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SASKATCHEWAN  
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INTERVIEWER: CAROL PEARLSTONE  
INTERPRETER:  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Born Carlton, Saskatchewan. Father was ferryman and farmer.
- Pierre was in a sanatorium for treatment of tuberculosis but on recovery worked at farming and woodcutting.
- Work as farmer and woodcutter.
- Talks about his children's education and his own lack of schooling.
- What his grandfather told him about the Riel Rebellion of 1885.
- The Metis in World War I and II.

Pierre: (translated) My father had a homestead and he was a ferryman at the same time. We weren't rich but we made not a bad living. From Carlton then we went to Bonne Madon. We moved to Bonne Madon when I was twelve years old. We moved to Bonne Madon because the summer before, myself and my younger brother had gone to work for a bachelor up there and then the bachelor said he would rent his land to us and when we told our dad that, he didn't want to let us go by ourselves so then all of us moved out there.

Carol: How much land did your father have?

Pierre: (translated) A river lot. 160 acres. His land was right by where the Gabriel bridge is today. Two miles long and ten chains wide, 160 acres.

Carol: Were both your parents Metis?

Pierre: (translated) Both of my parents were Metis and my mother died when I was three years old. My father remarried to another Metis. There were three kids when my mother died and there were six or seven more with my second mother.

Carol: What about your grandparents?

Pierre: (translated) My grandfather was supposed to be a Frenchman from Winnipeg and my grandmother was an Indian Metis.

Carol: Why did they come here from Winnipeg?

Pierre: (translated) It was the time when the prairie was an appealing thing. Everybody wanted to come to the prairies. They used to talk about, that it was, they would have a better life if they came here. The buffalo was, you know, they talked about the buffalo so they just came because of the circumstances.

Carol: And what was your occupation?

Pierre: (translated) When I first left home I worked wages, taking any job I could find, and then I went into partnership with my brother, and we worked together all of our life, until my brother died. So we decided to buy a homestead in Meadow Lake. Hard times came (Depression) and couldn't make a go of it on the homestead. So I took a contract to cut pulpwood. That was 1938, 1939, just after I came out of the San. Someone else was cutting firewood and I'd buy it from the cutters at \$3.00 a load - firewood - then I would haul it to town for \$10.00. I would make about two loads a day. And then we took another contract for ties for the railroad and my brother got

killed. A railroad tie fell on his head. That is when we decided on Green Lake. We worked eight winters there with Clark outfit, the rest of year on farm. Got \$15.00 for every thousand ties. I used my horses but I couldn't work. I hired my nephews to help me. They were good workers. The other Metis there turned against me because I was trying to advance, they were bucking me all the time. (translated) Then we decided to go back to Meadow Lake and rented some more land. Then I stayed there, had seven kids with my first wife and she had been married already, she had a son too. When we went to Leoville, I retired there. Got pension and welfare - \$9.00 a month. Then it was increased to \$27.00. With the pension it was \$109.00, with wife. But each time the pension went up a dollar, the welfare came down a dollar. Back to \$9.00 a month. (laughs) From Leoville we moved here to the old folks' home. We're free, so we like it here.

I have no education, nothing. (English) When I was supposed to go to school, I was crippled. Then when I was all right, I was too old to go to school, and was old enough to work. My grandfather taught me how to write. To work with lumber, I had to learn to work with numbers. I learned myself. But after I quit all that, I let everything go, so I forget again.

Carol: Can you tell me how you managed during the Depression?

Pierre: Well, I'll tell you. The hard times, I was at the San already. That is the hard time. And then the time I went out so my brother, he had that big job so he hired men; and then from there, I lived with my brother. So, then, we took them with horse when we hauled that. And then in the winter time, I drive one team but I didn't have to do nothing, just drive my horses. I had my own horses. When I get home first, my sister-in-law, she would feed my horses and put them in the barn for me. That is all I had to do. Because, I don't eat and I won't sleep all the time, nothing to do. So then when I go out, fresh air, I eat lots and again all right. So then when it come to the spring, I was loading my own load.

Carol: Since you didn't have any education at all, were you interested in sending your kids to school?

Pierre: (translated) Yes, in fact some of them did quite well. Some of them finished their grade 12. The oldest one was too interested in the work part. He was working at the time at the saw mill and the teacher came to me one day when he was in grade 6 and said, "You might as well keep him home. It is a sin to send him to school because all he talks about is wanting to work at the saw mill." So, the oldest one quit after grade 6 or while he was doing his grade 6. I am very happy that some of them finished their grade 12 and I wished that the oldest one had done the same. I wished I would have had the chance to

go to school. To me, education is very important today. Especially to find work because you can't get a job of any kind if you are not educated. And the machines are very complicated. You have to be educated to be able to operate them.

Carol: What do you remember about the First World War?

Pierre: (translated) About the Rebellion, my grandfather and another one that I called my grandfather but not really my grandfather were in the Rebellion and I remember hearing many of the Metis men were put into jail at this time therefore this made it very, very hard for the women who were left without their husbands. My father was six years old at the time of the Rebellion. But I remember my grandfather talking about it.

Carol: Why did the Rebellion take place?

Pierre: (translated) From what I remember, the Metis talking, the Metis way of talking, they were fighting for their rights

but they didn't know what their rights were. (laughter)

Carol: Do you think it was a just fight then?

Pierre: (translated) One thing they did get from the Rebellion was that they were given scrips and my father got one because he was the oldest and that is one thing that they did achieve by the Rebellion. They didn't really know what it meant then. They were given pieces of land but they didn't know where their land was, so it was kind of a useless thing. They weren't told, it wasn't explained to them what they did get by a scrip and where the land was or anything. To them, they sometimes... because they didn't understand too much, the meaning of how much land they were getting or how to go about getting it. My father traded his scrip for a wagon because he had two horses and no wagon. So he traded and got a wagon for his piece of land. He was a freighter, my dad was, so he figured a wagon was more valuable than his land.

Carol: Scrip was money though, wasn't it? Instead of land?

Pierre: (translated) Yeah, but at that time, land wasn't worth nothing at that time. They didn't know what land was at that time. But after, they got homesteads. That is how my father got his piece of land after. Another fellow got a pair of harness instead of the scrip money because he needed that for freighting also. There were a few Metis people who were smarter than the others and they used to argue with each other

what their rights were and they didn't come to an understanding and that is one of the reasons that they didn't get much out of the Riel Rebellion. Because the Metis themselves could not agree on what their rights were and therefore they just lost everything because of that.

Translator: I asked him the reason why some of the halfbreeds were more educated than others and he said, for example, his grandfather was a French guy and yet he was in the halfbreed gang. And then there was Dumont. Riel was educated. Whenever they come up with an idea, because the majority were not educated, they bucked against the ideas of the educated group. They just figured they were running the show, I guess.

Carol: Did you hear this from your parents or your grandparents or...?

Pierre: Just what I am saying, I got that from my grandfather. My grandfather, that is the way he told it to me.

Carol: Did your grandfather know Dumont?

Pierre: Mostly because my dad, that is his godfather.

Carol: Do you remember him talking about him?

Pierre: My dad used to talk about him. (translated) I didn't really hear too much about his character but when things were

not going too well, Dumont ran away. He had a little grey horse and he wanted Riel to run away with him and Riel said, "No, if I run away, my people will be mistreated." So he refused to go with Dumont.

Carol: That was after they were defeated though. It was either...

Pierre: (translated) Riel wouldn't have been hung or killed if he had gone with Dumont at the time that Dumont asked him to go. He went to France to see the King and when he came back, he would visit this grandchild of his. That is what I remember. My father was Gabriel's godchild so he would come and visit him.

Carol: Do you think the Metis had a good reason for fighting and stuff?

Pierre: Well, now I think in one way, they have no reason to attack the people, what they had. I don't know what ideas they had. (translated) They were kind of foolish to attack a bigger group of people, what I know now. (English) But the Indians, they told them, "You guys fight this time with us and we'll take them at night when they are sleeping. We'll knife them."

Carol: The Indians said they would attack the white guys?

Pierre: At night, yeah. You see, when they rest at night, we'll take them. So they will be sleeping and we'll get them that way. But Riel didn't want it that way. "No," he says. "We'll go fair play. That won't be fair to do that." So they didn't.

Carol: What do you remember about the First World War and the Second World War?

Pierre: (translated) I was about 11 or 12 or something like that and I just couldn't understand why these men were getting picked up. Many of them didn't know why they were going. In fact, there was one fellow going around to dances and things like that, and he'd tell them, "I'll hire you." And they would sign up or whatever, and then ask him, "What for?" and he said, "For doing nothing." And naturally, he'd make them drink a little bit and then he'd get them to sign these papers. So a lot got involved in going to war and they didn't know why they were going or where they were going.

Carol: What about the Second War?

Pierre: Second War, I had a brother-in-law that went and he went and signed for that. The first time he went to sign he was too young; they wouldn't take him. So, he went another way, he went and signed and he put himself two years older and he went in. (translated) I don't know why, he probably thought that the war would be easier than working. The laborers at that time worked very hard in those days. It was very hard to make a living.

Carol: Did the people around here get told why the war was being fought and everything?

Pierre: (translated) I wasn't educated, I didn't know the reason for the war because I couldn't read and that. And maybe they did explain it, but I probably wouldn't have understood the reason behind it.

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

#### INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
AGRICULTURE				
-farming	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	2,3
DISEASE AND ILLNESS				
-tuberculosis	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	3
EDUCATION				
-attitudes toward	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	3,4
EDUCATION				
-self-taught	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	3
METIS				
-and agriculture	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	2,3
RIEL REBELLION (1885)				
-accounts of	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	4,5,6
RIEL REBELLION (1885)				
-aftermath of	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	4,5
RIEL REBELLION (1885)				
-grievances leading to	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	4,5
SCRIP				
-land	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	4
WORK				
-for wages	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	2
WORLD WAR I				
-enlistment	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	6
WORLD WAR II				
-attitudes toward	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	6
WORLD WAR II				
-enlistment	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	6

#### PROPER NAME INDEX

PROPER NAME	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
CARLTON, SASK.	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	2
DUMONT, GABRIEL	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	5
GREEN LAKE, SASK.	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	3
MEADOW LAKE, SASK.	IH-140b	P. VANDALE	24	2,3

RIEL, LOUIS

IH-140b

P. VANDALE

24

5,6