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NORWAY HOUSE ANTHOLOGY  
STORIES OF THE ELDERS  
Volume II



by  
Byron Apetagon

Frontier School Division No. 48

Cover Photograph: Old Cree Man & Woman,  
Norway House, c. 1920s, Gordon Collection  
EP776 6306 (courtesy Manitoba Museum  
of Man and Nature)

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**NORWAY HOUSE ANTHOLOGY**  
**STORIES OF THE ELDERS**  
**Volume II**

The following is the second volume of stories as told by elders from Norway House, and recorded by Byron Apetagon, a Cree language teacher and resident of Norway House. The purpose of this collection is to provide relevant reading for anyone interested in the history and social life of Norway House during the twentieth century.



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Frontier School Division No. 48

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This booklet is the second in a series recording the stories of the elders at Norway House and represents Frontier School Division's continuing commitment to providing children with material related directly to their experience and community.

Special thanks are due to local teacher Byron Apetagon, who spent many hours talking to the elders and recording their recollections of the past. To Viola Menow and Roxanne Kozak for typing the original text and Kate Friesen for preparing the final draft for the printers. And to Raymond Beaumont for research, editorial and production assistance.

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Finally, a big thank-you to all the elders who gave so generously of their time and history, so that the younger generation might remember.

Cam Giavedoni  
May, 1992

## PICTURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Harry Chubb.....	1
The Cook Camp at Warren's Landing 1922 .....	2
Harry Chubb Family Chart .....	4
Andrew Evans .....	5
A Fishing Fleet Homeward Bound 1922-24 .....	6
Stanley Evans .....	7
Florence Muskego .....	9
James and Mapel Keamiwininiw.....	10
Hudson's Bay Company Post at Norway House, c. 1920 .....	12
View of Jack River from Paupanekis Point .....	13
Interior of a Dwelling, c. 1920 .....	14
Florence Muskego, Mapel Colon, Ida Simpson, Doris Chubb .....	17
Clara Halcrowe Muswagon .....	18
Clara Halcrowe Family Chart .....	20
Nelson River .....	21
John Muswagon .....	22
James R. Hart, Alfred Queskekapow, John Muswagon .....	24
Remembrance Day Celebration .....	25
Jemina Menow Dixon .....	26
Jemina Menow Family Chart.....	28
Man Stretching Hides, c. 1920.....	30
Jack River Roman Catholic Mission .....	31
A Fisherman with his Nets, Norway House, 1989 .....	33
Interior of Anglican Church, Norway House, c. 1920s .....	35
Betsy Muminawatum .....	36
A Winter Camp outside of Norway House, c. 1925 .....	37
Trading Stores, Rossville Village .....	38
Norway House Hospital, Indian Agency, etc .....	40
Betsy Anderson Family Chart .....	41
Cree Syllabics .....	42
Distributing Treaty Rations, Norway House, c. 1921-1934 .....	44
New Hospital, c. 1924 .....	46
Elderly Woman on Snowshoes, c. 1920 .....	47
Indian Industrial School, Brandon, Manitoba, c. 1900-1910 .....	48
Sunset, God's Lake, c. 1930 .....	50
Mary Clarke Family Chart .....	51
Paupanekis Point in Winter.....	53
Jimmy Robertson and Dog Team .....	54
York Boats from Oxford House at Norway House, c. 1921-1934 .....	56
York Factory Buildings, 1889 .....	57
George Balfour, Interpreter, with his Dog Team.....	58
Albert Sinclair Family Chart .....	60
H.C. Hyer, c. 1920 .....	63
R. Ross, Berrum, J. Hart, c. 1922 .....	63
Adam Colen Family Chart .....	64
Nancy and Henry Colon, Norway House .....	65
Nancy and Henry Colon Family Chart.....	66

## CREE PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

a as in maskwa (bear), or ahead

á as in ástam (come) or ask

i as in mistik (tree) or it

í as in nína (me, myself), or machine

o as in mispon (it's snowing), or foot

ó as in kóna (snow), or food

é as in pimohté (walk), or café

c as in mwác (no), (pronounced mwáts:  
c similar to ts in English)

hp as in tépakohp (seven)

hk as in áhkosiw (he is sick)

ht as in mitátaht (ten)

hc as in anohc (today)

k assumes a hard g sound when  
located in the middle of  
a word or expression.

## CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER I: HARRY CHUBB REMEMBERS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
In the Wilds .....	2
Values .....	2
My First Moose .....	3
My Music .....	3
At the Old Folks' Home .....	4
<b>CHAPTER II: ANDREW EVANS' STORY .....</b>	<b>5</b>
My Father, Stanley Evans .....	5
"As I Was Told" .....	7
<b>CHAPTER III: ANECDOTES FROM FLORENCE MUSKEGO ....</b>	<b>9</b>
Florence's Home On Towers Island .....	14
Florence's Childhood .....	14
The Epidemic .....	15
Our Winter Setting .....	15
My Dream .....	17
<b>CHAPTER IV: CLARA MUSWAGON'S STORY .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CHAPTER V: JOHN MUSWAGON'S MEMORIES .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Trapping .....	22
Canoe Freighting .....	23
World War II - Discipline .....	23

**CHAPTER VI: MY STORY - JEMINA DIXON ..... 26**

Memories from my Childhood and Personal Feelings for the Present .....	26
Duties and Chores .....	27
Skinning Muskrats .....	27
Setting Snares .....	27
Setting and Lifting Nets .....	28
Fish Traps .....	28
Wood and Water .....	29
Washing Clothes on the River Banks .....	29
Muskeg Moss for Diapers and Pampers .....	29
Traps .....	29
Remedies Long Ago .....	29
Wihkés .....	30
Everlasting Leaves .....	30
Food from the Wild and Food from the Fur Buyer .....	30
Island Lake Migrants .....	31
Old Times were Peaceful .....	31
School .....	31
Granny Mary Fletcher .....	32
Attitudes of the Now Generation .....	32
The Tragedies in my Family .....	34
My Baby Donald .....	34
Discipline and Punishment .....	34
Church Services .....	35

**CHAPTER VII: BETSY MUMINAWATUM ..... 36**

Family History .....	36
The Log Homes .....	36
The Winter Setting at Máhtawak .....	37
The Travelling Stores of the Fur Buyers .....	39
Off to the Spring Camp .....	39
Back Home At North End .....	40
Garden Work and Potatoes .....	40
Summer Employment .....	41
Off to Whitefish Islands and Goose Island .....	41
Sturgeon Fishing at Catfish Point .....	42
Education .....	42
Homemade Jeans and Woolen Socks .....	43
Too Young to Dance .....	43
The Distribution of Goods During the Ration .....	44



Ancient Shelters and Dwellings .....	45
Medicinal Herbs and The Midwives .....	45
Message for the Youth .....	46
<b>CHAPTER VIII: ELDERS FROM THE PAST .....</b>	<b>47</b>
Mary Fletcher's Story .....	47
David Packamackan.....	52
Life as a Trapper .....	52
David's Dogs and Dog Teams .....	53
A Fast Hunting Trip.....	53
Fishing Along Big Playgreen Lake and Whiskeyjack .....	54
Hudson's Bay Fur Buyer .....	54
Hunting for Moose .....	55
David's Teachings.....	55
Old David at John Bull's .....	55
James Muswagon: Disputes on the York Boats .....	56
John Henry Muswagon and his Family .....	58
Richard Muswagon .....	58
Alfred Muswagon .....	59
Chief Albert Sinclair .....	60
Memories of Albert Sinclair .....	61
The Older Thomas Colon .....	62
Thomas Colon Keeps Dogs .....	62
Old Móniyáwiniw .....	62
William Thomas Towers .....	63
Adam Colen .....	64
Crossing Thin Ice .....	64
Beyond Belief .....	65



# CHAPTER I

## HARRY CHUBB REMEMBERS



HARRY CHUBB

Harry was born in Norway House around June 19, 1924. However, because the records were lost in church fires, the exact date of his birth is not known. It was only through old family friends and relatives that he received an idea of his birth.

Harry was delivered by an old lady who had been a well respected midwife in the community for years. He does not recall the woman's name, but he remembers the circumstances.

"In the old days there weren't any hospitals nearby where expectant mothers could be rushed to have their babies. Elderly women were experienced and trusted people. They knew how to treat and apply medicinal herbs and roots. They became good doctors and handled their patients with care and kindness."

Harry's parents were Helen Bennett and Robert (Bobby) Chubb, son of Jeremiah and Jane Chubb. Robert and Helen had eight children. The children's names were Albert, Alec, Adele, Delia, Mary Ann, Jane Mary, Mary Jane, and Harry. As they became older and matured, most of them moved away to fend for themselves with their own families.

Robert was known as Bobby by most people in Norway House, God's Lake, and Oxford House. He was well known all over the inland communities because of his work with the United (Methodist) Church. He was a firm believer in Christianity. In his younger days, he attended the Brandon School where he learned to read, write, and speak some English. In later years, his involvement in the Church allowed him to travel to the inland communities to preach and carry out the Christian ministry.

He spent about three years at God's Lake, two years at Sandy Lake, Ontario, and a year at Island Lake. During his travels, people showed him respect and affection. In return he loved to be with them. Nevertheless, the call at home in Norway House was strong and he returned to do other things.

Once in Norway House, Bobby began to do some prospecting for minerals. Although he would leave for days at a time to prospect along the rivers, lakes, and creeks near Norway House, he never informed anyone of his findings.

Today, old people still say he brought back some shiny minerals, and a few friends were witnesses to their value. However, Robert did not inform anyone else of his findings.

Harry remembers that he and other members of the family used to go with their father on these special trips, but he never paid much attention to his father's hobby. Robert's findings are still a secret to this day.

### **In The Wilds**

Some of the trips Harry and his parents made were hunting, fishing, and trapping excursions. While on these trips, Harry became very happy and excited. He loved to be in the wilderness where he watched his mother set snares or traps and lift the old nets the family had used for many years. It was always exciting to catch something. As Harry says,

"Whatever my mother caught, she taught her children how to skin or fillet. Later she explained to us how to preserve and cook. It was good food. Today, I miss those delicious meals from the land and water."

Robert was also a carpenter. He built strong and sturdy log houses for his family and friends. He knew how to use the axe well. There weren't any modern tools such as power saws to use; everything was done by hand and primitive tools.

When the summer season allowed Robert to do other things, he would sometime take his family to Warren's Landing. There he would find work. At the landing, Bobby was a great cook admired by all. He worked in the kitchen where he prepared delicious meals for the hungry fisherman, as well as shorehands who packed and weighed the fish.



**The Cook Camp at Warren's Landing, 1922**  
Joannidi, S.N.C. Collection 474 (courtesy Manitoba Archives,  
Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

### **Values**

As a child growing up with his family, Harry learned obedience from his father and mother. He and his brothers and sisters were taught to respect the old people and strangers. He recalls the children had to go to bed early and get up early in the mornings. Everyone was assigned to do the

work that needed to be done. It was everyone's duty to cook, wash dishes, and sweep the floor. The girls and boys had to do the work equally. This happened at all seasons, even if the weather was below zero outside. The children were punished if there were disturbances and arguments amongst them.

Prayers were always special. They were offered both morning and evening. Every night, Harry and his family settled down to pray and be thankful for the day. Respect was shown in everything. Harry adds,

"When our older people killed something, there was respect for the animal. People were careful not to throw anything away that could be used. Furthermore, things which were not used were disposed of with respect and care."

Harry has other memories of his life he willingly shares.

### **My First Moose**

"One day, when I was about fourteen years old I took a canoe and paddled up along the lake shore near our camp. I only imagined I would see a moose or even a caribou, but in reality I was going to do much more than see.

"Suddenly, up ahead, there stood a young bull moose which had come down to bathe in the cool water. The bugs and flies were all over it. I was frightened and excited, but I grabbed for my gun and aimed. One shot and the moose fell. I waited until it was dead before I approached. Later on I skinned and butchered it for the meat. I was so happy I had killed my first moose. I knew I now had the right to be called a MAN.

"When I returned home with my moose, everyone was happy and I was the proudest man in camp that day. I had seen men killing moose and watched how they skinned and butchered them for the meat, so I didn't have much problem as I applied these skills. Later in my life, I killed other moose, but only to meet my needs."

### **My Music**

"We moved to God's Lake where my father looked after the Church. I was quite young when I attended school at God's Lake. I learned very little but enough to understand some English. I cannot speak it but I can make out what people say. And it was probably from the school I gained the desire to play musical instruments.

"I learned music by ear and through observation. Later on, I played around with the guitar and fiddle. Soon I became quite good with them and earned a place in the old-time dances. I played for long hours - from night till early morning. People did not stop because they loved to dance. It was their entertainment.

"I stopped playing the fiddle when a dance hall collapsed at Mission Island. I was told it was a bad sign because people danced too much to the fiddling music.

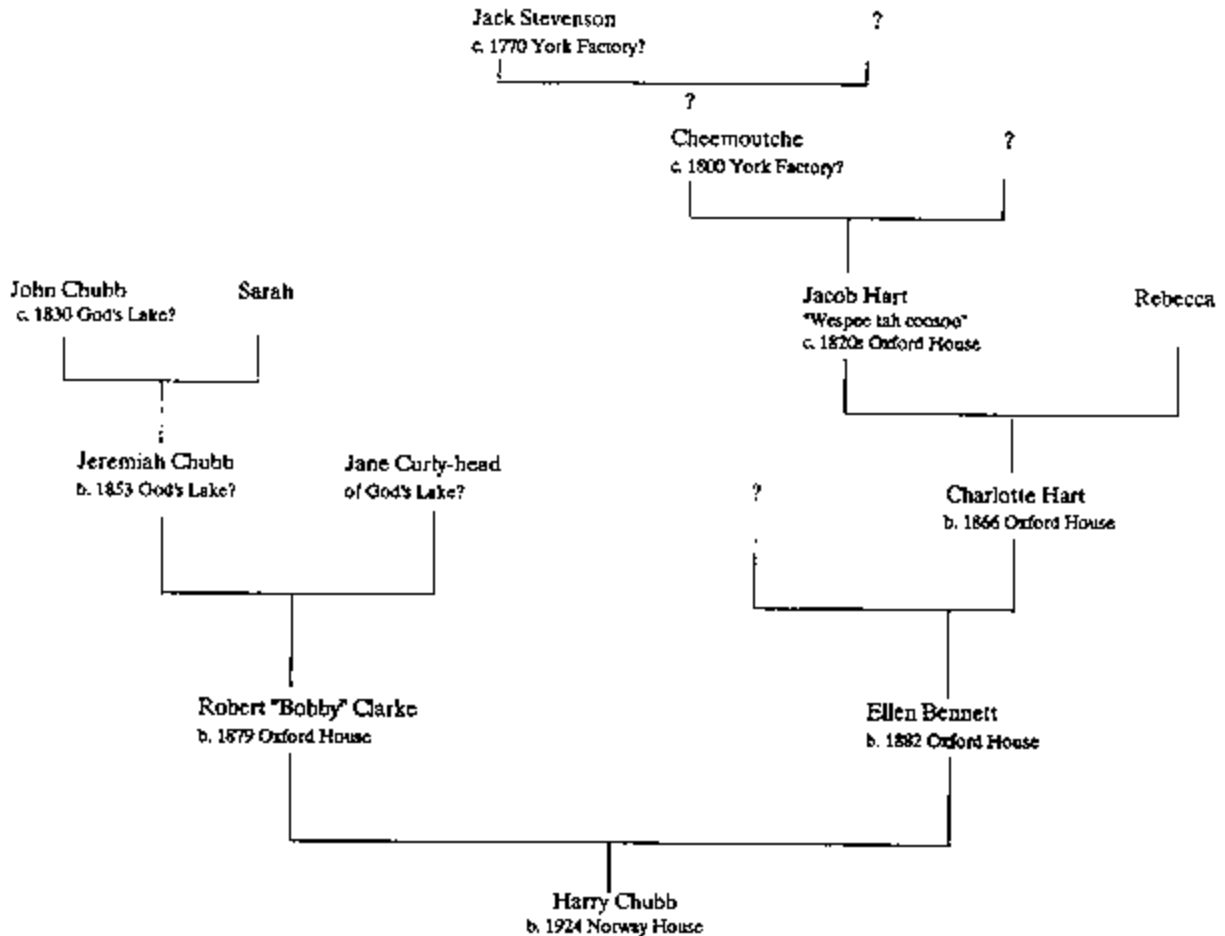
"I continued to play for wakes and church services. I did this under the guidance of the elders who told me it was the right thing for one with musical talent to do. I learned to play hymns and gospel songs through books and listening to people singing. Today, I play the guitar, piano, and accordion. I learned to play by using my talent the right way."

## At the Old Folks' Home

It's been three years since Harry moved to Pinaow Wachi where he receives care and kindness from the staff. He enjoys his room and the other old people he lives with. Still, Harry sometimes gets lonely when his relatives and friends forget to visit the home.

"It's hard sometimes here," he says. "Many of the old people cannot talk. Others have forgotten the things they used to do. Others are unfriendly due to senility. But me, I don't really say my poor eyesight is a problem; I can still see people and find my way around."

Shared by Harry Chubb and  
written by Byron Apetagon, 1989



## CHAPTER II

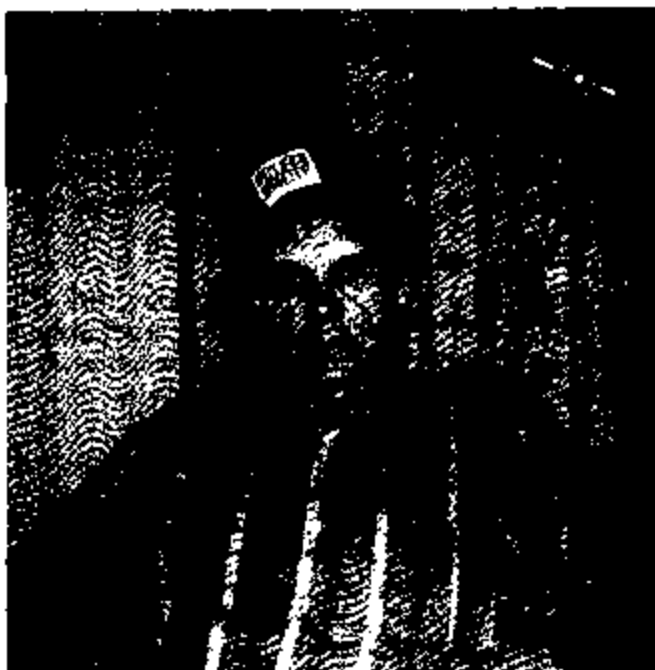
### ANDREW EVANS' STORY

Andrew Evans was born on March 25, 1931 at Towers Island in Norway House. As a young lad, he grew up learning the many skills of fishing, hunting, and trapping. Andrew's father is Stanley Evans and his mother was Mary Clarke. Stanley was one of the six sons of James Evans and Sally Budd.

Andrew's paternal grandfather is not to be confused with the Wesleyan Missionary James Evans, who developed Cree syllabics in 1840 at Norway House. Andrew's grandfather, James Evans, was a Hudson's Bay Company labourer who worked with the company for many years.

Andrew's maternal grandparents were Sarah Kirkness and Johnny Clarke. Sarah married twice. After her marriage to Patrick Simpson, her second husband, she was known as Sarah Patrick.

Andrew has five brothers and four sisters.



ANDREW EVANS

### My Father, Stanley Evans

"I want to tell you about the different types of work my father did to make a living for himself. As a young man, I observed the things he did. I learned many things by watching, listening, and helping him. Later on, I began to use the skills I had seen him use over and over again."

Stanley worked as a fisherman for the early part of his life. Every summer, like many other Norway House residents, he moved his family to Warren's Landing where they stayed for a good part of the season. It was the custom for the people to move there every summer, so that they could enjoy the outdoors and summer activities together.

When the fishing season terminated, Stanley worked as a canoe freighter. He would be gone for days and weeks at a time. Stanley could not take his family with him on those trips, because travelling as a canoe freighter was not easy. There were dangerous obstacles in the long meandering rivers of Northern Manitoba. On most trips the freighters journeyed to the inland communities of Island Lake, God's Lake, and Oxford House. They had to endure countless portages and rapids, but they knew how to handle the dangerous currents.

For several summers, Stanley set out on sailboats from Warren's Landing to Lake Winnipeg. Andrew often wished he could go along. The small, slow boats used wind powered sails, which the fishermen had to know how to handle efficiently. Many of the fishermen faced dangers while they were out on the big lake as the winds could shift and cause storms in a matter of minutes. Sometimes, the fog would hang over them for a good part of the day. From dawn to dusk, the men worked. Many times there were moments of suspense and worry if returning sailboats did not arrive on time at the landing. When the sails came into view, a sigh of relief was heard.

While their fathers were away, many boys and girls would spend long hours swimming and playing on the sandy beaches of Lake Winnipeg. But for Andrew and his friends, such fun was limited. They had chores to do around the camps, such as carrying water, chopping wood, or helping their mothers wash clothes.

Later on, the boys would walk down to the pier to watch the fishermen unload their catch for the day. Many times Andrew helped the fishermen hang and dry nets, and clean and scrub the floors of the tugboats.

The sailboats were replaced by gas-powered boats. These vessels were quicker, easier to operate, and safer than sailboats. They had bunk beds, a stove, and a place to eat. Andrew's father continued to work as a fisherman's helper, but made overnight trips now. It was easier to sleep out on the lake. The boats anchored in the midst of shallow reefs and ridges near the mainland or island shores.

On windy days, the boats remained on shore. This time allowed the fishermen to repair and mend their torn nets. Other chores had to be done, too, such as checking the condition of the boats and motors, and repairing the outfits they wore while fishing. Finally, a well-deserved rest made up for the many sleepless nights out on the lake.

Eventually, after many years on Lake Winnipeg, Stanley decided to work for himself, and took up fishing on Playgreen Lake. This was his main trade. Fishing from a small wooden skiff, Stanley ventured out every morning onto the lake. In the early days, very few men owned outboard motors. The only motors they had were man-powered oars and paddles. For several summers, Stanley rowed from net to net lifting each one and removing the fish he had caught. When finished, Stanley would row back to Sandy Island to sell his fish.



**A Fishing Fleet Homeward Bound, 1922-24**  
Joannidi, S.N.C. Collection 486 (courtesy Manitoba  
Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba)





STANLEY EVANS

Several years later, Stanley was able to buy a motor. It was small but made fishing much easier. Motor sizes were no larger than ten horsepower, but they enabled men to take their boats farther out onto the lake. More nets could be used and more time saved.

During August, treaty days were held at Rossville. People returned home from Warren's Landing, Whitefish Island, Goose Island, and Sandy Island for the annual payment of treaty monies. This was an exciting time of laughter, fun, and square dancing. As a young man, Andrew listened to the music of the violin and guitar. Later as a young man, he became one of the five musicians at the local gatherings. As for his father Stanley, it was a time to sit with the other men. The old men talked and told each other their experiences. Andrew and the younger people enjoyed listening to the stories their elders told.

## "As I Was Told"

When the treaty days at Rossville ended, people began to make the annual fall preparations for the hunting and trapping expeditions.

For most people, it was a time of work. Everybody helped each other. The children were given all types of duties and learned many of their skills this way. As they grew older, they remembered in almost every task the methods and skills they were taught under the guidance of their elders.

When the fall preparations had been completed, families met with each other to discuss where they would spend the winter. In those days, people could go almost anywhere they wanted. Usually, they tried to locate a place where Mother Nature's abundance existed. After discussing among themselves the availability of dry wood, trees, animals, water, and medicinal herbs in an area, they would select the most promising spots. As they travelled, they eventually separated into smaller groups along the way, so that they could do some trapping for themselves. The furs would be sold later to the traders of the Hudson's Bay Company. If one large group trapped and hunted in an area, the wildlife could become endangered. Consequently, the men discussed where each group could trap.

Early in the fall, just before Indian Summer, a long line of canoes could be seen going along the isolated rivers and creeks of Northern Manitoba. Eventually as the caravan continued, it became smaller as each group dropped off to set up its own camp. Each one made sure it was not far from the others, so that it would be in close contact in case of hardships during the winter.

The people had carefully organized themselves according to their knowledge, wisdom, and abilities. Each group had someone who knew how to handle medicine and control diseases. This person had to have knowledge of various herbal remedies, as many types of sicknesses such as coughs, colds, headaches, and other more harmful sicknesses could be caught during the winter.

The men had many abilities; some were canoe builders, carpenters, and weather predictors. Often each man possessed several abilities, which old people call "gifts."

The women played a major role in the groups, too. They prepared and made clothing, cooked the meals, skinned the animals, and were constantly tanning and smoking hides. They made sure there was enough wood cut and chopped, and plenty of water to drink. In the winter, the women kept the fire going because the men often returned tired and cold after their long walks through the deep snow around the traplines.

Old people were the teachers. They were experienced people who remembered dreadful experiences from the past and knew the hidden dangers in the wilderness. The younger people often learned from them how to read the signs that showed the dangers.

Old people were slow but their knowledge was valued by all. A special teaching of the elders was to respect the catch made every day. The men had to respect the animals they killed and be careful not to waste anything. The elders believed that many more good things would come if one showed respect and thankfulness to the spirit world. Every evening, there was a quiet hour when the elders hushed everyone to sit quietly. This was a time to pray for another good day and to give thanks for the blessings of past days on the trapline.

The children helped around the house by carrying wood, hauling water, and keeping the cabin warm. At nights, they listened to the stories of their elders. All through fall and winter, the people dried moose, caribou, bear, and beaver meat. Sometimes big game was scarce, so the rabbit was the mainstay in the middle of the winter when the supply of other food became low.

In the fall, the men made fish traps near rapids and falls. Fish swimming downwards swam into these funnel-shaped fences and were caught. When it was time to remove them from a trap, the entrance was closed and the fish taken out by hand or pointed sticks. Later, the fish were hung on stick racks, ten to a rack. Sometimes people kept hundreds of fish in this manner for their own use and to feed the working dogs. Whenever people borrowed fish from each other, they would simply ask for "one stick," meaning ten fish.

The men continued to trap for muskrat and beaver in the spring. The women quietly began to pack their possessions because it would be going-home time soon.

Once the ice had broken up and floated downstream, the canoe brigades again began their homeward journey. Along the way, men continued to trap and shoot beaver and muskrat.

When they arrived in Norway House, people got together to tell each other their winter experiences. Young people got to meet old friends they had not seen all winter. It was a cycle repeated year after year, and from one generation to the other, a cycle abandoned by the majority with changing times and needs, but still remembered with warm memories by the elders.

Told by Andrew Evans  
Written by Byron Apetagon, 1987

## CHAPTER III

### ANECDOTES FROM FLORENCE MUSKEGO



FLORENCE MUSKEGO

Florence Muskego is a well known elder in the community of Norway House. She has many experiences she is willing to share, having seen many changes through her lifetime. People visit her when they need herbal remedies, counselling, and her knowledge in the area of arts and crafts, especially leather and beadwork.

Florence works as one of the lay readers and helpers in the United Church and in fellowship gatherings. Once every week, several women get together at her home to work on beadwork and quilt making.

Florence lives with her husband, Adam. They have raised their own children, and grandchildren as well, teaching them in the same way they were taught by their parents. They also adopted a boy. Florence and Adam love to be around children.

Florence was born at Norway House in October, 1913. As a child she grew up learning the old ways of living in the bush from her parents. Florence's mother, Mabel or Mapel Colon, was the daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Colon who had migrated from Wépinápánis near Oxford House many years ago. Her father was James Keamiwininiw (Kiyámiwininiw) who was the son of Benjamin Keamiwininiw and Elizabeth Wilson from York Factory.

The Keamiwininiw family were people who kept much to themselves. Their last name reflected their habit of quietly taking life as it came without fuss or bother. However, Florence recalls her father as a strict man in terms of obedience and respect, and as someone who taught his children how to survive in the wilderness. Her mother was always happy and cheerful and loved to tell stories of her experiences as a young girl growing up at Wépinápanis. Mabel worked with beads and embroidery, often bartering her finished products with other people for clothes, food, more beads and hide. This is how Florence and her brothers and sisters got their new clothing.

Florence remembers her father as a tall man whose body was slightly bent. He had a dark complexion with black hair which did not grey very much as he grew older. His voice was soft, and he moved at a slow pace when he walked. During the summers at Towers Island, James worked on his garden. He began to work on it in early spring as soon as the family returned from the winter camp. After turning and hoeing the soil, he planted potatoes, not bothering with other types of garden vegetables. All through the summer, the whole family helped with the garden work. The children pulled out the weeds, while James hoed the soil.

Mabel worked on her beadwork and embroidery. Although Florence does not recall seeing her mother tanning hide, she observed other elderly women doing this. Later, Florence began to tan hides herself based on what she had learned through her observations.

James tended other men's dogs during the summer. He kept the dogs tied up, including the young pups when they were big enough, and fed them fish. This strengthened them in preparation for pulling sleds. The Keamiwininiw family did not own dogs themselves, but they could have used them during the winter. James' winter home was at Sipástikohk, not far from Towers Island. Florence remembers the trip usually took a good part of the day to walk in the winter or to row by boat in summer. She doesn't recall her father ever building a boat, but he collected or accepted old boats discarded by others.



James and Mabel Keamiwininiw  
(courtesy Florence Muskego)

Sípástikohk is approximately fifteen kilometres west of Towers Island. There the vegetation is rich with coniferous and deciduous trees as well as other plant life. There is rocky terrain, bog, and muskeg. Fish and rabbits are plentiful in all seasons. Sípástikohk is a small narrows which separates Big Playgreen from Small Playgreen Lake. A short river flows into the narrows. And a tiny creek flows into the river. Sometimes, the beavers made their home on the river and creek.

James took all his family to the winter camp when he left Towers Island. They did not take much except for necessities such as food, clothing, utensils, and medicine. They were able to sit comfortably in their small skiff which had two sets of oars. Usually Florence's father and the older boys did the rowing. When one was tired, there was always a pair of fresh arms ready to pull the oars. Sometimes, Florence shared the excitement by taking turns with her brothers. Along the way to Sípástikohk, Florence remembers seeing other people waving goodbye to them. They knew they would not see their friends until they returned home at Christmas.

Sometimes the lake was windy and rough. The Keamiwininiw family had to stop and make a temporary camp at Sákitaw, waiting several hours for the wind and the whitecaps of the Big Playgreen Lake to die down. A tent was pitched and the bedrolls were spread out on the ground inside the tent. Sometimes James would go hunting for some fresh ducks. The family would also try to catch a jackfish by the reeds. If lucky, Mabel boiled the ducks and fried fish for her family in an open fire near the tent.

As soon as the winds had calmed down, the family would continue its trip to Sípástikohk. On nice days, the trip did not take very long.

After arriving at their destination and unloading the boat, James and Mabel went right to work. There was much to be done because the snow would soon fall and lakes, rivers, and creeks would be frozen over. Florence's father set the net nearby, while Mabel and the children prepared the camp. Florence recalls that they lived in a tent when they first arrived at Sípástikohk.

The days were still too warm to live inside their mikiwáhp which had to be readied for the winter. To accomplish this, Mabel took the children into the woods to collect dry muskeg, moss, and spruce boughs. When enough had been gathered, these materials were used to cover the walls of the mikiwáhp which had been constructed earlier by James. Usually such shelters lasted for several seasons before a new one was built.

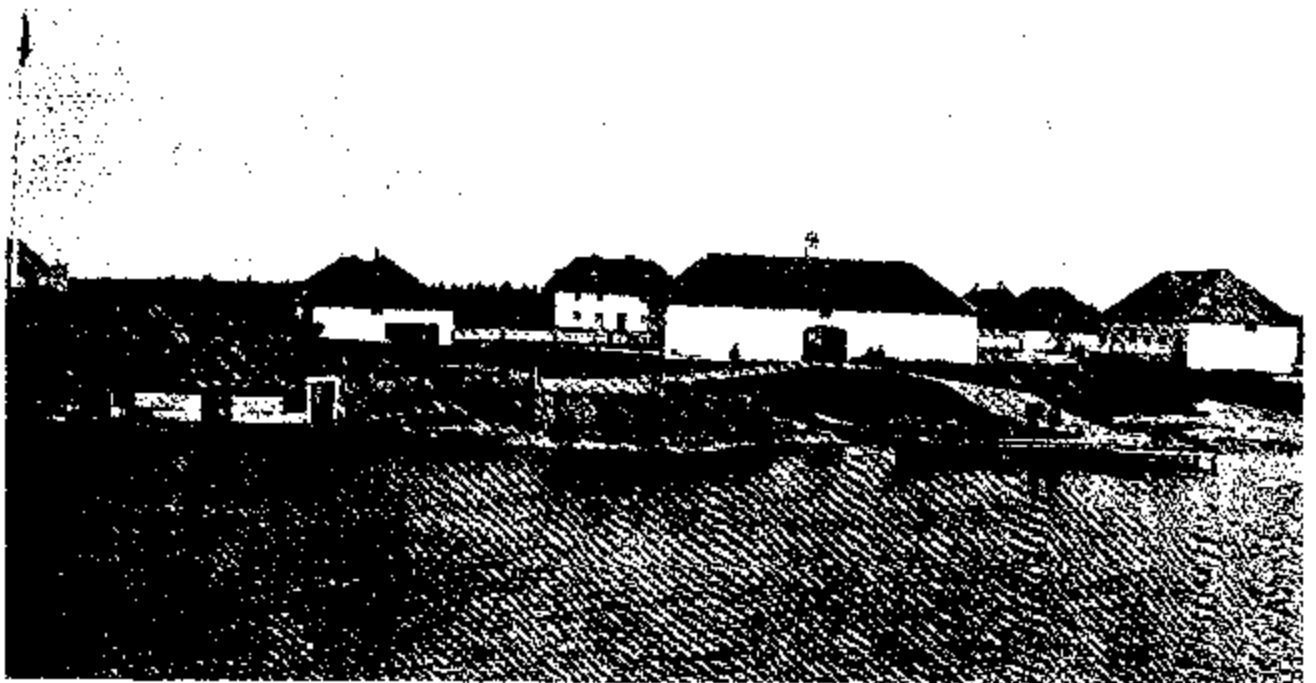
The interior of the mikiwáhp was large enough for everyone to move around. The ceiling had an opening which allowed the smoke and odours to drift outward. The floor was covered with moss, grass, and spruce boughs covered by a large blanket and a tarpaulin.

Twice a week, Mabel changed the spruce boughs and replaced them with new ones gathered by the children. At the centre of the lodge was the fire place. It was a hole in the ground filled with sand and surrounded by stones. When fire was built, the stones warmed up and acted as heaters after the fire diminished. Meals were prepared inside the lodge all winter.

Once the mikiwáhp had been upgraded for warmth and comfort, the children went with their mother Mabel to set rabbit snares. Florence and her brothers would make a contest of who could catch the most rabbits in one night. As the days were getting colder, there was little chance of having spoiled food. In the meantime, James continued to fish, and soon there was plenty of rabbit and fish in storage on high platforms or racks where the cold kept them preserved.

Sometimes, the family ran out of supplies such as flour, tea, lard, and sugar. James made special trips to Norway House where he sold fish and fur to the Hudson's Bay store or to the traders. He used to leave very early in the morning and return before sunset. It was not often James could bring candies for his children as the supplies and food were far more important. When he took

fish back to Norway House, he would be paid one dollar for a stick of ten. From his earnings he bought supplies his family needed. Another source of income was selling his furs if the animals were plentiful and the prices good.



Hudson's Bay Company Post at Norway House, c.1920  
Leif Sunde Collection EP 2002, 7808 (courtesy Manitoba  
Museum of Man and Nature)

All through the winter months, Florence and her family lived in their *mūkiwáhp* at *Sípástikohk* while their mother and father fished, trapped, hunted, and prepared embroidered clothing.

Just before the Christmas season began, the Keamiwininiw family returned on foot to Norway House, pulling their toboggans along behind them. The walk back to Norway House was easier than rowing. Florence remembers she did not have to bring back much because they only stayed home for a week or two. It meant Florence and her brothers had a chance to go to school for a few days. School was something Florence missed because life then was hard. Still, *Sípástikohk* offered some incentive for outdoor education.

The Christmas holiday at Norway House was a happy experience Florence always remembers. She recalls the older people who loved to dance until the late hours of the night. Feasts were held at various homes. People visited each other. Stories and experiences from the winter camps were exchanged and passed on to the community.

Prayers were said in different homes, and church services were held on Christmas Eve and New Year's morning. There was much teasing among the young and old. Florence recalls the old people traded hugs and kisses. Sometimes younger people would quietly disappear because they did not want to be kissed by the older folk. For the shy, it was embarrassing to be kissed by an old elder.

The feasts, dances, and services came to an end at New Year's. Everyone returned to their homes in the winter camps. Once again, the farewells were said and some sadly left behind their friends and relatives. But Florence liked to be at Sípástikohk. She enjoyed snaring rabbits, helping prepare meals, doing beadwork, and collecting firewood with her family. After early signs of spring arrived, the migratory birds returned, and the lakes, rivers, and creeks opened up once again.

As soon as the lake was clear of ice, Florence and her family returned to Towers Island by boat, leaving behind most of their belongings. James, Mabel, and the children had stored away everything ready for the next winter season. They brought back their clothes, food, and medicinal herbs. Florence and her family were happy to see their old friends and relatives once more.

During the summer, James continued to catch fish. At other times he would be out hunting ducks, and collecting duck, seagull, and Arctic Tern eggs. Wild eggs were a delicacy because birds only laid them once a year in the spring.

In the winter time, Florence recalls seeing her father build a small platform on a island. Atop the platform, he placed some hay to cover the wood. Next he added a trap and covered it with bits of hay to conceal it. Sometimes he would also tie some frozen fish on the side of the trap.

Occasionally, during the early morning hours, a snowy owl would land on the platform and get caught in the hidden trap. For Florence, this meant a good meal for her family. She watched as her mother plucked the feathers off the bird and boiled it in a pot over the fire. Once it was cooked, Mabel cut the meat into smaller pieces and served them with potatoes which had been brought from their garden at Towers Island. Florence remembers the meat tasted like the chicken available from the stores today.

Florence also remembers seeing her father hunting ptarmigans with a net. James would look for an area along the shoreline where black willows grew. James knew that these places were ideal for catching ptarmigans as they enjoy nibbling the bark of the black willows. The birds would walk by and become tangled in the mesh of the almost invisible net, which was camouflaged well by the white blanket of snow. Later, James would return to the net to check if he had caught any birds. Ptarmigan hunting in the winter was very exciting for Florence and her brothers.

Now here is more of Florence's story.



View of Jack River looking south from Paupanekis Point,  
Towers Island, Florence's home, on the right.

## Florence's Home on Towers Island

"We lived on Towers Island by Jack River. Our home was a one-story building, long and narrow, built from peeled logs by my grandfather, Benjamin Keamiwininiw. Two windows overlooked the river while another window was at the end adjacent to the single wooden door.

"The roof was made from homemade boards which had been cut and split by hand and axe. Roofing paper was boarded down on the exterior to keep the rain water from leaking through.

"The interior was one large room where we ate, worked, played, and slept. A cookstove stood near the door at the corner of the room. All our meals and water were boiled on the cookstove. We had another stove in the middle of the floor which was used mainly for heating the building. A fire was constantly kept burning on cold nights.

"There was little furniture. We had a table and used wood blocks for chairs. There was one bed, but most times everyone slept on the soft down-filled bedrolls which were spread out on the floor. We had a few boxes which we used to store away our dishes and possessions. Our clothes were left in paper carton boxes. Sometimes a line was hung across the width of the house where wet clothing could be dried from the heat of the stove pipes. My brother John was the last of our family to live at the same site where we all grew up."



Interior of a Dwelling, c. 1920,  
Leif Sunde Collection EP 2169 9638  
(courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)

## Florence's Childhood

"When I was a girl, my parents taught us how to adapt to the old ways of life. My brothers and sisters were all treated equally. Everyone shared the chores we were expected to do around our home on Towers Island.



"The girls not only did the girls' work, but also handled some of the boys' work, too. Our parents knew if their children learned to do various types of work, it would benefit them in the future. They were right. As I grow older, I began to understand as all the teachings I received became helpful and useful.

"Later, when I had my own children, I taught them the things I had been told by my parents. But, because of the rapid changes that have occurred, a new lifestyle has taken over, very different from what I learned growing up."

## The Epidemic

"I was about six or seven years old at the time. I was lying in bed when I saw two men entering our house. They carried something out the door wrapped up in a blanket. Later that evening, I was informed that my grandmother, Elizabeth Colon, had passed away. Not far from where I lay, my mother lay wrapped in her soft blanket. She seemed to be sleeping and had tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Earlier that day, my grandmother had asked me to comb her hair. I combed it gently while she sat talking now and then. I did not suspect she was using her last few hours for us. She must have known she was going to sleep forever. That night, she died from the flu epidemic. I remember the epidemic vaguely because I was still too young to know much about what had happened in those years. My grandmother had lived with us all the time before she died. We loved her very much.

"As I grew up, I listened to stories of the epidemic, which took place just after World War I. Many people died. Those who recovered told their children about it. In my family, some members had the flu, but not my father. He worked hard to take care of his family. I remember the medicine we were all given. It was called "Castor Oil" and tasted awful. I hated taking it but because I was afraid of my father, I swallowed the medicine quickly. Herbal remedies were also used, but most people used Castor Oil. The Castor Oil worked for people although many of the children hated it."

## Our Winter Setting

"Every fall, just before freeze-up, our family would leave for our winter hunting and fishing grounds. Many families left the community in those days.

"We had a wooden skiff we used to row our way to a place called Sípástikohk, which is not very far from where I grew up on Towers Island. At Sípástikohk, there were plenty of fish, ducks, and furry animals which were edible. Before the cold days of winter arrived, we lived in a tent while our father built the mikiwáhp. My brothers helped our father cut and haul the logs.

"I remember the long, thick logs. They were gathered and piled together near where the shelter was to be constructed. My father built the mikiwáhp. The logs were held together in an upright conical position and bound together by spruce and willow roots. Roots were used instead of string or rope because they were much stronger. When the structure was erected, the cracks between the logs were covered with muskeg, mud, and lichen to keep the cold out.

"At the top of the shelter was an opening through which the sky could be seen. The opening provided much light in the interior of the shelter.

"The interior was fairly large because I remember we could all sit and sleep in it. Many of our possessions were also stored inside our shelter. At the center of the floor, a rectangular fireplace was made right on the ground. It had many uses. We cooked our food there, dried our wet soggy clothes, and warmed our cold hands and feet. The fire never burned out.

"The cooking utensils hung on the walls. My mother was a very clean woman. She always made us wash dishes and clothes. She did not like to see the floor get dirty with debris and clothes lying around.

"The floor of the shelter was nothing but bare ground. Spruce boughs and grass were laid down to give warmth to our feet and bodies at nights.

"Every Wednesday and Saturday, our mother changed the spruce boughs. The children were told to gather them. We had fun running through the woods tearing off the branches from the trees.

"The door of the shelter was small, just large enough for one person to go in and out. At nights and on cold days, it was covered with a blanket which prevented the cold from entering the lodge.

"Inside the lodge, my mother often sat and worked with her bead and leather work. She was very talented at beadwork and making clothes. Many evenings, we would watch her display her art and all the finished products she had made throughout the winter.

"Aside from the life in the shelter, our parents taught us how to read animal tracks. I learned the rabbit trails. Every morning we would run to the woods to check our snares. Just about every day, I would catch at least four rabbits or more. Many times we competed to see who would catch the most. Later in the evenings, we skinned and cooked them. Rabbit stew was our main course nearly every day. I never tired of eating rabbit, especially if it was one I had snared.

"Early in the fall, my father placed the net in the lake. We had a fresh supply of fish all winter. There were several types of fish. Fish can be cooked a number of ways; therefore, we never had the same old routine of boiled or fried fish.

"My father would shoot ducks before they migrated south. Later in the winter, he would thaw them out in preparation for special meals. It was a treat to eat duck during the winter.

"When the Christmas Season was closing in, our family would walk back to Norway House. I still remember my father pulling my younger brothers and sisters on the sled. It was always exciting to go home for Christmas. We would see our friends and talk about our traplines.

"We had very little education, even though every chance we had we went to school. But, because we did not attend much, we were not promoted to the higher grades. I liked what I saw at school; however, I had to leave with my family to the traplines each fall.

"When Christmas and New Year's Day ended, it was time to return to Sípástikohk. There we remained until our return in the early spring.

"I do not recall any of the members of my family having serious illness while living in the wilderness. We all had the common cold and coughs, but our parents treated us with herbal medicines.

"We returned to our home on Towers Island in the spring. The summers were a time to relax a little, but there was still work to be done. We used to have a garden, which my father and mother worked hard to maintain. We pulled out weeds, turned soil over, and in the late summer harvested potatoes when they were fully grown.

"Shortly after summer ended, it was back to Sípástikohk for the winter, back to the mikiwáhp - our home."

## My Dream

"My mother could read Cree syllabics. When I was a girl, she read the Bible to us in Cree. We spend many hours during the days and evenings listening to her.

"When I was a young woman, my mother used to tell us to make an attempt to read Cree syllabics. The only way was through reading the Bible. For several years, I thought about learning before I finally started. As I read, I began to get more understanding, and I can now read the syllabics in my Cree language. Once I decided to learn, it did not take very long.

"The local ministers of the United Church asked me to get involved in church duties. I thought about it for some time. With my husband's support and motivation I agreed. Before I agreed, I had two dreams.

"I dreamed of being in a certain place. Someone placed a sheet of paper in front of me. A voice beckoned me to sing the song. It was written in Cree syllabics. I sang the song without any difficulty. When I awakened, I wondered what the dream meant. I thought and thought of the dream for a long time. I was very puzzled. Another dream followed the previous one.

"This time I dreamed of a Bible. Again, the voice told me to read it. I read it and as I finished reading, I saw a young woman being carried in. I was told to pray for the young woman. I touched her head. While I was praying for her, she lifted her hands upwards.

"I awoke and thought about the dream again. It was then I understood that I was given a gift.

"Today I help people in any way I can. I like to help my people."

Told by Florence Muskego and written by Byron Apetagon,  
1988



Left: Florence Muskego wearing traditional shawl. Right: Florence standing in front of the tent, Mapci Colon Keanwininiw kneeling beside a little girl, Ida Chubb Simpson, and Doris Chubb seated by the tent entrance.

## CHAPTER IV

### CLARA MUSWAGON'S STORY



Clara Muswagon was born 14 July 1913 at Norway House, the daughter of Roderick Halcrow and Betsy Bowan. Her husband was Alex Muswagon, son of John Henry Muswagon and Elizabeth Allan. Their children include Billy Muswagon, Donald Muswagon Jr., Janet Hart, and Josephine Flett. Two others, Adelaide Mason and Joseph Muswagon, are deceased.

This is the story of Clara. She shares her memoirs in brief and simple phrases. She talks about events and bits of her life story as she grew up in the old settlement of Norway House. She perceives herself as only a small part of the community but what she has to offer has modern day relevance.

#### CLARA MUSWAGON

"I was born Clara Halcrow at Norway House in 1913. I am not sure just where in the community; I should have asked my long-gone family.

"I recall the time I was a young girl as the good old days, although it was often tough then. My father and mother were quite strict raising their children. Now I love them for that. Today many of our children take advantages of the easier life.

"Girls my age had to do the same things I did. They were taught the basics of housekeeping, and also to do part of the man's work. In those days, we girls would pick berries. I loved picking them because our mothers would make pies, jam, and other delicacies such as berried pemmican. Our people used to make fish and moose pemmican to which the berries were added later. Those people who did not like to eat plain pemmican always ate pemmican that had berries in it. Berries were also frozen to keep them preserved for winter's use. There were all kinds. Sometimes they were mixed together to make a better flavor.

"I remember being out at the trapping grounds with my family. It was fun being out in the wilderness where I learned much about survival. I learned to eat rabbit for breakfast, dinner, and supper. It did not bother me to eat the same old stew day after day. While my father was away, I used to go with my mother to snare rabbits, both in summer and winter, and learned how to skin and cook them, too.

"As I grew older, a change took place. I was enrolled in a school where I learned to speak some English. I did not learn much, but I understand when people talk to me, although at times I cannot respond to them. I think it is valuable to speak English. As Indian people, we have to speak English to meet the demands of the ever changing society we now live in.

"When I went to school, we were not as fortunate as the children are today. We had no buses; we always walked. We did not live too far from the school, but on cold bitter days it seemed very far indeed. When the snow was deep, we stepped on each other's tracks, so we could get to our destinations a bit more quickly. When I look at the buses running to school every morning, I see some children who still hesitate to go; they should have been walking to school with us!

"I loved school very much. However, there were many times I could not stay for the whole year as I had to leave for the trapline with my family. But even when we were out on the trapline, we still went to school - we learned how to set nets, fillet fish, and cook wild food in several ways.

"Sometimes we went up the Gunosao (Kinoséw) River, making portages, loading and unloading the boat along the way. The children always did a big share of the work. For us, it was a game to portage and paddle. Sometimes our family went as far as Gunosao Lake. Along the way, we saw many rapids and falls, dangerous places to travel, but our father always knew how to handle them.

"When we arrived at our family's trapping grounds, we lived in a log house. It was big, and built to keep out the cold freezing temperatures of winter.

"When I became older, I married Alec Muswagon. His father's name was John Henry, who I think was from inland somewhere. I was told he had a beautiful wife. He travelled extensively and on one of his trips, he met Elizabeth Allen in Churchill. He brought her back with him to Norway House. When the news hit the community, many people wanted to see this lovely woman. Finally one day, she appeared out of their tent. There she was, bright blonde hair and beautiful eyes. She was a pretty woman.

"We had our children. We taught them in the way we were taught. They attended school and learned to speak and read English. Although we lived around Norway House, there were times we had to go to the traplines which we loved. We gave our children the experience of that type of livelihood.

"Going back to my childhood days, I remember seeing my first moose. I was terrified by what I saw. I was sitting in the middle part of the boat resting sleepily. All of a sudden, my mother lifted the blanket and motioned for me to look on one side of the river. I looked. I saw a huge bull moose with great big antlers and an ugly-looking face. I went under the blanket again to hide! Later on, the moose was killed. That was the first moose I ever saw.

"At nights when we were sent to bed, our elders told us stories. My, those were good stories, so good that they put me to sleep. One story I clearly remember was about a man called "Sumo." My father used to tell us this story while we were eating. Apparently, Sumo liked to eat fish, especially sucker heads. Now a sucker head has many bones in it, and Sumo could eat a whole head in one big bite. He would chew away for a long time. Then, he would spit out all the bones. Those people who were near him counted them. They say every single bone was there; none was missing. How he did that puzzled me; it still does.

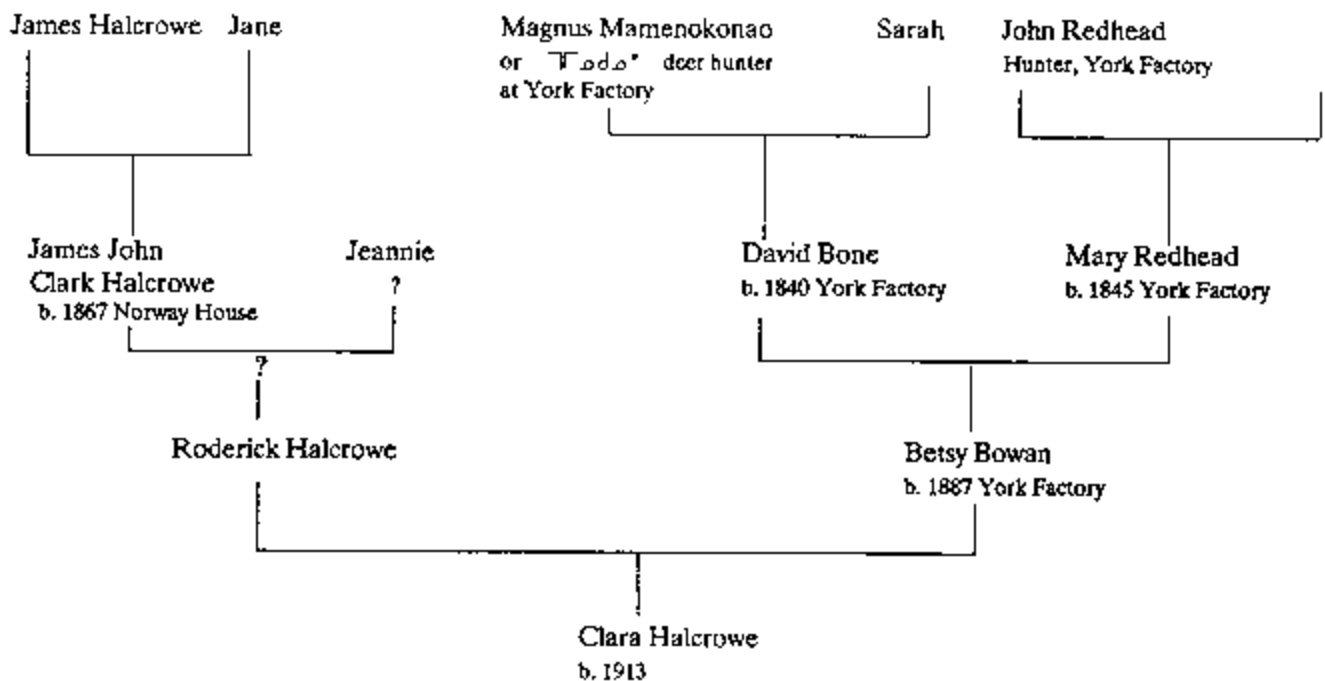
"I used to hear other tales when I was a child. Many of them I have forgotten already. For example, my people used to mention the York boats. I am told they were quite a thing to see. People used to say they knew York boats were about to arrive because they could hear them coming from ten miles away. There was a continuous moaning sound. This was the sound of the oars and the rhythmic shouting of men as they pulled on them. Those men were strong. They had a great deal of endurance to pull those oars for the long stretches of water they travelled.

"Long ago men were good trappers. I remember a family who lived not far away from us. The man's name was Frederick Apetagon who made a success of trapping for his family every year. We used to visit and talk to the Apetagons when they returned from Little Jack Lake. My family did not go far to trap. We went to places called The Narrows and John Bull's. We lived there during the winter.

"In those days, welfare was better known as "rations" and included such necessities as flour, sugar, and tea. People at the traplines had to travel back to Norway House for their share of the goods. Once I remember leaving my family and walking from John Bull's to get my rations. I was all alone, but as I walked along the portage road, someone by the name of old Monias was up ahead of me. I could see his footprints on the snowy trail and tried to catch up so I could accompany him, but he walked too fast.

"Along the way, I felt relaxed and unafraid. I did not fear wolves and actually did not even think of them. When I arrived at Norway House that evening, I visited my sister-in-law and told her I had just come from John Bull's. Because she cared for me, I received a good long lecture from her. I just listened and laughed. I had not been afraid of wolves. Besides I have never heard of wolves attacking people. Maybe if a wolf did get really hungry, it could attack.

"I raised my children the best way I could. Many people lost their lives during trapping and hunting, and the saddest time of my life was when I lost one of my sons. He had been out skating and drowned after the ice below him broke free. There were other children who saw what happened.



"I think of the times when my life was in danger. It frightens me now as I think of days when I grew up in the bush, but I guess it was not time for my life to end. My faith has carried me. As a young girl, I became familiar with church worship. I liked to go to church. I still do, because I believe in it. As a child, growing up on the trapline, my family always took the time to pray, even in those old shabby log houses. People in the old days always prayed at nights and on Sundays.

"Now I am getting old. I cannot move around as I used to. My health has been bothering me. But I am glad to share a bit of my experiences."

Told by Clara Muswagon, written by Byron  
Apetagon, edited by Dave Rosenburg, 1986



**Nelson River**, Leif Sunde Collection EP 2029 7807  
(courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)

## CHAPTER V

### JOHN MUSWAGON'S MEMORIES

This is a short biography about John Muswagon who experienced many difficult times while living through the many changes in Norway House.

John was born 28 December 1907 at Cross Lake and died in early 1992 at Norway House. His father was Daniel Albert Muswagon, who originally came from York Factory, and his mother was Elizabeth McKay, daughter of John Peter McKay of Cross Lake. It was at Cross Lake John attended some classes and managed to learn things which would later become beneficial to him. He moved from Cross Lake with his family when he was only about nine years old, travelling to Norway House by dog team one cold winter.

He recalled that the trip took one whole day, but it did not seem very far. Along the narrow path there was deep snow, cold northern winds blew softly, and numerous rabbit footprints could be seen along the heavy clusters of short pine trees. His parents stopped to rest their dogs two or three times and to have hot tea and bannock with lard. Upon their arrival at Norway House, they received warm welcomes from old friends and new faces. Since then, the family have become permanent members of the Norway House Indian Band.



JOHN MUSWAGON

#### Trapping

John made new friends while he was growing up in Norway House. One of the old men he worked closely with was Baptiste Soulier. John loved being around this man because he admired his wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of everything in the land. Being close to Baptiste, John spent many days watching him set traps over and over again.

"One time I recall, he told me to try setting the traps by myself. I had seen him set traps in muskrat holes. I had a pretty good idea how to work them. I succeeded in setting the traps, and ever since then, I have qualified as a trapper."

Not only did he observe Baptiste setting traps, but he also learned how to set and hang snares for rabbits, beavers, wolves, and foxes. Through observation, John learned to apply the skills and techniques of hunting, fishing, and trapping.

While trapping and hunting at John Bull's, John used to pull a sled. In it he took only the things he needed and always had some spare clothes just in case the ice broke under him. He used to catch



a few animals but the prices of the pelts were unprofitable. He understood then that maybe trapping was not for him. John admits he did it as a way of life where he was at peace with the surrounding environment and with nature. But after two winters of this lifestyle, John called it quits, and searched for other means of supporting himself.

## **Canoe Freighting**

John next became involved in one of the most tedious and difficult of tasks, namely, canoe freighting.

Long ago, there was no means of fast transportation. Nor were there modern highways. Communities were very isolated in the north. Dog teams and canoes were used to haul freight and cargo between communities.

The rivers were not always cooperative with the canoe freighters. There were rapids and waterfalls to portage. Some portages were long and hilly, while others were just small obstacles, but both meant lifting and pulling. Sometimes, the rivers were very shallow and hidden reefs lurked unnoticed. However, because most of the older men were experienced and wise, there were few accidents.

John travelled to places like God's Lake, Island Lake, Oxford House, and Cross Lake. He worked for a man called Mr. Leif Sunde (pronounced Sunday). Mr. Sunde was a store owner and fur trader.

John recalled the freighters took four nights to paddle to Island lake. They worked all day long and through a good part of the nights. This way the trips were quicker and the goods, supplies, and merchandise were delivered to the outlying communities in the far north on time. The salary was low, but it gave the workers income to meet their needs. John saw the tail end, or decline, of the canoe freighting era.

## **World War II - Discipline**

Many men volunteered their lives during World War II to save the democracy of this beautiful and peaceful country. The men who joined the army were good men. They were strong, and willing to give up their lives for their people and land.

John became one of those volunteers. He recalled when he was growing up with his family, his parents were very strict. His parents taught him to be responsible and obedient, and this helped him when he joined the army. John explained it this way,

"When I was a boy, I did many things I wasn't supposed to do. I was punished harshly by my parents. I was whipped with a stick. The punishment I received gave me much pain. As I grew older and matured, I began to understand why I was punished. I was taught the value of obedience. For old people of long ago, obedience was very important."

These are John's words. He simply wanted to let today's youth know that he was taught obedience when he was a young boy in a way that is not used nowadays as much. He went on to say that young children were sent to bed early. Every youth was expected to be sleeping before the sun went down. This was done because most of the living things that made noises all day long had disappeared for the night. Because this happened, the children were expected to follow the rules of Mother Nature, too. This was another method used to teach obedience.

When John was recruited into the army, he had little problem with discipline. He was obedient to the authorities who taught him survival skills during training.

The time came John had to go overseas. He did not know if he would ever return to see his family again. Being raised in an environment where Christianity was strong and evident, he had faith in God. Faith carried him through that terrible war in foreign lands.

John travelled with many thousands of volunteers to England. After England, John saw action and combat in France, Holland, Belgium, and Germany. For three years, John saw a war which is still talked about all over the world. Later, John reluctantly talked about the dreadful experience, but he did say it was something that always lingered in his thoughts.

At the end of 1945, John returned to his home and family in Canada. Many men never returned. Those who did were very thankful to be home. Today, only Alfred Queskekapow and James R. Hart, are still alive. James is a veteran of the Korean War. Alfred Queskekapow went to England during World War II where he took ill and had to return home.



James R. "Buddy" Hart, Korean War, Alfred Queskekapow, and John Muswagon, W.W.II  
at Remembrance Day Services at Rossville Church, 1980s (courtesy Byron Apetagon)

John returned with many memories of the war. It was while he was at home resting that he became a guard at the local R.C.M.P. detachment. For seven years, he worked with prisoners. Later, he moved to the Norway House Indian Band where he worked as a band constable. John worked for one year only because he felt he was getting too old for this type of work.

John believed that alcohol is hurting our people today. In the old days it was not available for the people to use. John believed if people had enough sense and power, they would not need alcohol to find happiness and a good life. He also believed if today's parents were more capable of disciplining their children with Indian values, alcoholism would not be a major problem in our community. Because John was disciplined harshly when he was young, he passed on a little message for people to think about.

"Today when I look back to the discipline and punishments I received, I would kiss and thank those people who taught me obedience."

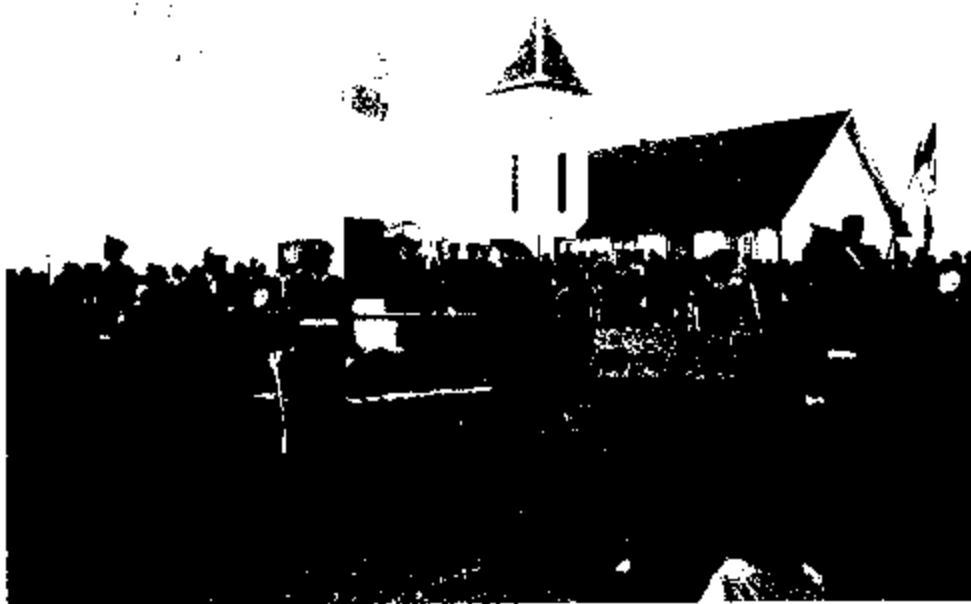
If you remember seeing an elder walking on the road with his hands in his pocket and head down, that was John Muswagon. If you offered him a ride, he would kindly refuse it. It was because he liked to walk and think.

If you ever went to a band meeting you would hear an elder speaking out strongly about our problems in the community. It was because he cared and loved his people and his home.

On Remembrance Day, you could see John and other veterans stand proudly with tears rolling down their cheeks. It was because they remembered the violence and terrible wars.

This was John Muswagon.

Told by John Muswagon and  
written by Byron Apetagon, 1987



Remembrance Day Service outside James Evans Memorial Church  
at Rossville, 1980s. Alfred Qeskekapow facing, Donald Paynter in wheelchair.  
(courtesy Byron Apetagon)

## CHAPTER VI

### MY STORY - JEMINA DIXON



JEMINA DIXON

My name is Jemina Ann Dixon. I was born August 7, 1921, at Norway House, Manitoba. I had three brothers and three sisters. My parents were Johnny Menow and Annie Grieves.

My husband Tommy Dixon was born on December 27, 1916. He was born in Norway House. He had two brothers and four sisters. Tommy and Emily are the only children left in his family. His father's name was Adam Dixon and mother's name was Adelaide Halcrow.

Tommy and I were married in September, 1939. Today we have ten children living. They are Annie, Emily, Johnny, Lawrence, Harriet, Percy, Helen, Margaret, Flora, and Joan. We had two other boys named Ernest and Donald who died. We have several grandchildren and great grandchildren.

### Memories from my Childhood and Personal Feelings for the Present

When I became old enough to help my parents with the work, I learned many things about survival which became very important later on in my life. It was not easy for our people long ago. They often had to worry about where their next meal would come from, but they always helped each other and did things together. No one was allowed to suffer from starvation and disease, because people were always nearby watching over each other.

In those days people cherished each other. Everyone cared and shared.

The young people were always taught to respect the elderly. I remember when I was still young, I used to hear elders lecturing the youth. When I reminisce about those olden days, I can only wish the same could be done for our young people today. However, we live in a time of changes, where things are very different from what I learned from my own people and their experiences.

Modern technology has taken over our way of life; television and music are destroying our children's identity as native people. We hear rumors and news of wars, conflicts, and discrimination. Our youth listen to these things and imitate them as real life experiences. It frightens me because I hear these things, too. One day, we may all be destroyed but this happens in a world of conflict, hatred, and unrest. However, we need to continue to live normal lives and teach our children to do the same.

## **Duties and Chores**

I remember my father going out on many hunting and fishing trips. He would be gone for days at a time. Sometimes he returned on the same day. When he came home he brought back many kinds of animals and fish.

When he returned, we were kept busy skinning and stretching pelts. I enjoyed working with furs. When we finished stretching and skinning, we smoked and dried the meat. I remember we used to have plenty of food. We stored enough for the fall and winter seasons.

## **Skinning Muskrats**

I remember my father went one day to check his muskrat traps. He was gone for a long time. We were all sitting around in the cabin when he walked in. He stood there and placed a bag near me. We looked in the bag and it was full of muskrats. My father turned away smiling and told me to start skinning them.

Well, at the time, I had never skinned muskrats before. I did not know what to do but I did not dare ask him how.

I knew I was being tested. I did not have the faintest idea about skinning muskrats, but took a sharp knife and quietly glanced at my mother who sat nearby.

Slowly my mother spread out her hand; carefully, so that my father did not see her. And with her index finger, she made a "T" sign on her palm. Seeing the motions she was making, I knew what to do. I began skinning the muskrats.

Ever since then, I have loved skinning muskrats. If my mother had not been nearby, I would have skinned the muskrat the way one does with a beaver. Skinning a beaver is not done the same way as one does with a muskrat.

Today, I still skin muskrats. My husband Tommy traps around the area. He loves to go out because that was the lifestyle he grew up with.

As we grew older, we were always kept busy. As children, we did not have much time to play because work always came first.

## **Setting Snares**

While we lived on the trapline, we used to go with our mother to set rabbit snares. We watched her set snares. After she had hung several, we returned to the camp, picking dry wood and sticks along the way.

The following mornings, we went to check our snares. We were always excited and happy when we caught a rabbit.

Once we learned how to set rabbit snares, we were allowed to go by ourselves. We had a lot of fun when we were by ourselves. Sometimes we got into trouble if we were gone too long.

## Setting and Lifting Nets

Ever since I can remember, fish was always the main source of food for our family.

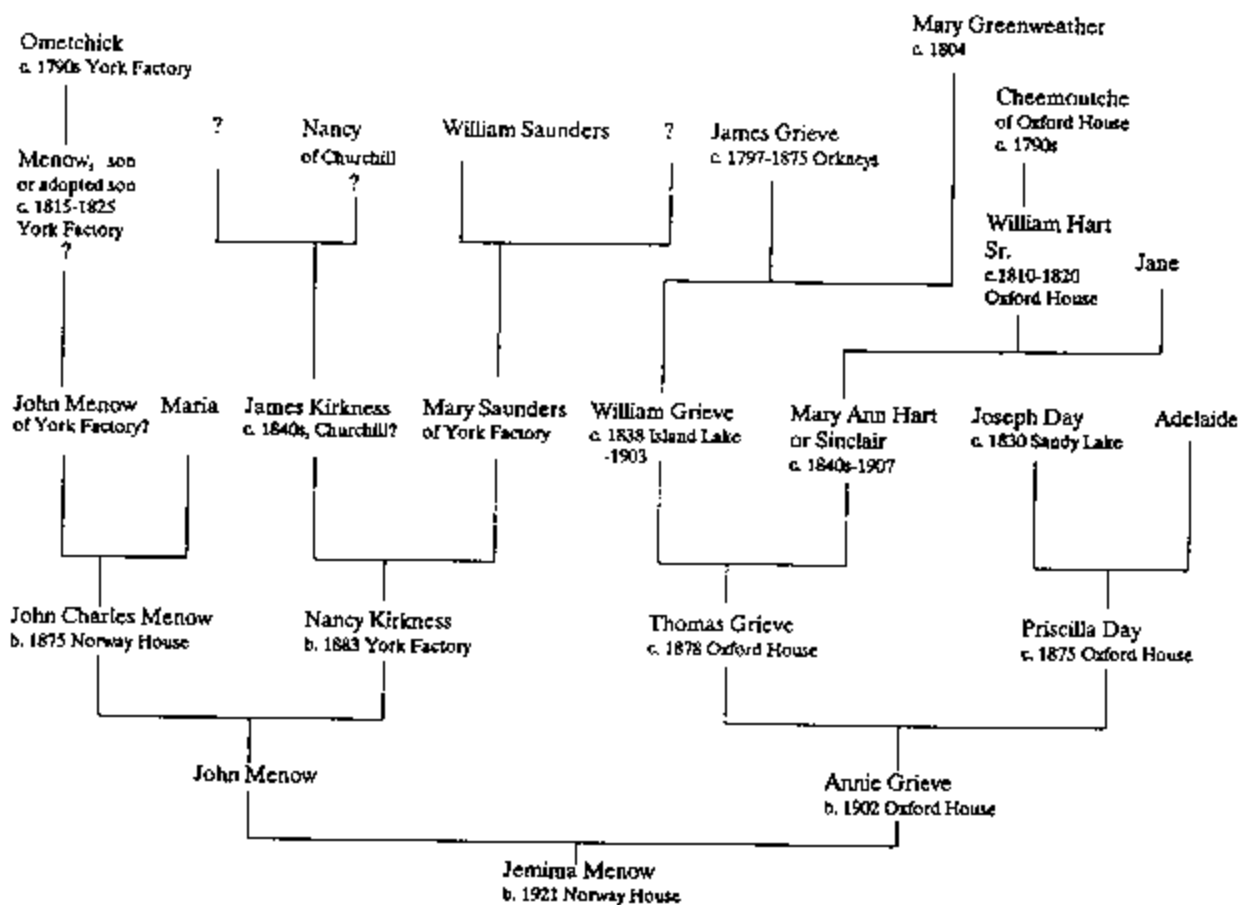
I remember we used to go with our parents to check their nets. When they had finished, we helped cut and fillet the fish. Sometimes we prepared the fish for smoking and drying.

During the cold season, we always helped set and lift nets. We placed the fish in racks where they were kept for winter preservation. The fish was used during the fall and winter.

I learned to cut, fillet, and cook fish in different ways. Fish can be fried, boiled, baked, and smoked. Sometimes we made fish flakes. The fish was baked and dried. Later the bones and unwanted parts were separated from the meat. Then the fish meat was pounded until it was powdery and flaky. The fish flakes were kept in bags, and sometimes berries were added to give it a sweeter taste. Children loved fish flakes.

## Fish Traps

We used to live at Kákwa Sákahikan (Porcupine or Little Bolton Lake) with other families. There is a narrow river with rapids nearby where we lived. It was there I saw men building fish traps. A fish trap was a fence-like structure built right below the rapids. Inside the structure was a net-like trap. As the fish came swimming down river, they fell into the trap. I remember I used to see many kinds of fish. The men scooped out the fish from the traps. These were the fish traps of Kákwa Sákahikan.



## **Wood and Water**

I remember one of our first duties was to gather firewood and haul water. Our parents would send us off into the bush to gather firewood. Sometimes we walked far to find dry wood and then carry it back to the camp. Later we hauled water which we used for washing dishes and clothes.

## **Washing Clothes on The River Banks**

One day I was washing clothes on the shore of the river near Bolton Lake when I noticed a shiny rock at the bottom of the water. I picked it up and told everyone about it. I remember telling others it must be of value but no one listened to me. I still remember that shiny rock I saw at the river while I was washing clothes.

## **Muskeg Moss for Diapers and Pampers**

I remember when we were growing up we used to go with the older women into the woods where we were taught how to pull out muskeg moss. It was not hard to do. We pulled out large lumps, then hung them on the branches to dry. Sometimes the older women placed the moss inside old potato bags.

Once the moss had dried, we carried it back to our homes. It was used to keep young infants dry at all times, and warm during the cold seasons. It was thrown away after every use. Today young mothers use pampers and diapers. These are expensive and not as warm as the muskeg moss. If mothers knew how babies were kept healthy long ago with inexpensive moss, they would realize the importance of nature's resources so abundantly available all around us.

## **Traps**

Sometimes we went into the wilderness to set traps and snares. Our parents showed us how to locate sites where animals may have run several times, or to locate habitats of certain animals. Once we had located different types of habitats, we were taught how to place and set traps. Traps are set differently for each animal. For example, an otter usually follows rabbit trails through the bushes. When it runs it takes a few steps and slides. It does this repeatedly. A trapper places the trap on the side of a trail. If the trappers placed it at the middle of the trail, it would hit the otter on the breast to no effect at all. But when it is placed on the side of the trail, the otter's foot will be caught in the trap.

Later we learned how to skin and stretch animal furs in different ways.

## **Remedies Long Ago**

People used all kinds of medicines long ago. They used to find herbal remedies around the areas where they fished, trapped, and hunted.

Sometimes the people would collect large amounts of a particular herb. This was necessary before some medicines could be made. Many of these herbs were good medicines. I used them when I was younger.

## Wihkés (Wild Ginger Root)

Wihkés was one of the most commonly used medicines. It had many uses. I remember seeing the old women crush it into small pieces. Later they soaked the wihkés in warm water and wrapped it in cloth. When people had headaches and colds, they would wrap this cloth around their heads.

Other times, wihkés was chewed to soothe our toothaches and colds. It was also used for sore throats and coughs.

## Everlasting Leaves

The everlasting leaves are called Kákiképakwa in Cree. I remember when people ran out of tea, they used to collect the everlasting leaves. The stems and leaves were bound together. These were boiled until the substance was a tea-like color. After it cooled, the people used this as tea which they drank while they ate their meals.



Man Stretching Hides, c. 1920, Leif Sunde Collection EP 2045 7898  
(courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)

## Food from the Wild and Food from the Fur Buyer

We had all kinds of wild food long ago. We ate ducks, geese, beaver, moose, rabbit, fish, and other edible wild animals. All these wild foods were served in different ways. This is probably one reason people never got tired of eating the same meals day after day.

I remember a fur buyer used to stop at our cabin on Bolton Lake. He bought our furs in exchange for food and supplies. The only candy we had was jam. Our parents served it once a week. I also remember we had milk, but again we only had it once a week.



Because we needed essential supplies like flour, tea, lard, and salt, our people always managed to conserve them for long periods of time. In those days, the fur buyers travelled to many places, so it was usually a long time before they would return to our camps again.

### Island Lake Migrants

While we lived at Bolton Lake, we were visited by groups of families from the Island Lake area. They, too, were scouring the land for food and furs.

I remember the older people sitting around telling each other the latest news and gossip they had heard during their travels. This was how people kept informed long ago.

### Old Times were Peaceful

When I was growing up in Norway House, everything was very quiet. The homes were almost noise free. In those days, we did not have radios, television, and telephones. Every bit of news travelled by word of mouth. Life was so peaceful.

### School

When I grew older, my parents placed me in the Roman Catholic School. I stayed there for some time until I left to help my family. After I left school, we moved to Kákwa Sákahikan for the winters. I missed school but I learned many survival skills while living on the traplines. There was so much to learn.



Catholic Mission, c. 1920, Leif Sunde Collection EP 2121 7851  
(courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)

## **Granny Mary Fletcher**

Many times we moved about the lands and waterways around Norway House. Our people used to spend much time in the surrounding lands fishing and hunting.

Other times we moved to Warrens Landing where men worked for the fisheries. I remember as we went to the landing, we would see people along the way. One of these people was Granny Mary Fletcher. Mary Fletcher was a strong woman who did everything for herself. Sometimes we watched her lift nets, or cut and fillet fish. Whenever we were nearby, she would always talk to us about the value of respect for everyone and everything.

Mary Fletcher taught us how to smoke meat and fish. I admired her. She was already aging when I saw her out on the lake. She loved being with nature.

Once we were camping at Two Rivers with Mary Fletcher. My husband Tommy went across the lake to hunt moose. After he left, Mary Fletcher told us to be quiet as we listened to her stories. As she talked, we heard several gunshots coming from across the lake. She knew Tommy had killed something. Shortly after, Tommy came back and told us to help him butcher the moose he had killed.

Mary told all the women to get ready to go across the lake. When we arrived there, we saw a moose lying near the shore. Mary got off the boat. She motioned us to follow her. We were inexperienced. We felt very uncomfortable because we did not know whether the moose was dead or still alive.

We watched Mary grab the moose's head. She opened the mouth and stuck her hand into it. Then, she turned around and told us the moose was dead.

As we stood around the dead moose, she explained to us how to cut and skin the animal.

Mary Fletcher was an intelligent woman. She had so much knowledge about survival, and wisdom concerning life values.

Many times she told us to be kind, respectful, loving, and obedient to the old people. She said if we did all these things, God would permit us to live a long life. I still believe that now.

When my husband and I first got married, we were very poor, but we already had many skills and teachings the old people had passed on to us. We managed to survive through the years.

## **Attitudes of the Now Generation**

Because my husband and I grew up in the traditional way of life, we still eat wild food. Sometimes when we share our food with our young grandchildren they do not want to eat it. They say it is not good for them. In a way I believe them because much of the land and water is being contaminated with all kinds of wastes.

Yet I still think wild food such as muskrat, ducks, and fish are the best foods. When we ate these foods long ago, we did not get sick but grew strong and healthy.

If only the young people could have seen how elders like Mary Fletcher lived. They would have learned then how to use the gifts of the earth. We used to watch Granny Fletcher make fish flakes and smoked fish. She taught us how to cook bannock over an open fire. We watched her hunt ducks. She did everything for herself.

One reason why I suggest Indian people should eat wild food is because it is a gift from God. God placed everything in this world for us to use. But when I tell my grandchildren to eat wild food, they tell me they do not want to eat it. It is not good food. It hurts me when I hear them saying those things. I'm still alive and quite strong, even though I ate wild food.

If only they could see how the elders used every part of the animals. Nothing was wasted. Every part of the animal was used in one way or another.

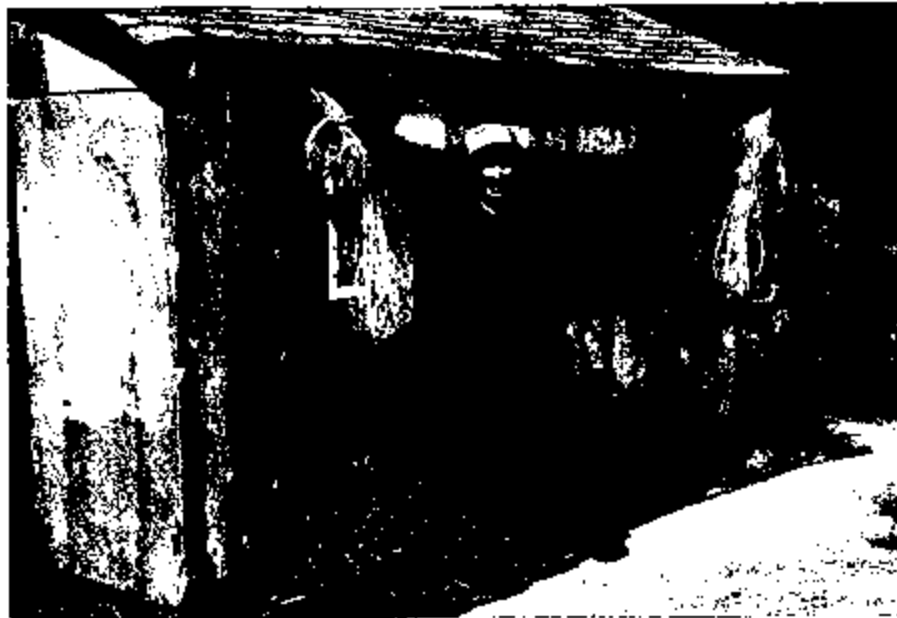
Once I remember my grandfather, John Charles Menow, going out to fish. When he returned he brought home a big sturgeon. Later, after he cut up the sturgeon, he saved the sturgeon caviare. I remember seeing him crushing the caviare and mixing it with bannock dough. When it was cooked, we ate a sturgeon bannock. It was very delicious.

Now there are very few sturgeons in the lakes. All those rich foods have been destroyed by man-made rivers and channels.

Today the young generation run to the stores to buy things they need. When they want something, they use money to buy it. Long ago, people did not need much money. It was through hard work and dedication that they provided for their own needs.

Another time I remember, my grandfather John Charles Menow did not have any matches. I saw him start a fire using two special rocks. He pounded the two rocks together to make sparks. It did not take long for him to make fire. To this day I am not sure how he actually build a fire from two rocks, but I saw him doing it. As for me, my brothers and sisters, we were not allowed to keep matches - not even one. Our father always feared we would start a fire.

These are the kinds of things we should pass on to our younger generation. They must grow and learn how to survive and use the skills of hunting, fishing, and trapping.



A Fisherman with his Nets, Norway House, 1989

## **The Tragedies in my Family**

One morning my brothers David and Elijah woke up early to go check their traps. They were laughing and joking around while they made preparations for their journey.

Because I was older, I had always seen them together. They shared things and worked with one another. The two boys were very close.

As they were leaving the cabin, I watched them go. I did not realize that day it would be the last I ever saw them alive.

David and Elijah must have been walking along on fresh frozen ice, not far from the shore line. The ice must have broken free and they fell into the cold waters. Both boys drowned.

One of the men who helped recover the boy's bodies was a local man named James McDonald. He had travelled from Norway House to assist in the search.

## **My Baby Donald**

We lived at Kákwa Sákahikan (Bolton Lake) after we got married. We had a little baby boy we named Donald.

One night as we were going to bed, I noticed Donald was not feeling well. Late into the night he cried, then went to sleep. Later I woke Tommy up to make fire as it was getting cold inside the cabin. I looked at our baby and noticed some blood coming out of his nostrils. It was then I discovered he had died in his sleep.

As I sat there, I saw a vision. I saw a child walking away in front of me. I had seen the spirit of my child going away. I got up and told my mother to help me.

My father brought my son home to Rossville, and they had a wake at one of the homes. My father had walked all the way to bring my baby Donald home.

## **Discipline and Punishment**

Punishment is always remembered. We learn something valuable from punishment and discipline.

I was the eldest in the family. I had younger brothers and sisters then. I was punished more than they were.

Once I remember two of my younger brothers and sisters were arguing and fighting. I was blamed for the incident. Naturally I was punished for something I did not even start. That was the only time I disagreed - but later on I forgot all about it.

Ever since I can remember, we were always told to be good and be kind to each other. If we did not follow these rules, we were all punished. Obedience was important for all children.

I remember another time my sister and I were told to set a net under the fresh frozen October ice. I did not like this. It was one of the things I hated doing. We attached the net to a stick and pushed it down under the ice through a hole we had made. As we were pushing the line through, we made many holes in order to keep the stick moving under the ice. Once we had finished, we knew how to set a net all by ourselves. This is all because of obedience.

We were always told to treat and use things with care and caution. My father told us not to play with matches and guns. One day I tested myself to see if I could use a gun. I did not have an idea how to load it but somehow I managed to put the bullet in. When I fired the gun, it jerked and the cartridge flew out, almost hitting my face. I was frightened. Since then I have never attempted to use a gun again.

### Church Services

I used to go to the Anglican Church with my parents and grandparents. People used to take lunches and sit outside and share them with others. People used to love going to church. They talked and visited with their friends and relatives before and after church services.

Among the church leaders were John Clarke and Geordie Clarke. They were nice people.

That's all for now.

Shared by Jemima Dixon  
Written by Byron Apetagon, 1987



Interior of Anglican Church, Norway House, c. 1920s, Leif Sunde Collection EP 2017 7810  
(courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)

## CHAPTER VII:

### BETSY MUMINAWATUM

#### Family History

Betsy Muminawatum was born in Norway House on September 17, 1921. Her parents were Enoch Anderson and Annabella Paynter. Enoch's parents were Mary Omand and John Anderson. Annabella's parents were Juliette Colon and Abraham Paynter.

Her grandfather John Anderson came from York Factory. He had reddish-brown hair and beard. Her maternal grandparents came from Oxford House. Annabella used to tell Betsy they came to Norway House by birchbark canoe when she was a very young girl.

Enoch Anderson was married three times. His first wife was Sophia Muchekewanape, and they had two boys, Alexander and Samuel Anderson. Samuel is still living at Rossville. Betsy can't remember the second wife, but there were no children. Annabella was his third wife, and there were six children; Betsy, Thomas, William, Moses, Margaret, and John James. Besides Betsy, Thomas and William are still living.

Betsy was first married to Donald Crate and their three children are Nora Wood, Alex Crate, and Ida Bear. She married her second husband, James Muminawatum, in 1955. They have been married now thirty-six years.



#### The Log Homes

As far as I can remember from the days of my childhood we used to live at the north end of Norway House near Rossville. In those days there weren't any good roads. We used to walk or go by boat to Rossville.

People had log houses. Usually most of the houses that families had were two storey buildings. Sometimes people made extensions where all meals were prepared and eaten. Everyone slept on the top floor, and the lower section was used as a living room where family members or visitors sat around to tell stories or discuss local events and issues.

I remember the older men had to make their own lumber to build the log houses. I remember my father Enoch constructing a new log house. Our old house had been built by my grandfather John Anderson and it was getting too old to live in. I remember my father had ordered some lumber through the band, but most of the logs came from the areas around Pine Creek. My father cut and hauled all the logs from there. He tugged in the logs by boat. The logs were peeled. The house he built was much bigger than the old house. I can just imagine how many logs he had to bring in from Pine Creek to build his family a new log house.

## The Winter Setting at Máhtawak

Long ago many families used to move to the winter camps in the surrounding lands of Norway House. Some families remained behind but because our fathers were trappers, fishermen, and hunters we went with them to the winter camps.

My father's winter camp was at a place called Máhtawak. It is around the Molson Lake area. Ever since I can remember we always went there for the winter. Sometimes people left in groups to go to the winter camps. My father always left earlier than other families; we usually travelled by ourselves. Sometimes our grandparents accompanied us. We did not travel at the quickest pace. My father hunted and fished along the way. By the time we arrived at Mahtawak, we had some food stored for the winter. Not long after we arrived at the winter camp other families and relatives began to arrive. They had hunted and fished along way also.

Upon our arrival at Máhtawak, we lived in a tent temporarily. There was much work to be done before the cold winter perched upon us.

The men and the older children gathered and collected dry wood. Once there was plenty of wood, all cut and neatly piled, the men left us behind with our mothers to go hunting. They hunted for moose mainly. Sometimes the men were gone for many days. Later they arrived home with plenty of wild meat.

While the men were gone, we still had many tasks to do. Everyone including the younger children hauled moss and muskeg to the cabin. These were used to fill in the cracks between the layers of logs on the houses. They were excellent insulators and kept the cold winds from entering the interior. After all the cabins were insulated we hauled dry wood for use as firewood.

Sometimes the men built a new log house before they went hunting. They would only built a new house if one was getting too old, or if more people had joined our group.

The cabin we had at Máhtawak had a clay stove in it. I remember once our mother was roasting some meat using this stove. The meat hung from the roof on a string. She would twist and turn the meat until it became a nice brown color. Everything was cooked on the clay stove. There were fish, rabbit, and moose meat meals. These were all delicious meals which we never got sick of eating.



A Winter Camp outside of Norway House, c. 1925  
William Rackham Collection N12877 (courtesy Manitoba  
Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

The older women and boys did some fishing while the men were gone hunting. There were always plenty of fish. In those days we did not have freezers or refrigerators, but there were several ways to preserve the meats. The fish and wild meat were smoked, pounded into Pemmican, or made into fish and meat flakes. The moose fat was melted and stored away. Later it was used as grease or a substitute for lard.

The hunters returned home with plenty of wild food. There was more work for us to do when they arrived. Everyone spend many hours preparing the wild foods for the winter's use.

I can remember there were at least five to six families at Máhtawak. Everyone trapped, fished, and hunted until the lakes and rivers froze over. Freeze-up did not prevent the men from trapping for the fur bearing animals.

With the advent of the cold season, everyone took care of each other. No one was left to go on without any food or medicine.

After the lakes and river froze over the men left their families behind to go hunting and trapping. Again the men would be gone for several days, sometimes a week or so. There was always plenty of wood and food accumulated before they left. Much of the food was now stored in racks where no animals or birds could steal any of it. While the men were gone, we set snares to catch rabbits. As children, we learned how to skin rabbit and cut fish.

The men always returned with something. Sometimes it was not much but it was enough to get by until the next hunt. The men did not just hunt moore or caribou, but they also trapped for beaver, muskrat, weasels, mink, otter, and fishers. These animals were important because once the lakes and rivers were safe to travel over, fur traders arrived at the winter camps to trade and buy fur for groceries and supplies. It was always exciting to have a fur buyer in the camp. Not only did they come to collect fur, but we also heard of the latest news from Norway House and also from other winter camps.



Trading Stores, Rossville Village, Hudson Bay Company Store on left.  
Gaudin Collection EP 3029 (courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)



## The Travelling Stores of the Fur Buyers

I remember the fur buyers used to come to Máhtawak at least twice a month. One of the regular fur buyers was Donald Houle who worked for one of the fur traders at Norway House. I can remember there were at least three stores at Rossville. These were the Hudson's Bay Company, Trappers, and Mr. Sunde's. All three stores stood side by side adjacent to where the present band hall now stands. I can remember that when customers entered the stores, a counter separated them from the storekeeper. The customers asked for the things they needed. The storekeeper fetched all the supplies and recorded everything. Things were cheaper in those days.

Earlier in the summer my father would take us to one of the stores. There he would purchase all the things we needed at Máhtawak. He bought salt pork, white beans, tea, rice, lard, flour, and some sugar. He also bought other things which we needed for trapping and fishing. That was the only time we went to a store. The next time we saw a store was a travelling one brought by a dogteam which moved from camp to camp.

When the fur buyer's dogteam arrived at our camp, I remember he would bring in all his goods and merchandise. Everything was all laid out on the floor. My father and mother would do all the selecting while all the children looked on. In the end, most of the supplies were food goods. I rarely saw my father buying things he did not need and I also remember he did not give all his furs away; he kept some furs for the next fur buyer to come knocking on our door. I cannot recall seeing any money when the trades were made.

Before the fur buyer went away on his journey to his next stop, we always had a little treat from our father. He would give some sweet biscuits. We each got one biscuit and didn't get any more until a few days later.

I also remember the children did not drink tea often. When we were given some, water was always added. There was sugar that was sold in cubes and only adults used it. We used sugar when we became older. We had flour to make bannock. There were times when we did not have enough flour. Flour had many uses. We also had some lard but it was available in limited quantity. We always had plenty of rice. I got tired of eating rice day after day.

## Off to the Spring Camp

On the verge of the spring season when the weather became much warmer, all the families moved away to their spring camps. My father took us to his spring camp when there were plenty of muskrats and beavers.

After we had stored all our winter equipment and supplies, we took things we needed at the spring camp.

Spring trapping was the best time for everyone to trap. Everyone, even the small children, were allowed to set muskrat traps. There were plenty of muskrats where we trapped. In those days there was no such thing as registered traplines or licenses. Everyone trapped alongside each other without much bitter envy or resentment.

The hustling and bustling about in the spring camp was always evident. The men and women were skinning and stretching muskrat skins. The girls were washing dishes and clothes, or cleaning up around the spring camp. The boys helped in everything. My brothers learned to skin and stretch muskrats.

Everyone worked all day long. When evening came our parents would call us in for prayer. (We were not allowed to make noise after sunset.) We always said prayers in the morning and evening, as well as before meal time. My father valued prayer. This is how each family lived long ago.

I remember when our parents got up in the morning, all the children had to get up too. If one slept in, it meant missing a meal. That was the rule my father gave us. I also remember my parents always told us to eat when it was time for everyone to have a meal. We hardly ever ate between regular meals.

The spring season brought a change of diet. We had ducks, geese, and fish daily. As the spring hunt came to an end, we journeyed back to Rossville. We had more wild food along the way. We were always excited to see our old friends once again.

### Back Home At North End

Sometimes we did not have flour to make bannock on our trip home from Máhtawak. There were times we depended on the wild game.

Upon our arrival in Norway House, my father sold his furs to any one of the fur buyers. He did not receive any money for them but could purchase more groceries and supplies we needed for the whole summer.

Again we always got a treat from our father. This time he would bring home one apple. We used to watch him as he divided one apple into four small pieces. We each got one piece of one apple. That was our treat for all the hard work we gave our parents. It meant a great deal to us to get a treat. I remember how I sat as I ever so slowly nibbled away at my piece of apple.

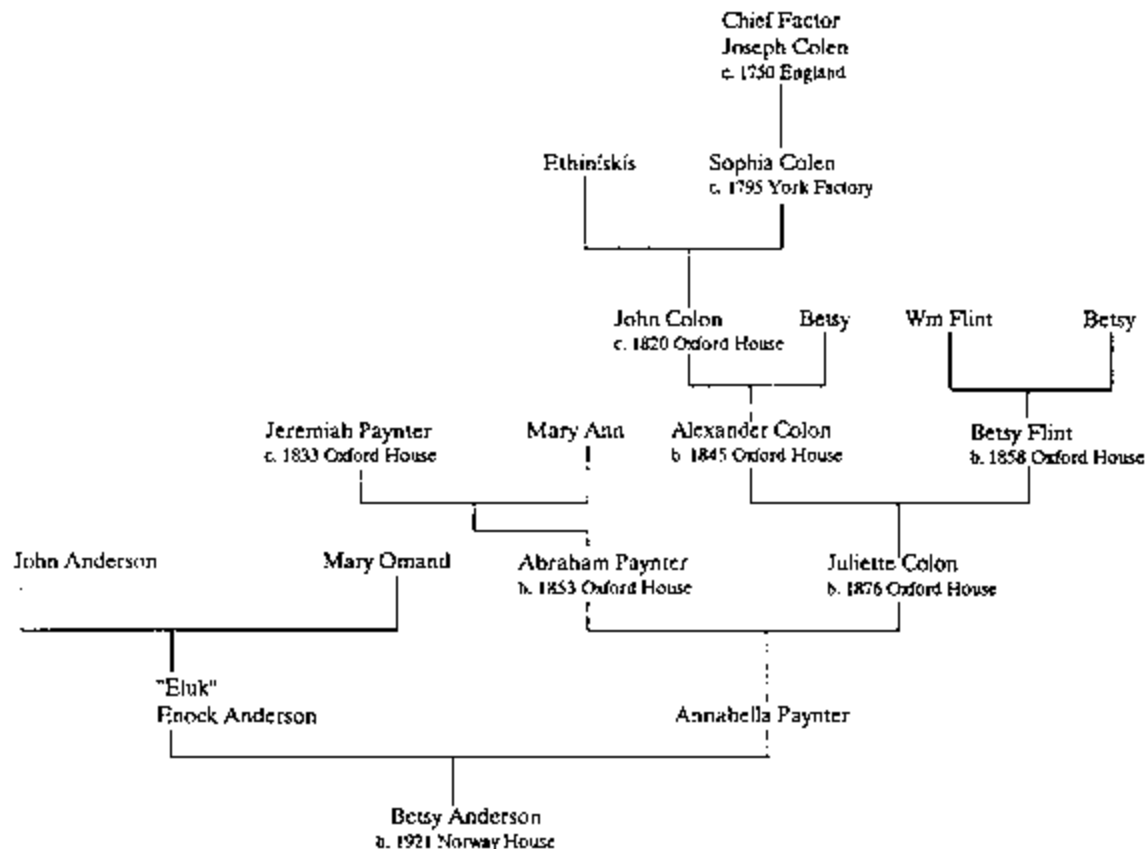
### Garden Work and Potatoes

Because spring trapping was over, it did not mean there wasn't any work to do. My father had a great big garden at north end. We all helped as he seeded the potatoes row by row. We weeded the garden all summer long.

At the end of the summer, everyone helped in the harvesting. My father had a root house where he stored all the potatoes for the winter. I remember many families had their own gardens. Some people had a variety of crops, but potatoes were the main crop grown.



Norway House Hospital, Indian Agency, tents at Treaty Time, and potato patch in foreground.  
Gaudin Collection EP 3039 (courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)



## Summer Employment

My father was rarely at home to tend to his garden. He always found work as a guide with the Hudson's Bay Company. My father was an excellent guide and knew the lands all over the north very well. When he left to take the Hudson's Bay manager away, he would be gone for many weeks. My father used to make long journeys to Island Lake, God's Lake, Oxford House, Cross Lake, and back to Norway House. They travelled to all these places in just one trip.

## Off To Whitefish Islands and Goose Island

While my father was away on long trips, my mother told us to get ready to row to Whitefish Island and Goose Island on Playgreen Lake.

In those days when people returned from their winter camps, they used to spend some time on their gardens at home. When summer grew warmer, many families left their homes to do some fishing. There were many families all over the lakes.

We just didn't go to the islands to catch fish; my father owned many dogs. We took our dogs to the island where we fed them fish all summer long. My father had very good dogs. They were working dogs and were always fed well at all times. We loved our dogs very much.

Other families went to do some fishing. They made fish oil, smoked fish, and fish pemmican and flakes all summer long.

I remember people stacked smoked fish. Sometime a boat would come back to Norway House to sell or trade smoked fish for food. Everyone bought smoked fish in Norway House.

Just before the Treaty Days began, people started returning to the community. My father would be home about that time as well.

The return trip from Whitefish and Goose Island was not easy work. We took turns rowing our boat. We had our dogs, supplies and our family to carry in our boat. I used to think we made good time when we came home. There weren't too many motors around at the time, but some people had them.

### Sturgeon Fishing at Catfish Point

When my father returned home from the long trip, he went to Catfish Point to do some sturgeon fishing. There was plenty of sturgeon at Catfish Point in those days. Sometimes he would return home with four live sturgeons. I remember he used to tie the sturgeons off the rocks at our place.

Yes, sturgeon meat is good food. My father did not waste any part of it that could be used for food.

Later, he used to go with my mother to sell or trade sturgeon meat. I also remember my mother used to make sturgeon oil which she used in cooking.

### Education

I did not receive much education although I would have liked to go to school. My parents wanted to take us to the trapline and help them out there. Besides, if both of our parents had gone we would not have had anybody to look after us.

Later as I grew older, I was allowed to go to school. I spent one winter at the old boarding school while my parents went to the winter camps. Later I was placed at the Roman Catholic school for two winters.

I wasn't fortunate as my two other brothers. Thomas and William had more education than I had. My brother Thomas went up to grade 9. William on the other hand had attended but was always sick. He left school to help out in the trapping and fishing fields.

Being on the trapline I learned many things about survival in the wilds. I had the basic skills of skinning and stretching furs, tanning hides, drying and smoking meat, mending and most important of all learning how to knit and do beadwork.

Sometimes, when I had the chance to attend school, I managed to take an interest in learning to write Cree syllabics. Our instructor was a priest who had a white beard. He taught us how to say and write Cree syllabics. Sometimes we said Cree prayers in class which helped us learn how to read the Cree syllabics.

INITIALS	SYLLABLES				FINALS
	ā	e	o	a	-
a	▽	△	▷	◁	• ow
wa	▽·	△·	▷·	◁·	X Christ
pa	∨	∧	>	<	'p
ta	U	∩	∪	∩	't
ka	q	p	d	b	'k
cha	ʔ	ʃ	ʒ	ʒ	-h
ma	ʔ	ʃ	ʒ	ʒ	˘m
na	ʔ	ʃ	ʒ	ʒ	˘n
sa	ʔ	ʃ	ʒ	ʒ	˘s
ya	ʔ	ʃ	ʒ	ʒ	˘r
					˘l

The dot over any syllable lengthens the vowel sound.

My brother Thomas can read the Cree syllabics as well. This is where I learned to read the Cree syllabics.

Today I regret I did not attend much school because I have very little English. Somehow I can manage to follow what is being discussed.

### **Homemade Jeans and Woolen Socks**

My mother Annabella had expertise in sewing, beadwork, and knitting. Being a girl I was taught all these things so I could use them when I went on my own.

Rarely did we have store-bought clothes. Most of our new clothing were made from old clothing. We used to be very happy and excited when our mother made us new clothes.

I remember the old stores used to provide jean cloth material. My father and mother used to buy the material and later my mother would make new jeans for my brothers.

My mother knew how to treat and tan hide. My father was a good hunter. We always had enough hide. My mother made new moccasins for us. I learned how to make moccasins and slippers from her. Sometimes when there was enough money, she would buy some silk to make other clothing wear.

Once I remember my grandmother had an old woolen sweater. She had received it in a trade with another old woman. In those days the older women exchanged old clothes for old clothes. Anyway after she received the sweater, she took the whole thing apart to make yarn. Later when the yarn was rolled into a ball, she took her needles and made woolen socks for us. My, we were so happy to get new socks from a very old sweater.

I also wore rabbit skins on my feet. We all did. The rabbits were the warmest socks one could have in those days. We wore the rabbit skins when we played, worked and when we went into the bush to haul and carry wood. Our footwear was always moccasins. We did not see anything fancy like the runners, joggers, and oxfords of today. We also had the moccasin rubbers which we wore constantly during the spring seasons.

I remember we used to have a large rabbit fur blanket. It was a blanket made from rabbit skins collected and sewn together. I guess the blanket was used as a comforter. I helped my mother make one. They are very warm, especially on cold nights.

### **Too Young to Dance**

The treaty days held at Rossville brought many people from all over. They set up their tents from one end of Rossville to where the Band Office now stands. People from the Jack River area all came to Rossville to participate in the Treaty Days celebrations. The treaty days only came once a year in the summer. It was time to receive treaty payments of five dollars. It was a time to relax, visit old friends, make new friends and dance.

The dancing began early in the afternoon. The old men and women danced and danced. There was laughter and much commotion. People danced so hard that one could see dust lifting from the floors.

The dances were held at the old band hall where the new band hall now stands. I can remember the musicians used fiddles, but I cannot remember seeing guitars until at a much later time.

While the dancing went on in the afternoons, there were large tents owned by peddlers who came from the south. They used to sell all kinds of goods and merchandise. However, I remember we

never had any money to buy what we wanted. The only treat we received was one box of popcorn which was distributed among the four of us children.

At about seven o'clock each evening during the treaty days, the leaders stopped all the events and activities. This was done so all the people, including the children, could attend a church service. It usually lasted for about one hour or so. Everyone attended the service which included the visitors from Cross Lake, Island Lake, and Oxford House.

The visitors arrived in small canoe caravans. The Island Lake crew used to make its campsite on Mission Point. Sometimes the canoe freighters from other communities arrived in time to participate in treaty celebrations. I used to see about four to five large canoes anchoring on the shores of Rossville. I used to hear visitors and trippers came by york boats, before I could see them.

Finally, when the church service was over, all the children were sent home to sleep. I hated the rule but being a child I did not have much say. My parents were quite strict. Therefore we had to be obedient.

I remember I used to lay inside our tent. I listened to the music and the people dancing away. The children were always kept by one adult. In our family, if my mother went to watch the dancing, my father stayed in the tent with us or vice versa. Some children were more fortunate. They went with their parents to watch the adults dance.

### The Distribution of Goods During the Ration

Usually during the treaty days a time was set aside to have the ration. The ration was a time to give the yearly goods and supplies to the heads of households. Men and women sat around in a big circle. There were workers who went around in the circle passing out portions of flour, salt pork, twine for nets, shotgun shells and bullets, and some rope. These were tossed into everyone's bag. This only happened once a year. I remember the chief and the members of the council were present at this event.



Distributing Treaty Rations, Norway House, c. 1921-1934  
Gordon Collection EP 790 6320 (courtesy Manitoba Museum  
of Man and Nature)

When the treaty days ended, everyone threw their tents down and went home. It was almost time again to return to the daily chores of preparing for another trip to the winter camps.

### **Ancient Shelters and Dwellings**

As a young girl, we went to a place called Pakitawákani Sákahikan (Pakitawákan Lake). While we were there, I can remember very vaguely being in a mikiwahp (wigwam). There were four of us - two adults and two children. All four of us lived in the wigwam. There was plenty of room to move around inside the interior walls of the wigwam. It was a large shelter. I remember the doorway was covered with a tarpaulin to keep the cold winds out.

We lived in a log cabin most of the time. There was always much work to maintain a log cabin. Moss and muskeg had to be placed between the cracks constantly. The floorings had to be overlaid with spruce boughs regularly.

In other temporary camps, and when travelling, we always used a tent. The tent is easier to set up and dismantle when travelling.

### **Medicinal Herbs and The Midwives**

The most common sicknesses we had were minor ailments such as earaches, toothaches, and fevers. My mother used something called wíhkés to sooth the ailments. She also used plants call kákiképakwa (everlasting leaves) which was used as a citron to drink. The citron eased and soothed all kinds of ailments.

There was a hospital at Rossville. All my children were born in a hospital. As for us, our doctors were local women. These are the midwives.

I remember one grandmother I had. She was my father's aunt. Her name was Betsy Spence. She was a short, little elderly woman. People called her Betsychich, meaning Little Betsy because of her size. She was a very nice lady, and I liked being around her. She helped me become a better handicrafts person in sewing, knitting, and mending clothes.

When my mother was expecting, my father used to leave us at home with Betsy Spence. My father trusted her very much because she was a midwife.

I remember Betsy always slept on the floor. She would get up very early in the mornings, make tea, and cook leftover food from the day before. When she had finished all that, she would wake up everyone to come and eat before beginning a new day's chores.

Sometimes I found Betsy very amusing. She would say her prayers before meals, mornings and evenings, despite all the traffic in the house. Once she had finished her prayers, she would call me over so she could talk to me. She used to tell me many stories and teachings about life. That is why she was a special person for me.

I remember Betsy used to catch squirrels near our home. I watched her skin them. Later she threw them in the oven and baked them. When the squirrel was baked, I used to sit with her and ate the baked squirrel meat. Today, when I think back to those days, I always see the old women eating things which are not eaten today. They liked to eat wild food because they knew how to cure it. They didn't waste anything.

My mother's doctor was Betsy Spence. She was a worthy person who demonstrated much faith and courage in her work. She enjoyed helping expectent mothers. Most times the midwives were not paid, but a gift was given for their help. I can remember the midwives did not leave the mothers until they were able and healthy enough to get back on their feet.

Some midwives I know were Evelyn Osborne, Priscilla Osborne, and Flora Simpson.

### Message for the Youth

Life was difficult long ago. We were always taught to abide by the rules of Indian values. We had to be obedient; if we were not obedient, we were always punished. We had to do our chores and do our share of the workload our parents carried on their backs.

Children had little time to play and relax - survival was far more important than sitting around and sleeping.

I remember I was angry and resentful when I was punished for my wrong doings. I am not sorry because I learned that discipline directed me to try to live a good life.

Furthermore we were always told to respect everyone. This was always an important teaching.

Shared by Betsy Muminawatum  
Written by Byron Apetagon



New Hospital, c. 1924 Gordon Collection EP 844 6377  
(courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)



## CHAPTER VII

### ELDERS FROM THE PAST

#### Mary Fletcher's Story

Before the arrival of cars, airplanes, out-board motors and highways, people travelled by canoes and dog teams. Almost every family had either one or both. To them, it was like owning something valuable. To own more than one canoe or a dog team gave those people a sense of well-being and of luxury.

However, to some families who owned an old canoe and a small dog team, luxury was not important. To be able to maintain and support the family was sufficient.

Many times people retrieved old canoes discarded by wealthier families and fixed them to be used again. Stray dogs were caught and trained to pull. Often these dogs were the strongest.

In those times, people helped each other in every way they could. If people were in need of food, hunters would provide the food. When people lost their belongings in house fires, other families gave clothes and utensils. When people took ill, there were medicine people around to help the sick.

Many women become widows. The men worked too hard; their lives were shortened by overwork, disease, and exhaustion. However, it was a custom for widows to marry again almost immediately. One reason was that a father image was needed to maintain family cohesion especially as families were so large. But women also died, succumbing to overwork and childbirth. In such cases, children were often raised by other families. Children who had lost both parents, and those whose families could no longer support them were sent to faraway places where they could receive education, a home, and care.

Such is the story of Mary Fletcher. Mary's maiden name was Clarke. As a young child, she grew up at the settlement of God's Lake, Manitoba. While still at a young age, Mary's mother took ill, became weak, and died. Left alone with their father, who was unable to take care of them alone, Mary and her brothers and sisters were sent away to Brandon. In Brandon, they would receive education and care.



Elderly Woman on Snowshoes, c. 1920

Leif Sunde Collection EP 2026 7880

(courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)

The Clarke children, Mary, George, John, Alfred, Helen, and Matilda were taken there by a missionary called Mr. Semmens. Mr. Semmens worked at God's Lake. When he saw the family was in need of help, he arranged a place for them to stay - and Brandon was the place.

When the Clarke children departed from God's Lake, they left in a caravan of canoes with a large group of people, who were headed south in search of work. In single file, they paddled down the rivers and crossed the lakes, until they reached Norway House. Most remained there, but the Semmens party headed southward into the rough waters of Lake Winnipeg. Travelling along the shores of the lake, they made camp and ate wild food along the way. They had a great time observing new country.

After some time on Lake Winnipeg, they finally reached Selkirk and travelled up the Red River towards Winnipeg. At Winnipeg, the children were placed in carts pulled by horses and taken to Brandon. The group enjoyed the new scenery as they crossed the beautiful plains and rolling sand hills. Soon they reached Brandon.



**Indian Industrial School, Brandon, Manitoba, c. 1900-1910**  
(courtesy National Archives of Canada)

Mary remained in Brandon for several years. She did not attend much school but stayed there to watch over her brothers and sisters.

In the meantime back in God's Lake, another group of people was making preparations to migrate to Norway House. Mary's father was one of them. Most of his friends and relatives wanted to live near the fort where employment was available. Furthermore, there were rumors a big school would be built for children to attend.

The Clarkes and Chubbs were among the families who moved to Norway House. As the people arrived, they began to intermarry within the community. It was also at this time people such as the Kirknesses chose to move to Fisher River to farm. The soil in the south was more arable than at Norway House.

Time elapsed and the Clarke children in Brandon were becoming older and more mature. Soon they would return to the North. They were eager and anxious to see their father.

In Mary's case, the entire family settled in Norway House, reunited with their father, who had remarried. His second wife was Victoria Paul, sister to Charles and Joseph, by whom he had two more children, Betsy and Thomas, both born at Norway House.

Soon after arriving at Norway House, Mary married William Kirkness and had two children named Irene and Gilbert. Their family lived by trapping, fishing, hunting, and cutting wood. Tragedy struck, however, when her husband died from overwork, and Mary was left alone to support her son and daughter. However, as Gilbert became older he was able to do some of the work his father had done. But despite the fact his father had died of overwork, Gilbert followed in the same footsteps. While still a young man, he died of overwork and exhaustion, too. That was a second tragedy for Mary and her daughter Irene.

For many years after these tragedies, Mary and her daughter made a living trapping, hunting, and selling fish. With many experiences in the outdoors, Mary became a strong woman, not only physically strong, but mentally powerful. She had developed a strong heart and love for everything.

Concerning the death of her son, Mary recalled she did not know how to help him. Perhaps, if she had known how to use plants for medicinal purposes, she might have saved her husband's and her son's life. Because of those deaths, she vowed to help people when they took sick. She began to practice medicine. In the woods near her home or wherever she went, Mary experimented with herbal remedies and developed many medicines. But she was very careful. She knew which were good and which were bad plants. In time, Mary realized she had a gift which she could use to help the people in her community.

Mary became a local doctor. At all hours of the night, men came to her house to take her to the sick people. Most times she was successful at healing her patients. In addition, Mary also became a midwife. She delivered many babies in their homes. It is said that she never lost any of the newborn babies during delivery, although there were some close calls.

The community of Norway House is separated by rivers. In the fall or spring seasons, Mary had to break ice, or crawl on thin ice, or walk for miles to reach her patients. She sacrificed herself for people. Those who knew her respected Mary for all the things she gave them.

Because Mary was living alone with her daughter, people encouraged her to get married again. About that time, a man lost his wife and was left alone to support his only son. Not long after, Mary agreed life was too hard for her alone and married Paul Fletcher. Irene Kirkness and John Fletcher became step brother and sister.

Mary worked along side her husband for several years, until he took sick and died, too. Left alone with Irene and John, she continued to live the life she knew best. She kept on trapping, fishing, and hunting. When Irene became older, she married Donald Muswagon, while John stayed a single man. Irene had children and her husband was generally around to support them, although there were times he had to leave his family to work elsewhere. But Mary was not far away, and she helped her daughter with her grandchildren.

As Mary's grandchildren became older, Irene and Donald placed them in the Roman Catholic mission school at Jack River. There they learned how to read and write. They also learned the basic skills of living such as growing potatoes, cutting cord wood, and sewing clothes. The Muswagon children spend several years at the mission.



Sunset, God's Lake, c. 1930. Leif Sunde Collection C.A.L. 2214  
(courtesy Manitoba Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

In the meantime, their parents moved to God's Lake where Donald was employed in winter fishing. He was a hard worker and made a good living. While Donald and Irene were away, Mary remained near Norway House where she continued to practise her medicine. People needed her so they did not let her go far.

The older children stayed in residence at the mission, but some weekends they visited their grandmother who was always glad to see them. On one such weekend, when they arrived home, they found out their mother and father were at God's Lake. Mary was home but she was busy hauling up logs from a point down the river. The children ran down to look for her. Not far away, they could see her boat. There she was pulling on the oars, and behind her she dragged about fifteen logs. The children admired their grandmother's energy.

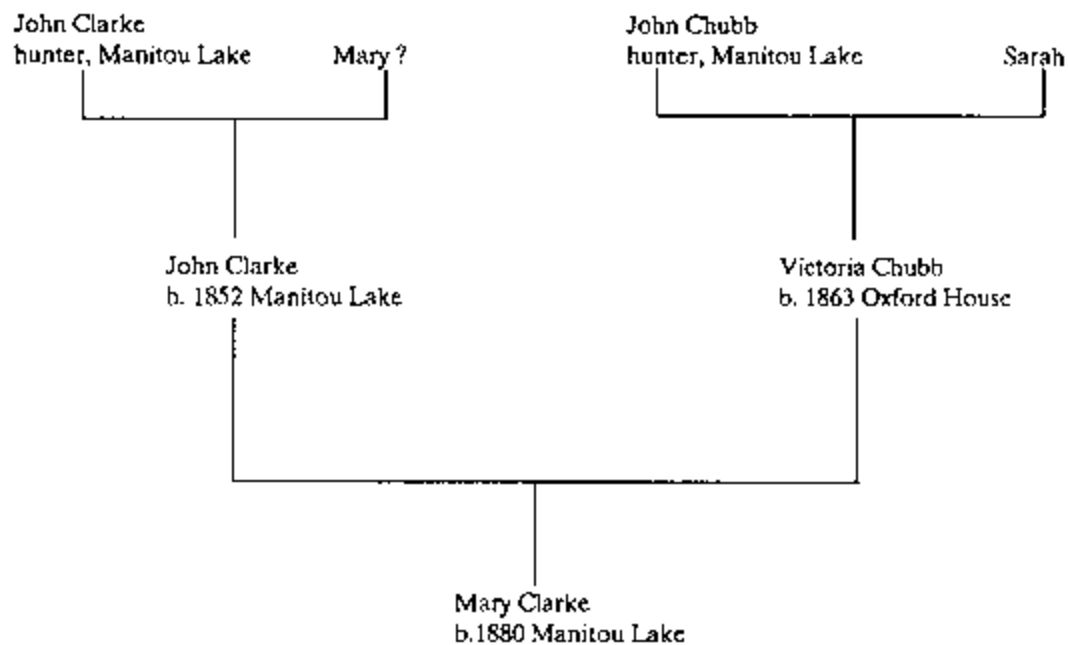
As she came ashore, Mary began to pull the logs onto dry land. The children tried to help her but were told to stand aside. Mary did all the heavy work. Those logs were green and heavy. After leaving them on the dry ground, she pushed her boat out again to get more logs. Day after day, she hauled logs. She was building a house for herself.

While Mary was working on her home, Donald and Irene arrived back at Norway House. Donald told her not to do any more hard work. She listened but began to haul wood for the stove instead. Shortly afterwards Donald completed Mary's log cabin. Winter came quite quickly and Mary moved into her new home. She lived there for a good part of the winter.

One day, Mary went out to gather wood. With an axe and a blanket to carry the wood, she set off. Most of the afternoon, she spent time cutting. When she had enough she threw a blanket full of wood over her back and began to walk back to her house. On the way, she slipped on the icy road and injured herself. She lay there in pain for several hours. By evening, her grandchildren went out to look for her. They found her lying in the snow. All winter she remained indoors recuperating from the bad fall. A year after her accident, Mary was back on her feet and began to do what she could. But the fall had taken away much of her strength. Mary, who intrigued and amazed people, died in her sleep on October 6, 1956.

Those who have seen her remember the old woman from Mission Island. She was the doctor, the helper, and the one who cared for others. Many people loved her. Those who worked near her with her medicine say she could heal all kinds of sicknesses. She made many medicines for others. For many years she knew about cancer. She had tried to beat this disease. The last medicine she was making was to find a cure, but her life ended before she could complete it.

Told by Betsy Apetagon and Irene Muswagon, written by Byron Apetagon and edited by Dave Rosenberg.



## David Packamackan

The name Packamackan (Pa ka má kan) appears in the Hudson's Bay Company records as well as the Treaty Annuity Pay Lists. Other spellings include Pak-a-ma-gan, Pak-a-ma-ghan, Pacaw-maw-chan. There were two brothers at Norway House by that name in the 1870s. The elder brother was named Joseph; the younger, described as an orphan, was named David. Later, the name was changed in the Treaty Annuity Pay Lists to Hammer, the literal meaning of the Cree word packamackan. It is possible that Joseph and David were connected to a Mallette family that lived at Oxford House during the nineteenth century, particularly in view of the fact that descendants have adopted Mallett as their surname.

Joseph Pak-a-ma-gan or Hammer moved with his family to Fisher River in 1883. He had at least nine children. His sons Joseph, Nicholas, and John married and had children. A daughter named Emma Jane seems to have survived infancy, too. At least four boys and a daughter died young.

David remained in Norway House, where he married, Mary Ann, the daughter of George McKay. They had two sons and a daughter of their own, all of whom died young. Their sons died at ages three and five years respectively. Their daughter Maria was sent to the Brandon Industrial School in 1896 at the age of ten years, and had died by 1899.

Donald Muswagon is one of the elders at Norway House. He learned from his experiences while growing up and later used the knowledge obtained from them in his work as a trapper, fisherman, and hunter. He remembers that the old men were often the best teachers. He observed these elders and listened to their stories and teachings. One old man who taught him much was David Packamackan. Here are his memories of him.

As a boy, I saw David around the community. I admired this old man because he shared many stories. David's name was Mallett, not Packamackan. I believe he came from the lands around York Factory. In those days, many people had nicknames which were given according to their physical characteristics and appearance, behavior, attitude, and beliefs. David was better known as Packamacken. I don't know why he was called that.

David's wife was Mary Ann. They did not have children of their own, but they raised a boy called Thomas. When Thomas became older, he moved away from Norway House and settled at Wabowden where his descendants are still living.

David and Mary Ann made their home at what is now Paupanekis Point. His neighbors were Albert Sinclair and Edward Paupanekis. I remember there were big gardens there, and one of them belonged to David. He grew potatoes in his gardens. I remember seeing him weeding and laying soil over the potato rows. Every harvest month, David had plenty of potatoes which he stored for the winter. He would give some away also.

In his younger days when David was still healthy and strong, he worked as an oarsman in a York boat. He made the long trips to York Factory with other men such as James Muswagon, John Mistatim, and John Apetagon. David had many stories of his trips as a York boat oarsman. He also worked as a trapper.

### Life as a Trapper

I remember David used to go trapping. His trapline was at a lake called Nikihtawá Sákahikan near Gunosao River, about eighty kilometres east of Norway House. He was a gifted hunter, trapper, and fisherman - one of the best in the community. He always collected plenty of furs which he sold to the Hudson's Bay Company.

David also trapped along the Gunosao River, Gunosao Lake, and the surrounding little lakes. I remember he talked about a small lake he called Ká kiyáskoskák, meaning "a lake with many seagulls." This was the furthest place from Norway House he went trapping.

I remember David used to go by himself when he went out trapping. He told me about the times he had when he was alone. He did it mainly because he knew the land very well and liked to do things at his own pace and ability. He always set a time for leaving and returning to his home at Paupanekis Point.



**Paupanekis Point in Winter**

### **David's Dogs and Dog Teams**

I remember my people used to talk about David Packamackan's dogs and dog teams. He had many of them. They were working dogs and very powerful. Since they were always tied up, they were aggressive as well. In those days, the dogs were very important and David treated his well, feeding and grooming them often.

He used six dogs to a team. The leaders were very obedient and intelligent. After they had travelled over a winter trail once, David did not have to command them to go or stop because they were so well trained.

My people used to say David's wife was also a good dog team musher. She would accompany him on some of his hunting and trapping expeditions up the Gunosao River.

### **A Fast Hunting Trip**

I remember one morning, David harnessed his dogs. He said he was going up to the lake to do some hunting but I had no idea he was planning to return the same day as the lake is quite a distance from Norway House. It was almost sunset when I saw him pulling up with his dogs and the sled full of caribou meat. It was then he told us he went to Níkihtawá Sákahikan to hunt caribou. Those were some dogs he owned.



**Jimmy Robertson and Dog Team.** Leif Sunde Collection EP 2146 6614  
(courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)

### **Fishing along Big Playgreen Lake and Whiskeyjack**

Some winters, David fished for sturgeon at a spot on Big Playgreen Lake. David used to say there was an abundance of sturgeon in the lakes. There were fish camps at Whiskeyjack Narrows, John Bull's, Tait's Island, Sandy Point, Yankee Point, and at Warren's Landing as well.

Although David worked as a sturgeon fisherman, he also hauled freshly caught fish by dog team to Yankee Point and Warren's Landing where they were kept until one of the old lake boats transported them to Winnipeg. I remember David telling me his dogs were so strong that harnesses had to be doubled because they sometimes broke on the trail. The old boats usually arrived in early summer to haul the fish away. When the ice became weak in the spring the sturgeon were kept at the fish camps until all the ice cleared away completely. Later the big boats would travel to all the camps as far as Whiskeyjack Rapids to pick up the remaining sturgeon.

David worked as a sturgeon fisherman from early fall to Christmas. After the festive season, he went trapping. When he was not fishing or trapping, he was out hunting caribou at Nikihtawá Sákahikan.

### **Hudson's Bay Fur Buyer**

David used to talk about the times he was employed as a fur buyer with the Hudson's Bay Company. Because he had such good dogs, the Company hired him to go to the outlying bush camps. In those days, people had little reason to remain in Norway House during the winter season. Winter was a time families made a living on the traplines. Some families went far; other families went farther away still. This type of seasonal movement made it difficult for them to make trips back to Norway House to sell their furs. Local men were hired as traders, and David was one of these men. He went all over the traplines with goods and supplies, returning later with many furs to the fort. Some of the outlying traplines he visited were Gunosao Lake, Gunosao River, Molson Lake, Whiskeyjack, and John Bull's.



## Hunting for Moose

When David was older, I used to go hunting with him. We did not go very far but by being with him, I learned many things. Here is one story I recall clearly from a hunting trip.

Late one summer, David and I went hunting for moose. We had not gone far in his small canvas canoe before stopping to have some bannock and tea. Suddenly, while we were making fire, he told me to be still. He had heard something. I did not hear anything, but I kept quiet.

Not far away, four moose appeared and wandered into the water. We kept quiet and watched them. They were beautiful. A whole family of four moose. This was the first time I had seen a family so large. There was a cow, a calf, a young bull, and an older bull. Slowly we moved into the canoe and paddled towards them. I sat in the front while David steered. When we were close enough, the moose stood there looking at us.

"I'll shoot the cow and the calf first," he said. One by one the two moose fell into the water. Then David turned around and laughed.

"Should I shoot the others?" he asked me.

"Sure, we're hunting, aren't we?" I said very seriously.

"Hurry, shoot them," I said urgently as I saw the two bulls moving towards the shore.

"Let's get closer; bullets cost money," he said, still laughing softly.

By now the moose were almost on the shore. One by one, he shot the two bulls.

## David's Teachings

David taught me some things about hunting moose on other trips:

When a hunter is shooting a moose, the first shot is very important. The first bullet should do the work, killing the moose instantly to prevent longer pain.

If a moose is wounded and runs away, the hunter should not follow it immediately. This allows the moose to stop and lay down, rather than running a great distance.

## Old David at John Bull's

David took ill when he was older and although sick for some time, he still refused to retire. He was very dedicated and had a strong will to do things. His home was near John Bull's where I lived with my family. I used to see him do some trapping and fishing. He also chopped wood but at a much slower pace.

It was not long after returning home from John Bull's that David Packamackan died. I believe he was buried at the Roman Catholic cemetery. These are a few things I can remember hearing by being around David Packamackan.

Told by Donald Muswagon Sr.  
and written by Byron Apetagon, 1988



York Boats from Oxford House landing at Norway House, c. 1921-1934  
Gordon Collection EP839 6371, 7886 (courtesy Manitoba Museum of  
Man and Nature)

### James Muswagon - Disputes on the York Boats

"My grandfather James used to tell stories of his experiences when he was an oarsman on a York boat. Sometimes men got angry at each other during the long trips. I remember my grandfather telling a story about a time when he and another man by the name of McIvor got into a dispute. The dispute led into a fist fight between the two men.

"It all began when my grandfather was working in a York boat bailing out water. McIvor came onto the boat and spoke harshly to him. My grandfather did not pay any attention, until McIvor became angry and started to push him around. Annoyed, my grandfather became angry, too, and hit McIvor on the head. Knocked unconscious, McIvor fell back and splashed into the water. He floated downstream where other men jumped in and pulled him to safety. I remember my grandfather saying McIvor never laid a hand on him from that time.

"My grandfather had paralysis in his right hand; therefore, he could not use it as effectively as his left hand. He used his left hand most of the time. I remember his saying he had a dream about that hand when he was a boy.

"In the dream, a black bear appeared before him. The bear told him he would lose the use of his right hand. It also warned him he should be careful how he used his left hand. If he did misuse it, something terrible would happen. My grandfather always remembered the dream during the times he worked as a York boat oarsman. All through the years, his left hand became very strong.

"In those days, York boats left Norway House in groups of two, three, four, or five. Sometimes there were more. When groups of York boats left, there were bound to be races and contests to see which would reach their destinations first. Sometimes men who were beaten became frustrated and angry because they had been defeated.

"This happened one day when my grandfather's York boat crew arrived at York Factory ahead of the others. While they were anchoring their boat, a second vessel arrived. A rival oarsman came over to my grandfather's boat and attacked him. My grandfather tried to ignore him but he kept pushing and calling him names. Finally my grandfather lost his temper. With his left hand, he grasped the man above his right hip on the fleshy part and squeezed him. The man keeled over and collapsed.

"It was then he remembered the bear's warning in the dream when he was a boy. The injured man suffered the injury for a long, long time."

Shared by Donald Muswagon  
Written by Byron Apetagon, 1987



York Factory Buildings, 1889, HBCA Collection 1987/13-33, N6341  
(courtesy Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

## John Henry Muswagon and His Family

John Henry Muswagon was a local man who worked for some time with the Hudson's Bay Company. On one of his trips to York Factory, he returned with his fiancée. Her name was Elizabeth Allen, a woman of Scottish ancestry. Upon their arrival at Norway House, the couple married, settled down permanently, and raised a family.

Their children grew up learning about the ways of the wilderness. When the children were still young, John Henry began to do more travelling. Sometimes he would take one of his boys to see other communities. When the children were older, they left home and raised their own families. They, too, taught their children about survival and how to make a living from the wilderness.

### Richard Muswagon

Richard was one of the sons who spend some time alone working for himself when he was a young man. He applied the knowledge and teachings his parents taught him. Richard loved the outdoors very much. He spend much time trapping, fishing, and hunting. However, it was not long before his life in the outdoors would end; health problems put an end to that lifestyle.

When Richard was old enough, he married a widow from Oxford House named Barbara Wood. She had been raised by her grandparents because both her parents died while she was still very young. Her maiden name was Colon. From her first marriage she had two children named Thomas and Margaret. It is believed her first husband died from over-work and exhaustion, a type of death common to many men in the old days. Upon her husband's death, Barbara was left alone to support her two children by herself.

A man by the name of George Balfour saw the woman in Oxford House and felt sorry for her. George asked Barbara to return to Norway House with him where she could do some housework for his family. She agreed and left to live with her new family there.



**George Balfour, Interpreter, with his Dog Team.**  
Gordon Collection EP840 6373 (courtesy Manitoba  
Museum of Man and Nature)

After being in Norway House for some time, Barbara met Richard Muswagon. Not long after, the two were married and had more children. Their names were John James, Isabel, Alfred, William Frederick, Elijah, Sarah, and Gertie. There were health problems in the family and three children, John James, Isabel, and Elijah, became ill. They were taken away to The Pas and Brandon for treatment of tuberculosis. None of the three ever returned. John James and Elijah are now buried at Clearwater Lake and Isabel lies in Brandon. Years afterwards, Richard died from tuberculosis too. At that time many other families also lost their relatives and kinfolks in the same way.

Barbara had many trials. It showed in her eyes as she used to look at other people. Despite the deaths of her children from the marriage with Richard, Barbara still faced more. She lost her oldest son from her first marriage, and tuberculosis once again was the killer. A few years ago, Barbara went to live at the Old Folks Home in Norway House. It was there that she died.

Barbara's family background at Oxford House is not well known. According to her son who still lives in Norway House, she did not talk too much about her past. The few times she did speak about it, she said she had a brother by the name of George Colon who lived at Oxford House. It is also believed Barbara had family ties with the Amos Colon branch. According to her son, she used to call Amos her uncle. [In fact, George Colon was her first cousin, and Amos Colon a more distantly related cousin.]

### **Alfred Muswagon**

Richard and Barbara eventually allowed their children to receive some education at the Roman Catholic Mission School. The education meant a new type of learning, unlike the wilderness. Their son Alfred tells about his experiences.

"I was admitted into Roman Catholic Mission school quite early. I did not receive enough schooling to read and to speak English well. Yet somehow, I did learn to apply some of the English and reading skills.

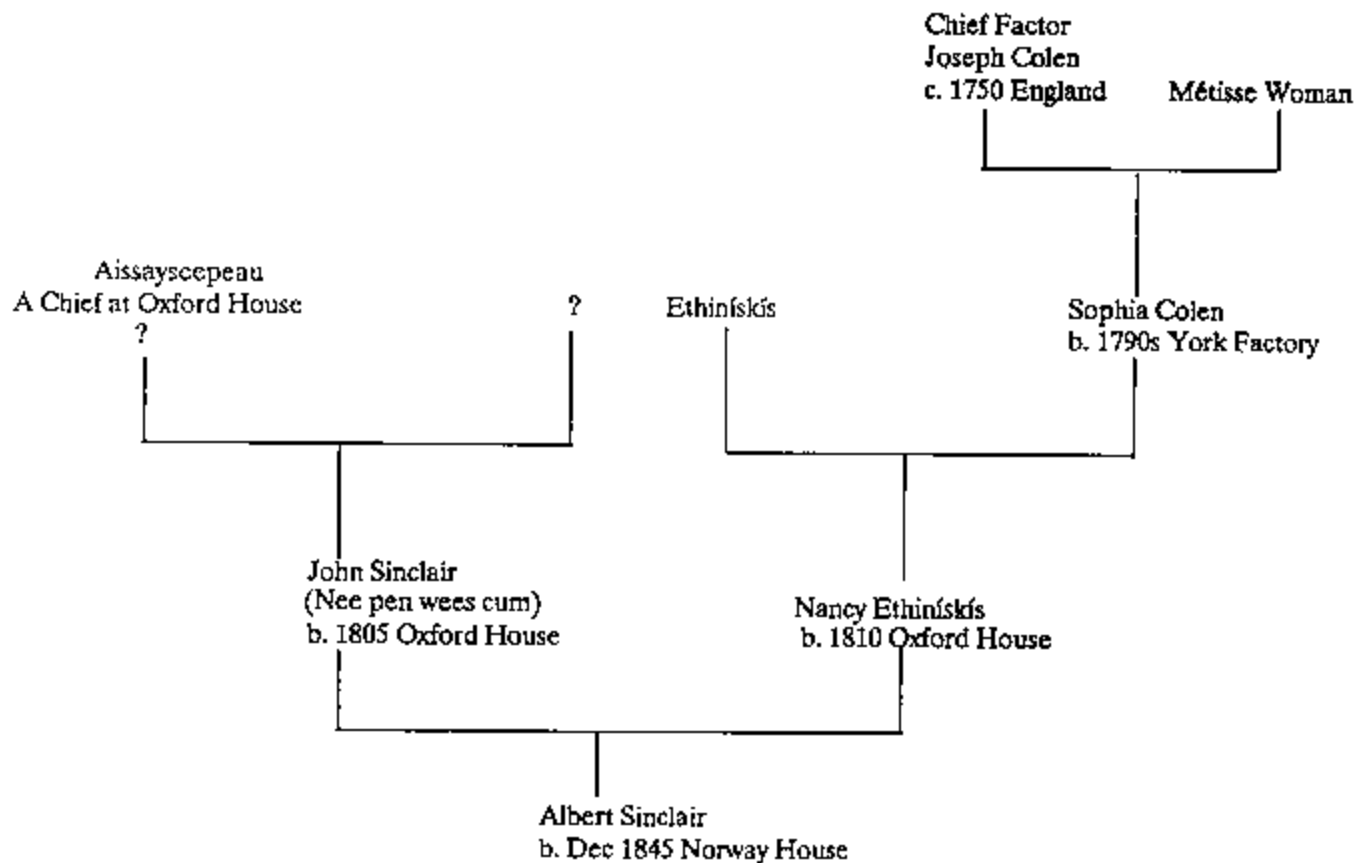
"My main education was to learn how to carry out physical work that needed to be done. Day after day, I worked in the barns with other boys. We cleaned out the barns as well as the potato house and the church. I also learned how to till the soil, and plant crops in the gardens which the mission used to have. All year long, I worked with the older men and boys hauling wood. We chopped and piled it because we were always told to keep a large supply of cord wood for heating the Roman Catholic Mission buildings.

"In the end, I did not stay very long. I left the school and began to use some of the skills I had learned from my parents and elders. Every winter, our whole family used to move up the Gunosao River and on to Round Lake where we stayed all winter. We hunted, trapped, and fished. At other times we helped each other build log houses including those for the other families who were making a living there, too. Later, I married Ann Marie Budd. Ann's mother is from Island Lake, her father from Norway House. This is all I can share for now."

Shared by Alfred Muswagon, Norway House

Written by Byron Apetagon, Native Studies, 1987

## Chief Albert Sinclair



Albert Sinclair was born at Norway House in 1845, the son of John Sinclair (Nee pen wees cum) and Nancy Ethiniskis or Colen, a granddaughter of Chief Factor Joseph Colen. His parents lived at Oxford House until about 1840, when they moved to Norway House. He married Sarah Murdock in 1872. Most of her family moved to Fisher River after treaty. Albert and Sarah had no children of their own.

Albert Sinclair was the third chief of Norway House after David Rundle and Thomas Balfour Misteagun. After being chief from 1899 to 1907, Albert retired to his home. He died in 1908. Today Albert and his wife lie in their graves at Paupanekis Point.

Sources: Norway House First Nation Annuity pay lists for dates of Chieftainship, and to church and Hudson's Bay Company records for family information.

## **Memories of Albert Sinclair**

When I was growing up in Norway House, I often listened to old people discussing local issues while they visited each other. One of the people they mentioned was a former chief named Albert Sinclair. I think he migrated to Norway House from what is now called Grand Rapids. [see note at beginning] People used to say he was an outspoken person. When he became chief, he spoke with much authority.

Albert Sinclair was married to Sarah, who was better known as Sarah Mojo around Norway House. I think she came from around Fisher River. Albert and Sarah did not have children themselves, but while they were living at Warrens Landing, they kept a boy whom they raised as their own. His name was George Hart, but he used Sinclair as his last name when he was older.

Albert was a hardworking man. Even when he was chief, he always found some time to return to his trapline. I remember hearing people saying Albert and his wife Sarah used to trap at William River near Limestone Bay. They travelled regularly back and forth from there to Norway House to sell fish and fur.

People said that Albert and Sarah each had a dog team when they went to their traplines. Old Sarah was a good dogmusher herself in her time. She worked like a man. She had to have that quality in those days because everyone had to do heavy work to survive. The woman had to do a man's work because the men were always away on hunting and canoe freighting expeditions to faraway places. The women were left behind for days and weeks at a time to keep their families.

I remember people saying Albert and Sarah used to have a big garden on a piece of ground at Paupanekis Point. During harvest season, they used to store away their crops for winter use.

Later in my life, I became involved in local politics. In my own judgement, Albert Sinclair was a strong chief. I say this because when I was part of the leadership, we ran into many difficulties and conflicts over governmental issues. It was while I was there, I heard many old people making statements about former Chief Albert Sinclair. One statement was, "If only Chief Albert Sinclair were still here, he would have made a strong stand on this particular issue." I used to hear this comment many times and it told me Chief Albert Sinclair was a powerful chief.

Information shared by Irene Muswagon  
Written by Byron Apetagon, Norway House

## **The Older Thomas Colon**

Thomas Colon Sr. lived on Towers Island where the Captain family now lives. Thomas Colon originally came from around Oxford House. His wife's name was Catherine.

In his younger years, Thomas Colon worked for the United Church at Rossville where he was a preacher. He was a faithful servant of the Church.

I used to hear my old people saying he kept his congregation listening at all times while he preached. When Thomas grew older, his work as a preacher almost ended as he became handicapped by paralysis in the lower part of his mouth.

I remember the old people used to say he was cursed by some people who were apparently passing through Norway House and had decided to go to a church service. In that particular sermon, Thomas had preached a strong sermon which was not too well accepted by the visitors. With some feeling of animosity, the visitors left and cursed Thomas Colon because they thought he had been saying negative things about them.

After this incident took place, Thomas Colon became paralyzed in the mouth area. When he tried to speak, he spoke with a bad slur.

Long ago, people could do things to hurt each other. I used to hear my old people telling many stories about people cursing each other. Sometimes these misunderstandings and conflicts led to feuds and the use of bad medicines. This belief in cursing was once widespread before the churches became stronger all over this land.

Children were taught to respect, treat the old people kindly, and not say things which could hurt other people's feelings. This is one of the reasons why the people of long ago told their children to behave and act accordingly to what was best for them.

## **Thomas Colon Keeps Dogs**

One of the fur buyers who used to have a store in Norway House was a man named Old Móniyáwiniw. Móniyáwiniw's real name was John Hyer. He was a whiteman who travelled to many winter camps and communities where he bought and traded fur for goods, food, and merchandise. For this type of work, Hyer had good working dogs which he used in the winter.

In the summers, local men were hired to keep the dogs for the owners. Since Hyer was a store keeper, he did not have time to take care of them himself. One of the men hired on was Thomas Colon Sr.

Every summer, Thomas Colon and his wife took Hyer's dogs to one of the islands on the small Playgreen Lake. Thomas fed and took care of the dogs there all summer long.

## **Old Móniyáwiniw**

I remember seeing old Móniyáwiniw. He was already old and had white hair. He moved very slowly when he served his customers. People found this humorous. When someone moved very slowly, he or she was called Old Móniyáwiniw.

Because Old Móniyáwiniw had lived in Norway House for years, he learned to speak some Cree. There were other whitemen who had stores in Norway House, and they learned, too. Roderick Ross, for example, spoke excellent Cree. Most of these fur traders and storeowners were single



men when they came here. It wasn't long after they arrived that they began to marry local Cree women. Often these women did not speak much English, but they soon learned from their husbands.

One of these men was Big Bill Campbell, who married Nancy Hart Munroe of Oxford House. They lived in Norway House and are Maggie Gunns' parents. Another was Charlie Isbister who married Agnes (Aggie) Keamiwininiw. They are Irene Atkinsons' parents. Roderick Ross's wife was Charlotte Robertson.

### **William Thomas Towers**

While Thomas Colon and his wife, Nancy, were living on the island at Jack River, they raised a young boy by the name of William Thomas Towers. When William Towers was older, he worked at Warrens Landing as a fisherman for one of the fisheries. When he was not fishing, William Towers was out trapping and hunting. He made a good living.

Later, he became involved in a leadership role in the community. He worked as a councillor from 1919 to 1923, chief from August 1928 to 1932, and councillor again from August 1936 to 1939. William Thomas Towers was the seventh chief of the Norway House Indian Band. William Thomas Towers was well respected by the people of Norway House. The island where he grew up with the Thomas Colon Sr.'s family is now named in his honor - Towers Island.

Shared by Irene and Donald Muswagon,  
and written by Byron Apetagon, 1988.

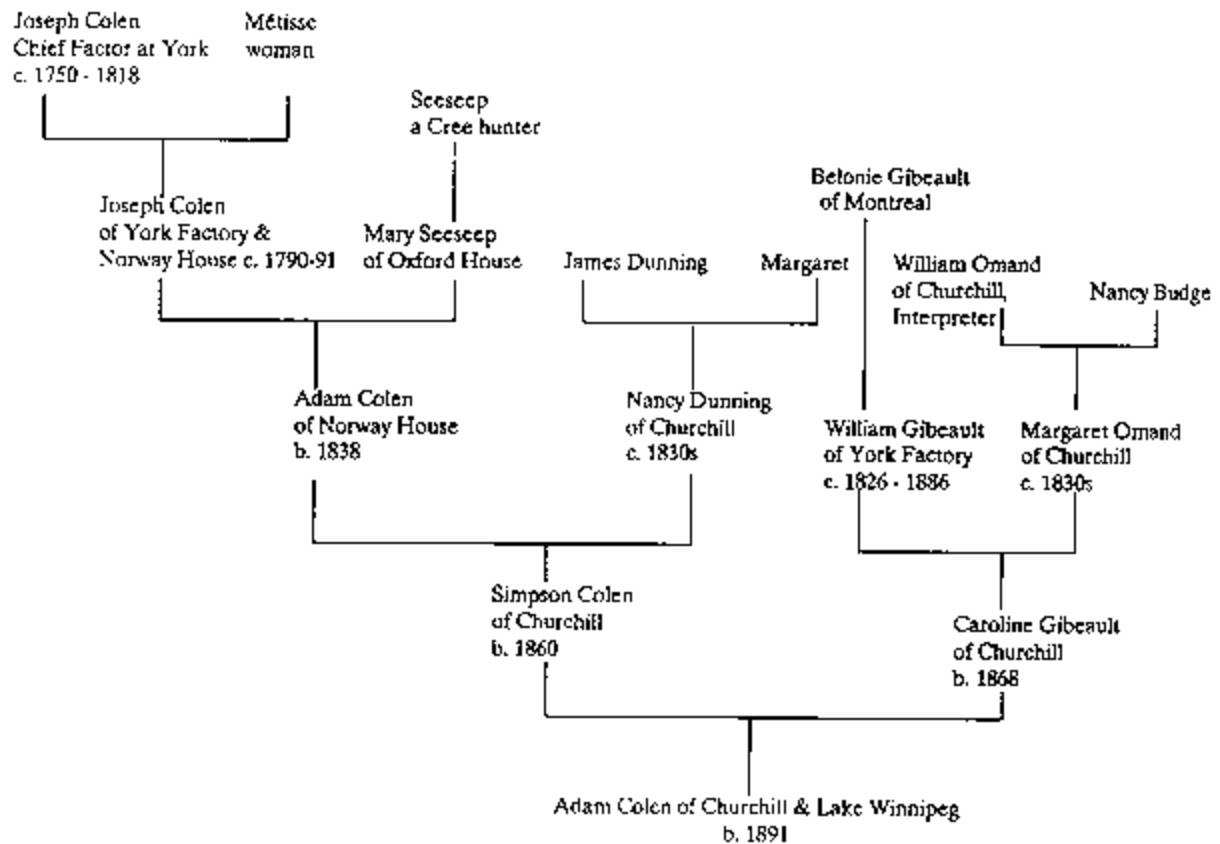


H.C. Hyer, c. 1920, Leif Sunde Collection EP 2028  
7812 (courtesy Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature)



R. Ross, Berrum, J. Hart, c. 1922, Leif Sunde  
Collection EP 2021 7855 (courtesy Manitoba  
Museum of Man and Nature)

## Adam Colon



Adam Colon was born at Churchill, where his father Simpson worked for the Hudson's Bay Company, but his grandfather, another Adam Colon, had been born in Norway House and retired here in the 1890s after working for the Hudson's Bay Company at Churchill for nearly forty years. The younger Adam also worked for the Hudson's Bay Company on and off for about thirty years. When not employed by the Company, he used to come to Warrens Landing to fish during the summers. Donald Muswagon Sr. recalls him as a small, light built man, much like the famous Amos Colon, a distant cousin, who was remarkable for his strength and endurance. Donald also recalls he was an excellent jigger. The following stories about him have been shared by Henry Colon, a son of the above mentioned Amos.

### Crossing Thin Ice

Adam Colon was a mail carrier. He travelled all over to inland communities and as far as the Red River Settlement delivering mail for important people. In those days winter travel was by dogteam.

One late spring, Adam and another man were returning from Red River. They were caught in a warm spell which melted the snow and ice rather quickly. When both dogteams arrived at Poplar River, they couldn't go beyond because the rivers were too dangerous to cross, especially with heavy loads. Adam and his partner left their dogs at Poplar and began to walk to Norway House. The men walked along the shores till they came to a narrower river north of Poplar River. Thinking the river was too dangerous to cross, his partner was reluctant to move forward.

Adam told the man to follow him. He instructed him to step into Adam's every footprint as he crossed the river. The man was quite frightened as he walked behind. Nevertheless, both men finally reached the other side and continued to walk to Norway House.

When they arrived at home, Adam's partner told people the ice was dark blue and dangerous. He told them not only that Adam was brave to go across on such weak ice, but also that he was able to read the ice as he walked along. The man said he would never have done such a thing himself if he had been alone.



**Nancy and Henry Colon of Norway House**

### **Beyond Belief**

The following story I'm sharing with you was passed on to me by an old man named Charlie Saunders. It is difficult to believe, but it was told so we could understand that the capabilities of aboriginal people were great in the past. Today we are intrigued by the accomplishments of the whiteman and forget that Indian people have some of their own tales to tell. To try to explain, I want to share this story I heard long ago about a man named Adam Colon.

Apparently Adam was out on a trapping or fishing expedition one winter, possibly on Lake Winnipeg or Molson Lake, when he survived a dangerous situation, an extraordinary feat which

took courage and determination on his part.

One day, he left his camp and told the others with him that he was going to check his traps. At one point in his journey, he had to travel on the lake. While making the crossing, Adam came upon an ice ridge. Ice ridges occur when the ice on a large lake cracks and piles up through the force of strong winds. Sometimes it piles up, the ice leaves a cavity underneath. Apparently Adam was crossing one of these ridges, when the ice crumbled and broke free under him and he fell into the chamber below. He was helpless. Even though he could move to some degree in the cavity, he could not get out.

He remained in that cavity for what must have seemed ages, not knowing whether more ice movement would crush him, or cause cold water to rush up from below. He had to keep himself warm by constant movement, and sleep was impossible. It was not until three days later that his companions became worried about his absence. The men began the search. They followed his tracks right to the hole into which he had fallen. They used a long pole to pull Adam out of the crevice which could have become an icy tomb.

The men were amazed that Adam had survived and still had enough strength to work again.

This story is hard to believe. It was told to me, so that I would know Indian people have the wisdom and patience to succeed in doing things for themselves, even under the most dangerous circumstances.

Told by Henry Colon Sr. and  
written by Byron Apetagon, 1988





