Father Genin had difficulties with women, judging by some of his correspondence. In a letter copied by Father Jules Belleau of Assumption Abbey containing scratched-out Latin fragments, Genin admitted to his superior of hearing the confession of a woman in the church of St. Joseph in Pembina that especially troubled him. Switching from French, Genin wrote: “... *et*

¹¹ Jean-Baptiste Richer, “Jean-Baptiste Richer to Alexandre-Antonin Taché. 5 March 1868.” Belleau Collection, Reel 3, Doc 1868-28, AA.

¹² Genin, “Jean-Baptiste Genin to Alexandre-Antonin Taché. 2 April 1868. Belleau Collection, AA.” I am choosing not to name the women implicated in this event. Since there is no way to corroborate this account, it is inserted therein only to demonstrate the possible consequences of famine on Metis communities. It is not intended to denigrate or to criticize persons who choose sex work as a profession.

in actu confessionis nunc a sacerdote oppressam sed in ardentu amplexu contactam... [sic]”

Attempting to reconstruct the bits of text still legible, the priest complained about the woman’s behaviour. The women in confession intended no harm, according to Genin. Nevertheless, he expressed trauma from the so-called wrongs he perceived in the fur trade society: “*J’ai sans cesse le cœur gros, et souvent je pleure.*”¹³ Genin affirmed to his superior that he was unfit for mission work, fearing he would succumb to evil should he remain in the region. Genin undoubtedly struggled with the Catholic hierarchy’s patriarchal social order requiring a lifetime of celibacy from its clergymen. This legacy of dissociation from community life influenced his views of women, his understandings of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, as well as his beliefs in the holy and the sinful.¹⁴

While Genin’s struggles were of a personal nature, Father Albert Lacombe reportedly fared better, and benefited from the assistance of lay evangelists. Father Lacombe, widely remembered for his missionizing to the Cree, Metis, and Blackfoot of present-day Alberta, promoted the role of lay catechists among Metis hunters.¹⁵ Laypeople helped priests by teaching their extended families about the rituals and knowledge necessary for eventual conversion. Lacombe relied on Catholic material culture too, as others had done before him. In November

¹³ Jean Baptiste OMI Genin, “Jean-Baptiste Genin to Alexandre-Antonin Taché, 15 February 1868.” Belleau Collection, Reel 3 Doc, AA. Translation by author: “I continuously have a heavy heart and I often cry.”

¹⁴ Sandra Marie Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church*, Rev. ed, The Anthony Jordan Lectures 1990 (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), v. In the preface to the second edition of her book, Sandra Marie Schneiders linked the ‘crisis of male domination and oppression in the Church... described in relation to women’ to the explosion of sex scandals involving the Roman Catholic church in the years 2000. Forced celibacy and patriarchy are at the core of the problem analyzed by Schneiders. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Residential schools in Canada, whose executive findings were published in 2015 conclusively linked the Roman Catholic Church to abuses of children in its care during the residential school era. In 2016, the Roman Catholic Church was cleared of its legal obligations to pay \$25 million for healing programs in restitution of its wrongs to Indigenous peoples in Canada. Instead, it paid the Canadian federal government a \$1.2 million administrative fee. See : Gloria Galloway, ‘Legal Misstep Lets Catholic Church off Hook for Residential Schools Compensation’, *The Globe and Mail*, 17 April 2016, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/legal-misstep-lets-catholics-off-hook-for-residential-schools-compensation/article29657424/>.

¹⁵ For historical studies on Lacombe see: Hughes, *Father Lacombe: The Black-Robe Voyageur*; Soeur de la Providence, *Le Père Lacombe, L’homme au bon coeur : D’après ses mémoires et souvenirs* (Montréal: Imprimé au Devoir, 1916).

1878, the missionary gave a catechism written in the Cree language to Alexandre Wilkie. Alexandre was the son of a Pembina band chief, Jean-Baptiste Wilkie, and Amable Azure. Born in 1831, Alexandre was among the youth receiving daily catechizing from Father Belcourt in Pembina beginning in 1845. He was also taught to read and write in Cree and French. The book's dedication on the inside cover dates the item. Likely penned by Wilkie himself, the inscription first remembers the priest's affiliation to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate with an O.M.I. The text refers to "St. Charles," a parish at the juncture of the Assiniboine River and Sturgeon Creek in present-day Winnipeg. The dedication continues: "*keti makisitjik miyo-kiskinohamawawok*" and its French translation: "Montrez les bonnes chose [sic] aux pauvres."¹⁶ The catechism, written by Lacombe, facilitated the work of its teachers, be they lay or clergy, since it outlines all of the directives required for the Catholic faith. The catechism helped Wilkie who associated with his Cree relatives while they sought out the last free-roaming buffalo herds on the continent. Throughout this time, religious ceremony continued. Families assembled outside and knelt together as they prayed in unison after supper. Louis Goulet recalled Metis families' fulsome recitation schedule. The religious ritual included:

les actes d'adoration, de remerciement, de demande à Dieu de continuer ses bienfaits, de résolution de mieux employer l'avenir au service de Dieu et de la Sainte Vierge. Puis, suivant la prière ordinaire ; Le Pater, l'Ave, le Credo, le Confiteor, l'Acte de contrition, les commandements, un soir le chapelet, le soir suivant les litanies ; une allocution du missionnaire, le salut de la bénédiction du très Saint-Sacrement.¹⁷

The Wilkie bison-hunting band was part of the large group of Red River hunters connected to ChWeUm Davis et al. By the 1870s, Metis kin moved away from the plains, now empty of buffalo. Wilkie and his family spent part of the 1870s in Montana, living by the Milk River on the Upper Missouri River. According to Elizabeth Swan, a Metis descendant of Montana bison

¹⁶ Albert Lacombe, "Instructions en langue crise sur toute la doctrine catholique" (St. Boniface, Manitoba, 1875), BX 1966 C73 L33 1875, JOPA. English translation: show good things (or deeds) to the poor.

¹⁷ Guillaume Charette, *L'espace de Louis Goulet* (Winnipeg: Éditions Bois-Brûlés, 1976) 45.

hunters, about twenty-five families resided near Frenchman's Creek during this time.¹⁸ Martha Haroun Foster's detailed study of the Spring Creek band explains its ties to Pembina. Pierre Berger's spouse, Judith Wilkie, was the daughter of famed Pembina brigade chief Jean-Baptiste. The union transferred the Metis political leadership of the Pembina hunters to a new region of the Great Plains.¹⁹

The concentration of Metis families in Montana Territory attracted the interest of a *Canadien* from Montréal named Francis Janeaux. Janeaux entered into business with Benjamin Klyne, a Metis trader, and the two opened a post on Frenchman's Creek in the 1870s. Janeaux lived his early years in the Dakota Territory before going to Montana and marrying into the Laverdure family of the Berger band. The Metis exchanged the products of their hunts – buffalo robes and pemmican – for processed goods. No money traded hands for furs.²⁰ Metis people spent their winters in cabins built of cottonwood and other local supplies of timber available on the Milk River. Contradicting the earlier critique Father Genin articulated about Metis women, Samuel O'Connell, bookkeeper for the post, recorded his reminiscences: "Virtue was a prominent trait among their women—Their garb was quite picturesque always clean and neat. They were dark colored [sic] dresses and double-width broadcloth cloaks—with black handkerchiefs around their raven black hair—The younger women and girls wore head gear of brighter colors."²¹ O'Connell remarked that the women wore five-inch-long silver crosses over their dresses, a conspicuous visual demonstration of their faith.

The most profound transformation in Metis lifeways occurred when the buffalo disappeared. The Metis had been preparing for this tragedy for decades. Metis elders and their

¹⁸ Elizabeth Swan, "A Brief History of the First Catholic Pioneers of Lewistown, Montana," 1960, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers MC27 Box 16, Folder 2, MHS.

¹⁹ Foster, *We Know Who We Are*, 775.

²⁰ Bill Thackeray, *The Metis Centennial* (Helena Montana: Wild Coyote Publications, 1979), 18.

²¹ Samuel O'Connell, "Juneaux's Trading Post on the Milk River, MT. Story of Medicine Lodge Known as Juneaux's Post," 1876, SC 597 Samuel O'Connell Papers, MHS.

relatives enacted, according to Charles Duncan Thompson, tried to preserve the dwindling bison reserves in the mid 1860s by enacting “a new Law of the Plains to save the cows and calves.”²²

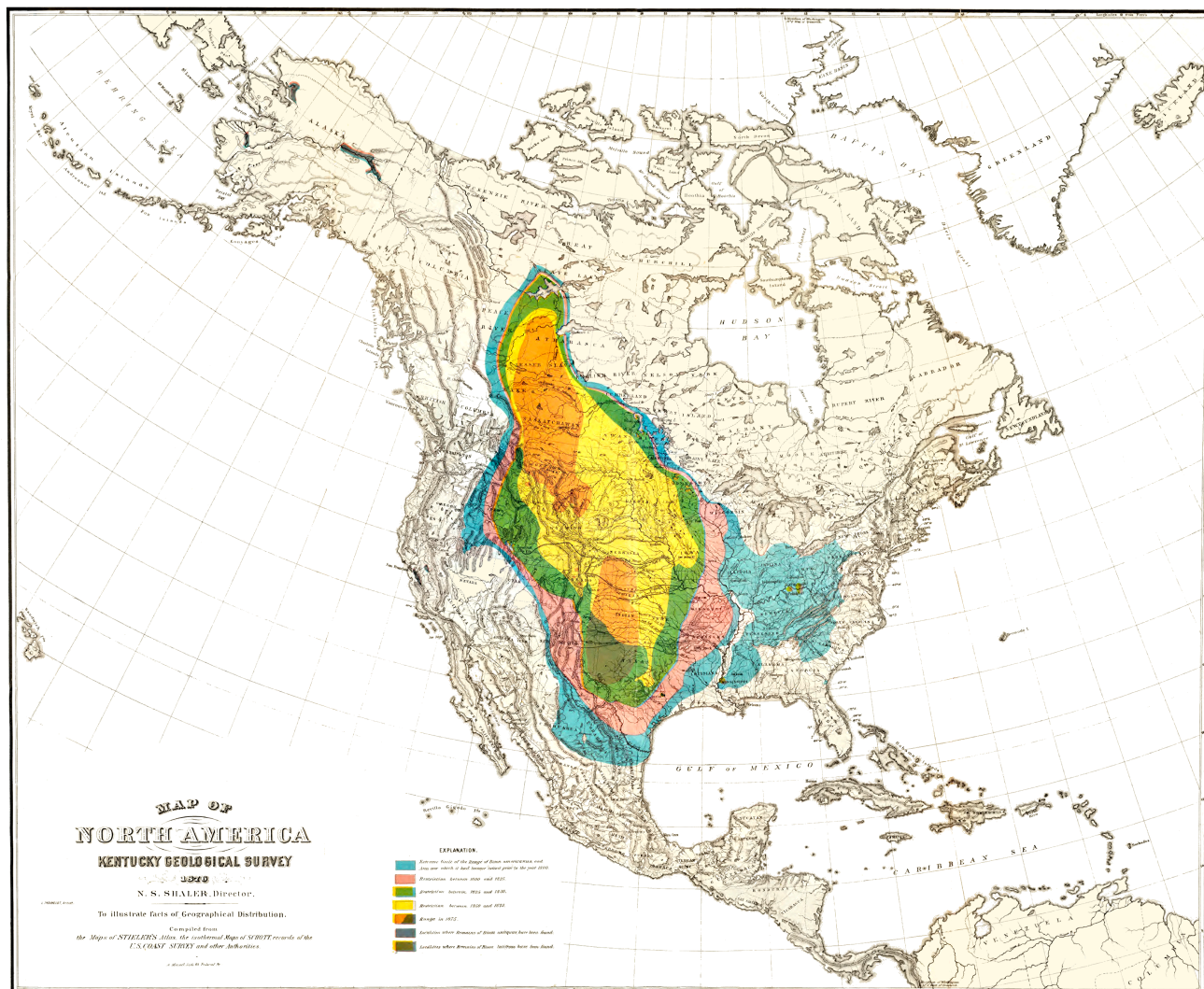
Even with conservation measures in place, the Dakota Plains, once lush with bison, no longer provided for the health and well-being of all buffalo culture families, including the Metis.

Missionaries were keenly aware of the difficulties and the famine caused by dwindling bison herds. Priests pushed Metis people towards sedentary living because they considered it part of the civilizing project that accompanied their evangelizing. Buffalo once roamed from the Peace River in present-day Alberta to the southern Great Plains of Texas. Yet, by the mid 1870s, the range of the animals shrank so much that only two small concentrations of bison remained on the North American continent: one in the region now consisting of Alberta/Montana and another in the Oklahoma/Texas area.²³ Early transcontinental railroads that carried the first passengers from one coast of territory claimed by the United States to the other effectively cut the animal’s range in half.

²² Thompson, *Red Sun: Gabriel Dumont The Folk Hero*, 75.

²³ See Image 5.2 for a detailed map of the bison range transformation in North America (1876) on page 257.

Image 5.2: Map of bison range transformations in North America (1876)²⁴



²⁴ J.A. Allen, *The American Bisons, Living and Extinct*, vol. IV, *Memoirs of the Museum of Comparative Zoology* 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1876), 249, <https://ia800502.us.archive.org/13/items/mobot31753003559363/mobot31753003559363.pdf>. Accessed 2 November 2015.

In 1876, the same year pictured in the map on the previous page, Father Albert Lacombe wrote to Canadian government officials requesting the creation of a bill to protect bison herds across the Northwest. Twenty-five years before, he accompanied the Pembina and St. Boniface brigades on a hunt, culminating in the Battle of Grand Coteau (1851). Lacombe relied on his experience among the Metis to express concern about the disappearing mammals that once fed Indigenous families in abundance. Addressing himself to Joseph-Édouard Cauchon, MP for Québec Centre, Lacombe foresaw that within ten years herds would cease to exist unless the government undertook legislative measures. Lacombe cited settler migration and the numerous traders posted among Indigenous peoples as the *cause célèbre* of the problem. The priest noted “*une telle loi sera bien reçue par les sauvages et les Métis...*”²⁵

After the buffalo’s near-extinction, many families plotted their return course to the Red River region. Metis hunters could no longer fulfil their traditional lifeways. In a vacuum of social order, missionaries proposed to claim territory for now destitute families, seven months before the U.S. government formally assigned land to the Turtle Mountain Chippewas in a presidential executive order. Father J.F. Malo recalled, referring to himself in the third person: “In 1882, May 3rd, Father Malo took possession of the famous Turtle Mountain on the American side of the international line. There was not a white settler for one hundred and fifty miles.” The priest continued: “during the whole summer the poor missionary had to camp in a teepee whilst the overjoyed Indians finished their log chapel with a roof, flooring, door and windows... It was christened St. John the Baptist after the name of its first residing missionary.”²⁶ Malo forgot Metis families and their Anishinaabe relatives affirmed their legal title to the land with the U.S.

²⁵ Albert Lacombe, “Albert Lacombe OMI to Honorable Mr Joseph Cauchon, 9 March 1876.” 9 March 1876, 76, RG10 Vol 3627 File 6157, LAC. Metis believers and their kin would happily welcome such initiative from the nascent nation-state.

²⁶ J.F. Malo, “Historical Sketch of the Catholic Mission of St. Ann,” 1899, 4, Catholic Church, Diocese of Fargo Records MSS 10366 Reel 601, SHSND

government many decades earlier. ChWeUm Davis and his kin arrived in Turtle Mountain two years after Malo “claimed” the site.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the Metis of the Turtle Mountain and their Anishinaabe kin explored a variety of political avenues to realize their convictions. These included direct action, petitions, delegations, treaties, and public demonstrations of faith. The educational model referred to in the 1880 petition was evidently Christian, and likely identical to the teachings received by the Metis in the 1850s from Father Belcourt. In December 1882, the President of the United States issued an Executive Order to create the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Indian Reservation. The initial terms of the land set aside for the band originally encompassed twenty townships and almost the entirety of Turtle Mountain, yet an 1884 Executive Order reduced the reservation to only two townships.²⁷ *Letan de levernement*, or wintering times, ended in 1884.²⁸ That year, ChWeUm and his family returned to Turtle Mountain to see what the new world order would bring them. Simultaneously, another smallpox epidemic made its way through the region and took many Metis bison hunters’ lives.

The political climate of the northern plains did not improve for Metis peoples. A few months after Davis’s return to the Turtle Mountain region, a delegation of hunters dispatched from the Saskatchewan River travelled to St. Peter’s mission in Montana Territory. ChWeUm recorded the names of those present to escort Louis Riel, as well as their date of arrival at their destination: “le 18 mai an 1884 Daligasion envoyez pour aler chercher Loeis Riel a la mission St Pierre Montana et rejoint L Riel le 4 de jeun mission de St Pierre an 1884. Delegui Jemes Ibister, Gabriel Dumon, Moise Volette, Michel Dumars.”²⁹ Even hundreds of miles away from their

²⁷ Shaw, “‘In Order That Justice May Be Done’ : The Legal Struggle of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, 1795-1905,” 333. This event is explained at greater length in Chapter 6.

²⁸ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 3,” 55.

²⁹ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 3,” 24.

relatives, Metis hunters remained well informed on the political actions taking place in their midst.

News of the Riel Resistance travelled far and wide. Keenly aware of Riel's and Gabriel Dumont's experiences, Davis noted the outcome of violent encounters between Metis people and the Canadian nation-state, such as the Battle of Fish Creek: "Avri 20 an 1885 fishe crike bataille —44 mitise contre 880 capeau rouge."³⁰ The numbers and date recorded by Davis do not align with the numerous, contested "official" narratives.³¹ The battle of Fish Creek was a significant victory for the Metis during the 1885 Resistance under the command of Dumont. The Metis and their allies managed to drive out a group of inexperienced Canadian soldiers from their traditional territory. Metis and Nehiyaw scouts tracked and recorded the movements of the Canadian troops from Fort Qu'Appelle onwards and reported their intelligence on the Canadian military encampments.³² Unprepared for the muddy environs of the South Saskatchewan River in April, and unfamiliar with basic firearms operations, the hastily assembled Canadian contingent retreated after suffering six casualties and forty-nine injuries.³³ The Metis lost five men and fifty-five ponies, a huge blow to the local economy at a time when resources were increasingly scarce. Davis learned the outcome of the 1885 Resistance by word of mouth. After the state-sponsored murder of his kin by Canadian authorities, Davis recorded an obituary of sorts for his fallen comrade:

Louis David Riel ne a St bonnifase Manitoba le 22 oct an 1844 et execute à Regina TNO le 16 de Nov 1885 il se maria avec Marguerite Bellehumeur de ce mariage il naquirent deux enfant, Jean Baptist ne le 4 de mai an 1882 a Carl Montana et Marie Angelique né Mission St Pierre le 17 se sept an 1883 Montana Louis David Riel fils de Loeis Riel et de Juli Lagimodier.³⁴

³⁰ Author's translation: "20 April 1885: Fish Creek Battle – 44 Metis against 880 red coats" Historians report that the battle of Fish Creek occurred between April 23-25, 1885.

³¹ Margaret L. Clarke, "Skinning the Narrative: The Story of Fish Creek," *Prairie Forum* 27, no. 2 (2002): 256.

³² Morton, *The Last War Drum: The North West Campaign of 1885*, 61.

³³ *Ibid.*, 51–68.

³⁴ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 3," 25.

The Davis diaries speak favourably of the political action taken by Metis hunters in the 1885 Resistance, even though ChWeUm did not join in, likely because of limited resources and the many dependents in his care. Davis's recollections of Riel's execution expressed both sympathy for the cause, and sorrow for the loss of a beloved leader. Metis families from the Dakotas to the Saskatchewan River echoed these sentiments.³⁵ Metis peoples were in shock at the violent state-sponsored suppression of their movement seeking political legitimacy. Although some priests actively worked against Metis interests in 1885 and punished those involved by refusing to hear their confessions, Metis believers did not, by and large, abandon their Catholicism.

Instead, Metis people renegotiated the parameters of their lived religion to fulfil more pressing community desires. More than ever before, bison hunters and their families needed help to heal from the violent and traumatic collapse of buffalo culture and the rise of the nation-state and its corporate interests. The famine triggered by the end of the hunt persisted. Those who escaped capture by the North West Mounted Police, including Gabriel Dumont and countless others from the Saskatchewan River region, sought refuge among their families south of the Medicine Line. Montana Metis oral histories left a record of such migrations in a series of interviews conducted in the 1990s. Ila Salois, granddaughter of Toussaint Salois, an active participant in the Resistance remembered her grandfather:

He was Riel's partner. In sort of a way, like lieutenant, you may say. He yelled "fight" up there and he was forced to move out down here. So, he never did go back to Canada, he just settled here. (...) I guess they lost two or three (grandpa and them) in their time. I have never heard him say how long but he said his last (xxxx) was this Batoche I think they call it. That's where they lost the battle, so that's why he moved down here. That's about all of that for grandpa that I know.³⁶

³⁵ Hugh Calderwood, "Hugh Calderwood to Joseph Kinsey Howard, 6 August 1948." Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers MC27 Box 9, folder 5, MHS.

³⁶ Ila Salois Agee, "Ila Salois Interview, 1995." (Collector: Harriett Hayne, 1 January 1977), OH 1888, MHS

Once again, family networks fostered safety and alternatives to suffering and the threat of arrest.

The last two decades of the buffalo chase were not easy for Metis families. Hardships caused by the sudden transformation of the relationship between Catholic clergy and Metis believers did not dissuade many from continuing their affiliation with the Church. ChWeUm Davis's life exemplifies this experience. The insights left in his journals reveal that even in circumstances most dire, Metis faithful found refuge in their faith. Encounters with the divine in the midst of extreme hardship strengthened religious convictions.

“JE ÉTÉ MAL CHANSEU POUR MA FAMILLE DANS MA VIE” CHWEUM DAVIS'S TESTIMONY

Recording his employment history, Davis noted that on 1 May 1865, he was among ten men hired by United States government at Fort Abercrombie:

1. Wm Gouin Capten
2. François Langé Cr
3. Moïse Langé
4. François Langé Jr
5. Jim Finlé
6. Antoine Caribou
7. Franco Caribou
8. Wm Davis Jr
9. Alexi Montréal
10. St Pierre Mason³⁷

ChWeUm worked as a scout for five or six months that year. According to the list provided in his reminiscences, William Gouin was “Capten” of the party. The employment seemingly continued in the fall of the same year. Davis applied to the United States federal government in 1923 for a “bounty”, or “une bonté,” in exchange for his service in 1865.³⁸ Scouting for the American

³⁷ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 1,” 86.

³⁸ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 4,” 1.

government, accomplished with or without wearing the colours of the U.S. Army, carried its risks. A Metis bison hunter named Louis Goulet recalled the Metis could compromise diplomatic talks and see the peace pipe refused if neighbouring Indigenous nations discovered they worked for the settler government. Goulet describes the difference between scouting in uniform, and scouting at large. Metis were often recruited for the latter. “Scouting at large” happened undercover, and the multilingual abilities of many bison hunters served them well in this task.³⁹

The postbellum labour Davis undertook represented one of many economic opportunities he pursued throughout his life. Davis provided data that traces his movements from the 1850s onwards, often twice a year. The Appendix at the end of this chapter tabulates all the geographic information comprised in the Davis diaries for the years between 1854 and 1884. After Davis’s 1865 employment with the United States army, he wintered at the “Sibley Crossing,” possibly the Maple Creek Crossing, southwest of present-day Fargo, North Dakota. Davis identified the site as the first traverse of North Dakota. It marked entry point for Sibley’s and Sully’s punitive 1863 Dakota expeditions, launched in retaliation for the 1862 events mentioned in the previous chapter.⁴⁰



CANTONMENTS, FORT ABERCROMBIE.

Image 5.1: Fort Abercrombie⁴¹

³⁹ Guillaume Charette, *L'espace de Louis Goulet* (Winnipeg: Éditions Bois-Brûlés, 1976) 101-2, 122-3.

⁴⁰ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 3,” 52.

⁴¹ Cantonments, Fort Abercrombie, June 1860. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, August 1860, Vol.21, page 306

As settler encroachment and state-sanctioned appropriation of Indigenous land affected food supplies on the prairie, maintaining traditional lifeways became increasingly difficult to continue full-time. Since Metis hunters demonstrated a marked expertise in navigating the terrain dividing the North American continent, they were hired to guide wagon trains of newcomers travelling through the plains. Settlers crossed Indigenous territories while ill-equipped (linguistically, logistically, politically) to do so. In 1866, the Davis family returned southward by way of Fort Abercrombie and began their spring buffalo hunt.⁴² En route to their destination, a large expedition heading westward accosted the Metis. Many settlers hoped to acquire wealth in the Montana gold rush, which was then just burgeoning. ChWeUm's father, William *Kug-Kay-day-wash-King* Davis, and Jean Parisien, both Metis from the Turtle Mountain, offered to guide the newcomers across the full breadth of the northern plains. They travelled from Minnesota to Montana's Last Chance Gulch, located in the heart of present-day Helena, Montana along the Rocky Mountain front. In exchange for pay and provisions from the settlers, the Metis party guided the wagon train on its journey of over 1,200 miles (approximately 1,900 kilometres), which took a little more than 100 days to complete.⁴³ Davis and his kin hunted bison on the way, accompanying the expedition with nine Red River carts shared between two families. The Pembina Metis provided food and safe passage for the overland wagon train known as the "Holmes' Train of 1866."⁴⁴

Very young Metis children actively participated in these new business ventures. Michel Davis's recollections of the Holmes wagon train elaborated on its proceedings. Davis Sr. and Parisien received ten dollars per day for services rendered to settlers in unfamiliar territory.

⁴² Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 3," 52.

⁴³ Helen McCann White, ed., *Ho! For The Gold Field: Northern Overland Wagon Trains of the 1800s* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1966), 193.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 182–84.

Indigenous polities reportedly fired at the train, likely responding to settler encroachment on their lands and resources. Unlike during bison hunts where Metis people protected themselves and their property by corralling their carts, the Davis and Parisien families accompanying the Holmes Train remained outside the train enclosure at night to ensure its good order. Michel, then four years old, assisted the guards in shielding their cattle and horses from thieves. During this particular expedition, Michel caught a horse thief, and:

He immediately called his father who, in turn, summoned the leader of the miners. They talk to the man in several Indian languages, but he did not answer. They could not get a word out of him. By signs they made him understand that if they run across him again they would shoot him. The white man said they have no right to kill him at that time, since he had not resisted when he was caught.⁴⁵

The lack of violence in this encounter demonstrates the continuity of a Metis strategy that prized conflict resolution based on consensus and consent. This practice is especially noteworthy in light of the clash involving Metis peoples and settlers. Turning to violence remained a last resort, only to be used in self-defence. After the train expedition concluded and the miners arrived at their destination, the Davis family travelled again, this time to Saskatchewan in the winter of 1866. The snow was very heavy that year and bison were difficult to find. The Davis family, including ChWeUm, his father, Michel and others, survived with fourteen sleighs rather than Red River carts.⁴⁶ When distance from clergy was not a problem, Catholic law sometimes limited Metis access to the sacraments. Father Genin lamented the marital irregularities, or the relationships between Metis Catholics and non-Catholics of all origins, particularly American soldiers. The priest refused to perform the sacrament of marriage for many Metis who requested it. Father Genin would not unite people of mixed religious backgrounds since they did not guarantee Catholic offspring. The missionary also denied marriage to those who could not

⁴⁵ Davis, "Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire," 22–23.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

provide documentary proof from a clergyman that they had not previously been married. Genin's refusals complicated the situation for many Metis unions. Such was the case with ChWeUm Davis and Euphrosine Hamelin, who did not marry in the Church. Metis Catholics nevertheless found ways to wed despite the requirements of missionaries. After all, Genin married "the daughter of Michel Klyne" to an American soldier, following the reception of a note from an army general asking the priest to oblige, promising the soldier had no spouse elsewhere and vouching for his character.⁴⁷ Social class influenced clerical actions and decisions. Consequently, some Metis maintained more access to Church sacraments than others, depending on their economic status in the northern plains settler society.

The Davis Metis family could not continuously access Catholic sacraments. After a failed winter hunting expedition in 1866–1867, the Davis family moved from the Saskatchewan River back into Montana, then headed east, returning to St. Joseph in the spring, searching for buffalo the whole time.⁴⁸ Although the Davis family life remained imbued with Catholicity, the circumstances of their lives sometimes made it impossible for them to obtain the sacraments. ChWeUm explained that in 1867, at age twenty-two, he married in the manner of the country at Devil's Lake, Dakota Territory.⁴⁹ His bride Euphrosine Hamelin, then eighteen years old, was not always a Devil's Lake resident. Her father died in Pembina in 1856. Father Belcourt buried him in the local cemetery.⁵⁰ Euphrosine grew up following Catholic rituals. The Pembina community celebrated her baptism by Father Belcourt in 1849. Her godparents were Pierre Vandal and Rosalie Hamelin. Neither signed the parish register, but both accepted the social and religious

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 3," 52.

⁴⁹ Davis, "William Davis Biographical File," 2.

⁵⁰ Belcourt, "Assumption Church of Pembina Record Volume 1," 158.

obligations that accompanied the role of godparents.⁵¹ Like her spouse, Euphrosine Hamelin accompanied her parents on the bison hunt in infancy and likely knew ChWeUm from childhood. The Davis-Hamelin couple and their kin wintered at Devil's Lake, Dakota Territory the year they married.⁵² Fort Totten, built there that summer according to ChWeUm's notes, provided Metis people chances to sell their wares to locals and find gainful employment.⁵³ Once opportunities there were depleted, the Davis family left the Dakota Territory and headed east to Minnesota.⁵⁴ Despite having to travel a significant distance on a dangerous trip, the Davis family believed they could find buffalo to hunt near the Yellow Medicine River in Minnesota.

Metis bison hunters entertained themselves by visiting one another, playing music, and dancing. They also had fun by taking part in horse racing and betting. In 1867, ChWeUm set out to win a horse race, which offered a valuable prize: 1,200 pounds of pemmican. Racing against the five best horses and riders from his encampment, it was a winner-take-all scenario, with an entrance fee of two-hundred-and-forty pounds of pemmican. The race was ten miles in length. Davis, then at the height of his prowess as a young man, won the race. He recorded: "Auzil de boi blan an 1867 Wm Davis son cheval a coureu une course diss mil avec 5 autre cheveu c'est a dire les 6 meheu coureure du camp son cheval a gagni la gajure de 240 Livre de toreau de chaque cheveu."⁵⁵ The race took place "at the isles of white wood." White wood, or *bois blanc*, is a synonym for birch tree, or *wiigwaas-mitig*, a traditional natural resource for Anishinaabe peoples.

⁵¹ Ibid., 17. While I did not find a "Rosalie" Hamelin, Jacques's sister was named Rosine, which may explain the godchild's name. It was not uncommon for a newborn to be named after the person that would become their godparent. The "Rosalie" recorded by Belcourt and Euphrosine's aunt Rosine, could be the same person. What is certain is that the Davis and Hamelin families shared an affinity for Father Belcourt, as evidenced by their shared proximity to him and continued participation in Catholic rituals whenever possible.

⁵² Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 3," 53.

⁵³ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 1," 8.

⁵⁴ William Davis, "William Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire," 3, MSS 10035 Reel 5905, SHSND.

⁵⁵ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 3," 22.

Wiigwaas, or birch bark, was harvested in the spring.⁵⁶ This information helps to tentatively date the race, since the Davis and Hamelin families likely accompanied relatives to gather birch bark in Minnesota. Evidently, people not occupied with harvesting had some free time on their hands, creating a perfect opportunity for competition among friends and kin. Even though the event happened in the company of ChWeUm's first wife, Euphrosine, his second spouse, Sarah Nolin, related the story to a Works Progress Administration (WPA) fieldworker in the 1930s. Sarah's narrative attests to the level of joy and accomplishment her husband associated with this victory throughout his life.⁵⁷ The Davis family wintered at Lac Qui Parle, Minnesota.⁵⁸ Their sojourn away from the Great Plains continued.

Happy times tempered more difficult circumstances. In 1868, the Davis family was hired as part of a group performing so-called "Indian dances" for an Iowa circus. Thinking that the employment would be lucrative and relatively safe compared to the perils of the hunt, the family took advantage of the opportunity. The Davis family were part of a larger movement of workers including many African American and Indigenous peoples finding employment in Midwest circuses by using their cultural attributes to astonish an increasingly racialized American society. Historian Sakina Mariam Hughes has studied such resistance strategies. Undeterred by the disparaging nature of the performance context, families employed in circuses and minstrel shows during the nineteenth century participated to advance their respective political and cultural interests.⁵⁹ In light of settler encroachment, violence, and legal discrimination affecting Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of colour, Michel Davis recalled his family's search for lucrative summer employment ended when a certain "Captain Waldron" invited them to join his travelling

⁵⁶ Wendy Djinn Geniusz, *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings*, 1st ed, The Iroquois and Their Neighbors Series (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 183.

⁵⁷ Nolin, "Mrs William Davis WPA Making Pemmican," 17.

⁵⁸ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 3," 53.

⁵⁹ Sakina Mariam Hughes, "Under One Big Tent: American Indians, African Americans and the Circus World of Nineteenth-Century America" (Ph.D diss., Michigan State University, 2012).

circus in Iowa. The Davis's knowledge of "Indian dances," acquired as participants in Indigenous ceremonies, created a new economic opportunity. Unfortunately, upon reaching their Midwest destination, the circus that hired the Davis family then abandoned them without pay, leaving them hundreds of miles from their home territory.⁶⁰ In June 1869, Euphrosine Hamelin gave birth to ChWeUm's first son, Leander, who shared his name with his paternal grandfather.⁶¹ Davis's WPA interview indicates Leander was born near present-day Blue Earth, Minnesota, 110 km east of Spirit Lake, Iowa—where the Davis relatives wintered once their circus plans collapsed.

The Davis family relied on their relationships with Indigenous peoples to survive, as they always had. Their kinship network ensured they were able to begin planning their return to Turtle Mountain as soon as they became aware of the deception. Gradually making their way home, the Davis family wintered at Spirit Lake near the Minnesota/Iowa border. Then they headed north towards White Earth, Minnesota, where they stayed for several years at the White Earth reservation, living near relatives. The United States government had created the White Earth reservation in 1867 for the Anishinaabeg after concluding a treaty with the Mississippi Band of Chippewa. ChWeUm, his spouse Euphrosine, and their family spent a total of eight years (1868–1875) coming and going from White Earth. During this time, ChWeUm found seasonal employment as a clerk for a local store-owner named Louis Robert.⁶² His ability to read and write in Michif French, as well as his knowledge of both mathematics and Indigenous languages, made his skills invaluable.

The Davis family did not try to engage in sedentary farming full-time until the bison herds were no longer roamed the Great Plains. As it became increasingly difficult to find and hunt the animals, missionary priests responded by continuing their attempts to entice Metis people into

⁶⁰ Davis, "Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire," 18.

⁶¹ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 3," 34.

⁶² Ibid.

full-time sedentary living. Gerhard Ens explains that transitioning to a settler lifestyle was impossible for families who had to travel additional distances to ensure their subsistence for the year. The impact of proto-industrialism in the Red River region profoundly transformed Metis lifeways. The hardships caused by repeated famine and increased competition for natural resources fostered a climate ripe for the political upheaval of 1869-70. Metis peoples resisted the Canadian settler project expropriating their lands and took a political stance that would ultimately secure a codified (legal) identity for themselves.⁶³

Back in the 1860s amidst intermittent famine and economic opportunity, ChWeUm Davis, as many others in his position did, turned to innovative mechanisms to feed his young family. Instead of attempting to remain in the Red River region where food supplies were scarce and farming depended on Providence, the Davis family packed up their carts, lodges, and relatives. They left the Red River travelling eastward until reaching their destination.⁶⁴ They brought along pitchforks, rakes, picks, and a “grate,” likely a drag, or a three-pronged tool, thinner than a pitchfork and angled like a hoe, intended to help loosen the soil. Later on when the Davis family reached the White Earth reservation they did not farm. Instead, Davis traded his farming tools with members of the White Earth Band. ChWeUm exchanged his goods for provisions useful to his family as they continued their pursuit of the hunt. Davis wrote: “je donner la rasion et les forche les roteau les pioche et grate an 1874 au sauvage jé lai payez avec les previzion pour moi et ma famielle que javais bezoin.”⁶⁵ ChWeUm relied on his kin connections on the White Earth

⁶³ Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*. See Chapter 5 : Metis Demography and Proto-Industrialism in Red River 1840-1870 for more insights on this time period and the transformations of Metis society between 1840-1870. On the impact of the Manitoba Act of 1870 on the development of a historical Metis Identity, see: Gerhard John Ens and Joe Sawchuk, *From New Peoples to New Nations*.

⁶⁴ Davis, “Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire,” 18.

⁶⁵ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 2,” 34. Davis wrote his family traded their farming wares at the “rizarve des sauvage de pimkina riviere lafolle manomini minisota.” He did not use the Metis appellation, which he uses elsewhere to reference his own family history, implying that the people of Pembina now residing at White Earth were more distant relatives, and did not live like the Metis hunters.

Reservation to make a mutually beneficial exchange. Metis people wished to continue the “buffalo chase” because it provided them with most of their most basic necessities and foodstuffs in times of crop failure. Between 1870 and 1874, ChWeUm and Euphrosine welcomed another three children to the world: Sarah in 1870; Agathe, in 1872; and Suzanne, in 1874. The Davis family resided in the Minnesota region until 1875. That year, tragedy struck their family of six. Between the spring and summer, ChWeUm lost both his spouse and his youngest daughter. Davis buried both in the vicinity of White Earth, Minnesota.⁶⁶

ChWeUm’s unexpected loss marked the beginning of serial bereavement in the Davis family. Disease, famine, and difficult circumstances came to mind when the bison hunter recorded the sum of his losses later in life: “Je été mal chanceu pour mafamille dans ma vie ses je marier Frizonne Amilin Oct 29 1867 je eu 4 entan del il sont mort a le morte mai 12 an 1875 je marier sara nolin nov 30 an 1875 je eu 12 enfants del 9 de mort je 3 entant de vivan sur 16.”⁶⁷ ChWeUm lost thirteen of his sixteen children over the years, which explains why he wrote down that he was unlucky in life. After the death of Euphrosine Hamelin, even though he mourned for almost two seasons as a widower, ChWeUm could not totally provide for his three surviving children. Women’s labour was essential to the successful undertaking of the buffalo hunt. Without a spouse to rear the young, help with the bison hide production, and prepare pemmican, the hunt could not continue. ChWeUm married Sarah Nolin in November 1875. Her family had long historical ties to the Pembina region. Sarah’s aunts, Marguerite and Angélique, both sisters of her father Joseph, left Pembina in the late 1820s to assist Father Belcourt and open the first school for Metis youth in St. Boniface. Sarah and ChWeUm had many babies together. In the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁷ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 2,” 31. Translation by author: I was unlucky in my family [life]. In my life, I married Euphrosine Hamelin October 29 1867. I had four children from her, they are [since] deceased. She died May 12 1875. I married Sarah Nolin November 30, 1875. I had twelve children from her. 9 are dead. I have three living children out of sixteen.

end, the Davis parents had to bury many of their children along the Red River cart trails they traversed.⁶⁸

Davis's family network associated itself with another community of hunters when its ties to Minnesota shifted after his first wife passed away. The Davis family packed up their carts, horses, and oxen. They headed west to the Devil's Lake region. According to 1930s WPA interviews, ChWeUm found employment at Fort Totten, a newly established American military post. The United States built Fort Totten to surveil the local Dakota people and ensure that commerce, in other words, the movement of trade goods and expansion of white settlements continued without obstruction. ChWeUm worked as both a blacksmith and a carpenter for the United States government.⁶⁹ Davis's carpentry skills, likely developed while making and maintaining Red River carts, left their mark on Devil's Lake. Since Davis's instructor, Father Belcourt, served as the local blacksmith to Metis peoples in the 1850s, Davis could have acquired this skill, or a penchant for it, from the same man who taught him how to read and write.

While some Metis hunters began to congregate around the Milk River in Montana Territory, ChWeUm Davis and his family continued to labour in the Devil's Lake vicinity. ChWeUm told his interviewer he built the "first big store" at Devil's Lake for a man named D.L. Palmer.⁷⁰ Such opportunities for revenue supplemented bison hunting rounds that increasingly yielded less and less. In the winter of 1877, the Davis family moved from Devil's Lake to the Souris River, a body of water linking the Canadian-claimed northern area (then called the Northwest Territories, and later encompassed by the province of Manitoba) to the Dakota Territory. Michel remembered: "[Michel] shot three buffaloes West of Minot [North Dakota] (...)

⁶⁸ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 1," 12.

⁶⁹ Davis, "William Davis Biographical File," 2.

⁷⁰ Davis, "William Davis Biographical File," 2.

After he came back to Dakota Territory, he got no more buffaloes as they were then all gone.

When asked what had become of them he said: ‘I shot them all.’⁷¹

Ever-decreasing buffalo herds triggered a demographic movement westward. Although in 1878 the Davis family wintered at Fort Totten, twelve months later, ChWeUm and his relatives headed to the Milk River in Montana. He called this moment the “gran detour.”⁷² The Dakotas no longer had enough meat to feed all his kin, so Davis followed the buffalo herds to the end of their migrations. According to Michel, ten families made the trip to Montana. ChWeUm’s younger brother cited the Milk River, the Bear Paw, the Judith Basin, and the Little Missouri as their places of residence while there.⁷³ ChWeUm specified that in 1880 and 1881 they wintered on the Musselshell River.⁷⁴ There they met with Louis Riel, whom they had not seen since the previous decade. Riel last stopped by Pembina after the Resistance of 1869-70. Although the encounter was political in nature, it was also rooted in the long-standing Metis matchmaking traditions. The Monet dit Bellehumeur and the Davis families connected to one another via kinship: Marguerite Monet, Louis Riel’s spouse, was a cousin. Michel related the following story to his WPA interviewer:

While in Montana Michael Davis saw Riel, The leader of the Indian rebellion in Canada, several times. At Carol [Carroll] Montana real call [Riel Called] Davis over to him one day and asked him if he could get a young girl to take a few drops of whiskey. He said, “I have tried to get her to drink a little of it, but she won’t do it.” The girl was a daughter of Michael’s cousin. Michael said he could get her to do it. After coaxing her for a little while the girl took a few drops of the liquor. A couple of days later Riel and the girl were married. Michael thought that Riel must have put a love potion in the whiskey.⁷⁵

The bison hunt encampment remained a space for family formation and the building of new bonds, such as the Riel/Monet alliance. Nevertheless, Metis people continued to participate in

⁷¹ Davis, “Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire.”

⁷² Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 3,” 54.

⁷³ Davis, “Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire.”

⁷⁴ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 3,” 54.

⁷⁵ Davis, “Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire,” 25.

political actions and demanded that their rights be respected to anyone who would listen, though they now did so on their own, instead of relying on Catholic clergy. Dozens of Metis men signed a petition dated 6 August 1880, penned by Louis Riel, addressed to United States Army Major General Nelson A. Miles, requesting a reservation in Montana and assistance so they could transition into an agrarian life.⁷⁶ Two years after putting their names on a similar document in Cypress Hills, the Metis longed for an agreeable solution to famine. The 1880 petition specified that the Metis reservation should be free of settler encroachment. The Metis recognized the need to transform their lifeway and abandon traditional mobility since the bison economy was no longer viable. Metis petitioners highlighted their close kin connection with the other Indigenous nations in the area to suggest they could influence their relatives. The petition informed the American government that granting the Metis land and sovereignty could help pacify the region. Both ChWeUm and his father were signatories, as were ChWeUm's siblings, Michel and Joseph, listed alongside 101 names.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Louis Riel and George Francis Gillman Stanley, *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel*, vol. 2 (Edmonton, Alta., Canada: University of Alberta Press, 1985), 223–26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* The number of 101 includes Louis Riel.

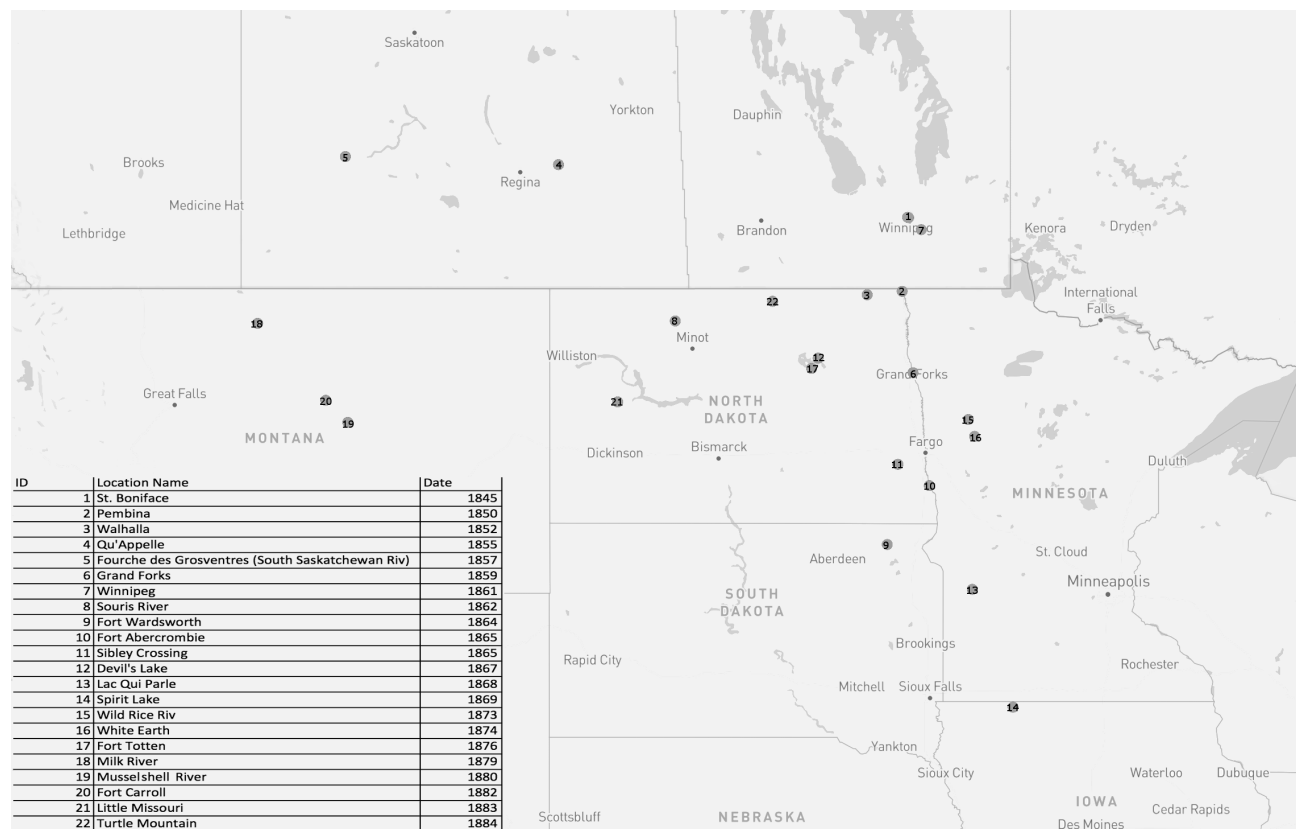


Image 5.3: Map of ChWeUm's lived religion (1845-1884)

In February 1882, Michel Davis married Flora Alarie. Michel's spouse grew up following Catholic rituals: "She was baptized by a priest at Winnipeg, Canada. She is French Chippewa. Mr. Davis stated that she was probably mostly Chippewa. Flabby Ellery's parents were Pier Alery and Angelique Parisian [sic]."⁷⁸ The wedding ceremony inscribed in the St. Peter's Mission parish register in Montana, indicates the officiating priest found the couple provided enough evidence that they were both Catholic and not previously married.⁷⁹ The absence of Church records on other members of the Davis family does not suggest a break with Catholicism. The

⁷⁸ Davis, "Michel Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire," 20.

⁷⁹ Foster, *We Know Who We Are*, 65.

absence of formally recognized sacraments, like marriage, did not prevent Metis people from practising their religion. Metis prayers were answered in difficult times regardless of the church sanction over local lived religion.

Reflecting on four decades of hunting bison with his relatives coming to a close, Davis wrote: “je faite mavie sur la chase de Buffalo et sur la traite sauvage à vener avri 6 1884 je venu au rizarve de montagne a tortu je pri une terre je commensé à sumer”⁸⁰ When Davis wrote he “took land,” this meant that, in the eyes of the American state, he squatted. His WPA interviewer elaborated on this fact, adding Davis “squatted on the present John St. Arnaud place. Some time later, he homesteaded on lots one and two and the east one half of the northwest quarter of section thirty, township one hundred sixty-two and range seventy, which became Ingebretson Township.”⁸¹ The interviewer noted a clear distinction between squatting and homesteading, giving the latter legitimacy, although Davis’s claim to land in the Turtle Mountain certainly surpassed that of Euro-American “pioneers.”

The return of bison hunters to the Turtle Mountain area from Montana fostered the growth of Catholic institutions in the region. Metis families built a log church to replace the structure from forty years prior, a legacy of Father Belcourt and his supporters. The new construction initially had no floor, and parishioners pooled whatever resources they had to finance a roof made of lumber and shingles.⁸² Father Malo described the religious fervour of his congregation in flattering terms: “The good Indian people who could sing Mass in Latin, Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, etc., but the selected pieces, Offertorium, Elevation, Communion were and are still sung

⁸⁰ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 2,” 32. Davis writes he made a living hunting the buffalo and trading with Indigenous peoples. On 6 April 1884, he returned to the Turtle Mountain to take up land and began to plant small crops. By 1913, Davis wrote he planted wheat, oats, barley, corn and potatoes in what he described as a small garden.

⁸¹ Davis, “William Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire,” 8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 9.

enthusiastically all in beautiful Chippewa verses and rhymes.”⁸³ When ChWeUm returned to Turtle Mountain, he continued to live a life imbued with Catholic rituals and practices. Lived religion sustained Metis believers through difficult times. The lived experiences of the divine fostered and maintained Metis people’s beliefs.

METIS LIVED CATHOLICISM LIVES ON

An increasing amount of people traversed the prairies in search of land or riches during the post-bellum era, straining the natural resources of buffalo country and, subsequently, causing more strife. Miracles continued to form and inform Metis lived Catholicism and provided a source of comfort in light of such hardships. According to a 1934 WPA interview with Mr. Joseph Laframboise, in 1865, the Metis from Pembina ventured back to Devil’s Lake. With no bison in sight, the brigade sacrificed some of its oxen for food. The surrounding lakes also dried up, which meant that conditions were dire both for the Metis and for their livestock. Laframboise recalled:

When the halfbreeds told Father [Genin] that they had no water he told them to go to a little lake and that they could get water there, but several of the halfbreeds had already been over to the lake and it was all dried up and they told father [Genin]. Then Father Jennin [sic] had them recite the rosary when they were through he told them to get their kettles together and go back again and so they did and when they got to the lake again water was coming up through the cracks in the bottom of the lake and they got all the water they needed. When they arrived back with the water from the lake, father [Genin] told them to pack all there [sic] goods and move over to the lake and make camp, when they got over to the lake Father [Genin] had them recite the rosary and celebrated mass. Then, he named the lake St. Mary’s Lake.⁸⁴

Finding water in a dire time was a blessing. For Metis believers, the situation constituted hard evidence of a miracle. Public rosary recitations provided instant relief from an impossible

⁸³ Malo, “Historical Sketch of the Catholic Mission of St. Ann,” 8.

⁸⁴ O’Leary and Laframboise, “WPA Files - La Fromboise, Joseph, Pembina County Walhalla,” 8–9.

situation. With such clear demonstrations of God's power, Metis Catholics continued to support the Church financially.

Metis families contributed to the Church's request in accordance to their means. They did not deviate from established practices, and continued to pay their priest with proceeds of the hunt: even though, at times, as in Pembina, financial support in the form of rations was deemed impractical for clergy. Bison hunters had to offer church officials payments in goods that were easily obtained on the plains. Bison hunters agreed to a communal strategy before donating to their missionaries. In so doing, Metis politics maintained the upper hand in their negotiations with priests

Despite the socioeconomic conditions created by circumstances beyond their control, Metis families continuously sought to improve the material wealth of their religious community. In January 1867, Father Hippolyte Leduc wrote to Archbishop Taché, informing him that the people of Pembina (St. Joseph/Walhalla) unanimously agreed to begin planning new buildings for the Church. After discussing their options, the group favoured leaving the present chapel where it was. Instead, they constructed a presbytery. Elzéar Goulet, renowned for his role in the Resistance of 1869, who was now a mail carrier serving Pembina and St. Boniface, offered his services to build the home.⁸⁵ Pembina residents debated how to raise funds for the materials and the labour required. Since they had no money to give, they promised the missionary two pounds (sterling) of rations per family, which they would provide after their next hunting expedition.

Leduc warned Pembina inhabitants that their proposal might not appeal to his superior, the Archbishop of St. Boniface, who likely already had all the rations he needed. Leduc offered to

⁸⁵ Lawrence J. Barkwell, "Goulet, Elézar," *Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture*, Accessed 6 July 2016, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/14257>.

seek his Archbishop's permission before committing to the proposed payment scheme.⁸⁶ As such, the group came to no decision that day. This exchange demonstrates consensus remained central to Metis governance, even when speaking to clergy. It also echoes Metis political values of sharing economic burdens; in this case, the cost of a new church building would be divided equally among the families of Pembina. Upon his departure from Pembina in June 1867, Leduc lamented the fact that the Church had failed to schedule a replacement for him in the region. Leduc noted that fluency in *Anishinaabemowin* was a required to serve local parishioners effectively, as Belcourt had done. The ability to communicate and catechize in Indigenous languages facilitated lasting connections with the Anishinaabeg and their Metis relatives. Clergymen now openly acknowledged this fact.⁸⁷ Leduc concluded his report by providing statistics on Easter communions for the year. He estimated 150 faithful partook in the ceremony.

Metis lived Catholicism manifested itself as much in clothing choices as it did in communal fundraising decisions. Women believed their physical appearance was intimately tied to their experience of the divine. Turtle Mountain Tribal historian Charlie White Weasel notes that Old Wild Rice, his son, Little Thunder, and his grandchildren were renowned for their devout Catholicity. Old Wild Rice's granddaughter, Isabel Gourneau Delorme, wore a large metal cross around her neck whilst residing near St. Joe (Walhalla, ND) in 1873. Clothed like her contemporaries, Isabel's everyday accoutrement was credited for miraculously saving her life. White Weasel recalled:

The life of Isabel Gourneau Delorme was saved by a large silver crucifix which hung from her neck during the Sioux massacre of her family on July 6, 1873. A Sioux bullet was stopped by the cross. Two sons, Patrick and Bernard escaped. Her husband

⁸⁶ Hypollite Leduc, "Hypollite Leduc to Alexandre-Antonin Taché, 27 January 1867." Belleau Collection, Reel 3, Doc 1867-18, AA.

⁸⁷ Hypollite Leduc, "Hypollite Leduc to Antoine-Antonin Taché, 4 June 1867." Belleau Collection, Reel 3, Doc 1867-24, AA.

Joseph and other family members were killed. Her great-granddaughter Margaret Lucier of St. Paul Minnesota is said to still have this cross.⁸⁸

The crucifix worn around the neck therefore served as more than a statement of religiosity and Catholic faith. For Isabel Gourneau Delorme, the cross representing Jesus's sacrifice to humanity was so powerful that it saved her life. The transmission of the devotional item through family members attests to its high value. Stories like the miraculous escape of Isabel and her two sons from the 1873 massacre functioned as reminders of the divine graces that believers received. Women displaying Catholic material culture in this way understood that certain objects could shape their experiences of the divine. Miraculous events were remembered and transmitted through family stories. Family members preserved and passed down these special objects so that the good auspices they carried might reach other believers.

Lived Catholicism involved gendered behaviour norms for men and women. While women often dressed a certain way to demonstrate their faith, men adopted specific behaviours towards women for the same reason. According to O'Connell, the Milk River group "had a code of laws and were governed by a council of twelve, under their chosen Gabriel Ausur [sic]." O'Connell's recollection is especially informative since it mentions punitive actions when brigade members used "disrespectful language" or insults, particularly towards women or girls. Penalties, though seldom enacted, ranged from flogging to the confiscation of tools. O'Connell recorded daily scenes of lived religion among the Milk River Metis:

It was customary for the half-breeds to pray when in camp sometimes in family prayers and many times when altogether on the prairie. When congregated around Juneaux's post, when the hour of noon arrived, [they sang] "The Angelus" they would, young and old, fall in a circle on their knees and under the leadership of old Pere (Pierre) Lavdier (Lavadure) Juneaux's Father-in-law get their beads or "rosaries" and pray most fervently. When in the hunt, when near the buffalo they would unite in prayer asking God's protection.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Charlie White Weasel, "Old Wild Rice 'The Great Chief' 'Genesis of the Pembina/Turtle Mountain Chippewa'" (2nd Edition, Belcourt, North Dakota, 1989), 13.

⁸⁹ O'Connell, "Story of Juneaux's Trading Post," 3-4.

When not busy with the labour of the hunt, Metis families came together in song. Alexander Wilkie, ChWeUm Davis's half-uncle on his father's side, organized his family in a church choir. They sang for the high or low Mass, depending on the request of visiting clergy.⁹⁰ According to Father Jean-Baptiste Genin, who celebrated Christmas Mass with Metis on the Milk River in 1878, Wilkie's singers, known for their "Gregorian masses," were lauded throughout the region.⁹¹ The choir was a multi-generational affair. Wilkie's daughters, nephews, and other relatives performed under his guidance. Being an established fiddle player, Wilkie included music in his lived religion and transmitted this tradition to family members in French and in Cree. During Mass, the entire congregation followed along in Cree, Latin, or French, depending on the circumstances and the company. They harmonized for all to hear.

In a letter published in the *Freeman's Journal* in New York, Genin described the Christmas Day celebrations to an American audience, praising the attendance of entire families, including young children and infants. Metis families planned for Mass on 24 December by "preparing a beautiful altar at which was celebrated the first midnight Mass on the Milk River. During that night, none of the children could sleep. (...) all who would attend (...) exercis [ed] themselves in the chant of pious hymns."⁹² Before the religious service, those that could take communion confessed their sins to the priest, who absolved them in preparation for the reception of the body of Christ. Festivities continued in the camp until the New Year. Genin added that on 1 January 1879, Metis people wintering on the Milk River greeted a large group of their relatives arriving on their horses and oxen. Three fiddlers rushed to the head of the train to meet the hunting party. As soon as they were within eyesight, Milk River families fired shots in the air to

⁹⁰ A high Mass is a celebration of the sacrament of Eucharist done in full tridentine rite. It includes signing, special vestments, servants, incense, and is longer than a low Mass.

⁹¹ State Historical Society of North Dakota, *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, 1:250.

⁹² *Ibid.*

celebrate and welcome their brethren. Genin remarked, “One of the headmen made an address, concluding by asking the priest’s blessing at the beginning of the new year. After they had received it they began firing and playing again, until the call was sounded.”⁹³

According to Elizabeth Swan’s recollections, until the Metis became sedentary, church officials accompanied them regularly on their hunting expeditions. Although the missionary presence remained intermittent, what did not change was a communal desire for Catholic clergy. Swan said: “Then if you [had] need of some priest [you] would go any distance to get one.”⁹⁴ Jesuits at St. Peter’s mission among the Blackfeet visited the Milk River Metis at least once a year. Father Philip Rappagliosi, known as “*le petit père Philip*,” was especially close to Alexander Wilkie. The Jesuit repeatedly stayed in Wilkie’s home during his trips to the region. Wilkie’s role as host continued a tradition of laypeople actively serving as agents of faith. As Elizabeth Swan notes, the Metis were not immune to the effects of conflicts among clergy. A priest from the Dakota Territory reportedly began occupying a chapel constructed in one of the Metis winter campsites, and refused to let *le petit père Philip* use the space to say Mass, which, in turn, upset the local population. When Father Philip passed away, Wilkie helped build and plant an oak cross in honour of the clergyman he long respected and admired. In so doing, he continued the age-old Catholic practice of ritually place-claiming.

Since the missionary presence on the Milk River throughout the 1870s was sporadic at best, Metis families relied on one another to perform certain rituals and ceremonies of Catholic life. According to Elizabeth Swan’s recollections, the French Creek settlement, including Alexander Wilkie, moved in the spring of 1879 to near present-day Lewistown, Montana. During this relocation, Bernard La Fontaine fell ill and passed away. Since a priest did not accompany

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Swan, “A Brief History of the First Catholic Pioneers of Lewistown, Montana,” 7–8.

them, the community had to perform last rites unaided. Alexander Wilkie first chose an area for a cemetery, atop a hill for all to see. The Catholic funeral described by Swan involved processions, rosary recitations, and prayers at the gravesite throughout the week:

They had to strip a Red River cart, as that was the only lumber available to make the casket with. Isaie Berger, we mentioned before, having carpenter tools made the coffin, as he knew how, and has made extra good ones. After he got the proper material to work with, and usually they did all that work for free of charge. As a matter of fact no one ever had to call for assistance, everybody used to volunteer to help in any way possible in such cases. And will give special mention here of young Ben who was always one of the first to offer his services especially when it came to dig a grave. He was the son of the old pioneer Benjamin Klein.⁹⁵

In the late 1870s, as the Davis family hunted on the Dakota Plains, the parish of St. Joseph, just a few miles south of the Medicine Line, was the site of another miracle. According to Albert E. Dease, Mrs. Marguerite Trottier, the eighty-one-year-old mother of the famed local trader Antoine Blanc Gingras, fell into the frigid Pembina River and survived. Trottier and her family were trying to reach Midnight Mass on 24 December by Red River cart. The weather turned for the worse as a winter thunderstorm developed. The tempest tipped the cart over in the river, throwing the faithful overboard. Although the water was not frozen, it shocked both the oxen and the travellers. Determined to keep going, the party got up, regrouped: “and they were undoubtedly assisted and guided by Him, for if it were not for the flashes of lightning prevailing, they may not have found their way in due time.”⁹⁶

The most significant transformation of Metis lived Catholicism that resulted from the end of the buffalo hunt was the end of the Sunday Law. For many years, it would take extraordinary circumstances for the Metis to break the Sabbath, a rule that prohibited the bison chase on Sundays. Sunday, after all, was a day of rest and time devoted to religion and ritual, especially

⁹⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁶ Albert E Dease, “Catholic Pioneers of Pembina County - Antoine Gingras,” 14 February 1939, 2–3, MSS 10026 Albert E. Dease Papers, State Historical Society of North Dakota.

when Catholic priests accompanied the hunters. The Vatican encouraged this practice by citing the Third Commandment, and stressing the importance of foregoing any activity that might hinder the worship of God on Sundays.⁹⁷ The Sunday Law, referenced by Riel in a poem titled *Le mépris de la loi du dimanche*, or the contempt of Sunday Law, increasingly fell out of habit as people grew hungry and destitute. Families exchanged their once-pious devotion for sustenance. Writing from Flat Willow Creek in 1881, Riel mused:

on court le dimanche
 on fait des tromperies
 le dimanche
 on part avant le jour le dimanche 10 juillet
 pour aller à la chasse

 on tue du buffalo

 on laisse ensuite perdre la viande
 dans le champ

 ou bien on ne lève même pas la
 peau de ces animaux

 Qu'est-ce qui fait faire tout cela ?
 l'ambition
 l'entêtement
 le plaisir de faire tort

 manque de réflexion

 le mépris de la loi du dimanche.⁹⁸

By the 1880s, the paucity of bison on the Plains transformed the sacred observance of a day of rest. Metis believers were at a clear disadvantage when they competed against people who did not

⁹⁷ "Catechism of the Catholic Church - The Third Commandment," accessed 6 July 2015,

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c1a3.htm. The Third Commandment states:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work." (Exodus 20:8-10)

⁹⁸ Louis Riel, *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel / Les Écrits Complets de Louis Riel. 2: 8 December 1875 - 4 June 1884.*, ed. George F. Stanley and Gilles Martel, vol. 2 (Edmonton, Alberta: Univ. of Alberta Pr, 1985), 234–35.

Author translation: we run the buffalo on Sundays, we cause trickeries on Sundays. We leave before daybreak on Sunday, July 10, to go on the hunt. We kill the buffalo. We let the meat rot in the field. Or we don't even remove the coat of the animals. What do to about it? The ambition, the hard-headedness, the pleasure in committing wrongs. Lack of reflexion. The contempt of the Sunday Law.

share their societal prescriptions. From this experience, and in light of the earlier discussion on Judas Priests, it would be fair to say that Metis lived Catholicism was in the process of transforming itself to adapt to new socioeconomic conditions. Since consensus continued to shape and organize the last few large-scale bison hunts of the northern plains, the abandonment of the Sunday obligation could only have happened with the agreement of Metis people and their relatives. As Louis Riel's poem indicates, not everyone supported such a change. In order to survive, however, the decision to abandon the Sunday Law prevailed.

Once the bison chase was no longer viable, Metis families suffered on numerous fronts. Hope born of Riel's organized resistance in 1885 ended with the leader's execution for treason to the Canadian state. The Catholic Church no longer supported Metis political aims. Nevertheless, the Montana Metis celebrated Christmas Mass that year. To commemorate the appearance of the star announcing Jesus's birth, Metis faithful erected an "*étoile artificielle*," or artificial star atop a nearby mountain. Believers asked their missionary whether there would be a celebration for the birth of their Saviour. The faithful gathered their relatives for the event and made their way to St. Peter's mission once the clergy confirmed it would take place. "*À 8 heures, une étoile artificielle brillait sur la montagne. Ce fut vraiment une nuit de paix et nos collines ont redit l'écho de Bethléem: Gloire à Dieu au plus haut des cieux et paix sur la terre aux hommes de bonne volonté.*"⁹⁹ Beginning at eight that evening, the star brightened the night, followed by Midnight Mass with all of its pomp and circumstance.

⁹⁹ Peter Bougis, S.J. "Extrait de Plusieurs Lettres Du Father Peter Bougis, S.J., 1860-1920," 1885, Box 862 St-Peter's Montana Folder 1:1, JOPA. Also published in *Lettres de Jersey*.

CONCLUSION

Metis families simultaneously experienced the violence of settler states and the hardships associated with the end of bison hunting. Although many people like ChWeUm were able to find employment with government representatives and agencies, such opportunities were short term and could negatively influence Metis diplomacy with other Indigenous nations. In the twenty years following the American Civil War, Metis relatives continuously renegotiated the parameters of their lived religion in light of Church actions and reactions. Believers came to experience what they understood as divine interventions. Occurrences of the divine encouraged many to carry their beliefs with them through difficult times. The historical record overflows with stories about divine intervention among Metis families. Miraculous events formed another tangible demonstration of lived Catholicism among the Metis.

ChWeUm Davis's diary provides fulsome insights on the prelude to the 1885 Resistance and its outcome. Whether residing in Dakota, Montana, or north of the Medicine Line in Metis settlements, Davis's writings reflect a national vision and common political goals that Metis people shared. Unable to access political power through the intercession of Catholic priests in the United States after Grant's Peace Policy, Metis families themselves petitioned American government officials with Louis Riel in 1880. While the French Canadian Catholic clergy was more receptive to Metis requests in Canada, collaboration came to a halt in the context of the 1885 Resistance. Nevertheless, the Church remained an important part of life for many Metis families. In 1885, the Chippewa and Metis of Turtle Mountain came together in the month of July to celebrate their first St. Ann's Day. The grandmother of Jesus and patron saint of the voyageurs was called upon to bring healing to the men, women, and families who laboured through decades of hardship and intermittent famine. Chapter 6 follows the life of ChWeUm Davis until its end in

1937. The bison hunters of yesteryear found solace in yet another form of Catholic identity, one that rewarded them for their patience and suffering. An annual pilgrimage was thus born.

Appendix 1: Leten de Levernement Dataset

DATE	PLACE	UNTIL	WITH	FOR
24 June 1845	St. Boniface, Manitoba	1852	Parents and family	Birth
1850	Pembina, North Dakota		Family	Census
1852	St. Joe, Walhalla, North Dakota		Family	
Winter 1855	Qu'Appelle River, Saskatchewan	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Spring 1856	St. Joe, Walhalla, North Dakota	Springtime hunt	Family	Return from wintering
Winter 1857	Fourche des Grosventre, Saskatchewan	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Spring 1858	St. Joe Walhalla, North Dakota	Springtime hunt	Family	Return from Wintering
Hunt 1858			Family	Shot first buffalo
Summer 1859	Grand Forks, North Dakota	Treaty with Sioux	Family	
Winter 1859	Qu'Appelle River, Saskatchewan	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Spring 1860	St. Joe Walhalla, North Dakota	Springtime hunt	Family	Return from wintering
Winter 1860	St. Anne Lorrete, Manitoba	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Spring 1861	Winnipeg, Manitoba	Springtime hunt	Family	Return from wintering
Winter 1861	Rivière Lange, Manitoba	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Spring 1862	St. Joe Walhalla, North Dakota	Springtime hunt	Family	Return from Wintering
Winter 1862	Mouse River, North Dakota	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Winter 1863	St. Joe Walhalla, North Dakota	Winter over	Family	
Spring 1863	St. Joe Walhalla, North Dakota	Spring 1864	Family	
Spring 1864	Fort Wadsworth, South Dakota	Winter over	Family	
Winter 1864	Fort wood Sward (sic), South Dakota	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Spring 1865	Fort Abercrombie, North Dakota		Family	Hired as a scout for US gov.
Winter 1865	Traverse Sibli North Dakota	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Winter 1866	Wiwastinache, Saskatchewan	Winter over	Family	Wintering

DATE	PLACE	UNTIL	WITH	FOR
Spring 1867	St. Joe Walhalla, North Dakota,	Springtime hunt	Family	Return from wintering
29 Oct 1867	S. Joe Walhalla, North Dakota,	Winter 1867	Euphrosine Hamelin	Marriage
Winter 1867	Devil's Lake North Dakota	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Winter 1868	Lac qui parle Minnesota	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Winter 1869	Holtiting Lake Seute D.? Spirit Lake Iowa according to M. Davis	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Winter 1870	La mitinajo, Minnesota	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Winter 1873	La rivière volle, Minnesota (Wild Rice Riv. Minn)	Winter over	Family	Wintering
1874	White Earth, Minnesota	Aug 1875	Frizine Amilin	Birth and death of Suzanne Davis (daughter)
Winter 1876	La butte a miljose North Dakota	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Winter 1877	Mouse River, North Dakota	Winter over	Family	Wintering
Winter 1877	Mouse River, North Dakota	Winter over	Family	Wintering
5 Dec 1875	North Dakota		Sara Nolin	Second marriage to Sara Nolin
1876	Fort Totten, North Dakota	1877	Sara Nolin and family	Death of Wm Davis III
1877	Fort Totten, North Dakota	Winter over	Family	
1878	Fort Totten, North Dakota	Feb 1879	Sara Nolin and family	Birth and death of Joseph Davis
1879	Milk River, Montana	Winter over	Family	Wintering
1880	Couler de rocheplate, Montana (Musselshell river w/Louis Riel)	Winter over	Family	Wintering
1881	Couler de rocheplate, Montana	Winter over	Family	Wintering
1882	Carl, Montana (FT Carrol, MT)	Winter over	Family	Wintering
1883	Tête du petit misouri		Family	Wintering
Winter 1884	Montagne Tortue North Dakota	Winter over	Family	Wintering

CHAPTER 6 LIVED RELIGION AS RESISTANCE 1885–1937

Despite sometimes being misled and overtly criticised by the Church, plenty of Metis people continued to affiliate themselves with Catholicism after the 1885 Resistance. The significant political and military defeat of the Metis north of the Medicine Line meant that many families were in need of healing. Prayerful requests were answered and Metis people's experience of the divine continued. The summer of 1885 is remembered on Turtle Mountain as the time of the first novena celebration, or nine days of prayer, dedicated to St. Ann. This event began a tradition of Catholic pilgrimages that persists to this day there.¹ This chapter argues that the medicinal and healing properties of faith became increasingly necessary as buffalo hunters simultaneously experienced the end of their long-established livelihood and overt violence from state actors. Metis lived religion once again adapted itself to changing circumstances and continued to fulfill a central role in the daily lives of many families. The Metis faithful quickly embraced the annual feast of St. Ann, celebrated on the 26th of July, for it fulfilled many of the communal elements that sustained their traditional buffalo hunts.

This chapter begins by evaluating the influence of the 1885 Resistance on Metis lived Catholicism. Priests were not passive agents in the suppression of the Resistance by the Canadian government. The Catholic Church took a clear political position that favoured Canadian interest and prevented some Metis from accessing the sacraments. After briefly considering the effects of the Metis Resistance on their ability to practise Catholicism, the chapter turns to the story of St. Ann and her affiliation to the Turtle Mountain region, which began officially in 1885. Explaining the provenance of St. Ann in the Holy Family, Catholicism, and her later arrival on Turtle Mountain prepares the ground for the miraculous cures soon credited to her intercession. Metis

¹ At the time of writing (2016-2017).

families suffering from famine and hardship united with settlers for days of prayer, with each hoping to experience the divine.

Political decisions by the United States government continued to influence the lives of former bison hunters. This chapter illustrates this point by examining the experiences of Metis peoples and their relationship to the Church in light of the 1892 McCumber Agreement: a deal imposed upon the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa Indians in North Dakota “for the cession and relinquishment to the United States of whatever right or interest they have in and to any land in said State to which they claim title.”² The terms of the 1892 Agreement, negotiated on Church property, forever divided the Pembina hunters. ChWeUm Davis’s writings on the McCumber Agreement provide important insights about how Metis families who remained in the United States lived and perceived this event. Throughout ChWeUm’s life, Church and Metis interests converged and diverged at different points in time. At the end of the nineteenth century, mutual interest in Catholic ceremony bound the two once more. The novena to St. Ann and the pilgrimages spawned by its celebration are among the most visible legacies of Metis lived religion.

BEFORE AND AFTER THE 1885 RESISTANCE

Obtaining the blessing of a priest was a tradition that persisted among Metis believers throughout the nineteenth century. Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont, leaders of the 1885 Metis Northwest Resistance, accosted Jesuit Father William Eberschweiler at Fort Benton, Montana, seeking his blessing and, thus, protection for their upcoming journey to Batoche. The missionary blessed Riel

² ““The McCumber Agreement” | North Dakota Studies’ <http://ndstudies.gov/content/%E2%80%9C-mccumber-agreement%E2%80%9D>, Accessed March 1 2017.

and Dumont after celebrating Mass. The priest reluctantly granted the Metis their request on condition they renounce the use of arms to advance their rights, a promise both men tried to keep until the Canadian state inflicted violence upon them. While the 1885 Resistance culminated in the hanging of Riel in Regina, Saskatchewan, Dumont escaped to Montana Territory, where he had relatives and assurance the North West Mounted Police could not pursue him. Eberschweiler reported that Dumont met him in Fort Benton specifically to thank the priest for his blessing:

“Father”, he accosted me, “I owe you the greatest thanks.” “For what?” I questioned, “For saving my life,” he replied, “in the war I was in continued danger of life: see here how near the gunballs approached to me!” herewith he bowed his large round head showing the cicatrice of a gunshot wound which made a line, as broad and as deep as a finger, in his half head, from the forehead to the top. “My escaping I attribute only to your blessing.” He affirmed, also, that Riel tried to the last to avoid the war, but the mounted police commenced it.³

Dumont even composed a prayer commemorating the blessing granted by the Montana Jesuit, which he later dictated in his memoirs: “*Seigneur forcez mon courage, et ma croyance, et ma foi, pour la sainte bénédiction que j’ai reçue en votre Saint Nom, afin que j’y pense tout le temps de ma vie et à l’heure de ma mort. Ainsi soit-il.*”⁴ Dumont’s gratitude to Father Eberschweiler demonstrated his continued devotion to Catholicism, even though the Church was neither a participant nor a supporter of the 1885 Resistance. Indeed, Catholic clergy withheld sacraments and confessions from some Metis people, reviving sentiments of disappointment in their spiritual leaders. So-called Judas priests (discussed in Chapter 4) sought to influence Metis behaviour by appealing to the highest authority possible—that of God—and limiting Metis access to Him. Some accused Riel of usurping the priest’s role during Catholic confession. Clergymen alleged

³ Wilhem Eberschweiler Fr. S.J., ““Descriptive Accounts of St.Peter’s Mission an Surrounding Region, by Fr Eberschweiler, S.J. ‘Two Years in Fort Benton’” in Fort Benton, Montana, 1 November 1885), St.Paul’s, MT, Box 2 Folder 2:18, JOPA.

⁴ Dumont and Combet, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 54. The prayer asked God to test Dumont’s courage, beliefs, and faith “for the holy blessing” provided by the black robe so that he may remember it for the rest of his life, until the hour of his death

the bison hunters confessed their sins to one another instead of saying “Mea Culpa” to their priests.⁵ Oral interviews of 1885 survivors indicate that Metis people did not do so.

Il y a quelques années, un vieux missionnaire, voulant narguer un des anciens chefs de l’insurrection sur ce qui s’est passé en 1885, lui dit : “Te souviens-tu la fois que Baptiste Boucher a confessé Auguste Laframboise ?” “Quand est-ce, ça ?” reprit le vieux Métis. “Bien, quand est-ce ? tu dois savoir, la veille de la bataille de Batoche.” — “Comme ça, ça serait au mois de mai ?” — — “Oui” — “Ben, Auguste Laframboise a été tué au lac aux Canards le 26 mars, c’était pas mal difficile pour Baptiste Boucher de le confesser au mois de mai !⁶

The assertions of the priest were triangulated with local knowledge and proved to be unfounded. Since Augustin Laframboise died at the Battle of Duck Lake in March, he could not have confessed his sins to Baptiste Boucher in May of the same year.

Metis families and Catholic officials held different opinions about the Resistance’s legitimacy. In 1885, Catholic officials criticized the political actions of Riel and his allies, as contrary to both state and church authority.⁷ Priests from the Prince Albert region wrote a collective statement dated 12 June 1885 denouncing Louis “David” Riel and the usurpation of their missions at Batoche and environs. Fathers Alexis André, Zacharie Touze, Julien Moulin,

⁵ Trémaudan, *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l’Ouest Canadien*, 425 Trémaudan answers the question “Did Riel usurp the place of the priest in the confessional?” (my translation) with a firm No.

⁶ Ibid., 425–26. My translation “A few years ago, an old missionary, wishing to taunt an old leader in the 1885 insurrection said: “Do you recall the time Baptiste Boucher confessed Auguste Laframboise?” “When was that?” asked the old Métis. “Well, when? You should know, the night before the Battle of Batoche.” — “So, that would have been in May?” — — “Yes” — — “Well Auguste Laframboise died at Duck Lake March 26. It would have been pretty hard for Baptiste Boucher to confess him [hear his confession] in May!”

⁷ The papal encyclical letter *Immortale Dei* of November 1885 articulates very clearly that Catholics are to submit to the will of the state, for it is divinely ordained, much like the Catholic Church. The passage: “To despise legitimate authority, in whomsoever vested, is unlawful, as a rebellion against the divine will, and whoever resists that, rushes wilfully to destruction” appears immediately after the cover page of a pamphlet of clerical correspondence denouncing the 1885 Resistance, published two years later (in 1887). Although the Battle of Batoche happened in the spring of 1885, this document was used to justify the suppression of the Resistance. See both: ‘Immortale Dei (1 November 1885) | LEO XIII’. Accessed 17 November 2016. https://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01111885_immortale-dei.html. and Grandin, Vital-Justin. *Le véritable Riel - Tel que dépeint dans les lettres de Sa Grandeur Mgr Grandin, évêque de Saint-Albert, du Revd. P André, supérieur des missions du district de Carleton, des Revds pères Touze, Fourmond, Vegreville, Moulin et Lecoq, missionnaires du Nord-Ouest, d’une religieuse de Batoche, etc, etc*. Montréal: Imprimerie générale, 1887.

Vital Fourmond, Valentin Vegreville, and Pierre Lecoq noted in their missive that Riel did not “deserve the sympathy of the Roman Catholic Church.”⁸

Disavowing Louis Riel was a political act by the Catholic Church. The institution needed to assert itself as an ally of the Canadian state. Louis Riel’s political project, inherited from his father, turned into a prophetic mission which granted Metis people a privileged place in God’s kingdom. Riel believed God chose him to lead the Metis, yet he continued following prescriptions of the Catholic Church for most of his life.⁹ Riel’s messianic convictions have been studied elsewhere.¹⁰ But readers should note that Riel’s behaviours and goals did not radically transform the way believers practised their faith. Mistrust of Catholic clergy among Metis families surfaced decades before the 1885 Resistance.

Many Metis families remained Catholic despite the events of 1885. The elaborate celebration of Christmas Mass at St. Peter’s mission (see Chapter 5) the month after Riel’s execution, as well as continued devotion elsewhere, attest this faith. Metis people could even overlook collaboration between missionaries (specifically, Fathers Alexis André and Vital Fourmond) and Charles Nolin.¹¹ For many believers, a few bad apples did not spoil the whole bunch. Metis Catholicism, once again, overcame the temporal hardships brought on by priests. Metis believers rooted their belief and devotion in their experiences of the sacred. With St. Ann’s intercession, ChWeUm Davis and others experienced divine intervention and recorded their miraculous experiences.

⁸ My translation. Cited in: Ernest Tremblay, *Riel - Réponse à Monsieur J.A. Chapleau* (St-Hyacinthe: Presses à vapeur de l’Union, 1885), 74–75.

⁹ Flanagan, *Louis “David” Riel*, 140.

¹⁰ For two examples of studies on Louis Riel’s prophetic mission and messianism, see: Flanagan, *Louis “David” Riel*; Gilles Martel, *Le messianisme de Louis Riel*, Éditions SR, v. 4 (Waterloo, Ont., Canada: Publié pour la Corporation canadienne des sciences religieuses par Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1984).

¹¹ Auguste-Henri Trémaudan, *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l’Ouest Canadien*, 427. Trémaudan notes Nolin was a renowned Metis traitor who received a generous payout for his betrayal from the Canadian government.

THE LONG HISTORY OF ST. ANN ON TURTLE MOUNTAIN¹²

The history of the “mother of the mother of God” is obscure at best, and contradictory at worst. David Hugh Farmer’s *Dictionary of Saints* asserts “No historical details of her life are known.”¹³ In the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, biblical scholar Edward Arbez states “In spite of her early widowhood, [St. Ann] never married again.”¹⁴ In contrast ecclesiastic Alonso de Villegas’ *1623, Lives of Saints* alleges Anne remarried twice after the passing of her husband, Joachim. Anne then gave birth to two more daughters she named Mary: “*She loued fo the firft that if she had more we may belieue she may name them fo allo.*”¹⁵ The history connecting St. Ann to France, New France, and finally, Turtle Mountain explains why Metis believers adopted and disseminated the cult of St. Ann.¹⁶

The origin story of Jesus’s grandmother is rooted in what American author and Catholic convert Frances Parkinson Keyes described in 1955 as “legend, folksong, and vision.”¹⁷ According to Keyes, a hermit visited Ann’s mother before her marriage. The hermit told her to expect a daughter who would then give birth to a “most holy virgin, even the future mother of God.” Decades went by without any manifestation of the hermit’s prediction. One evening, whilst kneeling in prayer, Ann’s mother witnessed the appearance of gold letters spelling “A-N-N-A” on the wall at home. Soon she was with child, and her daughter, later known as St. Ann, was born

¹² The spelling of Ann’s name varies based on interpretation and sources. French spelling of Ann’s name includes an e at the end. English spelling variations include or exclude the e, without offering a clear pattern for doing so. When referencing St. Ann on Turtle Mountain, I make the conscious decision to use the spelling represented in the historical materials of the Turtle Mountain community. When referencing the places named after St. Ann by francophones (like Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré) the French spelling prevails.

¹³ David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 18.

¹⁴ Charles G. Herbermann et al., eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 15 vols (New York: The Encyclopedia Press Inc, 1913) 530.

¹⁵ Alonso de Villegas, *The Lives of Saints, 1623*, vol. 356, English Recusant Literature 1558-1640 (London: Scolar Press, 1977) 146-147.

¹⁶ Readers familiar with St. Ann and her story may wish to jump ahead to page 298 to her arrival among former bison hunters and their families.

¹⁷ Frances Parkinson Keyes, *St. Anne, Grandmother of Our Saviour* (New York: Julian Messner Inc, 1955), 31.

shortly thereafter.¹⁸ Ann, a prayerful Jewish woman, spent much of her life lamenting her sterility; unsure whether the prophecy foreseen by her mother would ever come true. Ann and Joachim tried to grow their family for twenty years without success. A priest denied temple access to Joachim, theorizing that he and his wife could not conceive because of “some offence or other, for which it pleased God not to fend him children.”¹⁹ The allegation deeply troubled the couple since they were deeply devoted to the principles of their faith.

Matthew’s Protoevangelium sheds light on Ann’s story and the immaculate conception (free of original sin) of her daughter, Mary. Imploring God in her late stage of fecundity, Ann pledged her progeny to Him, and received a visit from an angel’s who reaffirmed the holiness of her future child. He promised that her daughter, Mary, would be admired for centuries after the end of her natural life.²⁰ The celestial being then appeared to Ann’s husband Joachim, informing him that his progeny would grow up in the temple of God and that the Holy Spirit would one day live inside his daughter.²¹ Joachim returned home only to learn that he and his wife witnessed the same apparition, and the latter was now with child. Such is the story of the Immaculate Conception, a term often confused with the virgin birth of Jesus to Mary. Devotion to Ann began in the Middle East, where the Christian faithful revered the Holy Family and their relics. Frances Parkinson Keyes mentions that the first two bishops of Jerusalem were St. Ann’s nephews, one of whom may have authored the Protoevangelium on her revelation. The destruction of Jerusalem foreshadowed by Jesus prompted his followers to cross the Mediterranean Sea with the remains of St. Ann, fearing their desecration. Sister Catherine Goddard Clark writes: “Fourteen years after

¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹ Alonso de Villegas, *The Lives of Saints, 1623*, vol. 356, English Recusant Literature 1558-1640 (London: Scholar Press, 1977) 145.

²⁰ Charles Michel, *Évangiles Apocryphes I: Protévangile de Jacques, Pseudo-Matthieu, Évangile de Thomas* (Paris: August Picard, Éditeur, 1924), 65.

²¹ Ibid., 67.

Our Lord's death, Saint Mary Magdalen, Saint Martha, Saint Lazarus, and the others..." drifted until reaching the south of France. The saints and their helpers reburied Ann in a crypt and built a chapel atop of it. The chapel fell into a state of disrepair and dropped from memory until Charlemagne's reign, which "enabled the people to build a magnificent new church on the site of the old chapel at Apt."²²

On Easter Sunday 792, the new church was consecrated. A fourteen-year-old boy found the entrance to St. Ann's old crypt underneath the new construction and instantly became cured of his significant disabilities. Goddard Clark explains that the crypt contained scrolls and relics later authenticated by Pope Leo III. The discovery of St. Ann's relics – credited to Charlemagne – at Apt facilitated the spread her cult to French Catholics in the eighth century and beyond. A single miracle cure attributed to the mother of the mother of God triggered hundreds of years of worship, prayer, and healing.²³ The *Dictionary of Saints* indicates that St. Ann's cult travelled rapidly among the faithful after growing devotion to the Virgin Mary began in the twelfth century. Knowledge of St. Ann's miraculous intercessions soon reached the shores of England, Ireland, and, eventually, New France.²⁴

A party of French (Breton) sailors brought the cult of St. Ann to North America in 1658 by building a chapel in her honour at Beupré. Miracles were credited to her intercession shortly thereafter: "A crippled farmer, who had contributed three small stones to the sailors' chapel, 'through devotion' was suddenly freed from his handicap."²⁵ The location of the chapel, according to historian Robert Choquette was also a site of Indigenous worship. Beupré became a

²² Sister Catgerube Goddard Clark, 'Charlemagne and the Finding of the Body of St. Anne'. <http://catholicism.org/finding-st-anne.html> Accessed 24 November 2016.

²³ Keyes, *St. Anne, Grandmother of Our Saviour*, 116.

²⁴ David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

place of pilgrimage for Catholic settlers.²⁶ As outlined in earlier chapters, the practice of usurping Indigenous spiritual sites with Catholic places of worship repeated itself again and again as Church expanded westward.²⁷ Medically unexplained healings continued to be attributed to St. Ann, and by the mid eighteenth century, pilgrims travelled from far and wide to the church in Beaupré in hopes of obtaining answers to their prayers. As the patron saint of voyageurs, St. Ann kept those who believed in her safe on their perilous trips. *Engagés* passed down the practice of the cult to their offspring in the interior.²⁸

St. Ann was first entered into the heart of the North American continent by way of Indigenous trade routes. She arrived to Turtle Mountain much the same way. In 1859, with the help of local believers, Oblates created a shrine to St. Ann in the future province of Manitoba at Sainte-Anne-des-Chênes. The site, then called St. Alexander, grew quickly. Oblate Jean-Marie Le Floch renamed the location after the grandmother of Jesus in 1867 to avoid any confusion with nearby Fort Alexander.²⁹ Metis believers learned the story of St. Ann long before the establishment of the yearly novena on the Turtle Mountain in 1885.

Medical historian Jacalyn Duffin defines miracles as “an event of wonder, which lacks any other reasonable explanation; it can also serve as a ‘sign’ of divine action.”³⁰ Duffin notes the Catholic Church emphasized the connection between saint-making and “illness and earthly medicine” beginning in 1588. The Holy See developed a complex trial process for evaluating the validity of miracles attributed to the intercession of a saint. Church officials heard evidence

²⁶ Choquette, *Canada's Religions*, 126. Choquette does not specify which Indigenous peoples were engaged in religious practices at the site of what became Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Québec.

²⁷ For instance, the Ste-Anne Mission in Alberta (now known as Lac Ste-Anne) was known as Manito Sakahigan (Manitou Lake) before the settler and clergy renamed the site to suit the colonial project.

²⁸ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 55.

²⁹ Anonyme, “Sainte-Anne-Des-Chênes,” *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* 40, no. 5 (1941): 125–27. Both Ste-Anne-des-Chênes and Fort Alexander (now Sagkeew First Nation territory) are in Manitoba.

³⁰ Jacalyn Duffin, *Medical Miracles: Doctors, Saints, and Healing in the Modern World* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

involving medical (lay) experts, and testimonies from eyewitnesses or from the cured.³¹ When Metis believers requested the help of saintly intercession to bring forth God's healing or protection whilst on the hunt, they followed behaviour inherited from biblical times. Believers also remember that Jesus healed the sick, at times, through "laying of the hands." When Jesus healed, or when St. Ann interceded and cured an ailment, they did so sacramentally. Sacramental healing happened because of a direct connection to God.³² In contrast, the Metis belief in miraculous healings and sacred intercessions has older Indigenous sources of influence. For instance, in Indigenous cultures where mothers and grandmothers are considered sacred providers of life, Marian devotion and the belief in St. Ann can easily be transposed and understood.

The Turtle Mountain Centennial Anniversary provides information about the first celebration in the honour of St. Ann. It recalls that: "in 1885, Father [John] Malo established St. Ann's Novena ... it is thought that since [French] Canadians were so dedicated to St. Anne de Beaupre [sic], Father Malo wished to share his devotion with his loved ones, the Plains Indians."³³ Father Malo fostered the growth of devotional items to St. Ann by bringing a statue of her likeness to the Turtle Mountain from Italy. The cult of St. Ann would likely not have survived on Turtle Mountain for over a century if Metis had no prior knowledge of her. The orchestrated yearly celebration and feast day served a very important social purpose in the lives of the Metis men, women, and children who organized their families seasonally until the end of the buffalo hunt economy. The local population's love for St. Ann persisted. Belcourt residents turned to petitioning the Church yet again, this time receive permission to use her name for the Catholic mission. Enrolled Turtle Mountain historian Charlie White Weasel explained that Kah-ishpa

³¹ Ibid., 16.

³² Morton T. Kelsey, *Psychology, Medicine & Christian Healing*, 1st ed (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 65–67. In Mark (6:5) Jesus healed the ill by placing his hands on them.

³³ Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann's Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*, 32.

Gourneau, the Elevated One (1817–1917), grandson of Old Wild Rice (Gaytay Minomin) and son of Little Thunder (aka Joseph Gourneau), spearheaded the campaign to name the Catholic mission after Jesus’s grandmother. Kah-ishpa Gourneau “headed Father Malo’s list of petitioners who asked that St. Ann be named the Patron of the Turtle Mountain Indian Mission Church at Belcourt, North Dakota.”³⁴

Henceforth, elements of a Metis collective identity grew through the practice of pilgrimages and devotion to St. Ann. Whilst believers once regulated their calendar of encounters with missionaries in and through the bison chase, the changing circumstances of the late nineteenth century transformed the longstanding Metis Catholic calendar. When Metis families could no longer follow the bison in the last decades of the nineteenth century, pilgrimages filled this newfound void in their religious lives. Much like the biannual hunts, the ritual of the pilgrimage involved travelling to a set destination on Red River carts, with their relatives and belongings in tow. Over the course of several weeks, families would meet again, visit, and pray. Pilgrimages thus united Metis communities as the hunt once did. The Catholic calendar offered a space for Metis people to continue large yearly kin gatherings, despite the obstacles erected by an increasingly fortified Medicine Line.³⁵ Pilgrimages provided opportunities to catch up with relatives who travelled south across the forty-ninth parallel from Canada, or east from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Historian Brenda Child demonstrates that Indigenous responses to settler colonialism included creating new ceremonies, rituals, and medicines.³⁶ The healing capacity of Red Lake Ojibwa jingle dresses, for instance, rose to counter the destructive

³⁴ White Weasel, “Old Wild Rice ‘The Great Chief’ ‘Genesis of the Pembina/Turtle Mountain Chippewa,’” 17 Kah-ishpa Gourneau’s father, Little Thunder, was raised as a Catholic by his mother’s second husband, a “mixed-blood” named Joseph Gourneau. All four of Little Thunder’s children were devout Catholics. Old Wild Rice, Little Thunder’s father, is identified as Pembina Chief in Alexander Henry the younger’s writings.

³⁵ E.O. Drouin, *Lac Ste-Anne Sakahigan*, Éditions de l’Ermitage (Edmonton, 1973), 53.

³⁶ Brenda J. Child, *My Grandfather’s Knocking Sticks: Ojibwe Family Life and Labor on the Reservation* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2014), 126–27.

wave of influenza in 1918-19, offering an avenue to cope with the continued and ongoing loss of human life. Similarly, requests for St. Ann's intercession on Turtle Mountain, which persists today, provided a way for believers to find respite from the traumas of settler colonialism.

The novena to St. Ann entered the life of ChWeUm Davis and his meticulous record-keeping when he noted that, in July 1896, "bonne St Ann" healed him on the day of her feast: "*Wm Davis aveugle le 10 de jeun 1896 et la vu revenue par le secour de la bonne St ann le 26 de juiillet 1896 an dedan de 24 heur*"³⁷ ChWeUm lost his sight on the tenth of June at the age of fifty-one. The former buffalo hunter asked St. Ann for help during the eleventh annual novena celebrations at Turtle Mountain.

The novena soon attracted people not affiliated with the tribe, who came to the Turtle Mountain to bear witness to the healing properties of *bonne* St. Ann, or to request help for themselves. One outsider, a settler, named Howard Bateson, recorded the events surrounding the procession in the year 1925, which he published and sold in pamphlets intended for the benefit of the St. Ann mission and its population. It reads:

First came the good mothers with their children. I stood there and watched them coming—hundreds of them, yes more than hundreds marched in that holy procession. Then came that holy man of God, the priest, Rev. Father Potvin, wrapped in his sacerdotal robes, slowly with dignified tread he came. Following him, bearing aloft the chalice of the Blessed Sacrament came Rev. Father Fafard, preceded by the incense bearers who walked with measured tread, wafting odours unto heaven. As this holy man approached me, I bared my head, and like those about me I knelt in adoration as the Blessed Sacrament passed before me. Following these disciples of truth came the men. Chanting aloud, they sang in unison their voices resounding to heaven re-echoed through the vales of the mountains.³⁸

Bateson interviewed ChWeUm Davis, whom he described as "the chronicler of Turtle Mountains [sic]" because Davis's notebooks, filled with historical knowledge, informed Bateson and

³⁷ William Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 1", s. d., 7. Davis credited St. Ann for curing him within twenty-four hours of his request, on 26 July 1896.

³⁸ Bateson, *A Great Faith Hath These People - Spirit of St. Ann Prevails Within Turtle Moutains*, 17.

provided background for his pamphlet. Details published by Bateson on the celebration of the novena, such as its first official record in 1896, coincides with the year that St. Ann interceded to restore ChWeUm's eyesight. It is likely, then, that ChWeUm's reported miracle is among the earliest primary sources detailing the St. Ann novena celebration on Turtle Mountain.³⁹



Image 6.1: 1925 St. Ann Novena procession in Belcourt, North Dakota at the present-day site of St. Ann's mission. This image shows the transition between car culture and buffalo cart culture. Metis families camped for about two weeks to the right side of the church, where the tent and carts are pictured.⁴⁰

The St. Ann Mission Centennial publication of 1985 provides more insights on the history of the processions passed down through both memory and practice. As was the case with all Catholic celebrations, members of the community shared preparations for the novena. Men tended to the organization of the grounds and provided security for the gathering, while also guiding pilgrims to their parking or encampment sites. In so doing, men facilitated participation in the pilgrimage, and maintained control over a social space otherwise dominated by clergy. On the other hand, women prepared food for concession stands and decorated the interior of the church.⁴¹ When not involved in religious ceremonies, believers visited their relatives, hunted, or helped the local settlers with haying to make a few dollars. Jigging and dancing also filled the

³⁹ Idem. Bateson wrote: "Each year – away back to 1896 as far as I can trace it and maybe for many years before." The archival trace to 1896, based on his extensive interview with ChWeUm Davis, comes from Davis's diaries, currently housed at the State Historical Society of North Dakota in Bismarck.

⁴⁰ Bateson, *A Great Faith Hath These People - Spirit of St. Ann Prevails Within Turtle Mountains*.

⁴¹ Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann's Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*, 24.

free time. Priests allowed social activities in the midst of this otherwise sacred time since strict Lenten practices did not apply.⁴²

The nine-day novena to St. Ann included special prayers, many recitations of the rosary, confessions, processions, and participation in daily Mass. On the final day of the novena, Mass took place at 6:30, 7:30, 9:30, and 11:00 in the morning. At 2:00 pm, the largest procession began. Local history recounts that:

The procession began with a wagon. On it, a new hayrack drawn by a team of white horses. At the front of the hayrack was the statue of St. Ann [sic]. A young girl dressed in white sat beside the statue. Sitting on the edges of the hayrack were several little girls dressed in white, each carrying a basket of wild flowers from which they strewed petals along the procession path.⁴³

The two-hour-long display continued with young women in long gowns, followed by the older women of the community. Young boys and men came afterwards, forming a choir and singing hymns to their beloved saint.⁴⁴

Thousands have sought St. Ann's intercession on Turtle Mountain. Information recorded by Davis on the pilgrimages to St. Ann was fulsome. It included the names of priests presiding at the celebration, the number of people participating in the ceremonies, the sum total of Holy Communion distributed, and finally, the number of carts and motor vehicles used to make the trek. ChWeUm carefully noted the religious history of the St. Ann mission for years, presumably until he was no longer able to do so. His diaries included details for all pilgrimages at the Turtle Mountain between 1912 and 1919. In 1916, for example, Davis documented 6000 people in attendance, 500 carts, and 200 or 300 automobiles.⁴⁵ The "Turtle Mountain chronicler" recorded pilgrimage participation in the thousands for the years 1913, 1916, and 1917. Novenas and

⁴² Ibid., 23.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 1," 76.

devotion to St. Ann attracted believers beyond local Metis and Anishinaabe peoples and their extended families.

Catholic celebrations brought settlers and Indigenous peoples together. At times, even outside of the July celebrations, the faithful journeyed specifically to the town of Belcourt to pray for a cure to their ailments. Davis's notebooks indicate more successful requests for healing in the twentieth century. On 18 April 1918, a pilgrimage made its way from Bottineau to Belcourt. The settlers travelled thirty-one miles in twenty-three cars, assembling close to 100 persons seeking special favours from St. Ann. Eight people came to the church in Belcourt, in hopes of a miracle. One was a bedridden woman. Two men carried the woman into the church. According to the Davis's chronicle, participants confessed their sins and attended Mass. Then, the outsiders partook in Holy Communion with some of the local parishioners. By 2:30 in the afternoon, the bedridden woman walked out of the church and into the vehicle that brought her there. En route, she raised her hand in the air, and said to God and the priest, "I arrived bedridden this morning, I leave this afternoon with the mercy of Good Saint Anne."⁴⁶ St. Ann aided both Indigenous peoples and settlers who asked for help. Both came together in prayer, and found common ground in the lived religion of Turtle Mountain.

Some people were blessed with St. Ann's intercession multiple times. In 1921, ChWeUm experienced the intercession of St. Ann once again, this time he received healing for an ailment of the legs. In 1925, Davis explained to Howard Bateson in 1925 that his bones were "rotting away," leaving the buffalo hunter bedridden for six months. Once again, prayers requesting assistance during the novena proved effective, saving Davis from a double amputation, the only therapeutic solution prescribed by a medical professional. Bateson recalls Davis making clear: "The Lord made me with two legs and two arms, and when I die I want to die whole ... and

⁴⁶ Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 1," 62-63. (Author's translation of Michif French)

then I went to the church. Saint Ann is a good doctor ... faith did that faith in Saint Ann and I could tell you of many more who have likewise been cured.”⁴⁷ Although the Church did not investigate miracles experienced by Davis and others at Turtle Mountain, continued instances of divine intervention soon drew Catholic believers from around the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century.

While the pilgrimage began as a way for Metis peoples and their relatives to heal one another and continue their yearly family gatherings, it turned into a fundraising opportunity for Catholic clergy in the United States. In the 1930s, a monthly newsletter organized by the Catholic clergy, now permanently posted on Turtle Mountain, disseminated information about the intercession of St. Ann there. Beginning in 1935, Benedictine Father Hildebrand Eickhoff published a gazette intended for Euro-American Catholic benefactors of the Turtle Mountain Indian mission residing beyond reservation boundaries. Later baptized *The Bells of St. Ann*, Father Hildebrand’s regular bulletins made public pleas for clothing and funds. The priest informed the Catholic faithful of the happy outcome after the yearly novena: “many letters have been coming in day after day telling us that petitions were answered during the Novena ... yes we are confident that good St. Ann’s obtained many favours for all of our benefactors during these days of special graces.”⁴⁸

Ongoing devotion at multiple pilgrimage sites is a testament to the continuing importance of Catholicism for many Metis to the present-day. By the twentieth century, Metis believers could access sites of pilgrimage and devotion to St. Ann in Belcourt, North Dakota, in Sainte-Anne-des-Chênes, Manitoba, or at Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta.⁴⁹ The pilgrimage to Our Lady of

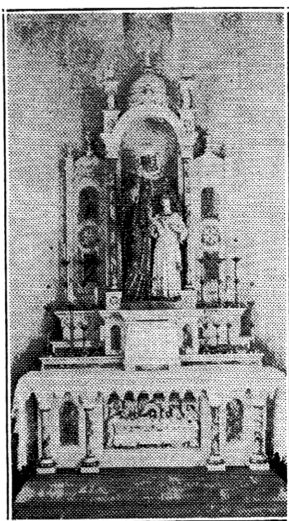
⁴⁷ Bateson, *A Great Faith Hath These People*, 16–17.

⁴⁸ Hildebrand Eickhoff, “News from St. Ann’s Indian Mission” (St. Ann Indian Mission, August 1937).

⁴⁹ For more information on the pilgrimage to St Ann in Alberta, see: Simon, *Healing Waters*.

Lourdes in St. Laurent, Saskatchewan provided a fourth option.⁵⁰ On both sides of the forty-ninth parallel Metis lived religion developed a calendar of worship centred on travel to a particular pilgrimage site in the summer time, instead of the buffalo hunts of yesteryear.

**ST. ANN'S SHRINE FOR
THE INDIANS**



This is a picture of our Shrine of St. Ann. It is on this altar, beside the statue of St. Ann, that all the petitions of our benefactors are placed. The Rosary and Litany of the Blessed Virgin are recited daily before the Blessed Sacrament. These prayers are offered as a perpetual Novena for the intentions of our benefactors. Our Indians have great faith in good St. Ann and often pray before this Shrine.

Good St. Ann, Mother of Mary, who is our life, our sweetness and our hope, pray to her for us and obtain our request.

Image 6.2: Information provided for Euro-American Catholics about the Turtle Mountain devotion to St. Ann.⁵¹

The Church simultaneously cared for the spiritual and physical well-being of Catholics. To the outside world, it engaged in a civilizing

project of Christianization of so-called heathens. At the same time, though the institution became an important political tool for the Metis during an era of ballooning conflicts with the American state. The racialized political environment that privileged Anglo-Saxon Protestant interests disadvantaged the former buffalo hunters. Catholic Metis men and women sought the protection

⁵⁰ Margaret Sanche, "Catholic Shrines and Pilgrimages," Reference, *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, accessed 22 November 2016, http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/catholic_shrines_and_pilgrimages.html.

⁵¹ Eickhoff, "News from St Ann's Indian Mission," 3.

and assistance of their Church to push back against government intrusions, while also depending on its traditional spiritual purposes. Despite the tumultuous years enveloping the 1885 Resistance, the Metis sought the Church's assistance again in the late-nineteenth century. And the Church proved agreeable to some of the Metis's demands.



Image 6.3: Procession during the Holy Mass to St. Ann on Turtle Mountain, 31 July 2016.⁵²

THE POLITICAL CHURCH: AFTER 1885

Links to the Roman Catholic Church continued to hold importance for many Metis of Turtle Mountain and beyond. Some buffalo hunting faithful who returned to the Turtle Mountain region after the last organized hunt began to see in their Church an instrumental tool against settler colonialism. This relationship was born out of mutual necessity. Clergymen needed to

⁵² Photo graciously provided by Nicholas Vrooman. The author is located in the middle of the procession, under the white and blue building.

demonstrate their purpose, relevance, and successes to the Vatican, while the Metis saw in the Catholic Church an institution that could lobby on their behalf.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the Metis of the Turtle Mountain and their Chippewa kin explored countless political avenues to realize their convictions and sovereignty in the face of state encroachment and subjugation. In 1882, United States President Chester C. Arthur issued an Executive Order that created the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Indian Reservation with 500,000 acres of what the federal government deemed public domain.⁵³ According to historian John Morrison Shaw, American officials anticipated drastic changes to these tribal boundaries, in part, because of white squatters on reservation lands. Settlers justified their encroachment by claiming the “Indians have no real title,” especially not those of mixed European-Indigenous ancestry since they were not “full blood.” Census enumerators separated the Metis from their Chippewa kin. State officials then used their tallies and lists to justify rescinding the boundary terms of the 1882 Executive Order.⁵⁴ President Arthur issued a second Executive Order in March 1884 that shrank the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation from 491,520 acres to only 46,080, dispossessing more buffalo hunting families in the process.⁵⁵ The remaining landmass did not suffice for all of the Turtle Mountain peoples. Historian Charlie White Weasel notes that traditional adoption secured the inclusion of the Turtle Mountain Metis in the federally recognized band alongside the “full bloods.” Citing oral tradition, or “handed-down stories,” White Weasel states Misko-piness (Red Thunder), Chief Little Shell’s stepfather, informed government officials that the Metis were part of his band:

⁵³ Shaw, “‘In Order That Justice May Be Done’ : The Legal Struggle of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, 1795-1905,” 326.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 326–27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 328.

It is not the fault of the mixed-bloods (michifs) if they are not regarded as Indian or white people either. It is the fault of the white man by taking Indian women as wives and raising families with them. Although most of these white men stayed with their families until they passed on in death, the white man now wants to throw away what was produced by raising families with Indian women. We, the full-bloods will not throw them away. We pity them because of what the Government white man is trying to do. So we will gladly accept them as our own people.⁵⁶

Bureau of Indian Affairs representatives enumerated families like that of ChWeUm Davis in census documents. Enumerators produced annual Turtle Mountain population census tallies beginning in 1884. At times, state officials conducted the census. When none were available, nearby Euro-American farmers who happened to be literate did so. Enumerators distinguished and separated Pembina relatives on their lists according to perceived blood quantum, dividing people on the lists into “mixed bloods” and “full bloods.” In the years 1888 and 1889, for example, census takers arranged the Metis population alphabetically by surname, then, by gender (men and boys were listed first), and then age (from head of the household to the youngest).⁵⁷ This census-making process did not require enumerators to go house-to-house and collect data systematically. The data was accumulated and sorted before it was submitted to the United States government. Turtle Mountain census makers created alphabetical lists documenting Indigenous peoples in order to later test their legal claim to Indigineity, sovereignty, and political rights in the United States of America. As historian Bruce Curtis argues, census data “should certainly not be invoked as factual evidence” without additional research on a locality.⁵⁸ Individuals with a vested economic interest in Indigenous land dispossession entered, organized, arranged, and edited the final census forms for government records.

⁵⁶ White Weasel, “Old Wild Rice ‘The Great Chief’ ‘Genesis of the Pembina/Turtle Mountain Chippewa,’” 5.

⁵⁷ United States National Archives and Records Service; United States Bureau of the Census, “Indian Census Reels 1885-1940 Devil’s Lake Agency (Sioux and Chippewa Indians)” (Washington: The National Archives National Archives and Records Service General Services Administration, 1965), Microcopy 595 Reel 94, United States National Archives. A farmer named E.W Brenner enumerated Turtle Mountain people in 1889.

⁵⁸ Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840-1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 17.

The 1880s highlighted the lethal realities of the imposed settler colonial regimes on both sides of the international border dividing the Turtle Mountain. Between 1887 and 1888, Father Genin reported that 151 men, women, and children died due to the poor living conditions and the absence of regular food on Turtle Mountain.⁵⁹ Clearly, the government's so-called answer to the reservation question did not ensure the sustenance and health of Indigenous peoples. Metis families turned to their faith to surmount the atrocities happening around them. Difficulties shared between the Metis and Anishinaabeg of Turtle Mountain were not enough to overcome cultural differences, however. Despite their adoption into the tribe, many remained culturally and spiritually distinct from their traditionalist relatives. Historian Charlie White Weasel writes about this division:

In spite of the generosity of Red Thunder, in adopting the mixed-bloods as tribal members with full rights of Indian heirship [sic] the majority never take part in Indian cultural activities. They looked upon their Indian full-blood relatives with mild contempt, scorn, and ridicule, and have always termed them "les sauvages" or savages. Instead, they prefer to be known as "michif" or "metis" for those with strong French/Indian affiliations.⁶⁰

White Weasel observed a separation between Metis and Anishinaabe grounded in language used by both Church officials and ChWeUm Davis. Clergymen, though, did not share the meaning of "sauvages" used by Metis peoples. Davis, as with other Metis people, used the word in his writings without also promoting or emphasizing a sense of racial hierarchy.

Census documents are an unexpected source of historical information on Metis lived religion. The census documents enumerating Turtle Mountain people into two distinct categories ("mixed blood" or "full blood") recorded families with children christened after Catholic saints.

⁵⁹ Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann's Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*, 31.

⁶⁰ White Weasel, "Old Wild Rice 'The Great Chief' 'Genesis of the Pembina/Turtle Mountain Chippewa,'" 5. Although White Weasel indicates the Metis "never" engaged in Indian cultural celebrations, this is contrary to evidence in the Davis family history, such as being well versed in all of the "Indian dances" when employed in an Iowa circus. See Chapter 5 for more information.

The patron saint of fishermen had many namesakes, such as St. Pierre Amyotte, born in 1873 and enumerated in 1885. Several little girls were born and baptized after the healer of the Turtle Mountain, St. Ann. In 1887, an Indian agent recorded a little girl named St. Ann Boshman (Beauchemin), born in 1881. Two other children under five on the state-sanctioned list for the same year shared her first name.⁶¹ Metis namesakes also cross-pollinated the “full-blood” enumerations. In 1888, census takers noted a Riel who was three years old, the adopted son of Wah kate wan akwet, or Black Cloud, and Frezine.⁶² Lived religion permeated all facets of Metis lives, even influencing naming practices in the late 1880s. While believers had long appealed to saints for myriad reasons, they began to seek out divine help for their children at a time when food was scarce and illness loomed large. By naming one’s child after a healer, or a provider, families hoped to ensure their progeny would share the qualities of their namesake.

ChWeUm and his family returned to the Turtle Mountain region from Montana in 1884. Their subsequent enumeration on Turtle Mountain Indian censuses between 1885 and 1890 resulted from what Nicholas Vrooman calls the “Milk River Clearances,” a military campaign of ethnic cleansing led by the U.S. army to rid the Montana borderlands of what it saw as alien nationals, including so-called British Indians and “half-breeds.”⁶³ During this process, former buffalo hunting settlements were deemed foreign, residents were rounded up and given a short time to leave before soldiers burned down their houses and other buildings. The Dawes Allotment Act in 1887 fuelled military pressures on Indigenous people. Historian Delia Hagen notes, “the act spawned racial and tribal classification commissions charged with marking official tribal membership lists. On the Great Plains, these commissions tried to separate the Métis from other

⁶¹ United States National Archives and Records Service; United States Bureau of the Census, “Indian Census Reels 1885-1940 Devil’s Lake Agency (Sioux and Chippewa Indians).” A farmer named E.W Brenner enumerated the Metis in 1889.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Vrooman, *The Whole Country Was ... One Robe. The Little Shell Tribe’s America.*, 207.

Indians and from Indian reservations.’⁶⁴ Hagen remarks that the military efforts to remove the “Canadian” Metis from the United States triggered the very mobility the U.S. army sought to curtail. Two years after the Dawes Act, in addition to implementing a reservation pass system that required Indigenous peoples obtain written permission from an Indian agent to travel outside the reservation, “on both sides of the border agents also tried to limit reservation visitors to Indians or whites with official permission to be there.”⁶⁵

The institutional growth of the Catholic Church on Turtle Mountain after 1884 facilitated the congregation of peoples, both traditionalist Chippewa and Catholic Metis, in a common place. Large indoor meeting spaces were few and far between. As such, assemblies on treaty matters filled the pews of the St. Ann mission as much as they did for Sunday Mass. People came together to try to understand why the American government was not living up to its treaty promises, and to learn how to fight back. The McCumber Commission began under provisions found in Indian Appropriation Act of July 1892. Its purpose was to finalize the terms of the Pembina land cession underway in the 1880s. The Commission and its sequels feature prominently in the Davis manuscripts, specifically in the fourth booklet. For ChWeUm, the events surrounding the McCumber Commission, and later, the McCumber Agreement of 1892 (ratified in 1904), featured the church as a meeting place in which Metis people organized a political resistance to state actors. Historian Nicholas Vrooman succinctly explained that the McCumber Agreement, forever remembered as the “Ten-Cent Treaty ... forced transfer of ten

⁶⁴ Delia Hagen, ‘Nations, Migrations and Métis Subistence, 1860-1940’, in *Race and Displacement: Nation, Migration and Identity in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Maha Marouan and Melinda Simmons (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 132.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 135.

million acres of [plains Ojibwa] traditional historical homeland to the federal government” for ten cents per acre.⁶⁶

American authorities cited the presence of Metis active in the 1885 Resistance in Canada as the *cause première* of the difficulties on the Turtle Mountain in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Father Genin defended the Turtle Mountain people and assured the state that their accusations were unfounded. Genin claimed to have personal knowledge of the local population and could confirm their ancestral links to the descendants of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa. According to the priest, the Metis were not newcomers to the region, as the American government previously argued.⁶⁷ Genin also attested to the ravages of state inaction, delay tactics, and famine on once thriving buffalo-hunting communities.⁶⁸ As exemplified by ChWeUm Davis’s life story, many Metis remained south of the Medicine Line during the events of 1885.

The McCumber Commission was the American government’s administrative attempt to squeeze the Turtle Mountain Chippewa in the two-township reserve created by Executive Order in 1884. The “Ten Cent Treaty” was instrumental in the cleaving of the Little Shell Tribe from their Turtle Mountain relatives. The Little Shell Tribe are a polyethnic band of Indigenous people living in Montana whose ancestors were members of the Pembina Anishinaabeg. The Pembina and Red Lake Bands entered into a treaty with the United States government in 1863 at Old Crossing. This legal agreement provided Turtle Mountain people with the rights and privileges of federal “Indian” recognition.⁶⁹ The state-sanctioned punishment for Chief Little Shell’s refusal to sign the ten-cent per acre agreement in 1892 led to the loss of federal tribal recognition for himself and his descendants. The Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians, although officially

⁶⁶ Vrooman, *The Whole Country Was... One Robe*, 368.

⁶⁷ Shaw, “‘In Order That Justice May Be Done’: The Legal Struggle of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, 1795-1905,” 381–82.

⁶⁸ Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann’s Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*, 31.

⁶⁹ For more information, see “Introduction,” p. 42.

acknowledged by neighbouring tribes and by the state of Montana, continues its decade-old fight for federal recognition today.⁷⁰

The McCumber Agreement was succinct. ChWeUm Davis recorded 8 October 1892 as the date of the McCumber Commission. Citing internal discord between the citizens of Turtle Mountain, Davis noted the treaty, like many of its predecessors, went unratified for over a decade.⁷¹ The implementation process of the agreement meant the end of hereditary leadership on Turtle Mountain. When Chief Little Shell (the third) refused the terms proposed by the United States because they were insufficient for his people, it destabilized long-standing Indigenous diplomacy and political organization of the band. Government officials facilitated the creation of a committee comprised of individuals who did not traditionally descend from tribal leadership. Instead, state representatives used an equal number of Metis and Anishinaabeg willing to assist them achieve their goal in exchange for a treaty payment.

The Turtle Mountain centennial anniversary publication recalls, “after Little Shell abandoned the tribe, a group of enrolled members hurriedly appointed new leaders and a committee of 16 full-bloods and 16 mixed-bloods, known as the committee of 32, held meetings to decide whether or not they would accept the terms of the 1892 agreement.”⁷² Davis maintained that this process fragmented the tribe: “le chef la coutiel [Little Shell] et son conseil on refusé avec une partier de la tribu pour lors le traité napoint été ratifier pour bien des anés faute qu’on été en deux parties...”⁷³ Best described by historian Charlie White Weasel, the break in traditional leadership created by the departure of Chief Little Shell III gave rise to a “hereditary” system run by the state: “When Indian tribes became subject to the U.S. Government, the title of

⁷⁰ Edward O'Brien, “Little Shell Chippewa Tribe May Get Federal Recognition In 2015,” *Montana Public Radio*, 7 January 2015, <http://mtpur.org/post/little-shell-chippewa-tribe-may-get-federal-recognition-2015>.

⁷¹ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 4,” 3–4.

⁷² Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, *St. Ann’s Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*, 108.

⁷³ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 4,” 2. Davis noted that when Chief Little Shell refused to sign onto the 1892 agreement, the Turtle Mountain people were divided in two

chief became a hereditary one. The Superintendent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs became the chief power on the Indian Reservation.”⁷⁴ The Bureau of Indian Affairs, or BIA, managed every political decision for the tribe until the 1930s.

On 1 October 1901, almost eight years to the day after the McCumber agreement meeting recorded by Davis, the former buffalo hunter organized an assembly in the Belcourt mission church. There, ChWeUm heard from an attorney offering representation to the Turtle Mountain Chippewa in their disagreement with the U.S. federal government over the McCumber terms. The name of the speaker addressing the congregation, recorded as “Mr. Jim M.E Agraide,” asked for a five percent return on the potential million-dollar payout. The lawyer then requested an additional ten percent on any money won for successful amendments to the treaty.⁷⁵ Church spaces were among the largest community meeting places accessible to Turtle Mountain residents. Metis people turned to an old method of direct political action: petition-signing. On 29 October 1901, ChWeUm Davis started a petition, gathering the names and signatures of family heads. Davis lamented that the process took a long time: all of three months to complete. By January of the following year, he reported that the petition was backed by a majority of Turtle Mountain people, who expressed their opposition to the government’s terms. The petition assembled 360 kinsfolk.⁷⁶

The Belcourt church named after St. Ann continually served as a meeting place in the first years of the twentieth century. Turtle Mountain tribal members sat together in nicely lined pews, hoping to find resolution to the political dispute created by the American state. In October 1904, Charlie Davis (no relation to ChWeUm Davis) summoned an assembly in the Belcourt church to ratify the 1892 McCumber Agreement. Using his authority as Indian Agent at Fort Totten,

⁷⁴ White Weasel, “Old Wild Rice ‘The Great Chief’ ‘Genesis of the Pembina/Turtle Mountain Chippewa,’” 7.

⁷⁵ Davis, “The William Davis Diaries, Book 4,” 5–6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

Charlie Davis justified his presence among the Turtle Mountain people to give them the promised million-dollar payment owed for over a decade. Upon learning the news, ChWeUm rose from his pew, walked towards the altar, shook the hand of the Indian Agent, and said, “I am happy to hear that you are coming to give us what is owed. We’ve now long suffered from misery and hunger.”⁷⁷ Before returning to his seat, however, ChWeUm added, “I’m only charging you 5 per cent interest per year on the million dollars owed for 12 years, which comes to \$600,000.” This calculation missed the opportunity to include compound interest, alas, which would increase the U.S. government’s debt to the Turtle Mountain Chippewa to \$795,866.33 for twelve years of arrears.

The agent denied Davis’s request on the pretext that he was “only authorized to distribute one million dollars” and nothing more.⁷⁸ Upset at this lack of accountability and the many years of hardship caused by bureaucratic evasions, Davis stood atop a church bench, and called out the folks in the house of God. Davis asked them if they believed the million-dollar cheque was an acceptable offer. More misery and hunger loomed at the prospect of an unratified treaty. A majority of people accepted the government’s offer, and not a soul voted against it. Resigned, ChWeUm climbed down from his pew, pointed a finger at the Indian Agent and said, “I accept the offer you’re making, but I will *never* leave you be for that 5 per cent.”⁷⁹ After which, Davis reported that all of the Metis were in agreement but the *sauvages* rejected the proposed ratification. The final terms of the McCumber Agreement were not formalized until 1905.

In reference to this event in particular, as he did throughout his diaries, Davis spoke of the actors involved as either “*Mitis*” or “*sauvages*.” When denoting himself and those culturally, linguistically, and religiously like him, Davis used *Mitis*, and distinguished between the *Mitise*

⁷⁷ Ibid., 12. Author’s translation of Michif French to English.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 14–15.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 15. Emphasis added.

Canadien (French Canadian Metis) and the *Mitis Anglais*, or English Metis.⁸⁰ When ChWeUm wrote about the traditional Anishinaabeg, or Chippewa Turtle Mountain people, he referenced *les sauvages*. In contrast to missionary accounts that undermined Indigenous sovereignty under the guise of so-called “savagery,” Davis wrote about *les sauvages* the same way he wrote about any other family member: with care, attention, and respect.

As he had done for the vital statistics of countless relatives, ChWeUm recorded treaty money disbursements after ratification of the McCumber Agreement. The first payout was in the spring of 1905. During the following three years enrolled Turtle Mountain tribal members received fifty dollars per head. Payments between 1908 and 1913 varied between a one-time \$100 amount, and \$5.47 per person.⁸¹ Until 1926, ChWeUm Davis, Turtle Mountain’s chronicler, continued to note ongoing political disputes between the Turtle Mountain people and the federal government. For instance, a delegation left Belcourt on 16 January 1925, got into a car in Rolla the next day (six miles, or nine and a half kilometres away), and headed to Washington. They returned to Belcourt on the twenty-seventh of the same month. In 1925, Pembina hunters came together and marked the seventy-fourth year since the unratified treaty of 1851. They continued to find unity in treaty politics and firmly asserted their sovereignty to the United States government.

The political church manifested itself in many forms. In addition to serving the Turtle Mountain population in its fight against the McCumber Agreement, in July 1896, a group of parishioners on the former site of the St. Joseph mission asserted their political will. Parishioners of St. Joseph, the site where Belcourt moved with the Metis after the spring 1852 flood, sent a request to Bishop John Shanley, appointed to the Jamestown (now Fargo) diocese in 1889. The

⁸⁰ William Davis, ‘The William Davis Diaries, Book 5’ 2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

five-page document written in French laments that what was once a thriving locale for believers was now without a priest. The authors, identified only as “*Les catholiques de Walhalla*,” informed the Bishop that they were twenty to twenty-five families in dire need of clergy.⁸² The authors regretted being unable to celebrate their faith with the same splendour the residents of St. Joseph parish, in nearby Leroy, North Dakota. Although it is impossible to determine which, if any, of the 1896 petitioners were in fact Metis, the political strategy advanced in the letter seems inspired by past experiences of petitioning for clergy.

The form of this petition was similar to previous ones sent in the nineteenth century. First, the authors explained that they were poor, both financially and spiritually. Petitioners informed their spiritual leader that, although they could not raise the six hundred dollars the diocese required for a priest, they believed they could gather four hundred dollars for the cause. In addition, believers offered to build a suitable home for the future priest and foresaw that with clergy’s assistance, Catholics would grow in number in the region. Another important element of the 1896 letter hints at its potential Metis authors. Before ending their plea, the petitioners noted that if *Monseigneur* could not fulfill their request, “*nous ne serons pas rebelles à votre decision [sic] si elle n’est pas suivant ce que nous aurions souhaité.*”⁸³ In light of the Roman Catholic Church’s position on Louis Riel specifically, and Metis peoples in general after the 1885 Resistance, the need to reassure the Church that denying their request would not be met with a rebellion is striking. This clause would be a logical addition for Metis authors asking for help, particularly in light of the events of 1885. In 1896, believers in Walhalla made an identical request in content and scope to the 1817 and 1823 petitions sent by Metis Catholics.⁸⁴

⁸² Catholic Church Fargo Diocese Parish Records, “Lettre des Catholiques de Walhalla à Monseigneur Shanley, octobre 1896,” October 1986, MSS 10366 Reel 601, SHSND.

⁸³ Ibid. My translation : “We will not rebel at your decision if it does not follow what we would have wished”

⁸⁴ The two early nineteenth century petitions and their connection to the Great Lakes is explained in Chapter 1.

Metis families continued to seek out the political recognition they deserved throughout and beyond ChWeUm Davis's natural life. In the twentieth century, ChWeUm and his contemporaries found themselves frustrated by years of broken promises. Standing atop a church bench for any reason would have been unthinkable decades earlier, and a grave violation of a sacred space. Times changed, and people were increasingly desperate for a resolution. Metis families' relationship to the Catholic Church shifted once again to accommodate direct action by laypeople. Metis families and traditional Anishinaabeg met in church buildings without the direction of clergy to plan their political future.

Davis's life and views represented those of many Metis people in his community. The pioneer biographical interview series of the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s recognized the breadth of historical knowledge comprised in the data gathered by Davis in his notebooks. The events surrounding the legacy gift of Davis's memoirs to the State Historical Society of North Dakota provided additional insights on his state of mind at the end of his life. Even though many experienced war, dispossession, and famine in the course of their lifetime while continually affirming their political sovereignty, they remained proud. Whilst interviewing Davis, Dana Wright asked: "What hardships were encountered?" Davis's response to the question was "none in particular."⁸⁵ ChWeUm passed away on 26 January 1937, at ripe the age of ninety-one.⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

Twenty-six years before his death, ChWeUm wrote in his notebooks that he had a dream foreshowing his particular judgment, or the moment when God judges each soul immediately

⁸⁵ Davis, "William Davis WPA Pioneer Questionnaire," 2.

⁸⁶ J E Balmer Superintendent, "Turtle Mountain Indian Census Reel," 1 January 1937, 120, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Ancestry.ca. The census document was annotated to include the date of passing of ChWeUm Davis.

after a person has passed away. In Catholic teachings, the particular judgment determines whether a soul heads to heaven for an eternity with their Catholic family members by God's side, or whether it goes to hell for eternal damnation, or to purgatory, where sinners undergo purification before being allowed into heaven.⁸⁷ This process is in accordance with Revelation (21:27), which states that nothing deemed impure can enter heaven. On the night of 18 May 1911, ChWeUm dreamt that his time on earth was over. He wrote:

Raive de Wm Davis partier pour àler aujugement particulier il lui sanble quil marcha sur une gran prairi bien loi il voi une obje bien bo mes bien gran il marcha bien lontem il arive proche de cette obje sitai tune maizon bien grande il bien haute la portte étai un porte à panou la larjeur de deux porte commine le boi de la maizon et de la porte montrai comme du boi brule du sollael.⁸⁸

ChWeUm anticipated his particular judgment in the place he knew best: on the northern plains, where he grew up and roamed free until he could no longer hunt bison for a living. In a prairie filled with long, glowing grass, ChWeUm would meet his maker, who would in turn decide if, thanks to good deeds and a good Catholic life, the Metis man would ascend to heaven. ChWeUm Davis's lived religion remained in a Catholic sphere from his birth to his death. The same rang true for many of his Metis contemporaries, who continued to rely on their Church in the United States long after the buffalo had disappeared. As Metis Father Guy Lavallée noted, social bonds of Metis people were reinforced through participation in Church rituals and ceremonies. Funerals allowed access to the sacred in times of crisis.⁸⁹ When Davis passed away, close relatives came

⁸⁷ Archidiocèse de Québec, *Le grand catéchisme de Québec à l'usage de toute la province ecclésiastique de Québec*, 7eme ed. (Québec: Presses mécaniques de J.T. Bousseau, Imprimeur de l'archevêché, 1860), 86–87.

⁸⁸ Author's translation: "Dream of Wm Davis, left for his particular judgement. It appears he walked along a big prairie, very far, where he saw very nice object, that was very big. He walked for a long time, until arriving near this object. It was a big and tall house. The door had panels the width of two normal doors. The wood for the door and the house looked like it was burnt by the sun." Davis, "The William Davis Diaries, Book 3," 43.

⁸⁹ Guy Albert Sylvestre Lavallée, *The Metis of St. Laurent, Manitoba: Their Life and Stories, 1920-1988* (Winnipeg: G. Lavallée, 2003), 46–47.

together to celebrate his life, his particular judgment, and the many miracles that graced him through the years.

Metis families like that of ChWeUm Davis, who shared a common attachment to the Turtle Mountain region and to Catholicism, resisted state and capital interests that claimed the land's natural resources as their own. Buffalo hunters often used the voice of Church official to support Metis political demands. The signatures on numerous petitions, lists, and grievances sent to representatives of Canada and the United States are affirmations of Metis sovereignty. The appearance of pilgrimages, like those to St. Ann in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, helped build and develop new cultural rituals of significance.

The decline of the buffalo hunt among Metis believers meant the loss of a mobile space for Catholic worship. The practice of the pilgrimage came to fill this spiritual void. St. Ann, a renowned healer, appealed to the Turtle Mountain residents dying of hunger because of settler encroachment and unratified treaties. Consequently, the newfound importance of certain Catholic rituals as facilitators in the development of kinship links in this era helps explain why Metis people in the nineteenth century embraced their lived religion and named their children after saints. The calendar of devotion to St. Ann also provided an avenue of healing for the negative impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous health. Finally, the instrumental use of the mission buildings in the political battles on Turtle Mountain during the early twentieth century are another facet of Metis lived religion. For the first time, resistance articulated itself in the physical spaces of the Church, without the direct intervention of clergy.



GOOD ST. ANN, MOTHER OF MARY, PRAY FOR US!

Image 6.4 Image of St. Ann and St. Mary published in *The Bells of St. Ann*, 1945.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ "News from St. Ann's Indian Mission" in *The Bells of St. Ann*. (St. Ann Indian Mission, July 1945).

CONCLUSION
LOOKING BACK: LIVED CATHOLICISM AND DIGITAL HUMANITIES

On 28 October 2016, in Belcourt North Dakota, on a cold and crisp autumn morning, the sun began to shine its light on the St. Ann cemetery around eight. The St. Ann Roman Catholic Mission in Belcourt rests atop prime real estate on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation. After bundling up and walking down to La Dots to find much-needed coffee, I returned to the Ladies' House, the former rectory next to the mission church. There I saw rays of light slowly melt the ice off tall blades of grass between distant tombstones. The sight encompassed missionary priests buried alongside their faithful. Near Father J.F. Malo's grave are the final resting places of people whose surnames resonate with Metis historians north of the Medicine Line (Brien, Houle, Jerome Laframboise, Wilkie, etc.).

Grateful for a return invitation from David "Doc" Brien to the Holy Land of the Chippewa and Metis, I began sketching out an outline for Chapter 6 of this dissertation. The invitation was a blessing in disguise on many levels: materials on the history of a Catholic Saint are difficult to come by in a secular University setting. Another objective of this visit, however, was to symbolically return the ChWeUm Davis collection to Turtle Mountain after it spent close to eighty years in North Dakota's state archives. I use the term symbolically because microfilm readers are presently not freely available on Turtle Mountain. In other words, the content of Davis's diaries needs to be translated into English and transformed into a more accessible format before it can become widely shared and used in local curricula. That process is underway now. Digital humanities will be a big part of that story. For historians with a praxis centred on giving back, reciprocity is ongoing.



Image 7.1: ChWeUm Davis’s papers upon their late-night arrival to Turtle Mountain, 25 October 2016. Photo taken by the author.

The Pembina region broadly, and Turtle Mountain specifically, became sites of institutionalized Catholic religion that served Metis such as ChWeUm Davis throughout his life. The site remains an active place of Catholic worship. Regular Sunday services are busy at St. Ann’s in Belcourt, entire families fill the pews, and parishioners volunteer to supervise the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist in a small chapel next to the large mission church, from morning until late night. Catholic believers are young and old on Turtle Mountain. This stands in stark contrast to parishes in French Canada today.¹

¹ Reginald W. Bibby, ‘La religion à la carte au Québec : une analyse de tendances’, *Sociologie et sociétés* 22, no. 2 (1990): 135.

ChWeUm Davis's life story, presented through the lenses of digital and social history, helps highlight the role and shifting manifestations of Roman Catholicism in the lives of Metis believers during the long nineteenth century. Davis's life began whilst his parents were chasing bison across the northern plains. In his lifetime south of the Medicine Line, Davis experienced Indian Wars, the American Civil War, treaties with the United States government (unratified and ratified), the end of the buffalo hunt, executive orders and other state creations, plus the first years of the Indian Reorganization Act. North of the forty-ninth parallel, he encountered increasing economic difficulties for Metis families, two Resistances, numerous Red River floods, the birth of Canada and, then, Manitoba, as well as the political affirmations of the Metis nation. For the ninety-two years of Davis's life, and the generations that preceded it, Catholicism fostered a coalescence of common goals and desires. What began as a Great Lakes-based militant Catholicism amid fur trade descendants articulated in the writing and sending of petitions requesting a regular missionary presence, became a central element of identity for many Metis.²

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

When Father Albert Lacombe joked that the only atheism observed among the Metis happened at noon sharp for they were "un peuple à thé," he emphasized their religious devotion alongside their drink of choice.³ The prominence and geographic reach of Catholicism among Metis people is a central aspect of this dissertation. Metis lived Catholicism became, for some, a tool to advance the collective will of their polity. In contrast, institutionalized Catholicism in the U.S.

² Maura Jane Farrelly, 'American Slavery, American Freedom, American Catholicism', *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10, no. 1 (2012): p. 74. This kind of activist Catholicism was happening elsewhere in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century, namely in Kentucky.

³ Guillaume Charette, *L'espace de Louis Goulet*, 40. In French, athée (an atheist) and à thé (meaning tea drinkers) are homonyms.

and Canada served as an advocate for the interests of the state. As this dissertation argued, Metis lived Catholicism, exemplified by the daily life of buffalo hunters on the northern plains, had three notable impacts:

First, it played an integral role in the political affirmation of Metis families by creating common spaces of sociability for the development of a distinct Metis national memory. Shared experiences in the spiritual and physical world encouraged ChWeUm Davis to record a detailed synopsis of events that held special meaning to him. From the Battle of Grand Coteau to the miracle cures attributed to St. Ann, the Metis national memory Davis articulated intimately weaves the religious and the political. After Metis petitioners finally secured permanent clergy in the Red River region, missionaries disseminated Catholic rites and beliefs using diverse forms of material culture. Metis faithful adapted Catholicism to suit their lifeways on the northern plains. In Easter ceremonies, for example, buffalo hunters used oak branches for Palm Sunday. Parishioners produced Catholic material culture with harvested tears of Job, whose seeds were made into rosaries and blessed by a priest.

The full-time presence of Catholic missionaries after 1818 slowly standardized Catholic practices and enabled the institutional growth of the Church in the heart of the North American continent. Though few Catholic priests served the northern plains in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Metis families sent their political representatives to St. Boniface and continued an eighteenth-century tradition of requesting the sacraments and religious instruction. Communal practices of religious rituals followed the Catholic Church's calendar, which helped bind Metis believers together throughout the northern plains. Between the Red River and the Rocky Mountains, laypeople either sought out missionaries for the spiritual well-being of their families or continued to lead their relatives in daily ceremonies of prayer and song until regular clergy were available.

Second, the Catholic faith of Metis men and women provided a tool of adaptation, resilience, and healing; for some it constituted a medicine to treat the traumas of colonial violence. The repeated miraculous cures experienced by ChWeUm Davis through the intercession of St. Ann are one such example. Requesting God's protection on the buffalo hunt was another variation. Adapting the *loup-garou* and transforming him into *LeRuGaRu* – a more culturally appropriate representation of a French beast – to shape Lenten behaviour is yet another demonstration of Metis lived Catholicism's many purposes. Resistance articulated on church pews to fight back against the will of American Indian agents was also part of the story.

Third, lived religion fostered historical networks uniting Metis families with their relatives through the rituals of ceremony. Studying networks of Metis lived religion provided insights about kinship creation, community coherence, and nation-building at a time marked by settler states asserting their dominance on the prairies via military force. Using social network analysis to see ChWeUm Davis's family helped establish the partial historical provenance of Catholicity among them. Adhesion to Roman Catholicism travelled a relatively short route (one generation) between the Great Lakes region and the Great Plains. Its impact, however, was profound within Metis polities.

This dissertation contributes to and engages with Metis, Catholic, and U.S./Canadian historiographies by adding to the academic discourses on Metis Catholicism, be it called folk, vernacular, popular, or lived religion. By focusing on the lived elements of religious devotion among Metis families, I heed the call of Nicole St-Onge and Jean-François Bélisle “[to] re-examine the accepted dichotomous concept of the religious and the political.”⁴ This dissertation asserts that, for Metis families, the religious and the political were often intimately intertwined.

⁴ Jean-François Bélisle and Nicole St-Onge, ‘Between Garcia Moreno and Chan Santa Cruz: Riel and the Métis Rebellions’, in *Mixed Blessings: Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada*, 103-4

My historical investigation of Metis lived religion begins to answer Brenda Macdougall's query as to *why* "Christianity broadly, or Roman Catholicism specifically appealed to Metis or Indian people." This dissertation argues that the experiences of the divine, the adaptability of practices, and the development of a distinct Metis Catholic calendar, articulated multiple incentives for participation in a Catholic life. Much work remains to adequately explore the "complexity of Christian interactions with the theologies developed in Aboriginal societies."⁵ The historical analysis provided herein emphasizes how mobility shaped the Metis experience of Catholicism. This dissertation builds from the methodological advances of St-Onge and Macdougall by echoing the importance of kinship networks, specifically, religious kinship networks, and by taking advantages of social network analysis to understand and represent Metis family connections.⁶

Instead of adopting a Canada/United States dichotomous geographic framework, this dissertation espouses a holistic understanding of the North American continent, thereby connecting it to scholars writing about the Metis in the both countries and the borderlands they share. On the northern plains borderland, Metis people facilitated the dissemination of Catholic rituals and practices that were central to the lifeway of so many families. Metis mobility, exemplified by the tabulated data on ChWeUm's wintering history, demonstrates that it is impossible to trace Metis lifeways (religious or otherwise) without criss-crossing the Medicine Line. In other words, this dissertation asserts, as many have before, that the Metis past is transnational. In the North American context, this means understanding that Metis lived religion has long antecedents in both Canada and in the United States. Following in the footsteps of Michel Hogue, I highlight some of the "ongoing ties between 'Canadian' and 'American' Metis

⁵ Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan*, 130.

⁶ Brenda Macdougall and Nicole St-Onge, 'Rooted in Mobility: Metis Buffalo-Hunting Brigades', *Manitoba History* 71, no. Winter 2013 (2013): 16–27.

communities” in the Catholic sphere.⁷ In so doing, I ground Metis history in the polyethnic buffalo-hunting band experience that Nicholas Vrooman described in his study of the Little Shell Tribe. The Metis were part of the “one [buffalo] robe” that united many peoples across the northern plains. Catholicism was not an obstacle to building new family relations among Indigenous nations.⁸ I study the Metis as a postcontact Indigenous nation to highlight Metis historical approaches to Indigenous nation-building and diplomacy. This dissertation demonstrates that Catholicism played an important role in Metis diplomacy during both times of war and times of peace.

ChWeUm Davis’s writings and life story presented in the preceding chapters articulates an ethnohistory of Metis Catholicism. It explains how the Metis lived their religion and followed a distinct Catholic calendar, and makes clear that faith permeated their political projects. Davis’s journals advance Catholic historiography in North America. Specifically, the present study connects with scholarly works on popular Catholicism, lived Catholicism, and the study of Catholicism in North America more broadly. There are key parallels between the expression of Catholicism among voyageurs and those of the bison hunters of the northern plains. This dissertation unites fur trade localities and articulates certain areas of common ground in their demonstrations of religiosity. For instance, Guillaume Marcotte’s study of *Canadien* voyageurs and their progeny in the Abitibi-Temiskaming area of northern Ontario and Québec shows that they shared an attachment to the sacrament of baptism also found on the Plains.⁹

Instead of characterizing introducing the lived Catholicism of the Metis as part of a conquering colonial force, I argue it articulated a cogent sense of shared experiences among

⁷ Michel Hogue, *Metis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People*, 9.

⁸ Nicholas C.P. Vrooman, *The Whole Country Was ... One Robe. The Little Shell Tribe’s America*.

⁹ Guillaume Marcotte, ‘Intempérance et piété chrétienne : les voyageurs canadiens et l’implantation des missions catholiques chez les Autochtones d’Abitibi-Témiscamingue 1836-1863’, *Rabaska: Revue d’ethnologie de l’Amérique française* 12 (2014) 83.

Metis believers. Although Robert Choquette understood the Oblate presence on the northern plains in as a “conquest of liberation,” this dissertation recognizes lived Catholicism as a tool of resistance to colonialism.¹⁰ Metis Catholicism was adopted and adapted by bison-hunting families and helped them resist the political, economic, social, and environmental changes spawned by settler colonialism.

Metis lived Catholicism connects with numerous studies on popular Catholicism in France, French Canada, Latin America, and the United States. The practices of devotion and the rituals appearing on the northern plains traced back to the Middle Ages, as was the case with the dissemination of rural crosses.¹¹ The cult of St. Ann, whose origins are rooted in the same era, served former buffalo hunters in their recovery from the sudden end to their bison-based economy. As Natalie Zemon Davis argues, perceiving lay believers as “passive receptacles” seriously limits historical analyses.¹² I avoided this pitfall by following the suggestion of theologian Orlando Espín to consider encounters of the divine to explain Catholic practice.¹³ Historical records documenting Metis experiences of miraculous events provide a wealth of undervalued sources for the study of lived Catholicism.

What distinguishes Metis Catholicism from the *Canadien* variety? Pierre Boglioni notes that in French Canada, popular Catholicism manifested itself under the watchful eye of priests.¹⁴ Metis Catholicism, in turn, was under such surveillance less often until the last days of organized bison hunts. Laypeople took on an active role in the dissemination of Catholic rituals and practices, explaining, in part, how Metis Catholicism became distinctly articulated around the

¹⁰ Robert Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest*, 21.

¹¹ Gabriel Le Bras, *Études de sociologie religieuse* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

¹² Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion’, 309.

¹³ Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism*, 91.

¹⁴ Centre d'études des religions populaires, *Les Pèlerinages au Québec*, ed. Pierre Boglioni and Benoît Lacroix, Travaux du Laboratoire d'histoire religieuse de l'Université Laval 4 (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981) 24.

bison-hunting calendar. In French Canada, for instance, the summer schedule of worship centred on sedentary parish life.¹⁵ After the buffalo disappeared from the Plains, Metis families continued their travels, replacing the buffalo hunt of the summer with annual pilgrimages to St. Ann on Turtle Mountain and at Lac Ste. Anne. These new events enabled believers to visit family and pray together.

Finally, the particular story of ChWeUm Davis, and that of Metis lived Catholicism in general, attests to the intertwined nature of Canadian and American historiographies regarding northern plains Indigenous peoples. Limiting my historical investigation to the frontiers of contemporary nation-states would have significantly distorted the scope and reality of Metis mobility. This dissertation responded to Stephen Greenblatt's assertion that "mobility must be taken in a highly literal sense," and interrogated the role of Catholicism as a "contact zone where cultural goods are articulated."¹⁶ ChWeUm Davis grounded his religious life in his ability to chase the bison until the 1880s. After the buffalo disappeared, many of Davis's relatives remained on the move, pushed away from their traditional territories by force, famine, and state government policies. Furthermore, Davis's gripping Michif French legacy constitutes perhaps one of the earliest written records in that language.

By bringing to light Davis's words and analyses, and weaving a historical understanding of Metis Catholicism in and through Davis's experiences, this dissertation emphasizes Metis spiritual resistance to settler colonialism. Studying Metis lived religion while engaging with the history of settler colonialism helps explain the behaviours of state and non-state actors who entered the northern plains and crossed paths with mobile Red River cart polities. It also provides a framework for interpreting how and why settlers, in both Canada and the United States,

¹⁵ Jean-Claude Dupont and Jacques Mathieu, *Héritage de la francophonie canadienne: traditions orales*, 14.

¹⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, 250-1.

suspended the so-called rule of law when it came to following the terms of their treaties with Indigenous nations in the long nineteenth century. Moreover, it proposes an avenue for understanding the logic behind President Abraham Lincoln's decision to hang thirty-eight Dakota men without supporting legal evidence. When settler bodies squatted and stole land all over the northern plains before the Metis and other nations resolved territorial disputes with the U.S. government, the effects on Metis families were profound. Restricting Indigenous peoples to reserves through the use of force or treaty-making constituted part of a "logic of elimination" described by Patrick Wolfe and others.¹⁷

Understanding the connection between the Catholic clergy's choice to abandon overt political support of Metis causes after the American Civil War and the advent of President Ulysses Grant's Peace Policy is key. It reveals a clear distinction between the political position of Catholic priests in Canada and the United States. Both operated with distinct political interests in the nineteenth century. The power granted to churches in selecting their own Indian Agents was significant.¹⁸ Because the American government gave the Catholic Church overt political power over Indigenous bodies and lifeways, priests that previously lobbied and supported Metis political goals stopped doing so. As the American settler state colonized the West, Metis political power that once opened diplomatic doors for clergy no longer held the prestige of the early and mid-nineteenth century. Missionaries relied on Metis labour and connections to build and expand the Church's northern plains empire. In the end, however, priests watched while settler powers confined Indigenous sovereignty to tiny tracks of land, often by force or threat of it.

¹⁷ Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 487-409.

¹⁸ Robert H. Keller, *American Protestantism and United States Indian Policy, 1869-82*, 1

INTERPRETATION/THE “SO WHAT?”

The historical investigation of Metis lived Catholicism provides tremendous insights about the daily practices that bound extended families together. Whereas scholars have often reduced the phenomenon to “folk” or “vernacular” religion, choosing the “lived” descriptive moved the study away from the prescriptions of the Catholic institution. The concept of lived Catholicism reveals how lay teachers, midwives, and heads of families became involved in the propagation of the faith among Metis bison hunters. The lens of lived religion also emphasized the mobility of Metis peoples and their beliefs. By taking mobility literally, in other words, following Metis Catholics across the northern plains, I teased out the changes and continuity in the religious behaviours of ChWeUm Davis and his family on their journeys. While distances travelled to obtain the sacrament of baptism faded away as the Church institution established itself in St. Boniface, Metis families continued to live according to their desires. Bison hunting polities pursued their yearly rituals until the 1880s, when the animal was no longer a viable food or income source. This mobile lifeway contravened the Church’s increasing prescriptions in favour of a sedentary life. Countless Metis people travelled across the plains until the bison disappeared. They spent much of their religious life following the buffalo. Once Metis families determined that Catholic clergy could be useful on their hunting expeditions, priests were invited to accompany cart brigades across the northern plains.

By blending social history and social network analysis, I demarcated the contours of an ethnohistory, biography, and prosopography. My micro and macro examinations of ChWeUm Davis’s life story reproduced his family connection across time and space. Social network graphs exhibited how kinship and ideas travelled through time in more palatable formats than traditional genealogical research. Mapping historical social networks of Metis religiosity, such as godparenting networks, across the northern plains would be a worthy endeavour. Though such a

large-scale project was not feasible for this dissertation due to the sheer volume of data it would entail, my study of Metis lived Catholicism points to concrete advantages gleaned from microhistorical analyses using graphs. To demonstrate both the scope and the complexity of Metis kinship, graphs explain *how* people connect to each other, informing historians moving beyond descriptions of human networks.

Engaging with the data and metadata produced by inputting historical evidence into computer software revealed historic kinship patterns built on blood and faith relations. Another highly visible but underrated outcome of this research was the digital restoration of published primary sources. The Catholic ladder in Chapter 3 (Image 3.1) originally spread across six pages and suffered from a significant image quality loss. Using a free, open-source image manipulation program called GIMP, I restored and sharpened an 1876 map and made it usable for contemporary purposes (Image 5.2). Although digital image editing skills are not essential for historical research, the wealth of information gleaned from digitally updating nineteenth-century publications proved its value.

This dissertation demonstrates that throughout the long nineteenth century, for Metis believers, religion *was* political. What began as communal actions of barter—promises to support Catholic missionaries financially in exchange for regular Catholic services—turned into a *rapprochement* with the Church. A mutually beneficial relationship helped articulate tangible political demands for Metis families crystallizing in the 1840s and 1850s with the actions of Georges-Antoine Belcourt. After the American Civil War, although lived Catholicism's political nature changed when the Catholic clergy embraced their newfound power in Indian reservations, religion remained political. Instead of relying on missionaries to send petitions and letters, Metis men like Louis Riel and ChWeUm Davis, now equipped with the literacy the Church provided

them in their youth, organized themselves and their kin. In Davis's case, he did so at the same place he came to hear Mass and experience miracles.

Through the lens of lived religion, this dissertation examined both change and continuity in the daily lives and beliefs of buffalo hunters over the long nineteenth century. After the buffalo went away, Metis lived Catholicism that was once rooted in Indigenous kinship and mobility, became restricted. Before this time, however, political strategizing by Metis polities relied on Church intermediaries, after priests demonstrated their power on the bison hunt. When American Indian policies transformed Metis modes of political operations, they adapted. As the bison supply on the North American continent dwindled to near-extinction, hungry Metis men, women, and children, started to ignore some aspects of their religious law. Sunday, once a day of obligation to the Lord, could no longer be respected without risking death.

An unexpected research finding that became painfully evident as I studied Metis Catholicism and its *Canadien* antecedents was the importance of the French language in a field dominated by English-language scholarship. Historians often lament the absence of Metis voices from historical records, but careful consideration of such claims points to an even bigger problem: the absence of scholars mastering the French language. My research demonstrates that Michif-French sources pepper archives fonds in Canada *and* the United States. Why such rich materials remain "hidden in plain sight," to use popular verbiage, is a good question that goes beyond the scope of this research project.¹⁹

To conclude, the study of Metis lived Catholicism deployed in this dissertation advances interconnected disciplines. Blending social and digital history allowed for a multifaceted

¹⁹ Daniel J. K. Beavon, Cora Jane Voyageur, and David Newhouse, eds., *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 8. Newhouse et al. argued Aboriginal contributions in Canada are too often obfuscated and misrepresented by mainstream society, making them hidden in plain sight .

exploration of Catholic relationships, pasts, and beliefs. ChWeUm Davis resisted distinct Canadian and American colonization plans for the West, as well as their respective myths and ideological baggage. As the first Turtle Mountain resident to document the region's history, Davis recorded information about wars between Indigenous peoples and state actors, conflicts among relatives, and much happier recollections, like his exploits on the hunt. Fully grounded in his Catholic faith, Davis hoped to see his family again in heaven, after a beautiful Last Judgment by God on the open prairie.

As this dissertation comes to its close, the repatriation work on Davis's diaries continues. It is important to emphasize the ethical need for scholars to engage with descendants of stakeholders in history. Every story from the past connects to people in the present. Although my doctoral program did not outright require that I begin the repatriation process (nor that I obtain University ethics approval) due to the nature of the archival materials presented herein, historians have an obligation to make research findings accessible and historical materials readily available to Indigenous peoples. In this way, I follow the spirit of the ethics guidelines recommended by the Tri-Council Policy on research involving Indigenous peoples in Canada.²⁰ I present ChWeUm Davis's stories in the living rooms, at the kitchen tables, or in the church halls of the people who invite me on Turtle Mountain and in Montana. I am currently translating the diaries page by page in hopes of publishing Davis's historical legacy in its integral form, digitally and in print, as soon as possible. By adopting a research praxis centered on giving back, historians transform their insular methodologies and connect the past with the present. Archives are not mere document repositories. They contain intimate information and records conserved for posterity. They provide tangible material glimpses in the hearts and minds of Pembina hunters that were intended for

²⁰ Government of Canada. *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. Chapter 9 – Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada. <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/> Accessed 14 March 2017.

their descendants. The story of Metis lived Catholicism and St. Ann's arrival on Turtle Mountain could not be told without the help and guidance of Turtle Mountain peoples, past and present.

The historical legacies of Catholic Pembina bison hunters – as well as the suggestions, ideas, and interests of their descendants – informed this analysis from beginning to end. Marsi, miigwetch, kinanâskomitin.

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