

REVIEWS: OTHER MEDIA
DAVID T. MCNAB, EDITOR

SPECIAL MÉTIS ISSUE
AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE AND RESEARCH JOURNAL

Vol. 6, No. 2 (1982)
139 pp. \$3.00, Paper.

In 1981 twenty-six American and Canadian scholars gathered in Chicago for North America's first conference on the Métis (peoples of mixed European and Native ancestry). The Chicago meeting honored Marcel Giraud, whose 1945 classic *Le Métis canadienne* laid the foundation for studies of the western Métis today (see also Giraud, 1986). The essays in this special issue demonstrate that the history of the North American Métis reaches much farther back in time, and across much of the continent. Papers by Olive Patricia Dickason, Jacqueline Peterson and Carol Judd examine the origins of the Métis in New France, the Great Lakes, and James Bay region, respectively.

Dickason notes that while there was considerable racial mixing in early New France, when French officialdom promoted "one race" and "one nation," the Métis did not emerge in eastern Canada as a separate people. She argues that Quebec historians have treated the eastern Métis "as though they never existed" (p. 2).

Intermarriage was necessary for the very survival of early settlers, and for the development of the fur trade among Indian tribes who valued alliances based on kinship. Many seventeenth century French-Indian unions were simply not reported because they were informal and did not receive Christian sanction, and many of their offspring became invisible in official church records, for they assumed French names once they were baptised or adopted.

By the early eighteenth century once the colony of New France was established, public opinion turned against these intermarriages. In Acadia and the St. Lawrence valley, Dickason shows that the children of early Indian-French unions identified either as Indians or as French, but not as Métis. She contrasts this situation with conditions in the Great Lakes, Red River, and the Pacific coast.

Peterson's article follows the Métis west to the Great Lakes fur trade communities, where eighteenth century English and American travellers "discovered to their surprise that they had entered a foreign land" (p. 25). If early visitors described the residents of these communities as Canadian, French, or Indian, Peterson shows that pejorative terms like "half-breed" began to appear by the early nineteenth century.

The study demonstrates that a myriad of Métis or fur trade towns sprang up south and west of Lakes Superior and Huron. Despite the plans of French

authorities to control the fur trade and promote the interests of Jesuit and Recollet priests at designated locations, the *coureurs de bois* preferred to live, at first, among the Indians. Later, when Métis towns or hamlets developed, Peterson shows that these were visually distinct from Indian villages and Atlantic seaboard towns. The occupational identity of the Métis, and their patterns of land use are rigorously examined. Where possible, parish records of intermarriage are analyzed; Peterson recognizes that here, as elsewhere in North America, this was underreported.

In the 1820's and 1830's, the region began to feel intensifying racial prejudice with a "color-coded caste system" (p. 24). By then Peterson estimates that these Métis towns had a combined population of 10,000 to 15,000. Although they left a "residential imprint," the Métis' intraregional mobility - so necessary for the fur trade - proved to be their downfall, for it hindered "group solidarity and combined action." It forged an identity based on region and occupation, rather than place. From 1815 to 1850, these communities "collapsed, drowned in the flood of American settlement and capitalistic expansion" (pp. 55-56).

Judd's paper on the people of Moose Factory, in northeastern Ontario, is not up to the same standard. By using the unscientific racial term "mixed blood," she diverts us from the cultural features of the Moose Factory Métis (who she also confuses with the "non-status Indians").

In 1678 the Hudson's Bay Company established a fur trade post at Moose Factory, on the southern margin of James Bay. Following the familiar pattern we have seen elsewhere in North America, families of mixed ancestry ("mixed bloods") soon developed despite official censure. By the early nineteenth century, these new people were finally acknowledged, a school was opened, and they began to form an important part of the HBC labor force. People of mixed ancestry often were relegated to the lower rungs of the occupational ladder. Later in the century, as English women (fur traders' and especially missionaries' wives) entered the scene, the status of Métis or Indian women drastically declined.

All of this, however, has already been established by other ethnohistorians (Brown, 1977:180; Van Kirk, 1980). Unlike the other articles, this one is sparsely documented. It is obvious that Judd has examined the voluminous Hudson's Bay archives, but so have others, who did a better job and whose scholarship goes unrecognized. Judd has re-invented the wheel.

Where Dickason and Peterson described regions, Judd has focussed on one small community which had already been studied. Had she extended her study to the wider James Bay area, we might have learned whether the Moose Factory situation was typical of nearby Rupert House, Fort George or Fort Albany.

In 1905, when Treaty No. 9 was signed at Moose Factory, we are informed that the "mixed blood" HBC employees were refused Indian status by the Canadian government. This fact is not footnoted, and again Judd has conveniently ignored another's research (Long, 1978).

Her analysis of Moose Factory today, based on brief visits, bears no resemblance to the community which I have known since 1972. Suddenly the "mixed

bloods" become "non-status Indians," whom Judd claims to be the "dominant ethnic group" at Moose Factory (p. 87) - ignoring the growing influence of the Moose Factory Indian Band, whose members constitute the majority (Long, 1986).

Arthur Ray reviews the state of scholarly research in fur trade social history and Métis history in Canada, and finds that historians have relied too much on the literate upper crust of the fur trade and assumed that the Red River experience was typical. He urges that more attention be given to the interaction of social and economic considerations in the fur trade, and the relationship between historical and contemporary patterns of social interaction in northern Canada. Surprisingly, he makes no mention of the importance of Métis oral history.

Dickason's and Peterson's papers were subsequently published in the conference volume (Peterson & Brown, 1985), adding to the growing literature (Lussier, 1983, Flanagan & Foster, 1985) on the Métis in North America.

John S. Long,
P.O. Box 490,
Moose Factory, Ontario,
Canada, P0L 1W0.

REFERENCES

- Brown, Jennifer S.H.
1977 A Colony of Very Useful Hands. *The Beaver* 307(4):\$9-45.
- 1980 *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Flanagan, Thomas and John Foster
1985 Special Issue: The Métis, Past and Present. *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 17(2).
- Giraud, Marcel
1945 *Le Métis canadien: son rôle dans l'histoire des provinces de l'Ouest*. Paris: Institut d'ethnologie.
- 1986 *The Métis in the Canadian West*. 2 volumes. George Woodcock, translator. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.
- Long, John S.
1978 *Treaty No. 9: The Halfbreed Question, 1902-1910*. Cobalt: Highway Bookshop.
- 1986 The Politics of Education in Moose Factory, Ontario, in William Cowan (Editor): *Papers of the 17th Algonquian Conference*.

Ottawa: Carleton University Press.

Lussier, Antoine S

1983 Special Issue: The Métis Since 1870. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 3(1).

Peterson, Jacqueline & Jennifer S.H. Brown (Editors)

1985 *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*.
Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Van Kirk, Sylvia

1980 *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society 1670-1870*.
Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer.