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SASKATCHEWAN
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SASKATCHEWAN
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INTERVIEWER: CAROL PEARLSTONE
INTERPRETER:
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mrs. Ranger was born in Batoche around 1892. Her parents were farmers and her husband a ferryman.
- Account told by her mother of the Riel Rebellion of 1885.
- Childhood memories of Gabriel Dumont.
- Effects on the Metis community of the Depression and the two world wars.
- Her impressions of how the Metis are treated by various outside groups.

Carol: ...born in Batoche here and what did your parents do here?

Adelaide: Everything, they do. All kinds of things (laughs) to live. They got lots of cattle, they don't use any more.

Carol: They farmed then, eh?

Adelaide: Yes.

Carol: And how much land did they have?

Adelaide: They had two (quarter sections) but they sold one you see. They didn't sell it, I guess. They gave it to my brother Charlie.

Carol: Two quarter sections?

Adelaide: Yes.

Carol: Two river lots?

Adelaide: Yes, two river lots. (translated) He gave it to my brother because my brother was too young to get a section. In those days they had the right to one piece of land and so Dad, when he first came, he gave ten dollars for a river lot. And then later on, for a while we were allowed a second river lot and that is why my father got a second lot. My brother had been too young to get one so when he got married, he gave him his second river lot.

Carol: Were they both Metis? Both your father and your mother Metis?

Adelaide: Yes. (translated) My father was Metis but on my mother's side, my mother's father was French-Canadian, from Quebec. My mother's father was named Dumont - he was French-Canadian from Quebec. My mother was a Metis and her name was Henriette Nault. She was my grandmother, this one.

Carol: What about your great-grandparents, do you know?

Adelaide: (translated) I don't know on my father's side, my grandparents, their names. My father's parents came here because it was a whole bunch that came together from Winnipeg. My mother's parents did not come at all. I don't know - I've never seen them. (English) But they came and saw my mother, but not to stay here.

Carol: But they came to see her?

Adelaide: Yes, they came to see her but not to stay here.

Carol: Do you know which ancestors are Indian?

Adelaide: (translated) No, they never talked about it, our background. My mother called herself Metis but, to me, I think my parents - my grandparents - were both French-Canadians.

Carol: Did you go to school?

Adelaide: (translated) I went to school to the age of twelve. After that my mother was too sick so I stayed home.

Carol: What grade?

Adelaide: (translated) I don't know what grade I went up to because in those days we didn't have such things as grades. What I do know now is that I learned that at school. I know I can read and write but I learned on my own quite a bit because

at the age of twelve you really don't know that much. I don't need anyone today to carry out my business things.

Carol: Do you read and write English and French?

Adelaide: (translated) I can write both French and English. I prefer writing in French. Two of my daughters don't write French, so when I write to them I write English.

Carol: When did you get married?

Adelaide: (translated) It has been 54 years since I got married.

Carol: How old were you when you got married?

Adelaide: (translated) I was 28 years old.

Carol: And how many children did you have?

Adelaide: (translated) I have had twelve children. Seven are still alive. And three died as children. And I've had two miscarriages, and that counts as twelve children.

Carol: Were they sick when they were children or...?

Adelaide: (translated) The first child died because... I believe it was measles. My husband was a ferryman for 14 years. It was so damp on the river that they died from complications, things like that. I got him to a doctor but it was too late.

Carol: And the others?

Adelaide: The same things.

Carol: Did there used to be more people living in Batoche?

Adelaide: (translated) Yeah, there was a lot of people. It was nice to have so many people close to you. Nowadays it's kind of lonesome.

Carol: Why did they all leave?

Adelaide: (translated) They were dumb that's all. They just sold everything - what did that give them?

Carol: They couldn't make a living?

Adelaide: (translated) They were dumb that they sold. They were just crazy that they left. Yes. They all had animals. They could have lived - maybe not very good living, but, well, I mean, a wealthy living, but they would have been good living. Because many years besides their farm, they used to find jobs, outside jobs. You know what halfbreed Metis are like. (laughs) The old people were more willing to stay in their old homes

but it's the young people that aren't satisfied to stay - they sell their land for no reason.

Carol: Do you remember when you were younger the old people talking about the Rebellion?

Adelaide: (translated) Yeah, Dad used to talk about it, and especially my Mom used to talk about the Rebellion - she told me about how she had run away. At Bellevue there is a big hill and she said she went up there and she had to carry her kid. And when they stop, they had to come back, all they come back, you know.

Carol: They were scared?

Adelaide: (translated) Yes. But they had nothing. They had the house and they burned it all.

Carol: Your Mom's house?

Adelaide: Yes.

Carol: What was your mother's name, your maiden name in other words?

Adelaide: Pilon.

Carol: And they burnt down her house?

Adelaide: (translated) They lost everything but my mother had been lucky enough to think of bringing a trunkful of clothes to the church here. And they were able to save that.

Carol: And they didn't burn the church?

Adelaide: (translated) No, they didn't burn the church.

Translator: I asked her if the soldiers seemed to be against the church, how come they didn't burn it, but she said they didn't seem to bother that area.

Carol: How many houses were...

Adelaide: (translated) My parents used to say what a tough time they had during that Rebellion. And they had a little boy at the time. It was a baby boy. My mother ran away with him. The women used to go more or less in groups and run away. But the men were not allowed to. They would not let them go, so they stayed behind. (English) And one day they go and not very far from the Lepine's place here, down here, my dad say that they put all of us stand up. And we were there, he say, you see? All, maybe ten, something like this. I can't tell you all the names they were. And the police come and they ask all them everything, you see? And they had to talk to say this, well, we thought that they were going to send like that and...

Translator: And shoot them?

Adelaide: No, no, and cross-questioned...

Carol: These were the women?

Adelaide: Only the men.

Carol: They lined up the men?

Adelaide: Yes.

Translator: But they didn't kill them, they just questioned them?

Adelaide: No, no, they questioned them.

Translator: But they were scared, the men?

Adelaide: Oh, for sure they were scared.

Carol: Did any of them get hurt? Did they hurt any of them?

Adelaide: No, not that time. But up till that I guess, I suppose they finish. I don't know when they finish. I don't remember but Mom and Dad, they tell us all that, you see? Where they pass. Yeah. Was pretty hard with the boy in his arm.

Carol: How many houses got burned down?

Adelaide: I don't know how many houses but they come back at Pilon's place, here, you see? In the prairie, and there was a whole fire there. And he killed a little calf. And he say when he come back he say that he was cooking outside, you know, the meat. And the first one, he say to Mom, he say, "Come you, you have the first. You have got the baby and you give something to the baby."

Translator: Oh, they helped each other.

Adelaide: Yes, they give him some meat you see when they come back. (translated) They really didn't say how many they burned. I know my parent's and another fellow's house (Albert) was burned which was more or less around that section that the houses were burned.

Carol: Why did they burn the houses?

Adelaide: Because they were bad I suppose (laughs). They had nothing - all burned they say. And Mom - her clothes was in the church in a box, something like this. She put that there. They always and very often talked of that. Oh yeah, they talk about the Rebellion.

Translator: Did this make the Metis hate the white?

Adelaide: (translated) They didn't say nothing that way.

Carol: Why did the fighting take place?

Adelaide: I don't know why they were fighting but I don't know. (translated) My parents especially talked about what was little incidents that happened during the Rebellion but they didn't go into anything about why they had fought.

Carol: Was your grandfather or any relative fighting in the Rebellion?

Adelaide: They had to! Because they were forced.

Carol: Which relative of yours?

Adelaide: (translated) My father was in the Rebellion and I was related to quite a few of them in there. There was lots of people in it. (English) There was nobody who WANTED to fight.

Carol: But they had to?

Adelaide: Because they come back here, the first time that they were coming here eh? And they had their little house but they burned. They put the picture outside of the house and they burned, all sent the picture.

Carol: Why did they have to fight?

Adelaide: (translated) I can't tell you why for. Boats used to come with the troops down the river here and they felt they had to defend themselves.

Carol: Did they talk about Gabriel Dumont?

Adelaide: (translated) Oh yes, they talked about Gabriel Dumont, he was the first in there. I remember him, yeah sure, because I saw him many times. And I remember when they used to come to mass, and there was a front pew and that's where he used to sit, right there. And the young kids used to sit upstairs with their teacher, Miss Dora (?), and I remember I always used to always during mass sort of poke the other beside me - and used to point at Gabriel Dumont's bald... because of the bullet wound that used to look funny on top of his head. I used to get (laughing)...

Carol: How did he get the bullet wound?

Adelaide: (translated) Because at the time, he was already white - he had white hair. Yes. And he was bald-headed and there weren't too many bald-headed men and so I used to find that kind of funny.

Carol: Why did he get the bullet wound?

Adelaide: (translated) I don't know how he got the bullet wound, but it was during the battle and he just happened to get in the way of a bullet. And because it was kind of rough, the Metis used to say it was really rough at times. They had to

fight back if they wanted to live.

Carol: Did they talk about him as a leader?

Adelaide: (translated) They really didn't say that much when he was a... I guess he must have been the best guy. He must have been a good leader.

Carol: Did people like him?

Adelaide: (translated) Oh yes. Yeah, they seemed to be proud of him as a Metis. And he must have been a nice guy, because he used to come to mass and everybody talked to him. When he came back from his trips there, he was pretty old. He has

stayed in his little house for a little while. But after that he stayed with his brother, Edouard Dumont. And he often stayed too at Moise Ouellette's, and I figure he might have been his brother-in-law or relative. Something like this, related somehow. They made a great, great big tombstone for him.

Carol: Could he read and write?

Adelaide: (translated) I don't know for sure. He should have been able to.

Carol: Why did he go to the States?

Adelaide: (translated) I don't know why he went to the States then. He didn't really run away, I never heard any talking in that way. Probably some did talk or it could be some that talked that he ran away but I didn't know about it.

Carol: What about Riel, did they talk about Riel?

Adelaide: (translated) No, they didn't talk about Riel the way they did about Gabriel. I don't know why. (laughs) They just talked more about Gabriel. Probably the older ones would talk about him but, you know, when you're a kid you don't occupy yourself with such things.

Translator: I asked her when she would see him if she thought of him as a leader, that he had done a great thing for his people, and things like that. And she said, "No," she said, "I was just a child and..."

Adelaide: I was just a child, you know, and - I saw him as a friend. I know it was Gabriel but I don't know how it was. (laughs)

Translator: You didn't think of him as special in any way?

Adelaide: Yes, yes, yes.

Carol: Do you remember the years of the Depression?

Adelaide: (translated) During the Depression my husband got a job as ferryman. He was a drunkard, but still he managed to keep his job. And so I didn't suffer during the Depression because he always had this steady job. I never asked money from the municipality, never got relief.

Translator: I asked her why they didn't ask for relief and she said they didn't like to beg for money.

Carol: What about the other people in the area - were any of them on relief?

Adelaide: (translated) Many, there were lots. There was lots of people, yes.

Carol: Did any of them have trouble getting enough to eat?

Adelaide: (translated) I think they managed to sustain.

Carol: Why were things worse then in the 1930s than before?

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Translator: I asked her what caused the Depression - why they had less money and less food. She says she doesn't know.

Carol: What was she talking about?

Translator: She was just explaining that the reason that they were not too bad was because they had the ferry and that they, they thought of it as a disgrace to ask for money.

Adelaide: I never went to the municipality for money.

Carol: If you would have had to go the municipality for money, what would you have done?

Adelaide: (translated) I wouldn't have gone because my Dad - we don't get nothing from the municipality, not a cent. I can say that I've never gone to the municipality for money, but my father would help me out whenever we needed extras. If my father had been poor, then I would have been forced to ask for money.

Carol: Do you remember the years of the First World War?

Adelaide: (translated) My husband went to war in 1920. He went to France, a soldier. (English) He came back in 1920. He left in 1916, I guess.

Carol: So he was gone for four years?

Adelaide: Yes. I got his paper here.

Carol: Why did he go?

Adelaide: You know how the young is, heh? He went to talk together - with (Robert Cornoyier?) and they say, "We'll go," just like this. They were not obliged to go, you see.

Carol: Do you know why they fought - why there was fighting?

Adelaide: (translated) No, we did not know why they were fighting but you know how young people are - they just get things in their head and then they - I've got his papers - his discharges and...

Carol: I'll look at it after.

Carol: And what about the Second War?

Translator: I was wondering you know, if she had been married during the war - how she lived. But she said she hadn't married. But she said that's the reason she got married older. Because she had been going with him before the war, and that she waited for him. And she said all the time that he was out there, he would write to her.

Carol: And what about the Second War? Did anybody from around here go to that?

Adelaide: (translated) No, because in the Second World War, they had had enough - and that any - the ones who did go now seemed to be forced to go, and that they didn't ...

Carol: They didn't want to go?

Adelaide: (translated) No, the Second World War wasn't like the first one. They were - they didn't feel like going - not like the first one where they wanted to go just for adventure.

Carol: Do you know what they were fighting about then?

Adelaide: (translated) The people didn't talk about it - maybe some but not a whole bunch.

Carol: How did they force them to go? You said they didn't want to go but how...?

Adelaide: (translated) They were obliged to go. The police would come and pick them up.

Carol: How did they treat them when they picked them up?

Adelaide: (translated) They seemed to treat them quite well as far as food and clothing. But they trained them pretty hard. (laughs)

Translator: Oh, I asked her why this time they didn't want to go. And she said, "I guess they were scared they'd get killed, and besides that, many left their women or girl friends

behind."

Carol: Were things better...?

Adelaide: (translated) Some from here had gone across, but they got there and the war had ended. Therefore they were brought back and they did not fight.

Carol: Was it easier to make a living in those years than in the Thirties?

Adelaide: (translated) Yes, yes. During the war, we didn't have any trouble.

Carol: Do you know why things got better?

Adelaide: (translated) I don't know why, but personally, we had never had any trouble. The only trouble we've had was my husband when he was at war, but when he came back he made out okay.

Carol: Okay. Do you think the RCMP, the police, treat the Metis different than the whites?

Adelaide: (translated) To me, the Metis and the white, there's not that much difference. I figure they're treated about the same by other people, and the police, if a Metis does wrong, he'll pick him up. And then, sure, if a white does wrong, he'll pick him up.

Carol: What about the kids at school? Do the teachers treat them the same - the kids?

Adelaide: (translated) There's no more school here. They go to Bellevue, but I have never heard of mistreatment of the kids.

Carol: What about the church - the priests and the nuns?

Adelaide: (translated) The priest we have now seems to not show too much difference. But in the past it might have been different. But one thing is that they - there's been a - you see, this priest is not from Batoche, he's from Bellevue, and he comes here just to say mass. He's been asked by the people sometimes to go and eat, and he's always refused. He's never visited us at the house. I don't care. All I care about is that a priest says mass. To me, that's...

Carol: Do you think he would go into white people's homes?

Adelaide: (translated) I don't know. He probably does because it's his parish. That's his parish, he probably does.

Carol: Are the white people richer than the Metis?

Adelaide: (translated) Not that much difference. No, not too

bad.

Carol: Do you think that they were better off with homes, more money?

Adelaide: (translated) Not that much difference. My house here is maybe not that good but I've lived here all my life and probably won't live here till the end of my life because I'm alone and I'm lonesome. Therefore, I might look for someplace else. All my kids are gone. I had one boy but he's going to get married and he's the one who really thought of me the most. Now, if he's married, he won't be around.

I have no more neighbors. My neighbors that live across there, they're not neighbors because they're always gone.

Carol: Do you think the younger people today have a tougher time making a living?

Adelaide: (translated) I think that life is easier in a way for the young people today. They have every chance of being happy. The young people are much better off today than I was when I was young.

Carol: Are they happier today?

Adelaide: Oh, they're all happy. You know, the halfbreeds are never... (laughs)

Carol: The halfbreeds are happy people?

Adelaide: Yes! (laughs)

Carol: Do the white talk down the halfbreeds?

Adelaide: (translated) No, no, no, I never heard that one.

Carol: Okay.

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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