

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: MRS. ALEXANDRINE NICOLAS
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: DUCK LAKE
SASKATCHEWAN
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SASKATCHEWAN
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INTERPRETER:
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mrs. Nicolas, nee Fleury, was born in Duck Lake in 1887.
- After brief period in U.S. where she attended school she returned to the Duck Lake area where she has lived ever since.
- Mostly involved in mixed farming. Has raised her own family of ten plus three foster children.
- Childhood, schooling.
- Life on mixed farm including the Depression years.
- Account of the Frog Lake Massacre as told by her grandfather.
- Relatives who fought in WWI, WWII and Korea.

Carol: Okay, you were born here in Duck Lake in 1887. And what did your parents do?

Alexandrine: They were farmers.

Carol: Just outside of...

Alexandrine: Four miles east of Duck Lake.

Carol: And, do you know how much land they had?

Alexandrine: They had two quarters. My grandfather had one and my father had one.

Carol: And what kind of farming did they do?

Alexandrine: Mixed farming. Of course, farming at that time, it wasn't like today. Just little patches here and there. They didn't clear the land the way they do these days. At the time, they would seed a little bit of wheat, a little bit of barley, and oats, and besides we had cattle. They milked cows.

Carol: And where were your parents from? Do you know?

Alexandrine: My parents I guess were born around Duck Lake here.

Carol: Were they both Metis?

Alexandrine: Yeah.

Carol: And what about your grandparents? Do you know anything about them?

Alexandrine: My grandfather, his name was Patrice Fleury. I guess he was born around Winnipeg.

Carol: Was that your father's father or...?

Alexandrine: That is my father's father. And my mother, she was - my grandmother, I am talking about my grandparents; my grandmother, she was Agatha Wilkie. And my father, his name was Patrice too, Patrice Fleury and my mother, Justine Monteur.

Carol: And what about your mother's family? Your mother's parents and ...?

Alexandrine: I can't say. I don't know where they came from. When I know them they lived around - on this side of the river on this side of Batoche Ferry. What is Batoche Ferry today. That is where they were farmers too, mixed farmers.

Carol: Was two sections quite a bit? I mean two quarters, was that quite a bit in those days?

Alexandrine: No, a quarter is a 160 acres.

Carol: Most people just had one.

Alexandrine: Yeah, oh yeah. It isn't like nowadays.

Carol: So was that quite a bit of land then, or...?

Alexandrine: It was, 160 acres. But it wasn't clear as it is today. People didn't clear their land. Wherever there was a prairie, that is where they used to plow and seed. And they didn't have no binders or anything when the harvest time came around. They had to cut the grain with a scythe and sickles.

You would see the men cutting the grain with a scythe and women with sickles. And they would tie it and they would make their own - I don't know how you can say that - to tie their grain and put it - to make bundles and put it in stooks.

Carol: That was when you were a girl, eh?

Alexandrine: That was when I was young. When I was a child. I'll say until about, maybe ten. Then I went to the - my parents went to the States, Montana. My mother was sick so they - somebody had told them that there was good doctors over there so we went out there and that is where I went to school. I went to school in the States in the Ursuline Convent. And we stayed out there for four years I guess. Then came to Medicine Hat in 1905, my father had left a bunch of cattle and we had to come back and look after this bunch of cattle. So, we came back to Duck Lake in 1905 in October, and I have been in Duck Lake ever since.

Carol: That must have been a lot of work, working the land with scythes and that.

Alexandrine: Everything by hand. Not like today. One man can do all that field work.

Carol: Did they work harder then?

Alexandrine: Beg your pardon?

Carol: Did people work harder then?

Alexandrine: Oh, they used to work hard. They used to work harder. But everything was so cheap then. You take a pound of butter. Sometimes they couldn't sell their butter, there was so much butter. Maybe they would get 15 a pound.

Carol: Did they work longer hours?

Alexandrine: Oh, no. I can't say exactly but I don't think so. They were their own bosses and they done whatever they could and I know they used to milk a bunch of cows when I was young. I did the same thing after I was married on the farm. I tell you, I have done my share of milking.

Carol: Your husband farmed too, eh?

Alexandrine: Yeah.

Carol: Outside of Duck Lake all his life?

Alexandrine: Yeah, yeah. We lived north from Duck Lake about ten miles out.

Carol: And when did you move in here then?

Alexandrine: My husband died in 1945 on the 14th of October

and I stayed on the farm until I couldn't do anything. And then I still had a girl that was going to school and she had to walk three and a half miles to go to the school. All at once Mr. Cook, an inspector, came over and saw me and asked me if I wouldn't move into town. I said, "I don't know." And he says, "Your girl can't go to school alone three and a half miles." And she had to walk. "Well," I said, "if I can find a house in town." So I found this little shack and I bought it and on the 29th of August, I moved here in 1946 and I have been here ever since. Now, my daughter has been married since 1959 too. But after I moved into town in 1946, these people that I bought this shack from, they were not ready to leave the house. They were making a house, so I had to rent a house. So the inspector came and asked me if I would take in children. Two boys school age. So, I kept these two boys from October 7, I took in these two boys and when they emptied this house, I moved here on the 18th of November with my daughter and these two boarders that I had. After I was here, the inspector came again and asked me if I wouldn't take in another two boys. So, I took in another two school age boys. They didn't have no school in their district so they had to go to school. So, I took in those two boys. They were all about the same age, from 10 to 12.

Carol: Were they Indian boys?

Alexandrine: No, they were two Metis boys and two Germans. And the fifth one, and then all of us again, Mr. -

Carol: In this little house here?

Alexandrine: Just here, yes. I used to have the five boys. So I kept them and they stayed until their school was ready. Their school in their own district was ready and they took them away. So I stayed with my daughter. All of a sudden, Mr. McGaukey(?) from Saskatoon asked me if I wouldn't take any welfare children from Green Lake. So I took in a family of three, two girls and a boy and I kept those kids for twelve and a half years. I was a foster mother for twelve and a half years. Oh, yeah. Now, my daughter is off married here, I am left alone. But I am never home; I am always all over. I got children; I got a son and a daughter in Prince Albert. I go and stay over there. I got two sisters in Prince Albert, so I go. They always want me. They don't want me to stay alone. They want me to go and stay with them but I like my own place and I do an awful lot of sewing. All kinds of, not fancy sewing, but I do it. Quilting, make quilts and embroidery and crochet, all those things. And here I am here, oh but, today it was, I found it so lonesome.

Carol: Lonesome today? It is a good thing we came.

(laughter)

Alexandrine: Oh no, I used to be out working on the farm. It wasn't like these days. When you are on the farm, you always

have something to do. Feed the pigs and chickens and look after the chickens.

Carol: Was there a lot of visiting in the old days? More or...?

Alexandrine: I don't know. See, I wasn't in town at that time; we were on the farm.

Carol: How many children did you have?

Alexandrine: I had ten. Seven girls and three boys.

Carol: And did you go to school when you were a girl or...?

Alexandrine: Yeah, I went to school in Montana.

Carol: Oh, yeah right, you said that didn't you. Until what grade? Do you remember?

Alexandrine: Five. I'll tell you, I didn't go very high.

Carol: In those days I think that was pretty high.

Alexandrine: Yeah, it was high. I never went to school in Canada.

Carol: You say you remember people talking about the Rebellion and so on, what do you remember them telling you?

Alexandrine: Well, my mother, she used to often tell me. And see, her father was a trader in the fall. Late in the fall they used to go way up north around Frog Lake, she used to tell me. And trade and bring such as ammunition and sugar and tea. Of course, I don't think they had any coffee at the time. They had tea anyway. Tobacco, and things like that. They had salt pork and they traded with these Indians with fur. And then they were out there. I guess the men had gone and built two shacks and they had a storeroom. But this storeroom had no windows or door, just from their living quarters, you know. There was a door from their living quarters. All at once in March, the dogs were barking and they didn't know what it was. So here was three Indians at the door and then, I guess - he wasn't my grandfather at the time - but my grandfather and boys' father - it was these Indians and told my grandfather that there had been fighting around Fish Creek, I guess. "And now," he says, "we want all the ammunition you got and the tea and you'll have to come to Frog Lake Mission." There was a reserve there and there was an Indian agent and there was a Catholic church and there was priests. "So as soon as it is light, you people just get ready and come there. Otherwise you will be sorry if you don't listen to us." That was Big Bear's son-in-law, she used to tell me.

..talk nothing but Cree I guess.

Carol: So your grandfather talked Cree?

Alexandrine: Yeah. And, so they had to obey the orders so they came. They had to shovel the snow in order to put up their tents or tipis, whatever they had at that time. But, not near these Indians camps, there were there. And that was the Holy Week. Are you Catholic? So, you know what it is, the Holy Week, eh?

Carol: Yeah, yeah.

Alexandrine: The week before Easter. So, they got there on Thursday, we call that the Holy Thursday. And they camped there and the next morning it was the Good Friday and I guess these young girls wanted to go to church and their father said, "No. You never know what the Indians will do." There were just seven Metis there with my grandfather and the boys. Well, there was seven of them. And then, when they camped there, there was a family there already by the name of Johnny Pritchard. So there was seven Metis anyway. So the girls didn't go to church. All at once, they heard gun shots and that was the time that the Indians killed the priests and two... In Frog Lake.

Carol: This was in Frog Lake, okay.

Alexandrine: Yeah, that is in Saskatchewan. It is northwest from here. Where are you from?

Carol: Me, I'm from Saskatoon.

Alexandrine: The Indians shot a priest. It was a Father Fafard and Father Marchand I think. And two, a clerk by the name of McClain(?). And they killed this McClain(?) and Delaney. French Canadians from down east. They were walking with their wives and they shot the two men.

Carol: Do you know why?

Alexandrine: No, I guess they didn't want to obey the orders. I don't know why.

Carol: What about the fighting around here and so on?

Alexandrine: I don't know anything about that. They told me that Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont were there, here about a mile out. That is where they were fighting, the Indians and the Metis; and the English were coming from Carlton.

But I went to Gabriel Dumont's funeral in 1906, I went with my grandfather. It was my grandfather's brother-in-law. He was married to a Madeleine Wilkie. But, I remember old Gabriel. He used to come and visit at our place but I never knew his wife.

Carol: Do you remember anything about him?

Alexandrine: Oh, he was - see, I don't know much about him. I know, they used to tell me after the Rebellion he went to

Montana. From there he went, he worked with whoever they called Buffalo Bill. And from Buffalo Bill, they met some French people from the old country and he went to France, he went to Paris. And from there he came and visit the old people around Duck Lake.

Carol: Then he moved back.

Alexandrine: Back, yeah, and then when... I don't know what year he came back but I know he died in 1906 on the 6th of June.

Carol: But you don't remember much about him, what he was like or anything?

Alexandrine: Oh no, I don't know. See he wasn't around here. Just in the very end. I wouldn't know what year he came here. You see he came...

Carol: It was in the 1890s. Sometime in the 1890s. About 1893, I think.

Alexandrine: See, he came and visit but he went right back. He stayed about a month here visiting his friends and relations and he went back to France. And then he came back but I don't know what year he was back.

Carol: Do you remember your parents talking about him or anything?

Alexandrine: Oh yes, I remember them talking about old Gabriel Dumont but...

Carol: What did they say about him? Do you remember?

Alexandrine: Oh, what - I don't remember what exactly they say about him but I know they used to get close together to his brother, brother-in-laws but I wouldn't say if he was a good person or what. No, I don't know.

Carol: What about Riel, did they talk about him at all?

Alexandrine: Riel, well, I don't know. I don't know anything about Riel.

Carol: Did they talk at all about why the Rebellion took place?

Alexandrine: No. Maybe they did but I don't know. I wasn't interested and I wouldn't listen when they would be talking about that, you know.

Carol: Did they talk about it a lot do you think?

Alexandrine: Oh, yes, they talked about it, yeah. I remember but...

Carol: Do you know now why the Rebellion...?

Alexandrine: No, I still don't know. And I never tried to know.

Carol: So you don't know if it was, if they had a just cause or...?

Alexandrine: No.

Carol: Okay, can you tell me anything about the Depression years? Do you remember that?

Alexandrine: Oh yes, the Depression years, oh mercy. In 1930s I was milking fourteen cows and I used to get so much cream, fifteen gallons of cream. We had these shipping cream cans and a boy by the name of - Mr. Eddy's son - he had a truck and he used to come and pick up the cream every second day. We used to get a dollar and eighty, a dollar and eighty-five for five gallons of cream. And we had so many eggs, fifteen dozen a crate. Five cents a dozen for our eggs. And there was a German woman living just north of us, she had only three cows and all the time she comes over to me and says to me, "I got too much butter and I haven't got enough cream. Wouldn't you buy my butter from me every week?" I said, "What's the price?" but I know the price. She says, "Ten cents. I will bring you ten pounds every Saturday." She used to bring me all that summer till late in the fall in 1900. Ten pounds of butter and I used to give her a dollar and I was shipping my cream. I didn't get much, a dollar and eighty, a dollar and seventy-five, depending on the grade of the cream. And ...

Carol: Were things worse then than before the Depression and after?

Alexandrine: No, it was better before the 1930s but...

Carol: What was the difference?

Alexandrine: At least we used to sell our butter and cream, whatever we had, for a little higher. In the fall, we had snow, and we got a threshing machine. We paid twenty-two cents to get it threshed and in the spring we brought home - I remember because I was with my husband with two loads of rye - they wanted to give us eleven cents a bushel. We went right

back and we crushed that rye. We crushed it and early in the spring we would feed it to our cows before the grass was green. That is what we done.

Carol: Instead of sell it.

Alexandrine: Well, you see we paid twent-two cents threshing. It was Henry Dick that threshed for us and in the spring to sell it for eleven... We turned back and crushed it.

Carol: Was there any problem with getting enough to eat during the Depression or...?

Alexandrine: No, well, not too much. Of course, after we had to get - I guess it was in 1945, 1944 - we had to have a permit to get butter. We had to have tickets.

Carol: Do you know why things were worse then?

Alexandrine: I don't know. No, I don't know. And we had such a hard time. We couldn't even get any face towels.

Carol: What about the years of the war, the first war...?

Alexandrine: The First World War? Oh, well the First World War, out here it wasn't bad. We didn't suffer for anything.

Carol: Did any of the boys from around here go and fight?

Alexandrine: I had a brother, the First World War. I had a brother that went overseas and he stayed over there for four years, I think. He was wounded a couple of times and he was gassed and he came home in 1919, in November. He came back to Duck Lake in November and he died on the 15th of July, in 1920.

Carol: Did a lot of people from around here go?

Alexandrine: Yeah, there was lots of boys that went.

Carol: Did they want to go?

Alexandrine: Oh I don't know. I had a brother. Then in the Second World War, I had two sons. Archie went to Europe. Now, today he is all fixed with silver plates. He limps, yeah. He is a farmer. And he stayed, I don't know how many years, out there.

Carol: Did they want to go then?

Alexandrine: Yes, he wanted to go and I tried to stop him when I saw how my brother came home.

Carol: You didn't want them to go?

Alexandrine: He was buried and I didn't want him to go. But he wanted to so he...?

Carol: Why didn't you want him to go?

Alexandrine: Well, I was afraid he would get the same thing as my brother.

Carol: Do you know what that war was all about?

Alexandrine: No, I don't know nothing. So, I had another son, Robert; he went to Korea.

Carol: To Korea?

Alexandrine: Yeah, in the Second World War, he went to Korea.

Carol: In the 1940s or in the 1950s?

Alexandrine: That was in the 1950s, in - I wouldn't say exactly what. Anyway, he came back in 1953. His shoulder blade was all mashed. His arm was open and his side was all opened. The station agent used to come at the door here and bring me telegrams and that was - it happened some time in May, I guess, early May in 1953. So, all at once he says to me, he came smiling in July. The last days of July. "Well," he says to me, "this isn't a sad one." He was smiling, you know, and the station agent brought me the telegram. And he says, "Your son is coming back on the 30th. They want you to go and meet him at the airport in Saskatoon." So, I had these welfare children and I hired my sister-in-law to stay with my three welfare children. And my daughter and I took the train and went to Saskatoon to meet Robert.

Carol: Do you think the Metis people are treated any differently by the RCMP than the white?

Alexandrine: I don't think so. Why should they? I don't think so. I don't know anything about that.

Carol: What about at school, do you think they treat the Metis kids the same as the white kids?

Alexandrine: I don't know, I don't know. My kids were always treated good and I don't know anything. I'm one that doesn't go and bother the teachers or anything. When my kids and these foster children I had, I never went and bother. It is all right if I was called, if I was asked to go, but I wouldn't go and bother the teachers or anybody. I still don't.

Carol: What about the Metis people on welfare, do you think they are treated any differently from the whites?

Alexandrine: Heaven sakes, I don't know about that because I was never on that. I always worked enough to make my own living.

Carol: What about people that did have to go, you know?

Alexandrine: I don't know. I don't try and know people's business. I have got enough of my own affairs without bothering to try and know somebody, what is this and how is that. No, I don't know such a thing.

Carol: Okay, good, okay, thanks a lot.

Do you think that the Metis people have a tougher time getting jobs and stuff like that? Do they have a tougher time than whites?

Alexandrine: For heaven sakes, I don't know. No, I don't know.

(End of Side A)

(End of Interview)

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