

***George Mann was not a Cowboy: Rationalizing Western  
versus Aboriginal Perspectives of Life and Death  
“Dramatic” History***

College of Graduate Studies and Research  
Master of Arts  
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## *Abstract*

*The dramatic history of the 1885 Riel Rebellion has been revisited and reinterpreted countless times by hundreds of amateur and professional historians from all cultural backgrounds. From 1885 to the mid-twentieth century and beyond the tendency of many historians was to create melodramatic narratives, a writing style that began in various English theatrical traditions, dating back to the Middle Ages. Of particular interest to this study were the eyewitness narratives whose melodramatic style included a desire to codify and define the roles of Aboriginal people, another British tradition of defining the dark skinned 'other' that was debated in London theatres from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. The Canadian historical myth was created by gifted writers who captured the broader public's imagination with their dramatic style, a hegemonic force which eclipsed many Aboriginal versions of similar historical events. One such event was the George Mann family's dramatic "escape to Fort Pitt," as remembered by descendants of Mann and those of Nehithawe (Wood Cree) treaty Chief Seekascootch, whose family aided the Mann family in their escape. Through a variety of methods that have included historiographical analysis, literary analysis, playwriting, microhistory, and interviews with members of both families, this paper engages an interdisciplinary approach to the academic areas of drama, history and anthropology as a means of creating a broader picture of history that is hopefully interesting and accessible to people from multiple cultural backgrounds. This project concludes that single discipline western academic narratives do not sufficiently problematize their archival sources, and often underestimate the complexity of Aboriginal epistemologies.*

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## Table of Contents

Permission to Use.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
1. Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
2. Chapter Two: Dramatic Voices and Historical Writing.....	18
3. Chapter Three: Historiography	
a) Historical Authority and Western Historical Voices.....	33
b) Aboriginal Voices.....	41
4. Chapter Four: Disclosure. What Do We Choose to Remember?.....	51
5. Chapter Five: The Mann Family in Onion Lake. Narratives that Defy Drama.....	69
6. Chapter Six: <i>Friends or Friendlies?</i> Narratives and Drama in Juxtaposition.....	80
7. Chapter Seven: Conclusion.....	88
8. Appendix One: <i>Friends or Friendlies?</i> .....	92
9. Appendix Two: <i>Friends or Friendlies?</i> Staged Reading- Program and Cree Translations.....	125
10. Appendix Three: Glossary.....	129
11. Select Bibliography.....	131

## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION

That little war of 1885 was the Great Divide of Western History. It marked an end and a beginning. The rising on the Saskatchewan [River] was the last volcanic outbreak of the fire primeval, the savage spirit of the old Wild West. With the suppression of that rising, the fire was quenched forever. The old times ended; our new times began.<sup>1</sup>

This was the image of the wild Canadian west. And, after 1885, more popularly known by potential settlers as “The Last Best West,” the place where new immigrants could come and enjoy free land and a fresh start.<sup>2</sup> The 1885 Riel Rebellion, as it is widely known, was the “little war” that accomplished the Canadian government’s goal of creating the perception of a safe haven for settlement. The non-Aboriginal Canadians that made this possible were portrayed as, and largely remembered as, the courageous “cowboys” willing to go out and subdue the Indians, and one of these men was my great great grandfather government employee George G. Mann. Melodramatic narratives of cowboys and Indians and British traditions of defining dark skinned ‘others,’ influenced stories of Mann’s experience in the west, an experience that became lost in a mythological history that did little justice to the actual nature of non-Aboriginal/Aboriginal relationships. The hegemonic nature of this discourse, which I will collectively refer to as the Canadian historical myth, has distorted my family’s perceptions about the role of George G. Mann and his family, who lived and worked with Aboriginal people in Onion Lake, North-West Territories from 1879 to 1900. Onion Lake was very near to one of the most infamous occurrences of the rebellion, the so-called Frog Lake “Massacre,” a deeply controversial historical event that has been a source of division between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities since it took place on 2 April 1885. The

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Angus Kennedy, *The Book of the West*. (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1925) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Bruce, *The Last Best West*. (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1976).

dramatic versions of 1885 were the stories that sold newspapers, and did little to enlighten newcomers to the context of actual events.

In reality, the years and months leading up to the 1885 Riel Rebellion, in what was then called the North-West Territories of Canada, were some of the most difficult and trying times in the history of North American Native-newcomer relations. The Buffalo had all but disappeared, and the Nehiyawak (Plains Cree) and Nehithawak (Wood Cree), many of whom had just signed Treaty Six in 1876, were mostly settled on reserves and working to learn a new way of life. Mistihamaskwa or Big Bear was a Plains Cree Chief who gained notoriety as one of the last holdouts to Treaty Six, not signing the agreement until 8 December 1882.<sup>3</sup> He believed the Government would not live up to the treaty promises, and wished to have a large single reserve surveyed for all Nehiyawak and Nehithawak so they could preserve their autonomy. However, the Government wished to divide the Cree, and forced them to settle on separate smaller reserves.<sup>4</sup> The predominantly British culture of the Canadian Government viewed Indians as a dying race, and the reserve land as a temporary solution, a holding area until the eventual assimilation of the remaining Indians into “useful members of society.”<sup>5</sup>

Indian reserve number 121 and 119 were two of these small reserves, and were located near what is now the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, just north of the North Saskatchewan River. Frog Lake and Onion Lake North-West Territories were the two small government outposts that were located on these reserves for the purposes of Indian administration. The supply route to the North-West was primarily via steam ships on the North Saskatchewan River, and the Hudson Bay Company outpost, Fort Pitt, was conveniently located on the banks of the river, just thirteen miles south-east of Onion

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<sup>3</sup> Hugh Dempsey, *Big Bear and the end of Freedom*. (Douglas & McIntyre: Toronto, 1984) 111.

<sup>4</sup> Dempsey *Big Bear* 122.

<sup>5</sup> J. R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 264.



Lake. However, only a few administrators had been sent west after the signing of Treaty Six in 1876, and by 1878 many Cree in the North-West were in desperate need of further assistance. The limited government personnel had barely enough resources to distribute treaty payments, let alone issue rations and farming implements. The government of Canada, to help with the “civilization” of the Cree and aid their conversion to a more settled, agricultural way of life, finally sent additional Indian agents and farm instructors in 1879.<sup>6</sup>

That year George Gwynne Mann left his home in Bowmanville, Ontario to start a new job in Onion Lake, North-West Territories as a government farm instructor to the Indians. He worked there alone for four years before his wife Sarah and their three children, Blanche, George Junior and Charlotte, eventually joined him in 1883. The family was together at the farm instructor’s residence when trouble broke out on 2 April 1885. The large numbers of Indians in his care and limited resources made his job of facilitating the conversion of the Cree to an agricultural lifestyle extremely difficult. Not only was he in a territory that was not particularly well suited for agriculture, he was working with people who were quite unfamiliar with the practices he was obligated to teach. The recent loss of their territory, limited resources and a short growing season were some of the many complications the Cree faced that made success at their farm work very difficult.<sup>7</sup>

Many of the farm instructors appointed by the Canadian government had received these jobs as patronage appointments and George Mann perhaps received his post as a result of previous service to the government during the Fenian raids.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bill Waiser and Blair Stonechild. *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion*. (Fifth House Ltd.: Calgary, 1997), 34.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 219.

<sup>8</sup> *Glenbow Archives*, George Mann fonds. Letter from G. G. Mann to The Secretary, Department of the Militia, Ottawa. 13 November 1900.

However, education and merit were also factors, and Mann had been a successful farmer in Bowmanville, Ontario, prior to his move west.<sup>9</sup> Older histories that discuss Indian agents and farm instructors depict them as the last hope of Native peoples to save them from desolation and starvation,<sup>10</sup> while more recently they have been discussed merely as agents of racist and misguided policies.<sup>11</sup> Barron astutely points out that government policy was not implemented in a human vacuum, and that these men had a difficult job to do in a department that often had a “penny-pinching approach to Indian administration.” In 1885, the danger faced by Mann and his colleagues was certainly exacerbated by the lack of resources available to maintain an adequate level of human welfare for the Cree people.<sup>12</sup> In 1884, the deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs, Lawrence Vankoughnet, had again cut back the assistance to the Cree and the number of government employees dealing with their concerns, which resulted in attacks on farm instructors and hungry Native people breaking into government storehouses when rations were denied.<sup>13</sup>

The situation in Frog Lake and Onion Lake was further complicated in late 1884 when Edgar Dewdney, who had recently been promoted to Indian commissioner for the North-West, forced Mistahimaskwa and his followers to move North to Frog Lake or face starvation. Dewdney was particularly concerned about Big Bear’s men who had been openly discussing killing Indian agents and farm instructors during the summer of 1884. During this summer, the Cree leaders Big Bear, Piapot and Little Pine had held a council

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<sup>9</sup> For more discussion on the role of Indian agents see F. Laurie Barron, “Indian agents and the North-West Rebellion.” In *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*. F.L. Barron & J. B. Waldram (eds). (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1986), 139-154.

<sup>10</sup> GFG Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), 242.

<sup>11</sup> Most of the literature focuses still on the negative role of Indian Agents as men who blindly enforced the Canadian governments oppressive policies. For example see Robin Jarvis Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918-1939*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2003), ix-xxiii.

<sup>12</sup> Barron *Indian Agents* 140-141.

<sup>13</sup> John L. Tobias “Canada’s Subjugation of the Plains Cree.” *The Canadian Historical Review* 64, no. 4 (1983): 533.

in which they continued to discuss uniting to renegotiate the treaties and ask for one large Indian Territory and greater autonomy. Dewdney and Assistant Commissioner Hayter Reed had determined that the Cree were further planning to request a meeting with the government in the summer of 1885, and therefore the pair sought to separate the Cree Chiefs, and even have them arrested through new provisions in the Indian Act set to take effect in January 1885.<sup>14</sup>

Hungry and desperate, a large contingent of Big Bear's Plains Cree finally moved to Frog Lake in the fall of 1884, and lived there while Big Bear continued to negotiate with the government. During the following winter, under pressure from his starving followers, Big Bear finally agreed to accept a separate reserve that would be surveyed in the coming spring. Their presence made Frog Lake a very crowded settlement, and they spent a very difficult winter working and begging for rations and hunting for limited game - a situation that created a spirit of unrest in the camp that some say was amplified by the actions of the Métis in Batoche.<sup>15</sup> They were also forced to deal with Indian agent Thomas Quinn and farm instructor John Delaney who were known for having prior difficulties with the Cree under their charge, and were in fact slated for a transfer out of Frog Lake in March 1885.<sup>16</sup> It was predominantly Big Bear's men, under the control of War Chief Wandering Spirit, who killed nine white men in Frog Lake in the morning of 2 April 1885. These men included Indian agent Thomas Quinn and farm instructor John Delaney, colleagues of George Mann. Eyewitness accounts suggest that later that day, two men were sent to Onion Lake to kill farm instructor Mann and thus complete the elimination of government employees in the immediate area. However, Mann, his wife

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<sup>14</sup> Tobias "Canada's Subjugation..." 536-538. Tobias argument is developed exclusively from letters between government officials found in RG 10 files. I have provided a short summary of his position to provide context for my own story, but a complete reading of his article is highly recommended by the author for those seeking a deeper understanding of the complexity of issues in play prior to the rebellion in 1885.

<sup>15</sup> Waiser and Stonechild. *Loyal Till Death*, 106-125.

<sup>16</sup> Tobias "Canada's Subjugation..." 540.

and three children were helped to escape that night by Nehithawe treaty Chief Seekascootch and his family who feared for the Manns' safety;<sup>17</sup> the Mann family arrived at Fort Pitt at one in the morning on 3 April unharmed. The friendly relationship between the Mann and Seekascootch families was tested in an extraordinary way that night, and this microcosm of history will be a primary focus of this paper.

Several people, including the Hudson Bay Factor William McLean, his family, and twenty-five North-West Mounted Police (NWMP—under the direction of Captain Francis Dickens), greeted the Mann family at the Fort. They were the first to bring news of the killings at Frog Lake, which caused much concern among the Fort's residents.<sup>18</sup> On 14 April 1885, after almost two weeks of sentry duty where the Fort's residents feared an attack by Indians, a large contingent of Aboriginal, white and Métis hostages, under the control of Wandering Spirit and his Nehiyawak warriors, arrived at Fort Pitt and wished to have access to the Fort's supplies. Fearing more bloodshed, Big Bear met with McLean. After a period of negotiations the twenty-five NWMP were allowed to leave the Fort, and floated down river on a scow to Fort Battleford. After the police's departure, many members of the camp took supplies from the Fort, and the warriors made all the remaining inhabitants their hostages, including the Mann family. After two months in captivity, during which the entire group was pursued by Government troops through the swamps and bushes of this rough northern prairie, all hostages were released unharmed.<sup>19</sup> As it is beyond the scope of this project to go into greater detail, this brief introduction is a short version of a very complex history that is meant to give the reader

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*. (McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal, 1997), 63-65.

<sup>18</sup> *Saskatchewan Archives Board [SAB]*, S-A751, George Gwynne Mann fonds. Blanche Mann's account titled "Episodes of the Riel Rebellion, 1885."

<sup>19</sup> Carter, *Capturing Women*, 60-67. Carter points out that none of the hostages were actually rescued; they either escaped or were allowed to leave.

some context in which to understand the situation in which the Mann and Seekascootch families found themselves in during the spring of 1885.

Accounts of the Frog Lake “Massacre,”<sup>20</sup> as it is still widely known, and of the subsequent two-month captivity of the non-Aboriginal hostages including the Mann family, dominated historical literature after the rebellion. These stories portrayed the dramatic events of 1885 as the last gasp of Aboriginal resistance in western Canada, even though many of the people who were frightened and held against their will also included Indian and Métis families. In fact, evidence suggests that people from different cultural backgrounds did interact with one another as equals, working together for the safety and wellbeing of all involved. However, in the non-Native community these narratives were eventually obscured by the more popular sensational stories of Indian savagery and white women under a constant threat of a “fate worst than death.”<sup>21</sup> The 1885 Riel Rebellion has been described as a watershed event in Western Canadian Native-newcomer history, when attitudes towards Aboriginal people were irrevocably changed.<sup>22</sup> In the aftermath of the conflict, images of noble, peaceful Indians were replaced by stories that labeled all Indians as rebels—unpredictable children in need of a firm civilizing hand. Within this atmosphere of fear and mistrust, Dewdney was finally able to arrest Big Bear and other Cree “trouble makers,” thus completing the government’s plan to divide the Cree and silence their ambitions for a united Cree

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<sup>20</sup> The word massacre is put in quotation marks to denote that it is a non-Aboriginal term that presents this historical event in a one-dimensional way. As has been alluded to, there is much historical evidence that casts considerable doubt on the assumption that it was an unprovoked and senseless act.

<sup>21</sup> Carter, *Capturing Women*, 60-62, 74, 114. Carter gives an extensive examination of the roles of Indian and Métis men and women who helped keep many prisoners safe during the two-month captivity. These stories were soon glossed over and the white men and women emerged as the true heroes of the rebellion. The quotation found in her book was taken from *The Toronto Daily Mail*, 25 April 1885.

<sup>22</sup> Erin Jodi Millions, “Ties Undone: A Gendered and Racial Analysis of the Impact of the 1885 Northwest Rebellion in the Saskatchewan District.” (Thesis MA, University of Saskatchewan, 2004) 92-110. Also see Carter *Capturing* 21, and Wasier and Stonechild *Loyal Till Death* 238-41.

Territory.<sup>23</sup> It is these shifting images of Indians as represented by popular post-rebellion historical literature that is a primary interest of this study.

In chapter one I will argue that the changing image of the Indian in the Canadian west was a continuation of a long standing British theatric tradition that espoused to be historically authoritative, especially when describing the needs and desires of dark-skinned 'others.' Since the Middle Ages, Europeans have had a fascination with dark skin, which has alternated between fear and admiration, and changed from disgust to pity and back again. Earlier religious fears of darkness (Christian versus Muslim) were eventually transformed into more sophisticated ideas of dark skinned people as noble savages who were gifted in the knowledge of nature, but naïve in the ways of the more sophisticated civilized world. These changing attitudes towards dark skinned 'others' evolved mainly in live performance where white actors painted their skin dark to become the 'other' in a metatheatrical world where they were in constant dialogue with their audience. This "nudge nudge wink wink" tradition was carried on in the New World as colonial British dramatic writers continued to be fascinated with tawny skinned races. The British melodramatic narrative style, which evolved alongside these representations of dark skin on stage, influenced the narrative style of popular historical literature and contributed to the development of a "mythological" Canadian history. Popular melodramas in the nineteenth century featured a predictable but entertaining suspenseful plot with a moral message. Indians and their civilizing white heroes were inserted into historical narratives that mimicked this structure. To please their readers, historical writers focused more on action than character development, and ignored the

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<sup>23</sup> Tobias "Canada's Subjugation..." 547.

complexity of relationships in favour of a clear conflict, climax and resolution, which fit the expectations of a predominantly British audience.<sup>24</sup>

My ancestor was cast in such narratives as were often found in newspaper and magazine stories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, written by British Canadian journalists and ghost writers whose dramatic style forever influenced the history of Frog Lake:

“One of the best known and at the same time one of the most remote from the ways of civilization is Indian Agent Mann, who at present acts as overlord to the Crees at Hobbema.<sup>25</sup> Mr. Mann has the distinction of being the only Indian Agent who not only took part in the rebellion of 1885, but with his wife and family went into captivity in the carts of Big Bear after the capitulation of Fort Pitt. At that time Mr. Mann was the agent at Onion Lake, which is north and west from the site of Fort Pitt. He was then, as he is now, a man who had no fear of any sort of man that wore a blanket; but in those days the Crees were a band of lunatics, and taking heed to the signs of the time, Mr. Mann drove his family to the fort.”<sup>26</sup>

Such writings reveal the tone of post rebellion historical anecdotes in the early twentieth century that often elevated the colonizer as the authority, and diminished the colonized. The escape story was a footnote to a broader narrative designed to reassure settlers that Indians were no longer a significant threat. In this version, the Mann family's escape was not particularly dramatic; George simply recognized the danger and drove to Fort Pitt. The description 'lunatics' was perhaps a reference to an earlier image of Aboriginal groups in late nineteenth century journalism, a time when those who were involved in the 1885 conflict were depicted as wild Indians who posed a threat to a civilized Canada. Those early accounts of 1885 focused on the peril of a small number

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<sup>24</sup> For more discussion on the deep roots of the melodramatic tradition see Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, *History of the Theatre, Eighth Edition*. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 245-246, 370.

<sup>25</sup> George G. Mann was promoted to Indian agent in 1885 and had a long career in the Indian department that ended in Hobbema, Alberta in 1915. *Glenbow Archives*, George Mann fonds. Copy of declaration of Indian agent and letter regarding George Mann's retirement.

<sup>26</sup> Author unknown, "In The Last West. Men Who Are Making Long Journeys And Blazing New Paths In The Little Known Regions Of Canada," (*Toronto Saturday Night*, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1908), 1.

of white settlers at the mercy of a large contingent of unpredictable Indians. However, as the nineteenth century was ending this shifted to an image of a more controlled Indian to quiet the fears of a soon to be rapidly increasing settler population. Then, as the twentieth century wore on and the subjugation of Indians became more entrenched, writers modified the melodramatic narrative to celebrate an austere period gone by. The influence of British drama on historical narratives can be found throughout the early historiography. Of particular interest to this study are the eyewitness accounts that emerged after 1885 and how they used this privileged position when they wrote their 'historically authoritative' accounts. The influence of the melodramatic British tradition has not been sufficiently analyzed in terms of its influence over these writers, one of whom was George Mann's eldest daughter, Blanche.

The remainder of chapter two is dedicated to a review of the more contemporary historiography and the degree to which it has succeeded in correcting the historical myth. Specifically I look at attempts to incorporate an Aboriginal perspective into academic history, and the continuing debate regarding the merit of relying on purely single discipline conventional historical inquiry. I argue that cultural perspectives have only begun to take a significant hold in an academia that too often resists the more complex interdisciplinary approach which includes history, anthropology and linguistics. In particular I agree with those scholars who embrace metaphysical theory as a way of understanding another culture's world view, and how this understanding can help academics embrace alternative narratives of the past that have previously seemed illogical from a western world view. The theories of R.G. Collingwood concerning what he describes as the "subjective objective" have been particularly inspiring in this regard.

In order to make my own mark in this interdisciplinary world I have attempted to further understand the British cultural perspective through its dramatic tradition. Further to this, in chapter three I incorporate anthropological style fieldwork into my project as I



look at the way two families, one Aboriginal and one from British Canadian heritage, remember the same historical event. To move beyond the brief, sensationalized newspaper accounts of the period, and the mainstream history that grew from this melodramatic style, two separate but interpenetrating eyewitness narratives of this event were examined as the starting point for this part of the study. Narratives of the escape of the Mann family to Fort Pitt on the evening of 2 April 1885 have survived to a degree in both the Mann and Chief (Seekascootch) families, and so an attempt was made to engage the descendants of each family in the historical process. In 1947, George Mann's eldest daughter Blanche, who was one of three Mann children present that night, wrote a compelling eyewitness narrative of 1885, and sent it to Robert H. Hougham who was organizing the dedication of a memorial cairn at the site of Fort Pitt.<sup>27</sup> The Aboriginal version of the event was passed down orally across generations in the family of Chief Seekascootch, and the event as orated by Jimmy Chief, Seekascootch's grandson, was translated and printed in a local history book in 1985.<sup>28</sup>

On the surface these two versions read as a simple story of people helping each other in a time of need, or as Blanche Mann put it, "three friendly Indians...warned us....," but the language of each eyewitness version holds important clues into the outside influences, both cultural and otherwise, on each version of events. During the interview process I discovered that the cultural difference visible between these narratives as static historical documents are related to the differences that remain between each family in the present. For instance, one family remembered certain aspects of this history that the other family left out, and vice versa. Even though most of the Mann

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<sup>27</sup> *Glenbow Archives*, Robert H. Hougham fonds. Letter from Blanche Askey (nee Mann) to Robert H. Hougham, 25 June 1947.

<sup>28</sup> SAB, S-A751, George Gwynne Mann fonds. Blanche Mann's account titled "Episodes of the Riel Rebellion, 1885." The Aboriginal version of this event called "Story now told by Misehew (Jimmy Chief's father)," in *Fort Pitt History Unfolding, 1829-1985*. (Fort Pitt Historical Society: Frenchman Butte, Sask.) 101.

family still reside in the Lloydminster area near Onion Lake reservation, and many of the descendants of Seekascootch, who go by the surname Chief, still live on the reserve chosen by their ancestor our memory of the past remains different. This I will argue is partially due to the British dramatic tradition's influence on the style of history written about our families' encounter. This is the historical myth of the dominant culture that I feel has also kept me from engaging in our past in a meaningful way.

Prior to the start of this project I had spent virtually no time in the Onion Lake First Nation community, and a limited amount of time seriously discussing history with members of the Mann family. Consequently a significant part of this study assumed the form of my own personal discoveries regarding identity and memory as I worked to learn more about the people of Onion Lake, and conducted interviews with the Mann and Chief families. Due to this and the time constraints presented by the MA program, I restricted my investigation to a limited number of participants in each family. In the Chief family and in Onion Lake I was limited to two men and one female elder. I think that because I was very much a newcomer to their community, and was working on a somewhat controversial period of history, I was met with a certain number of non-responses and dead ends. In my own family I focused on my mother and her two brothers who had heard stories of their great grandfather's time in Onion Lake from their father George 'Pete' Mann; their grandfather, George Mann Junior, died in 1938 before they were born. Mann Junior grew up in Onion Lake and was a fluent Cree speaker. Having him as a storyteller in their youth would have perhaps influenced their connection to our history in Onion Lake.

In the interview process, I did not ask direct questions of identity, but rather focused on each person's memory of this past, and let the cultural differences between memories expose themselves. As most participants only remembered bits and pieces of the event in question, I found myself asking questions about any personal recollections

of the relationship between the Mann family and the people of Onion Lake and how each person thought of this link between our families. From these memories, my extensive experience as an outsider and limited experience in the Onion Lake community, I have tried to understand how past perspectives of the 'Escape to Fort Pitt' have informed our current perspectives. I have approached this subject delicately. Forefront in my mind as I sought to reconcile the many sides of this story with different cultural identities/perceptions/epistemologies was my desire to present a narrative that would be meaningful to both families. I struggled not to offend either my cousins or my new friends in Onion Lake, and worried that my relationships might stifle my work rather than enhance it. My investigation has helped me realize that the stark economic contrast between our communities is only the most apparent of the divisions that have prevented people from communicating across the town-reserve boundary. The weight of this cultural separation motivated me as I worked to understand the multiple perspectives.

When I went to Onion Lake to ask for an Aboriginal side of the story for the first time in my life, I was bombarded by complex feelings of guilt and then astonishment at what I heard. In particular, the oral tradition shared by elder Mary Whitstone brought to light a much different perspective on the past than I expected, and even though I had studied the historical evidence for a long period of time prior to my visit, I was ill prepared for the story I heard. Without prematurely giving away what this discovery was, I will say now that I was inspired by this experience to investigate further positive social history about the Mann family and their inter-cultural relationships in Onion Lake. In chapter four I outline many of these stories that defy the dramatic portrayal of the Mann family—initially as under threat of death by Wandering Spirits warriors, and then later as colonial authorities attempting in vain to encourage large groups of lazy Indians.

The archival records reveal that after the difficult times in 1885 Mann was promoted to Indian agent, and he and his family lived in the Onion Lake agency house

until 1900.<sup>29</sup> Mary's oral history as well as Mann and Chief family memories reveal that at least four members of the Mann family learned to speak the Cree language, and the historical record suggests they took a great deal of pride in their work in Onion Lake, a place where I believe they developed a sense of community with the Nehiyawe and Nehithawe people. In my immediate family on my maternal side (Mann), stories still exist of the work our ancestors did in Onion Lake, and the "friendly Indians" that kept them safe during the rebellion. However, what has always been lacking, or rather obscured from our memories, are the names of these "friendly Indians," and a broader sense of the solidarity, if any, that perhaps once existed between the Mann family and the people of Onion Lake, especially the Seekascootch (Chief) family. I argue that the interdisciplinary approach has helped repudiate the early melodramatic history of 1885, and suggests the Mann family had a close relationship with the people of Onion Lake, a relationship that was perhaps strengthened by the actions of the family of Seekascootch who took care of them during those troubled months in 1885. However, since 1900 when the Mann family left Onion Lake, it seems our families have slowly drifted apart, and any shared narratives of 1885 that perhaps once existed have never come to light. Before I began this project there was almost no dialogue between the two families regarding our history and common identity as the earliest residents of Seekascootch Indian reserve number 119, North-West Territories.

Finally, the multitude of voices this interdisciplinary approach presented to me were combined in a theatrical play titled *Friends or Friendlies?* (that appears here as Appendix One), which I composed at beginning of the second year of the program. In chapter five I discuss this experience as key to my argument that a large portion of the history of the 1885 Riel Rebellion was dramatized in such a way as to almost obliterate my family's ability to understand this past in a meaningful way. My approach to the play

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<sup>29</sup> SAB, S-A751, George Gwynne Mann fonds.

was to situate the Mann and Chief narratives of the evening of 2 April 1885 amongst the multiple sensational versions of the events surrounding the so-called Frog Lake “Massacre,” and captivity, to allow these multiple voices to resonate together. I broke all the narratives into short excerpts that reveal themselves in stages throughout the play, and become a jumbled dialogue between several historic and contemporary characters. As I struggled through the initial drafts of *Friends and Friendlies?* I played with the order of these excerpts, letting past perspectives freely intermingle with current perspectives and vice-versa. Later, I added short scenes from early Canadian dramas about Indians to give a final touch of chaos to what had become a post-modern style play.

*Friends or Friendlies?*, was my first effort to show how current views of the past have been influenced by the dominant historical myth, and how this has perhaps contributed to the divisions that still exist between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities. As previously mentioned, the dramatic voices I encountered were hegemonic, and the ways in which they influenced the narratives of 1885 are also plentiful. Letting all the voices speak to each other in such a way as to expose these influences was challenging, and the post-modernist/deconstructionalist style soon became a cacophony of voices that would almost certainly make little sense to an audience. As a result I placed myself in the centre of the juxtapositions and comparisons of voices past and present to act as a sort of narrator and negotiator to help the audience make sense of what was going on. The consequence of this decision was that the ‘Student’ character came to represent my own internal struggle and vulnerability as both a historian and a descendant of the Mann family, and his dilemma soon became the central conflict of the play.<sup>30</sup> As I worked through the play’s later drafts, I gravitated toward a structure in which the story begins relatively calmly and then

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<sup>30</sup> Alan Long in consultation with James Guedo. Professor Guedo is an experienced playwright, director and dramaturge who helped the author discover this struggle and countless other important realizations along the way.

gradually moves toward a more intense and argumentative chorus of voices. The student's ability to mediate between these voices/characters becomes correspondingly difficult and by the conclusion of the play the action has climaxed to a cacophony of voices. In this somewhat chaotic structure, where conflicts are presented and left unresolved, I hoped to challenge the audience to come to their own conclusions about what happened that cold dark night in 1885, all the while leaving them with the clear message that to embrace a single narrative is to erase another voice.

I was inspired to engage in this post-modernist/deconstructionist style of theatre by the work of Heiner Müller, and the directing style of Anne Bogart. Müller presented stark and powerful images to German audiences who were divided by the wrath of two World Wars, while Bogart encouraged her actors to embody stereotypes and reveal their personal vulnerability as a means to discover a meaningful dialogue with their audience. How their philosophies specifically help explain my own work will also be discussed further in chapter five. The thrust of this entire paper is principally a reflection of the issues raised in composing the play, and an elaboration upon certain of the theoretical and methodological issues that arose through that thought process. These issues, which have already been alluded to, are the role of dramatic historical writing in memory and identity, the notion of historical authority and voice, and an analysis of how each family remembers or rationalizes the past in relation to authority and voice. In this paper, I have tried to push away my western desire for a linear, tidy narrative in favour of a broader analysis of complex historical issues that have been exposed through this interdisciplinary process. I combine play writing with a variety of methods that include historiographical analysis, literary analysis, microhistory, and interviews with members of both families, to engage interdisciplinarity as a means of creating a broader picture of history that is hopefully interesting and accessible to people from multiple cultural backgrounds. The intercultural relationship between the Mann family and the Cree,

particularly the family of Chief Seekascootch, was certainly more complex and nuanced than the multitude of simplified sensationalized historical anecdotes from the early to middle twentieth century that perhaps continue to influence current impressions of our ancestor's past.

My experience growing up in the Lloydminster area in the late 1970s and early 1980s was that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were two distinct cultural groups, separated by the space between the reserve and the outside community, a space widened by the pervasive racist assumptions of the dominant society, and the complete lack of any sort of a balanced view of history in the school system.<sup>31</sup> During the course of the research as I talked to the various participants, I contemplated this void between us, and how it dominated my past experience. It seemed to me there is still exists a sense of separation between the dominant society and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, and, as I read the history of 1885, the voice that haunted my thoughts was that of the dramatic Wild West, and the many forms it has taken in the literature of Western Canada. Was it this perspective, which dominated newspapers, magazine stories, and history books for three or more generations since 1885 that has driven us apart? If so, where did this voice come from? Is there a British melodramatic tradition that can help us understand it? I begin this paper with an investigation of the British heritage of drama and dark skinned 'others.' I attempt to reveal that this tradition of authoritatively defining other cultures has deep cultural roots that fed the melodramatic tendencies of early Canadian history, and divided what should be a shared history between the Mann and Chief families.

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<sup>31</sup> For more discussion small town Canadian colonialism see Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 3-27.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **DRAMATIC VOICES AND HISTORICAL WRITING**

In spite of choosing such a brief moment in history, the remembering, re-telling and dramatization of the event, “The Escape to Fort Pitt,” by several different characters, past and present, over several years, has resulted in a deeply layered history, a quagmire that could be likened to the swamp the Manns supposedly drove through as they fled to Fort Pitt that night in 1885. Therefore it has been argued that searching for the ‘truth’ or a central thesis is not desirable. Rather, it is more important that all the voices are given a chance to speak, and all the subtle influences on the strength of each voice be exposed and layered into one presentation. If all our attitudes are exposed, past and present, then an environment is created in which we can begin to understand one another’s perspectives, and it is this dialogue that is important, not individual academic narratives that may unintentionally exclude certain perspectives.

In this study, British dramatic traditions were investigated in terms of their influence on the style of writers of early Canadian history, and to facilitate a deeper, richer understanding of my (Mann) family’s heritage and its influence on their current perspective. It seems that in post-confederation Canada, British drama and history were one and the same, interweaving with one another easily. In particular, I wish to analyze the writers of drama in North America who were eyewitnesses to historical events and fascinated with Indian folklore and customs. They created fictional Indian characters for a British audience who had little contact with Indians, but had developed certain expectations concerning how these Indians, as “dark-skinned characters,” should be portrayed in a theatrical setting. Although these writers had firsthand knowledge of the historical event they were writing about, they recast the actions of the players in history to take part in the audience’s fantasies about the secrets of the Indians. The drama of



the noble savage was born of an English theatrical tradition that developed its assumptions about dark-skinned others through the constant interaction between writer, actor and audience. As in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century England, it seems nineteenth century Canadians had a complex of feelings surrounding their assumptions about the 'other,' attitudes that were constantly in flux in changing demographic and political climates.

The use of blackface on stage dates back to the Middle Ages in Europe when darkness primarily signified religious difference. This darkness represented a host of evil characteristics that were acted out in religious morality plays as a simple way of discerning bad from good. The savage man came to represent the "wild man within," and was suppressed only by Christian salvation; darkness, in both a visual and spiritual sense, was the realm of Muslims and Jews who were excluded from divine morality because of their "cultural (or moral) incapacity to [...] reap the fruits of salvation."<sup>32</sup> In the shift to modernity in the sixteenth century, views began to shift from religious distinctions to racial ones. The gaze upon the dark man was still suspicious, but elements of enchantment and enticement began to creep in. The treacherous yet charismatic moor character Aaron in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* defined this curious new archetype who remained tapped into the religious system.<sup>33</sup>

Moving toward the eighteenth century, drama began to combine the great Shakespearean form, and his link to the classical period, with more contemporary influences to promote more "advanced" ideas about primitive people, and to evoke the audience's pity for lowly black slaves.<sup>34</sup> Even more notably, Shakespeare's *Othello* represents one of the most popular "Moors" of the English stage, and was one such

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<sup>32</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993) 23,24.

<sup>33</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* 5-9.

transitional character from the warrior moor to a noble but still untrustworthy character on the sixteenth and seventeenth century stage. The fact that Sir Lawrence Olivier performed Othello in blackface as late as 1965 reveals a long fascination with this “tawny” Shakespearian character.<sup>35</sup> *Othello* was a forerunner to the noble savage character in theatre, a type most often associated with representations of Indians in North American dramatic writing. A popular convention of British dramatic writers that began in the late seventeenth century involved using the mask of the unknown, dark-skinned ‘other’ to allow them to critique British policy and Christianity. Since blushing was a colour reserved for virtuous white skin, dark skin became the shameless colour of criticism. The power to educate also came from the performative power of white skin painted dark. The audiences of Shakespeare’s time and beyond always knew they were in a theatre, and enjoyed the interplay between themselves and the actors through metatheatrical moments such as asides. An early modern popular maxim was “washing the Ethiop white,” a saying which could refer to any impossible task or duty. By repeatedly referring to their dark skin as sooty or soiled, the actors were playing a game of “wink wink, nudge nudge” with the audience.<sup>36</sup> Although there was still a religious significance to blackness, racial and geographical modes of identification became added to the mix, and audiences began to look for more human characters. The experience of portraying their own idea of the role of black people in society shifted theatre from a symbolic gesture to a historical reenactment.<sup>37</sup>

*Oroonoko*, a novel by Aphra Behn published in 1688 and adapted for stage by Thomas Southerne in 1695, was built upon the noble character Oroonoko, who, through

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid* 100-103. Only in the 1990s did we see mainstream performances of Shakespeare where colour and race were ignored in casting – See Kenneth Branagh’s 1993 MGM film adaptation of “*Much Ado About Nothing*”, where African-American actor, Denzel Washington plays Don Pedro of Aragon.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* 6-8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* 15.

multiple portrayals in the eighteenth century, evolved into a sympathetic noble savage type character. As the son of an African king, Oroonoko was a man with noble blood, and could therefore claim the status of a worthy historical figure. Because he was kidnapped and sold into slavery, he had the peculiar title of “royal slave,” a position that allowed him to critique the upper class. Cast as a tragic hero, a character normally reserved for the upper class, the black Oroonoko encouraged a shift in British attitudes towards black slaves. Oroonoko was further allowed to criticize European politics and Christianity because he extolled the virtues of a black man who was purported to be closer to nature: a widely held philosophical belief that began to develop in the early sixteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Performed over 300 times on the London stage from 1695 to 1800 by white actors in blackface, Southerne's *Oronooko* gradually developed into the historically authoritative version of the noble black man, a popular sympathetic symbol of the slave abolitionist movement in late eighteenth century England, and the beginning of a humanitarian tradition concerning dark-skinned “others” in the early nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> He was a friend to the white settlers who marries a white woman, a parallel to Othello that almost certainly was not an accident. Oronooko successfully defended his white friends against attacking Indians, and, if he was played with the correct nobility and tenderness, his final tragic death scene evoked much pity from the audience.<sup>40</sup>

As the anti-slave movement strengthened in the late eighteenth century, humanitarians turned to *Oronooko* again and again for inspiration. One producer of the play even modified the text to further stress Oronooko's wretched state of mind, reflecting his desire to educate his audience on the evils of the African slave trade.<sup>41</sup> According to Vaughn, the records of the many performances of *Oronooko* indicate “that

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<sup>38</sup> For more discussion and references on the noble savage see Stelio Cro, *The Noble Savage: Allegory of Freedom*. (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1990), 93-105.

<sup>39</sup> Vaughan, *Performing Blackness*, 149-150.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* 157.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid* 163.

complex and often contradictory responses to *Oronooko* arose from the synergistic interaction of the audience's expectations and actorly performance." She notes that many audience members had black servants; a personal experience that she argues complicated their feelings and also triggered changes in *Oronooko*.<sup>42</sup> There is also a very complex intermingling of pity and fear of dark-skinned characters evident in the plays about North American Indians where personal experience was, in this case, the realm of the writer attempting to project his or her own complicated feelings about Indians to others through the theatre. One of the first full-length dramas written with Indian characters in North America presents an opportunity to analyze one of the first works by a self-proclaimed eyewitness of historical events attempting to use theatre to educate his audience through the widely held philosophical authority invested in the image of the noble savage.

*Ponteach*, written by American Robert Rogers and published in 1766, was developed in this humane and educational tradition but also with a more explicit purpose in mind.<sup>43</sup> A well-educated and wealthy man, Rogers wanted to pass on his knowledge to the English upper classes about these noble men whose traditions and customs had fascinated him as an eyewitness to actual events in the French-Indian war.<sup>44</sup> He therefore wrote his play in the Shakespearian dramatic form (five acts and iambic pentameter verse), and made Ponteach and his men essentially the equals of the British officers and soldiers they were fighting. In the vast open Empire of the New World, he felt free to allow Ponteach to live to fight another day, a strong independent noble savage, and not a tragic noble black slave like *Oronooko*. As an American perhaps critical of British meddling in his country, Rogers shows an Indian leader who has all the

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid* 167.

<sup>43</sup> Major Robert Rogers, *Ponteach: or the Savages of America*. (London: J. Millan, 1766). In *Representative Plays by American Dramatists, Volume 1, 1765-1819*. Montrose J. Moses (ed.), (New York: Benjamin Blom Inc., 1964), 110-208.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* 110.

responsibilities and concerns of a British general, but without Christianity, politics and British superiority to corrupt his pure spirit. Rogers undoubtedly hoped for a production in the Old World, but perhaps because of his American background and overly critical stance, his play was relegated to 'theatre of the mind,' and was never produced. In the spirit of the strong independent men of the New World, Rogers had presented himself as the historical authority on Ponteach and, through theatre, hoped to capture the imaginations of people of influence.

After this early attempt by an American writer to dramatize encounters with Indians, a more firmly established dominant American culture began to include Indians as main characters in staged dramas. In New York and other major cities, Americans built large theatres and developed theatrical Indian stereotypes in plays such as *Pocahontas; or, The Settlers of Virginia* and *Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags*, a strong theatrical tradition that was absent in Canada.<sup>45</sup> The most popular noble savage drama was *Metamora*, first performed in New York in 1829. *Metamora* was based on the life of Indian leader, King Philip, and also purported to be an authoritative history, or at least a more enlightened historic interpretation of an important Indian leader. Romance was also the domain of this noble Indian who was virtuous but alas a heathen and unable to understand the corrupt politics of the more civilized.<sup>46</sup> Although *Metamora* represented all that was good, "were all thy nation mild and good like thee, how soon the fire of discord might be quenched,"<sup>47</sup> he was a one-of-a-kind chief. Unlike Ponteach, he lost his battle due to his allegiance to an inferior god and disappeared into the woods to return to his simple ways where he is eventually

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<sup>45</sup> See introduction to George Washington Custis, *Pocahontas; or, The Settlers of Virginia*. In *Representative American Plays From 1767 to Present Day* Arthur Hobson Quinn (ed.) (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1957) 167-169.

<sup>46</sup> John Augustus Stone, *Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags*, in *Staging the Nation: Plays from the American Theatre, 1787-1909*. Don B. Wilmeth (ed.) (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998) 59.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid 63.

killed. This ending shows an American style still heavily influenced by British theatrical models, particularly the heroic tragedy style of *Oronooko* and *Othello*. Canadian writers finally adopted the idea of a tragic noble Indian in the late nineteenth century, but with limited stages on which to perform, Canadians seemed to prefer to develop their historical myth as literature and not live theatre like their counterparts in the United States.<sup>48</sup>

*Tecumseh*, by Canadian military man Charles Mair, was an educational drama in the noble savage tradition, also written by an eyewitness to history that sought the status of historical authority. However, Mair was a Canadian and loyal British subject and as a result there are definite differences in tone and content when compared to similar American plays. Mair, like Major Robert Rogers, made Tecumseh a great leader who spoke in iambic pentameter and mirrored the British military persona, in this case the British Canadian general, Brock. However, unlike Rogers, Mair was part of the cause for a British Canadian Empire, and not a fully independent nation. Even though Mair had primarily fought the Métis in Manitoba in the first Riel led resistance in 1869 and 70, a racially impure society that contrasted with the British ideal of pure Indian leaders, he preferred to present himself as an authority on Tecumseh and his followers.<sup>49</sup>

Tecumseh was a true hero in his theatrical imagination and political ideologies and, like Ponteach, had a direct connection to what was pure and good through his close bond with nature. However, unlike Ponteach and more like Oronooko, Tecumseh must not live on and over-complicate the British colony, and so he dies like a true tragic hero to become a martyr for Mair's Nationalist Canadian cause. Although never performed,

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<sup>48</sup> Because of small populations and perhaps a desire to distance themselves from uncivilized American tradition, loyalist Canadians sought this more civilized style of portraying the noble savage.

<sup>49</sup> Norman Shrive, *Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 83-121. Mair was a member of the Canada First Party that sought to populate the west with the British race.

Mair's *Tecumseh*, released in 1886 after the second Riel Rebellion, has been called a successful and "conscious exercise in literary nationalism," in which Mair effectively portrays Tecumseh as the last Indian leader attempting to lead the "scattered and squabbling Indian tribes [...] to a state of simplicity and innocence."<sup>50</sup>

Without the great stars of the American stage to give substance to such a character, Canadians further diminished the role of their "Indian Chief" to a friendly servant eager to aid the deserving and virtuous, an exotic treat who, after he helped the white hero, grunted and disappeared into the woods.<sup>51</sup> *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812* written by Sarah Anne Curzon in 1876 and published in 1887, was one such play that further modified the noble savage to a more palatable character suited for Canadian audiences. This play altered the distant and martyred noble savage to one that fully supported all that was good in the post-confederation British Canadian upper class, the people in charge of the always changing Canadian historical myth. The drama in this play comes from a non-typical portrayal of a white woman in a dangerous military situation. Laura Secord is innocent, beautiful and frail: qualities that were used to heighten dramatic tension while meeting the audience's expectations that she remain a pure and moral Canadian woman. The new enemy is the evil Yankee with his disloyal and insolent temperament. The Indians' main function, as is the role of the black slaves and French Canadians, is to substantiate the myth of British moral and intellectual superiority versus the immoral and aggressive Americans.

Mrs. Secord is portrayed as a strong white woman in charge of her household who clearly knows what is best for her black servants, Pete and Flos. There is a definite

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<sup>50</sup> John Mathews, *Charles Mair*. In *Canada's Past and Present: A Dialogue*. Robert L. McDougall ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965) 90, 98.

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Ann Curzon, *Laura Secord the Heroine of 1812*, in *Woman Pioneers Volume Two: Canada's Lost Plays*. Wagner, Anton (ed.) (Toronto: CTR Publications, 1979) 126.

effort to use the speech of these two for comedic effect, and to show a wide distance between the rightful inheritors of the land and the simple folk who are there to serve.

Pete: Yes, mistis; jes', jes' now. I done tell Flos  
Ter put her bes' leg fus', fer I mus' go  
An' ten' dat poo', sick hoss.

Mrs. Secord: Nay, you'll do nothing of the kind! You'll stay  
And wait upon these men. I'll not have Flos  
Left single-handed by your cowardice.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly the Indians speak in a way that, while less deliberately comedic, also surely lowers their status far below that of the Mrs. Secord and the Canadian military. Lieutenant Fitzgibbon even modifies his own speech to make sure the simple Indians understand him.

Fitzgibbon: I am indebted, madam, for what I see  
Has been no common task. Be seated, pray. *A Cadet places a chair.*  
Chief, will you also rest? *He indicates a couch.*

Mishe-mo-quā: No. Woman, she  
Come far, to tell white chief great words.

Fitzgibbon: I thank her much.<sup>53</sup>

Although condescending, Mrs. Secord and the Canadian soldiers are direct and polite to the Indians and black servants, which is in contrast to the way the American soldiers are portrayed as blunt, unintelligent and mean.<sup>54</sup> In return for their politeness, Mrs. Secord and the Canadian military get the full support of the Indians, who are portrayed both as loyal and unpredictable for full melodramatic effect.

Interestingly, the frailty and bravery of Laura Secord has many parallels with the captivity narrative of Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*, a story about the two white women in Big Bear's camp that adhered very closely to British colonial literary traditions, and was perhaps the product of a "ghost

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid* 101.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* 133.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid* 102-103.



writer.”<sup>55</sup> The writers of *Two Months* and *Laura Secord* recognized the dramatic value of placing noble white women in the hands of dark men, a tradition that had its beginnings in the plays *Oroonoko* and *Othello*. Othello and Oronooko of course commit suicide at the end of each play, and thus end their foray in the white world; their relationships with white women are never allowed to bear fruit. Even though the image of the Indian was relatively benign in *Laura Secord*, Curzon does not hesitate to heighten the tension created by this well-established juxtaposition. The first time the Indians enter, the stage notes read: “She [Mrs. Secord] trips and falls, and instantly the Indian war-whoop resounds close at hand, and numbers of braves seem to spring from the ground, one of whom approaches her as she rises with his tomahawk raised.”<sup>56</sup> In *Two Months*, there is a particularly heavy emphasis on “the fate worse than death,” and the dangers of Aboriginal unions with whites that result in the “menacing Métis.”<sup>57</sup> Drama was a tool used to define the lines between cultures and remind people of the rules of an orderly society.

The noble savage image that was inherited from works such as *Oroonoko* and *Othello* and which saw its realization in the United States North American Indian in *Ponteach* and *Metamora* then adopted to fit the Canadian mold in *Tecumseh* and *Laura Secord* represents a long-held pattern of historical authority vested in the European community. Although the questionable moral superiority of Christian leaders was most highly criticized in *Ponteach*, all the plays discussed portray noble, wise, dark-skinned leaders unaffected by the worst of the white race. Moral superiority was the domain of the upper class in both societies, but in the end the Europeans prevailed as racial lines became more firmly drawn, and the superiority of the colonizer had to take precedence. In performance, the characters Oronooko and Othello had “absorbed and reflected the

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<sup>55</sup> Carter, *Capturing Women*, 114.

<sup>56</sup> Curzon *Laura Secord* 110.

<sup>57</sup> Carter, *Capturing Women*, 49.

contradictory feelings about black people that were circulating in culture at large,” and fueled debates about slavery in the late eighteenth century. Although they were influenced by this English dramatic tradition, the Canadian noble savage dramas *Tecumseh* and *Laura Secord* were never performed, and there appears to have been little debate surrounding the treatment of Indians in Canada. This is because Curzon’s *Laura Secord* appeared late in the stages of Canadian hegemonic colonialism and represented growing sentiments of a shared moral superiority among European Canadians. With their superiority firmly entrenched, the noble savage was no longer a curiosity to be pursued; rather he served to codify and preserve the structures of the colonial mentality.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the increased construction of Canadian stages for dramatic art in the early twentieth century, plays about Indians remained romantic and in the realm of the mind. *Laura Secord* was the title of Merrill Denison’s Depression-era radio play, a shorter version of the Secord story that further relegated Indians to token roles, with grunts and chopped speech.<sup>59</sup> Negro servants to Mrs. Secord took on a more significant role, and were again used to show how loyalists like the Secords treated their servants with much more human respect than the American visitors.<sup>60</sup> It was an early twentieth century melodramatic morality play with obvious parallels to Curzon’s work, and had a similar purpose of educating and enlightening the public about Canadian history.

Denison also wrote a drama that was one of the first English Canadian acknowledgments of Canada’s conflict with the Métis, another early twentieth century radio play called the “Battle of Seven Oaks.” In this play, the romance of the frontier was

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<sup>58</sup> Abdul JanMohamed, from “The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 12: 59-87, 1985. In Counsell and Wolf *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook*. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 97-103.

<sup>59</sup> Merrill Denison, “Laura Secord,” in *Henry Hudson and Other Plays: Six Plays for the Microphone by Merrill Denison*. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1931) 140.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid* 128.

central in a dramatization of the battle between the two great fur-trading companies. However, the only men worthy of the battlefield were the French and the English, while the “half-breeds” were portrayed as so wild they were “worse than savages.”<sup>61</sup> Once again, the desire to educate through dramatic history elevates Denison to the level of an authority.

A search of productions in western Canada’s oldest city and economic hub to the North-West Territories revealed that the acute case of amnesia with regard to dramatic conflict with Indian and Métis people continued into the mid-twentieth century. As the site of the first Métis resistance that eventually led to the formation of the first province in western Canada, it seems logical that Winnipeg, Manitoba, would have the most potential to feature dramas that codified representations of the other on the stage. After all, Winnipeg had a vibrant theatre scene that involved various amateur drama groups and touring companies, and was once home to Charles Mair who had written and released *Tecumseh* in 1886. However, the only staged drama in early twentieth century Winnipeg that was connected to Indians was the theatrical revues of Manitoba history performed for heads of state. Within these traditions European Canadians paid tribute to empire and progress with only fleeting references to Indians as the ‘first settlers.’ French voyageurs were touted as the first developers, and both were part of a “picturesque period of wigwam, pelt and pemmican,” that immediately gave way to the stalwarts of civilization, the British explorers. There was no mention of Métis, half-breed, rebellion or war; the defining struggle in the formation of Manitoba was not allowed on the main stage.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Merrill Denison, “The Battle of Seven Oaks,” in *Henry Hudson and Other Plays: Six Plays for the Microphone by Merrill Denison*. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1931) ##??.

<sup>62</sup> *Archives of Manitoba*, P5644, Winnipeg Royal Welcome Week Committee presents “Happy and Glorious, A Cavalcade of Welcome.” 20-27 May 1939.

A similar show hosted by the Canadian Girls in Training at the same Playhouse Theatre in 1940 featured a parallel program. The pageant began with the French (1650), followed by United Empire Loyalists (1780), Red River Settlers (1813 & 1820) and then leapt to The Great Immigration (1900-1910). Once again, rebellion, resistance and the Métis were completely overlooked.<sup>63</sup> The historical pageant tradition was enormously popular in the United States and Canada at this time, a form of theatre that also purported to be historically accurate dramatizations of history.

The historical authority placed in dramatic works involving noble savages can be seen in the persistence of this myth in the early twentieth century written historical record. The notion of what was true and good history lay in the hands of the people who could create the literature. Those people were the affluent of the dominant society who had vested interests in maintaining images of Indians that served their purposes. It has been argued that colonial societies established their cultural identity by reinforcing the patterns of allegiance and opposition in their past.<sup>64</sup> In the late nineteenth century works of Curzon and Mair, the concept of race was firmly entrenched within the theatrical tradition, and the darker-skinned other was classified to fit the vision of the new nation of Canada. The economic and nation-building motives for classification were apparent through the increased need to codify people that did not fit the European mold. The destruction of Aboriginal culture in colonial Canada resulted in what JanMohamed calls “pathological societies, ones that exist in a state of perpetual crisis.”<sup>65</sup> Within JanMohamed’s classification system, the plays *Tecumseh* and *Laura Secord* fall within the early stages of hegemonic colonialism. Dramatic literature of this kind essentially reinforced perceptions of Canadian history at this time, and reflected Government’s

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<sup>63</sup> *Archives of Manitoba*, P5644, “Canadian Girls in Training, Winnipeg, Silver Anniversary Grand Pageant, Souvenir Programme.” Playhouse Theatre 16-17 May 1940.

<sup>64</sup> Colin Counsell & Lauries Wolf (eds.) *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook*. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 95.

<sup>65</sup> JanMohamed “The Economy...” 97.

desire to speed up treaty signing, force Aboriginal peoples on reserves, and impose European styles of governance.

The drama of the Wild West was, and still is, seductive. As time created distance from the past, the people involved in the significant events of the “taming” of the west more and more became characters of a drama. This drama, written in the romantic trope, was the authoritative word of history for many generations of Canadians. As one of these writers, W. L. Morton, stated: “Men enact history and history is men in action. In looking at that most dramatic juncture in Canadian history, the events of 1869 and 1870 in Red River, we may therefore properly concern ourselves with two actors in that great act of historical theatre, Charles Mair and Louis Riel.”<sup>66</sup> Similarly, George Mann was an “actor” in that most dramatic event of “historical theatre,” “the Escape to Fort Pitt” situated in the middle of the even more dramatic Frog Lake “Massacre” and equally bone chilling, “Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear.” The history of this time was dramatized over and over in magazine and newspaper stories that situated themselves as authoritative in the dominant historical discourse. In the early twentieth century, mainstream histories were primarily long romantic narratives that catered to the British race as the undisputed decent and moral inheritors of the vast North-West.

The prairies, which some of us had seen in the undisputed possession of the Indian, the trader, and the wild animals they hunted, began to swarm with human life; and not only from British and American countries, but from many alien lands in Europe, immigrants commenced to build homes and to turn with the ploughshare the virgin sod of the plains.<sup>67</sup>

These stories were the cultural roots of my family's memory, or rather lack of it. The less dramatic narratives that existed in the days and weeks immediately following

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<sup>66</sup> W. L. Morton, “Two Young Men, 1869: Charles Mair and Louis Riel,” at <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/twoyoungmen.shtml>.. Manitoba Historical Society Transactions, Series 3, Number 30, 1973-74 season.

<sup>67</sup> R. G. MacBeth, *The Romance of Western Canada*. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1920) 227-228.

the release of the captives in 1885 have been obliterated from my family's memory by a well-rehearsed dramatic historical tradition.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Carter, *Capturing*, 60-69. Carter points out several stories that changed over time and the fact that not one Cree was ever captured by Middleton; all those wanted either escaped or later surrendered to Canadian authorities.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### HISTORIOGRAPHY

#### a) Historical Authority and Western Historical Voices

Historiographically speaking, virtually all of the academic and non-academic history in the first half of the twentieth century related to the Frog Lake area and the 1885 rebellion has focused on the “massacre” and/or the two-month captivity. This early history was influenced by sensationalized media reports that at first greatly exaggerated the number of deaths and the fate of any survivors as captives, blaming the savage and unpredictable nature of the Indians. “The Indians entered Mr. Gowanlock’s house, and without saying a word deliberately shot him dead. Another Indian raised his rifle and aimed at W.C. Gilchrist, when Mrs. Gowanlock, rushing forward, pinioned his arms by clasping them around his body. The Indian shook her off and fired, killing her instantly, and shot Gilchrist immediately after.”<sup>69</sup> The story appears to have been completely fabricated, as Mrs. Gowanlock had in fact not been killed; a correction to the story was printed as a short footnote to another story nine days later. In those reports, complete responsibility for the deaths of the men was placed on the nameless Indians, and further reports dehumanized their plight to help justify a swift deployment of Government troops to the area.

For example, in another story from Winnipeg that was also printed in the *New York Times*, the ensuing fights between the Cree and Government troops during the captivity were grossly exaggerated. In chronicling the battle at what is now called Steele Narrows, where only a handful of Steele’s men were wounded and only five Cree men

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<sup>69</sup> *Toronto Daily Mail*, 14 April 1885, p. 1.

were reported killed,<sup>70</sup> this story describes a battle in which thirty or more Indians were killed while Steele had sustained only a “trifling loss, only those being so rash as to expose themselves being shot.” The story appeared on 7 and 8 June 1885, just before the Mann family and other remaining captives were released.<sup>71</sup>

These sensationalized reports, that claimed to be authoritative, were a legacy of the British dramatic tradition that influenced the nature of later eyewitness accounts. Two of the most popular were the *War Trail of Big Bear*, and *Blood Red the Sun*, both by the only white male survivor of the “massacre,” William Bleasdel Cameron. Cameron, as an eyewitness, tailored his interpretation for an audience that was accustomed to the melodramatic narrative style. The first clue of this is readily seen in his choice of titles. Perhaps in an effort to remain believable to readers, Cameron flips back and forth in his romantically written books from admiration to condemnation of the Aboriginal characters, and simplifies them into the categories of good and bad. In his works, he kept an arms-length relationship with his Native friends and presented himself as an Indian expert of sorts, as he weaved in and out of the popular melodramatic writing style. He was grateful for the Indians’ help in his survival, but was careful to mention that for the most part, these poor simple people could not be trusted, a moral difference his audience had come to expect. He also often described Indians in terms of the dominant stereotypes of the time: the men as crazy out of control children, and the women as their slaves.<sup>72</sup>

Even as late as 1975, in a publication that actually sympathizes with most of the demands of the Indians and Métis in 1885 as “legitimate grievances,” the “massacre” is presented as a singularly unforgivable occurrence. “None, however, can have anything

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<sup>70</sup> Wayne F. Brown, *Steele’s Scouts: Samuel Benfield Steele and the North-West Rebellion*. (Surrey: heritage House, 2001) 137.

<sup>71</sup> *New York Times*, 8 June 1885; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2003).

<sup>72</sup> William Bleasdel Cameron, *Blood Red The Sun*. (Calgary: Kenway, 1926), 83-86. For more discussion on the dominant stereotypes of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Aboriginal people, see Carter *Capturing Women*, 87-135.



but loathing for the senseless killing of innocent people such as took place at Frog Lake that spring morning so many years ago.”<sup>73</sup> It was this very image of a quiet morning in a peaceful settlement with its dutiful, hardworking white inhabitants living in harmony with the many Indians of the area, which has dominated many stories emanating from that day; not until the 1980s did more culturally sensitive histories begin to emerge.

Hugh Dempsey’s book on Big Bear uses several eyewitness accounts of the “massacre” along with an interview with elder and Chief Seekasootch descendant Jimmy Chief to weave a more balanced narrative. Dempsey does not blame anyone in particular, but focuses on the circumstances leading up to the event. He asserts that the strong painkillers in the Hudson Bay Company’s store (ninety percent alcohol), and the Eucharistic wine in the church, both allegedly stolen and consumed by Wandering Spirit and his warriors, were primarily to blame for the situation getting out of control, evidence he gleaned from an 1885 newspaper story penned by eyewitnesses Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney. In his endnotes he states that he quotes Theresa Delaney from the newspaper, and not from her book, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*—the latter being a source that he acknowledges was “clearly influenced by a journalist.”<sup>74</sup>

However, he does not sufficiently problematize his source, which was also perhaps edited by a journalist, and part of a larger body of eyewitness narratives that were dramatized in the newspapers.<sup>75</sup> Dempsey’s style was in keeping with the western academic historical writing practice that takes information and quotations from sources, and uses them to back a sequence of logically organized events palatable to a western

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<sup>73</sup> Harold Fryer, *Frog Lake MASSACRE*, (Frontier Publishing Ltd.: Aldergrove B.C., 1975), 3. Note that massacre is in capitols in the title as in the original document.

<sup>74</sup> Hugh A. Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*. (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984), 155. See endnote 10 for Dempsey’s source and his explanation for its use. The lack of credibility of the Gowanlock/Delaney narratives has been very well documented by Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women* 110-111.

<sup>75</sup> The suspect quality of the writings that came from Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock has been well documented in Carter, *Capturing Women* 21,22,110,111.

audience, with limited analysis of the intentions of the writers of the source, or sensitivity to Aboriginal epistemologies. His work is dangerously close to what historical philosopher R. G. Collingwood denigrates a “common sense” approach to historical documents, where one treats one’s sources as unchangeable “authorities” of the past.<sup>76</sup> In Dempsey’s work there is little ethnographic interdisciplinary analysis, and only anecdotal use of one Aboriginal source.

Bill Waiser and Blair Stonechild present a more compelling and contextualized argument that is rooted in Aboriginal sensibilities of the period, and attuned to contemporary political tensions. Using more Aboriginal input and a wider range of archival documents, *Loyal Till Death* does not focus on alcohol as the primary cause, but instead argues that the unscrupulous Government agents who were not living up to the treaty were the principal catalysts of events. In doing so, the study treats Aboriginal people as more rational beings.<sup>77</sup> However, for all their strength in terms of recasting our gaze and providing a much-needed reassessment of the causes of the rebellion, questions have been raised about their approach and the way they constructed their interpretation from extant evidence. As one bare-knuckled review noted, Waiser and Stonechild worked primarily from a series of single interviews conducted by research assistants that did not allow for the building of trustful relationships. As a result, rather than engaging the complexity of the local Aboriginal voices, they pursued a coherent province-wide narrative. The majority of their assistants’ followed a set questionnaire, and then submitted summarized reports of the information they obtained in each interview. The Governor General’s award winning result is a compelling account, but one that has been criticized for being more concerned with creating historical coherence

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<sup>76</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 234, 235. The late R. G. Collingwood was a Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at the University of Oxford from 1935 to 1941.

<sup>77</sup> Waiser and Stonechild. *Loyal Till Death*, 106-125.

than with embracing historical complexities.<sup>78</sup> Other than initial visits to each reserve to secure permission to conduct the interviews, Waiser and Stonechild did not hear the testimony themselves, or form relationships with the elders who were consulted. Their understanding of this valuable source was further hampered by the fact that neither is a speaker of the Cree language.<sup>79</sup> My own research suggests that the oral tradition, as with the archival documents, is reflexive and fluid, and what is understood depends on the listener as well as the storyteller.

By focusing on the George Mann family's escape story and the cultured ways of remembering, I hope to delve deeper into a Native-newcomer relationship that can shed a different light on the sensitive history surrounding the so-called Frog Lake "massacre." The Mann narrative describing loyal Indians who warned George Mann and kept him safe needs to go beyond what history and nineteenth century drama has overwhelmingly portrayed as a shallow and incidental relationship.<sup>80</sup> Despite my reservations I was inspired by Waiser and Stonechild's thesis to embrace an alternative way of viewing this past. However, I hope to use interdisciplinary studies to give readers a greater appreciation of the complexity of this past as revealed by the differing cultural and personal ways of rationalizing it.

Sarah Carter's *Capturing Women*, for example, provides much needed insight into Frog Lake, because she focuses more on the intentions and style of the writer of the historical sources, rather than on how they can complement her own linear historical narrative. She notes, as I have done, that the stories of captivity after Frog Lake became more and more sensational over time, as writers took more creative license with

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<sup>78</sup> Winona Stevenson, "Indigenous Voices, Indigenous Histories Part 3: The Social Relations of Oral History." *Saskatchewan History* 51(2) (Fall 1999): 29-35.

<sup>79</sup> Alan Long in conversation with Tyrone Tootoosis, one of the research assistants employed by Waiser and Stonechild. Copies of the interviews are available through the library at First Nations University of Canada, Regina, Saskatchewan.

<sup>80</sup> How the 'noble savage' in British and Canadian drama has influenced Canadian historical writing has already been discussed in Chapter one.

the evidence. Also, Carter points out that the government and dominant society had an agenda of land acquisition and settlement that required a more mythological vision of the west to attract overseas settlers. The most desirable settlers were of course British Protestants, who viewed the mixed blood Métis at the bottom of the social ladder, with Indians only slightly above them. Drawing from a variety of sources in her investigation of the gendered manipulation of female identity, Carter provides an excellent interdisciplinary analysis of many of the newspaper stories that dramatized these events and shaped them into a narrative that served a specific purpose.<sup>81</sup>

Aboriginal peoples have most certainly been hurt by the sensational stories that painted them as villains, and the most recent generation of historians has done much to expose the corruption, manipulation, and malfeasance of the colonial actors. What remained essentially ignored, and almost completely unexamined, were the voices of the Aboriginal actors. Beyond the oral histories of Fred Horse and Jimmy Chief that were incorporated into the narratives of the academic authors previously discussed, additional oral history remains that can be interpreted, and from this will emerge works that better engage and reflect Aboriginal epistemologies. Although perhaps weakened by colonialism, an oral tradition still exists in the Onion Lake and Frog Lake communities. Elders there, however, were reluctant to share the details of these stories with researchers who were either not part of the community, or who had not spent sufficient time in the community to build relationships and trust.

Edward Ahenakew, a highly educated Cree Anglican minister, shared the pain and rejection felt by the Aboriginal people of Frog Lake, and hinted that a broader oral tradition still existed in his 1951 article entitled "Sixty-Five Years Ago," written as a rebuttal to the many sensationalized stories still being circulated in the press of the day. Ahenakew confesses that he had written the article "many years ago," and at that time

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<sup>81</sup> Carter, *Capturing Women*, 87-135.

had found many elders in Frog Lake willing to talk about the past to him as a fellow Cree, but still afraid to share their narrative with the public. This fear may also have played a role in the limited number of accounts Waiser and Stonechild were able to gather through their research assistants. According to Ahenakew many of the people he spoke with had been eyewitnesses to the events.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps Ahenakew was allowed to publish his article because of his Christian faith, and his adherence to many of the public's assumptions about Indians. He apologizes, for example, for the Crees' uncivilized behaviour and quotes an elder that blamed the deed on the wild Indians of the Southern plains and acknowledged that Christianity was the only thing that "can ever heal the wound made then."<sup>83</sup> But then again, to dismiss Ahenakew's interpretations and those of the elders he interviewed is to perhaps further marginalize his Native voice by applying the expectations of today's dominant discourse.

The depth of Ahenakew's cultural insight is revealed in his effort to at least partially explain the massacre from a Cree point of view. In fact, he claimed to know the exact reasons for the ill will held among the men, a "slight [small] reason" that was made worse by the "spirit of unrest" present at the time. The grudge he referred to was something he said Indians kept to themselves, as personal vendettas were a dangerous thing in Cree culture. It seems he was trying to create a cultured understanding of the so-called "massacre," as well as a cultured explanation as to why such accounts were not widely shared. He intimates that perhaps the conflict was not unprovoked.<sup>84</sup> He also made a direct effort to quell general misunderstanding that was fueled by non-

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<sup>82</sup> Reverend Dr. Edward Ahenakew, "Sixty-Five Years Ago," *The Western Producer*, 11 January 1951, p.1.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid* 1.

<sup>84</sup> Erin Millions astutely points out that almost all the killings conducted by Indian men during the 1885 conflict were done to settle personal vendettas and not as direct acts of war against the government. Millions *Ties Undone* 42-43.

Native exaggerations of history or “opinions based on startling magazine stories and writings of literary gifted ones who see only the surface part of their [Indians’] life.”<sup>85</sup>

Local historian Keith Davidson wrote a series of articles with the express purpose of countering the one-sided narrative and the dark cloud that hangs over Frog Lake First Nation as the site of the “massacre.” Davidson, who has lived and worked in the Lloydminster area most of his life, established significant levels of trust with the people of Frog Lake. In his article “Guilt by Association,” Davidson corrects a mistake made in the movie CBC movie “Big Bear” that places the wrong sympathetic Indian boy at the side of a dying priest in Frog Lake. He brings to the public domain the story of the Stanleys, an Aboriginal family who deplored the killings at Frog Lake, and how their story of sympathy contrasts with the way the Frog Lake “Massacre” Historical site is presented. His article was a direct appeal to “change the perspective on this event that has overshadowed an entire group of people for more than a century.”<sup>86</sup> Davidson’s effort to bring the Aboriginal voice out of the margins and into the mainstream, speaks to the need for more history that respects the Aboriginal way of remembering this past. As Aboriginal communities struggle to reclaim their language and culture, their historical voices must become engaged as well. Control over this voice and how it is used has become a central issue for Aboriginal communities.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ahenakew “Sixty-five...” 3.

<sup>86</sup> Keith Davidson, “Guilt by Association: A Frog Lake History Mystery.” *Lloydminster Regional Times*, October 28, 1998. A 12.

<sup>87</sup> An overview of perhaps the most famous Canadian case that used Aboriginal oral history extensively is by Brian Thom, “Aboriginal Rights and Title in Canada After *Delgamuukw*: Part One, Oral Traditions and Anthropological Evidence in the Courtroom.” *Native Studies Review*, 14, No.1, (2001): 01-26.

## **b) Aboriginal Voices**

I acknowledge that my restricted ability to create a meaningful connection with the indigenous people of Onion Lake and Frog Lake is a serious limitation of this study. I had never before visited the Onion Lake reserve to ask for stories, and, despite having taken classes, my understanding of the Cree language and traditions is still in its infancy. However, I am not alone in this dilemma and, as I have just discussed, the progress made in this area is limited. This is mainly because it requires a researcher to dedicate a large portion of his or her career to being a student of elders in a particular Aboriginal group and engage his or herself in interdisciplinary theoretical debates, a practice that is relatively new in the academic community. Many have argued convincingly that recording and cataloguing oral stories is not enough; rather, long-term relationships must be developed between researchers and Aboriginal communities to get meaningful results. Most scholars recognize that knowledge is a life-long pursuit, but these intellectuals sometimes fail to recognize that their counterparts in Native communities are elders who have also acquired their knowledge over a lifetime.

The use or misuse of oral narrative has sparked debates across several disciplines, but most notably history, anthropology, and linguistics. In post-colonial North America, the recent need for an increased recognition of the Aboriginal historical voice has been a direct result of the lack of progress made on Aboriginal issues. In Western Canada, Jennifer Brown characterized this need as a "...concrete demand...for historical data and insights that contribute to all sorts of issues: people's Aboriginal identity and status; treaty, scrip, and resource claims; heritage and museum issues; language preservation; residential school abuses; and problems faced in our rapidly growing urban

Aboriginal communities.”<sup>88</sup> Perhaps anthropologist Marshall Sahlins summed it up best: “So if for too long anthropology has been the study of ‘historyless peoples,’ history for even longer was studying ‘cultureless peoples.’”<sup>89</sup> As previously discussed, in the Frog Lake and Onion lake area, Aboriginal narratives have been captured, but have had only limited use as evidence and have not been understood in the broader context of an Aboriginal epistemology. To further explain this position it is necessary to look at some of the recent work that challenges single-discipline traditional academia.

Sally McBeth addresses some of these issues in her analysis of the story of Sacagawea / Sacajawea, the teenage Aboriginal woman who helped guide the Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific Ocean in 1805. Not surprisingly, several narratives have appeared from this event, all “constructed” for various reasons or to “essentialize worldviews.”<sup>90</sup> McBeth begins by framing the story in the context that is most comfortable to Western historians. Most of this evidence came from the journals of Lewis and Clark, records from forts and trading posts, and oral history that most closely corroborated these documents. This is followed by the descriptions of four other histories held by various Aboriginal groups. Although she does not frame her thesis in theoretical debates from history and anthropology, she makes an important point: “These [Aboriginal] stories are complex constructions of social histories that reflect both past and current concerns.”<sup>91</sup> McBeth believes that Sacaga/jawea belongs to all groups that have narratives about her, and that each cultural way of rationalizing this past must be recognized on equal footing. Aboriginal narratives of historical heroes like Sacaga/jawea “constitute a very different understanding of the past,” and cannot be

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<sup>88</sup> Jennifer S. H. Brown, “Doing Aboriginal History: A View from Winnipeg.” *The Canadian Historical Review* 84, no. 4, (2003): 615.

<sup>89</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Waiting for Foucault, Still*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002), 72.

<sup>90</sup> Sally McBeth, “Memory, History and Contested Pasts: Re-imaging Sacagawea / Sacajawea,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 27, no. 1 (2003): 01.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 26.



judged solely by western academic rationalities. They should be interpreted keeping in mind Aboriginal ways of understanding the past, and to judge them from strictly one cultural point of view is to “question the very integrity of American Indians.”<sup>92</sup>

The cultural background of the individual writing history is too often tied to the group of people they represent. The writing of history is almost always closely tied to cultural or political agendas, and revealed most explicitly when writers take a position on popular historical figures or events. For example, in Western Canada, Louis Riel has been appropriated by several groups and has been dubbed a religious leader, a Western political hero, a martyr for the Métis and a traitor to the status quo, in stories that are inseparable from issues of racism, dispossession, poverty and revived Métis nationalism. Unfortunately many of these works, such as that of Thomas Flanagan, deny the Métis and others of their unique historical perspective by predicating western academic versions as the most correct or authoritative.<sup>93</sup> This defeats Aboriginal epistemologies and continues to marginalize this perspective outside the dominant “finalist” discourse. An open-ended, more complex version of events resists imposing concrete solutions, and benefits all of us because it has the power to educate readers about cultural difference and respect.

Some Aboriginal scholars have begun to criticize western academia for precisely this reason, because for much of their history they have been dominated by culturally insensitive historical literature. For too long Aboriginal sources have been ignored even when authors wrote specifically about Aboriginal people. Aboriginal scholar Angela Cavender Wilson deplores what she considers the lack of respect given to oral narrative,

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid* 26.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Flanagan, *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered*. Second Edition. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). In the preface to this edition, Flanagan admits that his work on Metis lands was done for the Department of Justice. He does not consult Metis people or any oral history in his work as his political ties encourage him to present Metis history in a way that discredits their claims to special rights in Canada. Coming from this perspective he interprets the historical evidence to endorse Canadian government policy and discredit the Metis people.

especially in studies that pick apart oral stories for facts and discredits those stories that do not fit the western ideal of a linear chronology. For Wilson, during the time researchers spend with elders they essentially become a student of those elders, learning about the culture, the language and building relationships in the community.<sup>94</sup> Wilson believes that historians and anthropologists need to view their time in the Native community as an opportunity for personal growth, not for taking information and using it for personal gain. Implicit in this is the concept of reciprocity and respect of protocol when asking for stories.<sup>95</sup> However, one wonders about the extent of cross-cultural respect and sharing that can occur when one lopsided relationship is replaced by another. Scholars need to be honest with their Aboriginal informants and explain that their disciplinary obligations compel them to analyze, and not just accept, what they hear. Personal growth should be a goal of community-based research, as it is in any scholarly endeavour, but the need to be respectful should enrich the academic pursuit of knowledge in its fullest sense – blinded advocacy and uncritical enquiry can never accomplish either. Aboriginal communities need to appreciate the relationship they are entering when they speak to a historian, just as scholars need to appreciate the obligations and complexities they are committing to when they decide to take the time to build relations with Aboriginal people. Wilson is correct however when she states that to completely appreciate an Aboriginal view of the past, an effort should be made to learn the language. In explaining the cultural value and inherent complexity of oral narrative Wilson is articulating the need for the combination of anthropology, history and linguistics. This is born from a commitment to respect a culture that is, in her view and mine, an obligation that many researchers under-estimate.

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<sup>94</sup> Angela Cavendar Wilson, "Power of the Spoken Word: Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History," in *Rethinking American Indian History*, Donald L. Fixico (ed.). (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 105.

<sup>95</sup> Wilson, 5.

Perhaps it is fair to say that some Aboriginal scholars consider the gap between academic and Aboriginal ways of understanding the past irreconcilable, while certain academics see no fault in their pursuit of truth through traditional historical methods. From the author's point of view, the academic pursuit of knowledge is predominantly a solitary exercise, and within the discipline of history we are encouraged to weigh a significant amount of evidence while we formulate our own argument about how we understand the way a historical event has taken place. If the individual historian has done his or her homework and the number and style of sources is deemed to be sufficient and varied enough to back up his or her argument, then our academic colleagues are satisfied. The individual historian is pushed by an academic system that celebrates new and exciting ways of interpreting the evidence, and the desire to have his or her own "new" version of history become the most popular or authoritative history of the event in question. The historian who most successfully defends his or her argument will remain the authority of a particular historical event or time period until someone finds new evidence, or theoretical approaches, that disproves or questions this argument. Academic history is always changing because of this individual pursuit, as each new generation of historians reflects the influences of the changing world around them. This is the phenomenon known as historiography, and the job of the academic historian is to situate his or her work within the group of work that has been done on his or her particular topic, and validate it as a new approach with a new contribution. However, there is increasing pressure, and I believe justly so, that academics should now apply non-western ways of interpreting the past to previous western academic narratives and their sources (that is to the academic historiography), and thereby criticize the dominant discourse and expose a richer and more complex version of history that does not privilege one particular voice.

Keith Carlson attempts this in his article “Rethinking Dialogue and History,” where he analyzes written accounts of Aboriginal actions that have been previously dismissed as irrational, and validates them by applying Aboriginal ways of thinking he learned from his long-term relationship with the Stó:lō people. Carlson grounds his work in Collingwood’s metaphysical theory to justify Stó:lō belief systems as an equally valid way of historical thinking. Using his extensive experience in the Stó:lō community as a foundation for respectful interpretation, he formulates a hypothesis from the historical evidence that is based on an understanding of their metaphysical spiritual world.

From this vantage point, Carlson attempts to rethink the thoughts of past Stó:lō leaders to find a richer and thicker description of history that will have more meaning in the Stó:lō community. He uses conjecture and acknowledges that he is taking huge risks by exposing an Aboriginal way of thinking that may appear irrational to western culture. His primary concern is the effect this may have on Stó:lō land claims and court battles, pressures that are perhaps not always acknowledged by historians trying to look at a past event in its own historical context. Carlson takes this risk because his elders and teachers from the Stó:lō community would insist on a respectful interpretation, the same interpretation given to all visitors of Stó:lō territory who are told Stó:lō understandings of place and place names.<sup>96</sup> From Clifford Geertz, Carlson adopts the notion that meaning precedes experience, and the conviction “that it is incumbent on western society to try to understand the Aboriginal techniques of constructing knowledge, and not just the other way around.”<sup>97</sup> He also asserts that scholars need to accept the challenge and acknowledge conflicting interpretations rather than quickly dismissing them as incompatible, and to “respect both the legitimate claims of First Nations to tell their own stories and the moral and scholarly obligation to write culturally

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<sup>96</sup> Keith Thor Carlson, “Rethinking Dialogue and History: The King’s Promise and the 1906 Aboriginal Delegation to London,” *Native Studies Review*, 16, no. 2 (2005): 24.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 01.

grounded histories that can help us learn from the past.”<sup>98</sup> Since I have chosen to situate myself in this area of the historical debate, the question that now presents itself is: how can a Masters student with limited knowledge of Aboriginal culture and a two-year time-frame even begin to write a thesis on Aboriginal history?

What got me here in the first place is my love/hate relationship with history. Like most historians, I love the clarity of a narrative derived from a strong central argument, but I know that in many cases it cannot be that simple. Furthermore, skeptics like myself who do not trust single discipline historical work are increasingly picking apart arguments that lack cultural sensitivity. So I have painted myself into a corner. If I cannot write a cultured history because of my lack of cultural knowledge, what options do I have other than formulating my own narrative based on a central argument? I found myself focusing on this internal conflict as I researched this project and, as previously mentioned, expressed this turmoil in the play *Friends or Friendlies?*, where I resisted formulating a tidy narrative of the past, and rather chose to show the distance between interpretations and left the contradictions unresolved.

Carlson’s work embraced the relatively new practice among historians to engage outside theories in an interdisciplinary approach to history. This approach partially evolved from the idea of microhistory, an approach that is clearly engaged in this study. The intensive study of small historical events exposes the complexity of understanding the past in important and interesting ways. Post-modern theory, something that many historians have disengaged from as too vague, is suddenly re-engaged.<sup>99</sup> Through the play creation process I have found my own way to express the post-modernist perspective created by microhistorical analysis in a way that engages an audience without having to resort to a more tidy and coherent central argument. I have attempted

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<sup>98</sup> Cruikshank, “Oral Tradition,” 404.

<sup>99</sup> For further discussion see Richard D. Brown, “Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 23 (Spring 2003), 1-20.

to illustrate the cultural differences between two families who, despite sharing a slightly remarkable historical event, now lead somewhat separate lives.

Although my ancestors spoke the Cree language and reportedly had good relations with the Cree in Onion Lake (points I will expand on later), in my own life I have been mostly disengaged from Aboriginal people. Our family has ignored Aboriginal narratives for so long that I highly questioned my ability to dig up any when I went to Onion Lake to meet the people who shared our history. Therefore, I approached this project in a relatively open-ended way, keeping in mind that a respect of Aboriginal sources was the key to establishing a dialogue between their culture and myself. I gained valuable experience in this regard at an ethnohistory field school in Chilliwack British Columbia in the spring of 2002.<sup>100</sup> In this experience, my fellow students and I lived with the Stó:lō people and researched aspects of history the Stó:lō First Nation was interested in. We were mentored by cultural experts and guided by families who generously took us into their homes. We participated in ceremonies, took cultural classes and field trips, and engaged in dialogue with Stó:lō elders. This experience, along with consultations with Métis elder and theatre artist Maria Campbell, greatly informed my research protocol.

In the ethics approval process, I committed to forming long-term relationships with a small of number participants in Onion Lake, to facilitate stronger levels of trust within their community. In practice, I endeavored to be as respectful as I could, while trying to learn as much as possible about their culture. I enrolled in Nehiyawewin (Cree language) classes, participated in ceremonies, sweat lodges and Pow-wows, washed dishes, gave rides, watched hockey and helped to organize a gathering and birthday party for the elder most key to this project. I have focused primarily on this one elder,

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<sup>100</sup> Experience which led to the publication of a revised version of my term paper: "Emory Creek: The Environmental Legacy of Gold Mining on the Fraser River." *British Columbia History* Vol. 39 No. 3, (2007): 8-10.

and listened to the repeated telling of the same story. I ended up focused on two Aboriginal families in Onion Lake, and through formal and informal encounters, tried to understand their life in their community, and how they understand the past through present sensibilities. In spite of trying to focus on one night of history, I have met a large number of people from the two families, and found myself overwhelmed at times by the multitude of opinions inside a small section of the reserve community. For the modern British-Canadian perspective, I have relied on my experiences growing up in the Mann family and the Lloydminster community, and interviews with other descendants of George Mann.

As a vehicle to help my family and me see how we have become disconnected from Onion Lake, I have investigated the role of dramatic literature in the formulation of the early twentieth century historical myth. British theatre's long tradition of changing the image of the dark-skinned "other" represents a part of our family's cultural make-up that we know little about. I believe the writers of early Canadian history adopted this tradition to create a myth that has been so pervasive it has warped our vision of the past. The George Mann family of the nineteenth century was a part of this culture, which perhaps made them feel obligated to hide their strong connections in Onion Lake as the dominant society they increasingly wished to be a part of forced them and subsequent generations to bury a more honest and respectful narrative. By exposing the pervasive use of the melodramatic trope in the history of the Frog Lake "massacre" and captivity, I hope to give the modern-day Mann family some insight into why our ancestors' escape story was perhaps not as simple as some "friendly Indians" doing a good deed. In this way I hope to separate myself from past historiography that has let the desire for narrative

coherence erase the natural cacophony of genuine historical processes as they unfold among real human beings.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Alan Long in conversation with Keith Carlson, April 2007.



## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **DISCLOSURE. WHAT DO WE CHOOSE TO REMEMBER?**

As separate but similar narratives of the same “dramatic” historical event in 1885 that come from very different ways of remembering the past, the Mann and Chief stories of the night of April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1885 present an opportunity to engage Canadian history in an interesting way. The points at which Blanche Mann’s escape narrative versus the Chief family’s narrative of that same night diverge and interpenetrate, can give important clues into the way people remember, and how the cultural pressures on each family perhaps changed the way they told their stories. How individuals within each family remember this past in the present, and why some remember certain aspects of it that others leave out, also gives important clues to how each culture identifies with history. These multiple ways of remembering, when combined with archival documents and the multiple narratives, published and unpublished, makes the task of trying to think the thoughts of our ancestors that cold, wet night in 1885 a seemingly unattainable goal.

Since our close contact that night where lives were at stake, the paths of these two families have slowly drifted apart. The reserve system and the separate racialized communities it has created have resulted in an atmosphere of mistrust and misunderstanding in the Onion Lake/Lloydminster area, as in countless other regions of Canada. The economic disparity between the on- and off-reserve community and the manufactured identities this segregation has caused has created an environment in which agreement on history has become extremely elusive.<sup>102</sup> What people are willing or not willing to disclose about the past is deeply entwined in the politics of colonial

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<sup>102</sup> For further discussion see Furniss, *The Burden of History* 3-26.

Canada. But, as Collingwood says, the things that people leave out are as important as those left in.<sup>103</sup>

To begin with, I discovered that each family had a predominant story as a starting point. For the Mann family, it was an archival document written by George Mann Senior's oldest daughter Blanche, a short essay entitled "Episodes of the Riel Rebellion, 1885." For the Chief family, it was a transcript of an interview with elder Jimmy Chief, great Grandson of Chief Seekascootch, and an eye-witness account of Chief Seekascootch's actions in the council tent of Chief Big Bear. The premise of our two narratives, the location and the outcome are basically the same. Three men came to the Manns' house and told them that all the whites had been killed in Frog Lake and warned them that warriors approached from Frog Lake who intended to kill them. The Manns were helped by these men to hitch their horse to a wagon and were guided to a safe path out of Onion Lake. The Manns eventually reached Fort Pitt and were the first to bring news of the infamous Frog Lake "Massacre." These similarities are undeniable and represent the common narrative thread between the Mann and Chief families. The points where the narratives diverge provide interesting clues into the epistemologies of these two radically different cultures, which in many ways are further apart now than in 1885.

Blanche wrote her account out on many occasions, but this was the one she seems to have used the most.<sup>104</sup> Her narrative begins on 1 April 1885 with a description of restless Indians in Onion Lake. According to Blanche, the Indians held many councils that day and then came to their house and "commenced their war cry and fired guns. They had discarded the Government clothing and were in their war dress." She

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<sup>103</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea*, 246-249.

<sup>104</sup> Copies of the same narrative are found in the SAB, S-A751, George Gwynne Mann Fonds and in the *Glenbow Archives*, George Gwynne Mann Fonds. A third copy was found in the *Glenbow Archives* in the R. H. Hougham Fonds.

wrote that the Indians wanted to kill some cattle, but her father had talked them out of it. She also noted that they learned later that one of the Indians had intended to kill George Mann that day, but “lost his nerve.” On 2 April, Blanche reported that the Indians returned to their home expecting to meet Agent Quinn from Frog Lake and became “very excited” when they found he was not there. The Indians then moved their camp next to the agency, along the main road to “prevent anyone from leaving.” The heart of her narrative, which described how three friendly Indians helped them escape, is as follows:

About nine o'clock the same evening, Father was writing up his diary, when three friendly Indians forced their way into our house, and told us of the massacre at Frog Lake. They came [and] wished to warn us that Big Bear's warriors, were then a quarter of a mile away, coming to kill father, and wished to help us get away, they would show us a way out to the Fort Pitt road, as the main trail was guarded. Having a narrow escape from being shot the night before, Father accepted the assistance of these friendly Indians for the protection of his family. On going to the stables he found the horses had already been taken away, except a gray mare. She was harnessed to a single buckboard. Father took the children out of bed wrapping them in blankets and put them in the back of the buckboard.

An Indian guided us down a back trail for a short distance. After driving through a swamp of snow and water for some distance, father found that he was driving in a circle, and decided to stop until the moon rose to get the direction of Fort Pitt. From where we were waiting we could hear the shrill war whoops of the Indians and the firing of guns, they were already plundering our house. The suspense was terrible, fearing every minute the horse would winnow or the dog which had followed us would bark and reveal our location.

Two Indians had followed us for a short distance, but lost our tracks when we drove through the swamp.<sup>105</sup>

Written in the early to mid-twentieth century, many years removed from the event, Blanche may well be mimicking aspects of the dramatic/romantic trope that minimized the role of Indians to either unpredictable or friendly, the melodramatic categories of badness or goodness. Although she most certainly knew the names of those friendly Indians, she chose not to name them. The suspense of imminent death and shrill war whoops from Indians who had earlier threatened them, add to the drama of her narrative. It is impossible to say if she was stretching the truth, but the idea of the

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<sup>105</sup> SAB, S-A751, George Gwynne Mann Fonds. Blanche Mann's account titled “Episodes of the Riel Rebellion, 1885.”

horse and dog not responding to the commotion of their house burning seems a little suspicious. It almost seems like the mysterious workings of Providence: three Indians (wise men) warn a holy family to flee certain slaughter; they obey immediately and are saved by a miracle while others perish around them. In the mind of the reader it may even seem like God's angels intervened to save the innocent, and the Indians—knowingly or not—acted as His agents. Blanche's last statement, presented almost as an after-thought is the most peculiar of all. How could two Cree men from Frog Lake, presumably on horseback, lose the tracks of a horse and wagon in a swamp in the spring in a territory they probably knew well? Although water may have flowed back in places and cover their tracks, there almost certainly would have been a lot of snow and/or mud at this time that would quickly give up their position.

Blanche wrote out her narrative on at least two other occasions besides the version of events just referred to, and each time she adds or leaves out certain aspects, which change the dramatic quality of her story. These changes seem to reflect her relationship with the person or persons she was sending the story to, and the desired use of the story by that person. In 1957, Blanche sent a version to her niece, a teacher in Battleford at that time, to be used as source material for her grade eight students' historical essays. In this version she provides more detail on how her family was helped by the "friendly Indians" who "helped him [George Mann] get a horse and buckboard ready and he went into the house for mother and the baby and put them in front and [then] wrapped the two other children in blankets and put them in the back of the buckboard."<sup>106</sup> She also frames the warriors who pursued them in a slightly different light, saying "Two disappointed warriors had followed their tracks for a short distance in hopes of overtaking them." When one of Blanche's niece's female students used this account to write her own story about the Manns' escape she embellished this part of her

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<sup>106</sup> *University of Saskatchewan Special Collections. A. S. Morton fonds. Mss C555/2/9.1, p.1.*

story: "One of them [warriors] retraced the family but when he came to the swamp he thought they were drowned in it."

In another version of her story, in which her audience is unknown, Blanche explained that the reason they went in a circle that night and ended up back at their house was that the old grey mare they hooked to the buckboard was also called "Blind Kate," because she only had one eye. These and other variations of her narrative were exposed in the play, *Friends or Friendlies?*, to show how her dramatic story morphed and changed.<sup>107</sup> For purposes of comparison I will look at the short statement: "They lost our tracks when we drove through the swamp," and the absence of names for the "friendly Indians," as the two main points of divergence between her narrative and the oral account told by Jimmy Chief.

Jimmy Chief's narrative was passed on to him by his father Misahew, who was also known as Robert Chief. Misahew was a young man in 1885, around the same age as Blanche, and was one of the three "friendly Indians" who had gone to the Manns' house that night. The part of their narrative that coincides with Blanche's account is as follows:

Two messengers were sent to Onion Lake. One was [T]ousaint Calling Bull. They came to tell Seekascootch (Jimmy Chief's grandfather) about the trouble. He went to the agency and told Makahus (G. G. Mann) the agent about the trouble at Frog Lake and him to escape to Fort Pitt. They hitched up a big white horse to a buckboard and Mann, his wife, son and daughter got in and drove off for Fort Pitt. They got away just in time because two Indians rode in from Frog Lake. (Ya-ya-ki-cha-win and his father-in-law) and asked where Makahus was. They were told they had escaped. They started out after them. When Seekascootch heard about this he sent Misahew (Jimmy's father) and another man to tell these two to let Makahus and his family go. They caught up to them on the big flat past Joe Taylor's and Makahus was standing in the buckboard whipping the old white horse yelling, "Hi ya, Hi ya," while behind them about a quarter of a mile were these two fellows trying to catch up but their horses were played out.

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<sup>107</sup> In a rehearsal situation it would be interesting to play with whom she speaks to when she shares these variations in her story. Is it the audience, her father, her brother? The potential choices are extensive. For example see Appendix One, page 26.

Misehew and the other man told the two Indians who were chasing Makahus to leave them alone and these two Indians answered, "Makahus is lucky our horses are played out. We would have killed him."<sup>108</sup>

In his story, Jimmy Chief was recounting the words of his father Misehew, an eyewitness to the event. This oral history does not mention the restless state of Onion Lake or the fact that the Manns' house had been burnt down. The focus of the Chief narrative was not the romantic trope that Blanche used, but the notion of loyalty in the face of danger. Misahew refers to George Mann by his Cree name, a clue that they had a relationship with him before and after that night. Jimmy Chief does not mention a slough, but a flat, which could indicate a low spot or slough bottom. The Manns are not portrayed as fearless and lucky in their escape as Blanche's accounts seem to indicate, but rather as vulnerable and frightened. The spectacle of George Mann half stuck in a slough whipping his horse and yelling while the Indians looked on, does not fit the ideal of a clever white man skillfully avoiding capture from warriors in a close pursuit. The Chief narrative was also careful to point out that the intention of these men was to kill George Mann, and that their ancestors had played a significant role in saving the Manns' lives. They are the Manns' angels who, on the strength of their own agency, prevented their slaughter against all odds. Translated in the mid-1980s, the narrative was also connected to the people hearing the story and their relationship to the land of Onion Lake at that time, referring to the "big flat past Joe Taylor's," Taylor being a longtime resident of Onion Lake and former Chief.

The oral history referred to was captured by local historian Edgar Mapletoft,<sup>109</sup> and then printed in a local history book. Parts of this narrative were referred to and highlighted by Peter Chief when he related stories to me about Seekascootch. When I

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<sup>108</sup> *Fort Pitt History Unfolding*, 101.

<sup>109</sup> Edgar Mapletoft was highly respected by many people in Onion Lake, including the Chief family; he was made an honorary Chief in Onion Lake and participated in many ceremonies. Peter Chief had spent some of his early years on the Mapletoft farm while going to school in Frenchman Butte. Alan Long in conversation with Reuben Mapletoft, May 2007.

went to see Peter Chief about his family's recollections of this night, his first words were to help me understand how he situated himself in Onion Lake in relation to the stories he was about to share. He did not have all the stories of his grandfathers and lamented the loss of his traditions and the abuse he suffered in the day school at the hands of older students. He was thankful that some of the stories of his grandfathers were recorded; because when he reads them he can remember they were part of the same stories he was told. Peter looked back on his ancestors with a great amount of nostalgia, and as we talked several stories came back to him in bits and pieces. What were significant were what parts of stories he chose to share with me, and how this selective memory spoke to the present values he holds.

In our first visit he read me a quotation from his ancestor Seekascootch, which was recorded at the signing of Treaty Six. "I am glad of the goodness of the great queen. I recognize now that this I once dreaded most is coming to my aid and doing for me what I could not do for myself." Peter was very proud of his ancestor and the sacred relationship he had established with the British crown to ensure the survival of his people. Although Peter recognized Big Bear's men were hungry and acted out of desperation during the Frog Lake "Massacre," he was also proud of how his ancestor had spoke out against the killings. Peter read me a quotation from George Stanley's eyewitness account where Seekascootch stood up and spoke in Big Bear's council tent:

I just came over to see if what I heard was true as I came along by the agency I noticed several people there and the buildings were destroyed. I am very sorry to see what you people have done. We have at Onion Lake a Church of England, [a] minister and Indian officials and we do not want them to be killed in this way. I left my guards there to protect them. There are some Indians there who might start trouble so I must go back tonight.<sup>110</sup>

When Wandering Spirit threatened Seekascootch for condemning their actions, Seekascootch stood up to the warrior, pulled out his knife and said:

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<sup>110</sup> George F. Stanley, "An Account of the Frog Lake Massacre," *Alberta Historical Review*, 4.1 (Winter 1956) 27.

I will cut you to pieces. Although I only have one arm, I am not afraid of you. I used to be in front when we fought the Blackfoot Indians, you were behind me. It is a shame to see how you have butchered these innocent white people here, but you cannot scare me.<sup>111</sup>

Peter proceeded to tell me how Seekascootch was pursued back to Onion Lake by two braves from Frog Lake. It seemed he wanted me to know the effort Seekascootch went through to ensure the safety of my ancestors and thereby honour the treaty agreement. The most controversial part of his story was of the death of Seekascootch in a battle at what is now called Steele Narrows. In this final skirmish between Steele's men and the group of Wandering Spirit's warriors with their hostages, Seekascootch and two other Wood Crees were killed. Some history books have assumed that Steele's men shot him, but Chief family oral history says he was shot by a small bore rifle, the kind used by Wandering Spirit's men.<sup>112</sup> The Chief narrative suggests that Seekascootch paid the ultimate price for his loyalty to the treaty and his work to help the Manns escape, and keep them and others safe during the two month captivity.<sup>113</sup> Peter's purpose was to educate me on his perspective, as he aimed to persuade me that his versions of events were accurate.

In my family, although it is not something we often talk about or debate, most of us remember bits and pieces of Blanche's account. Stories of the Manns in Onion Lake are remembered much less since the passing of my maternal grandfather George 'Pete' Mann in 1988, grandson of Indian agent George Mann. There are some recollections of stories, but there is disagreement among us about what is true and what is an

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid* 27.

<sup>112</sup> In *Blood Red The Sun*, William Cameron suggests Seekascootch and his men were shot by Steele's scouts as they fled their teepees. The Jimmy Chief Narrative that describes how the other Indians were shooting at them is found in *Fort Pitt History Unfolding*, 103. Paradoxically, although he uses Jimmy Chief as his source, Hugh Dempsey does not mention Jimmy Chief's contention that Plains Crees killed Seekascootch. Instead, Dempsey quotes a *Montreal Gazette* article in which George Mann supposedly claimed that Seekascootch was actively engaged in the battle (Dempsey, *Big Bear* 178.) Another possibility is that Jimmy Chief would only share this part of the narrative with his trusted friend, Edgar Maplettoft.

<sup>113</sup> Peter Chief interview, January 2006.



embellished tale. Some feel my grandfather Pete loved to tell a tall tale, and that is exactly what most of Pete's stories were. Others tend to put more faith in the stories of the past, and also wanted to learn more about the hardships our ancestors and the Cree people went through in those early days. When one relative tried to recount the escape narrative, his recollection varied substantially from Blanche's account. Partway through he stopped himself and asked if I had read her story. When I said yes, he said "That's as good a one as you'll get," after which he continued "I think a friendly Native come and warned him there, or they probably would have shot him and captured the kids, hard to say what they would have done with those kids. They weren't killin' kids I don't think, but they'd a killed him yep."<sup>114</sup>

Within this last statement lies the main difference between our family's memories of George Mann's past in Onion Lake versus the Chief's memory. As far as I am aware, our family has never discussed the names or identities of those Native families our ancestors knew in Onion Lake. In both oral history and archival documents there is a significant amount of evidence that Blanche and the Mann family also knew the Cree names of the men that helped them that night. For example, Frank Nash, a grandson of Charlotte, Blanche's sister, remembers hearing the two women speaking Cree on the phone to one another many years after they had left Onion Lake.<sup>115</sup> However, in the context of her dramatic narratives written in the early to mid-twentieth century, Blanche does not feel compelled to use Indian names. Subsequently it seems our current use of Aboriginal names has been restricted mainly to the prominent leaders of the past from the more mainstream stories, for example, Big Bear and Wandering Spirit. Even though the Jimmy Chief's oral history has been in print in a local history since 1985, it has not

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<sup>114</sup> Frank Mann interview, January 2006.

<sup>115</sup> Alan Long in conversation with Frank Nash, September 2005.

been a significant topic of interest in our family. I did not become aware of it until I returned to University to study history in 2000.

Growing up in Lloydminster, I was acculturated to fear and distrust Native people. Since I rarely went to the reserve except to drive through Loon Lake on our way to summer vacation, the majority of Aboriginal people I saw were the impoverished and alcoholic Indians in downtown Lloydminster.<sup>116</sup> The descendants of the Aboriginal people who were close to the Manns in the past have been invisible to me for most of my life. I did not know what had happened in 1885 until after I graduated from high school, and at that point I gave this knowledge little thought. It seems incredible to me now that even in the mid 1980s when the University of Saskatchewan Department of Native Studies was beginning, and the revolution in Native politics and Canadian history was well under way, I remained completely oblivious to my family's past in Onion Lake, and unaware of narratives that respected Aboriginal epistemologies. The one-sided Canadian history I learned in high school was still commonplace as late as 1999. In that year, Elizabeth Furniss claimed that British Columbia "high school textbooks remain the most conservative and archaic of the official nationalist histories in the public domain."<sup>117</sup>

Much of my family identifies with a romantic version of the past, especially when it comes to Aboriginal people. We definitely come from the school of cowboys and Indians, an American twist that is mixed in with our upright British heritage as the true developers of Canada. The Protestant work ethic, the self-made man and the ideal of progress are strong values in our family; cultural values that many would say are incompatible with Aboriginal people. This, I now believe, is incorrect and racist, especially if we view Aboriginal people in the opposite way as lazy, tribal and primitive. These are the binary modes of thinking passed down to us through the British dramatic

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<sup>116</sup> For more discussion on the social phenomenon of the 'drunk Indian,' and small town common sense racism, please see Furniss, *The Burden of History* 132-137.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid* 61.

tradition, and this is how the Indians in George Mann's care in Saddle Lake were portrayed in the early twentieth century: "...It is better to be gloriously lazy on the reservation. Indolence becomes a virtue. Work is a strenuous and unpopular vice. Everybody is highly virtuous."<sup>118</sup> I don't want to dwell on negatives or racism, but it is important to recognize that this attitude was the dominant culture of early twentieth century Canada, a hegemonic belief system that most certainly influenced my grandparents, and by default shaped the values of subsequent generations.

When I traveled to Onion Lake to meet with an elder in the fall of 2005, it was only my third visit, and the first time I had gone there with a specific goal in mind. I was well prepared for my first venture to the first home of my ancestor in what was then called the North-West Territories of Canada. I had completed several undergraduate courses in the past five years in Native Studies, Native history, and Canadian history. I had done research on Native issues in Canada, and was listening to tapes and working on my Cree language skills (which are still quite limited a year and a half later). I had written two papers on the activities of George Mann in Onion Lake, in particular the farming he helped the Cree learn from 1885 to 1900. In one Native history class, I had met Darwin Chief, descendant of Seekasootch who initially opened my eyes to the names of his ancestors who had acted on the Manns' behalf in 1885. In spite of all this, as I drove to Onion Lake with Darwin sitting next to me, I felt awkward and nervous. He called his father to tell him we were coming, and spoke fluently and quickly in Cree, his first language. We were going to meet Darwin's maternal grandmother who had told Darwin that she had met George Mann, and had a story to tell me about him. Despite of all the studying I had done, I was ill-prepared for what I was about to hear.

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<sup>118</sup> Augustus Bridle, "The Brown Folk on the Big River," *The Canadian Graphic* 11. Copy of this article found in SAB, S-A751, George Gwynne Mann Fonds.

I was puzzled by the claim that she had met George Mann, who had died in Hobbema, Alberta in 1916. Mary was not born until 1912 in Loon Lake, Saskatchewan, so I wasn't sure what story I was in for. When we arrived at her warm and inviting home in Onion Lake, she was happy to see Darwin, and polite to me when I handed her a gift and some tobacco. Initially, she spoke directly to Darwin in Cree, and only shot me furtive glances as she told us the story; I guess maybe she was as nervous as I was. Darwin translated as I politely listened. What I heard shocked and surprised me. Mary apparently remembered George Mann well because she had seen him speaking to her parents fluently in Cree at a July 1<sup>st</sup> celebration in Onion Lake while she and her older sister watched from the back of a nearby wagon. But more than that, she explained that her older half sister Mabel had informed her that this man speaking to their parents was her (Mabel's) father. When Mary had later asked her mother Matilda if this was true, she confirmed it was. Caught off guard, I wondered if perhaps she was confusing George Mann with someone else – he had, after all, died long ago. When I showed her the picture of the Indian Agent she shook her head, and Darwin said that she was describing a man with a moustache and a wide brimmed hat with a beaded belt on it. When I showed her a picture of George Mann Junior, the Indian agent's son and my great grandfather, she nodded, looked at me and said in English, "That's the one." Darwin laughed at me as I tried to take in what I was just told. It was a moment that I will not soon forget.

As I left Mary's house that day she reminded me that I was family now, and that I was to call her "kokum" (Cree for grandmother) from now on. She asked me to bring a prayer cloth to our next visit, and to call her whenever I wanted, or if I had questions. It is still overwhelming to me that in spite of our family's long absence from Onion Lake, Mary was so quick to tell me this story and unconditionally welcome me to her family.

The significance of her acceptance became more apparent to me only a few weeks later. At a family gathering I related her story to one of my first cousins who, upon hearing what I had to say, looked equally as shocked as I had been. One uncle, however, who was listening to my story from a nearby table, did not seem at all surprised. He looked at us and remarked that yes he had heard of this woman and our extended family, the Gardipees, who were from the Cold Lake area. Mary's older sister was Mabel Trottier, born in Onion Lake in 1898, just over one year before the Mann family transferred to Saddle Lake. Mabel lived to be 101 years and five months old and died in 2000. She had married George Gardipee, and had a family of ten children that they raised on a farm near Deer Lake. As active community people and ranchers in the mid-west area north of Lloydminster, some of my relatives had met some of her sons over the years, and one of my uncles had intended to visit Mabel, but a connection was never made. Unfortunately, the rest of the family was unaware our connection to the Gardipee family until my first meeting with Mary in the fall of 2005. If I said I did not feel a little cheated by not being privy to this information until recently I would be dishonest. However, it must be reiterated that no one in the Mann family, me included, has felt compelled to investigate our family history in Onion Lake until recently. Indeed, the pressure has been to bury the history. However, as I began to delve further into the research, no one presented barriers, only words of encouragement, as it seemed we had kept our story separate from their story long enough.

Not long after this first visit, I set out to meet one of Mabel's sons, Richard Gardipee, who has been very gracious in telling me stories about his mother and extended family. Richard, a tall grey-haired man in his late sixties, told me that he had known for a long time George Mann was his grandfather, but had not seen a picture of him until I arrived at his home. Richard said that Mabel had always talked very highly of her father, and that he was a charismatic character with a big booming voice. When she

was three years old, Mann had paid to have her put into residential school so she would get a good education, perhaps claiming his daughter back from Matilda's second partner, a Native man who had taken Matilda away from Onion Lake. Mabel always told her family that she loved her time in the Onion Lake Roman Catholic Residential School, and that after she graduated she had spent two more years there as a teacher. Mary has since told me that her Métis father, Matilda's third partner and husband, could not afford to put her in residential school, and that she did not receive an education while her sister did. Mabel also told her family that George Mann was well-known and well-liked in the Onion Lake area, and Mary confirmed that he used to come to visit fairly regularly, helping people with their farming and ranching.<sup>119</sup> It was after this meeting with Richard that I went back to Darwin to get a more complete translation of Mary's story.

As we played the video I found that Mary reiterated again the importance of family. She said that her mother Matilda was forcibly taken from Onion Lake without George Mann's knowledge when she was pregnant with Mann's baby. An older Indian man took her away from Onion Lake and they moved further north where she gave birth to Mabel, and then had three more children with this old man. These four children were Mary's older brothers and sisters. She then told a story in which an old woman used bad medicine to seduce the old man and make him fall in love with a different young woman. This story took place in a camp, but Mary did not specify how many were in the camp or what the relationship was between the old and young woman who conspired to take the old man away from Matilda. Matilda and the children were given pine tree gum as a treat from the old woman, and it was this gum that had the bad medicine in it. In the evening when it cooled off they lit a fire in the stove in their tent. The children took their gum and rubbed it on the hot stovepipe making the gum smoke. When the old man

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<sup>119</sup> Alan Long in conversation with Richard Gardipee, October, 2006; Mary Whitstone, March 2007.

inhaled this smoke he passed out. The next morning when he woke up, Matilda and his children meant nothing to him. The camp of people, including the old lady and the young woman, had already left that morning to move to a different camp. The old man wandered around the empty camp all day in a daze; when his children tried to talk to him he would not respond. Finally, later in the day he suddenly grabbed all his belongings, saddled his horse, and took off up north after the younger woman. That was the last time they ever saw him.

Matilda returned to Onion Lake after this and began to work at the Protestant Residential School. It was here she met Métis Charlie Trottier and married him at the Roman Catholic Church. Mary was the oldest child of Trottier, Matilda's third partner, and was told this story by Matilda. After she had told this story she said that this was how Matilda Black was taken away from George Mann; they should have stayed together.<sup>120</sup> It seems to me that Mary took a certain amount of risk in telling me this story. I feel this way because it contains supernatural elements. Although we can understand the story of Matilda being taken away from a white man, the use of bad medicine in the way she describes it does not fit a rational post-Enlightenment explanation of events. This story may diminish or, to some, discredit the rest of her 'testimony,' and so context is required.

In the Cree culture, as in my own British culture, to abandon a wife and child is something that lessens one's stature in the community. If I follow the maxim that meaning precedes experience, then the significance of her story becomes clear. I am family, descended from George Mann Junior who was her mother's first partner. Mary's story tells me that he did not dishonor his Cree partner because she was taken away from him. I have returned to visit Mary several times to talk about this story, and about her large extended family in Onion Lake. During these visits I have told her in English

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<sup>120</sup> Mary Whitstone Interview, September 2005. Translated by Darwin Chief in December, 2005.

my understanding of the translation of her narrative. She corrected me when I was wrong, and sometimes added extra detail to parts of the story. She has since told me that George Mann was like a friend to the people, and that he would come visit his daughter regularly. She said her dad, Charlie Trottier, always knew George Mann was Mabel's father and that he was fine with that.

Over the past year and ten months I have returned to Onion Lake several times as I endeavored to learn more about Cree culture and the people of Onion Lake. Whenever I visited Peter Chief and Mary Whitstone I phoned ahead so they could prepare for my visit. Protocol was observed, and gifts and tobacco were offered in exchange for the stories I was told. When I was there it was clear that their stories had been held by them for most of their adult lives, and told to me with a specific purpose in mind. Each time I went there, my comfort level increased, as did my understanding of their stories, as each of them continued to add details to their accounts. There was a level of conviction and commitment to history that does not exist in my family, and this is perhaps the most significant difference between the memories in our two cultures/families. Even though some would argue that many of their oral traditions have been lost over the years through efforts of assimilation, what they have is a part of a living culture in which they take great pride. It also may be true that Mary and Peter only shared the stories or parts of stories that would portray their ancestors in a positive light. They were the only two people from Onion Lake that wished to go on record discussing this history, as other leads in the community came to dead ends. I sometimes felt that certain people in Onion Lake were suspicious of me and my intentions, and the same can be said about some members of the extended Mann family. The history around 1885 continues to be complex and contested in the hearts and minds of many people who have a stake in this past. I can only hope that those that chose to have a stake in



this project understand my intention to help all of us begin a more meaningful dialogue about our past.

Some might say that because we were the so-called winners of history and they were the losers, the significance of this history is correspondingly lower in our family than theirs. Perhaps we don't remember things as vividly because over the past century we have enjoyed the benefits of being a part of the dominant society. It has not taken long to clearly see the disparity between our two communities. Since I began this project, the Chief and Whitstone families have buried more than five family members between them, the cause of death ranging from poor health/old age, to car accidents, to suicide. Residential schools, internal political bickering and a host of immeasurable factors related to outside racism, have fractured the Onion Lake community. The stories I was told represent their struggle to reach out to the outside community while simultaneously holding on to their culture, identity and pride as First Nations' people.

This has become my primary motivation to carry out this project. I have felt increasingly ashamed of the level of my amnesia about my ancestors' past in Onion Lake. In my busy life I never gave these things a second thought until I decided to make the study of history part of my occupation, not just a hobby. It has taken time and effort to remove the barriers within me and listen to another side of the story. Clearly, when I say our family has ignored these issues I include my own past failure to reach out to the people of Onion Lake. However, I hope by being honest about this research it will inspire others to peel back the layers of their own assumptions and listen to alternative stories and points of view.

Lately there has been an acceptance in my immediate family that Mabel was my grandfather's half sister. My relatives' open confession that they did know about her and some of her family tells me that we are starting to worry less about the social pressures in the greater community that has perhaps made us feel we had to mute our past. We

have distanced ourselves from many Aboriginal people because of the perceived differences between Native and non-Native people, manufactured by our segregated communities and separate history. To help all of us continue on the path of acceptance and understanding, I have searched for additional historical evidence to reveal a human side of George Mann, and remove him from underneath the pile of incomplete or negative stereotypes of the Indian agent. Previous research revealed that he was well liked by many in Onion Lake, and I am grateful that he and his family seemed to enjoy their work in the Indian department. If the opposite were true I may have not had the courage to engage in this project, or perhaps would not even be here to do so if not for those “friendly Indians.” As I am now, I think George, Sarah, Blanche, George Junior and Charlotte were grateful for the treatment they received from Seekascootch and his followers, because in the years after 1885, it appears they worked hard for the people who had potentially saved their lives. What follows are stories that push against the dramatized history that have help divide our cultures, and reveal the Mann family as humanitarians of their time who made an effort to create a sense of community with the people of Onion Lake, especially from 1885 to 1900.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> My own research has indicated that as settlement pressure increased, Indian agents after George Mann more strictly enforced the government’s oppressive policies.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### THE MANN FAMILY IN ONION LAKE: NARRATIVES THAT DEFY DRAMA

The Mann family's dramatic escape in 1885 and their experience in Big Bear's camp changed their relationship with the Cree people drastically. Mann had lost several government colleagues in Frog Lake, but chose to remain in Onion Lake where he was promoted from farm instructor to Indian agent in 1886, in a downsized Indian Department. His wife Sarah and the three children returned to Ontario, presumably to be with family, for a short time after their release from captivity, but returned to Onion Lake to be with George on October 24, 1885, much to the delight of some of the Cree men and women who, Mann notes in his diary, were "very glad to see her."<sup>122</sup> The Mann children grew up in Onion Lake, working with their father and learning to speak the Cree language. Hudson Bay Company clerk Angus McKay noted some of their trips to Edmonton for school in the winter, but as far as can be understood from the records, they spent their summers in Onion Lake helping their father. As they grew up, daughter Blanche became the agency clerk, (probably sometime in the 1890s) a job she continued to do until George Mann Senior's death in 1916.<sup>123</sup> George Mann Junior owned cattle around the reserve and grazed his herd as far away as Fort Victoria, North-West Territories, according to McKay, who also recorded George Mann senior's many trips away from the agency to check on reserve farming and cattle.<sup>124</sup>

Many stories about George Mann and his family have existed in the greater community for some time, uncovered and told by local historians and former Onion Lake residents, and published in newspapers and books. These stories need to be here in

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<sup>122</sup> SAB, R-E3196, George Mann Diary Transcript, p. 1.

<sup>123</sup> Dion 123.

<sup>124</sup> *Archives of Manitoba*, microfilm reel IM 1015, Onion Lake Post Journals, Hudson Bay Company, 1893-1900. Fort Victoria was a Hudson Bay Post on the North Saskatchewan River 125 miles northwest of Onion Lake.

this project, all part of a collection of material that will help wake our Cree and non-Native families up to a new vision of our past relationship with one another. George Mann Senior and Junior were very abrupt in their diaries and journals and their written accounts of the past were almost always meant for government officials. Few stories were written down outside official government business and none have the level of detail found in Blanche's accounts of their escape to Fort Pitt. Some of the many stories of the Mann family that have been researched by me and other historians are documented here as part of the cacophony of voices that must be heard, several times if necessary, so they can infect our consciousness. Keith Davidson, a historian from Lloydminster who interviewed the daughter of Maggie Delaney, a young woman who grew up in Onion Lake, uncovered one such story.

Hazel Wheeler recounts the story of her grandmother who tried to walk from Kehiwin to Onion Lake during the winter of 1886 to ask Indian Agent Mann for food for the starving people in her community. Aid was scarce at this time as all the reserves around Frog Lake had been labeled disloyal, and the only Indian agency with supplies was Onion Lake. Hazel's grandmother had a twelve-year-old daughter and six-month-old baby daughter strapped to her back as she made the long journey on foot to Onion Lake. The baby was Hazel's mother, Maggie Delaney. After a difficult journey, and still many miles from Onion Lake, a man on horseback discovered the three travelers, and immediately rode to Onion Lake to tell George Mann. Mann hitched up a team and went out to meet them, about which Hazel said "My mother often spoke of her mother saying, 'He must have been a very kind man. He cried when he saw us.' He was feeling so sorry for them." Mann promised them a house in Onion Lake, and Maggie grew up there

and eventually married the store clerk Adrian Martineau. She said that George Mann immediately sent supplies to help alleviate the suffering in Frog Lake and Kehiwin.<sup>125</sup>

In 1885, Louison Mongrain had been charged and convicted of the murder of Constable Cowan, based on several witnesses who either saw him shoot Cowan after he was down and wounded, or heard him talking about it with others. These witnesses included three Aboriginal men, one of whom was Tousaint Calling Bull. Tousaint was named in an oral history account as the man that ran twenty-five miles from Frog Lake to Onion Lake to warn George Mann and the others about the killings at Frog Lake.<sup>126</sup> In Calling Bull's testimony, Cowan was supposed to have raised his hands in front of his face and said "don't brother" at which time Mongrain had fired twice at close range, shooting Cowan in the head. Amelia McLean refutes this testimony, citing that Mongrain was nowhere near Cowan when the shots were fired, this according to her father. She also wrote that Mongrain was particularly helpful to the white prisoners throughout their ordeal, especially the Mann family. She also testified that she knew the Cree language well, and from what she heard, Mongrain and others saved the Manns' lives the evening of the frightening news from Frog Lake, as he had secured the horse to the wagon for them, and guided them to the trail that lead to Fort Pitt. She says that Mann also stated that Mongrain repeatedly stood up for the prisoners in camp, disagreeing strongly with the Plains Cree that the white prisoners be forced to fight in the battle at Frenchman's Butte.<sup>127</sup>

It is worth noting here that Mann had apparently shared this information with the McLean family, but failed to mention Mongrain in any of his reports to the Government, prior to the petition for Mongrain's release. Perhaps Mann needed to feel secure in his

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<sup>125</sup> Keith Davidson, "A Trio of Travelers," *Lloydminster Meridian Booster*, 5 July 2000. B3.

<sup>126</sup> Keith Davidson, "Marathon Saviour: A Frog Lake History Mystery," *Lloydminster Regional Times*, Wednesday 31 March 1999. A10.

<sup>127</sup> *National Archives of Canada [NAC]* RG 13, v. 1421, 11463, Miss A. McLean to the Privy Council, 14 November 1885.

new position of Indian agent, plus have the backing of Amelia McLean and his government colleagues, before he mentioned the name of the suspected rebel. If it indeed had been Mongrain who had secured the horse and wagon for their escape as well as kept them safe in the camp, why had Blanche not mentioned his name in her narrative, which she wrote down after 1885? It seems that the pressures of government employment on George Mann, and the stylistic conventions which kept Indians mostly nameless in historical narratives, kept Mongrain nameless in the Manns' discourse. However, the spectacle of eight men being hanged simultaneously in Battleford on November 27<sup>th</sup> 1885, and the precarious nature of Indian-white relations on reserves after 1885 perhaps fed the fires of humanitarianism in the Mann and McLean families in the months and years immediately after 1885. Amelia McLean perhaps recognized that, as a white woman, her testimony could hold enough sway with the court to allow Mongrain's sentence to be commuted to life in prison.<sup>128</sup>

In 1887, two years after the rebellion, George Mann sent a petition on behalf of the Indians of Onion Lake to Ottawa to ask for the release of "Waywayseetowin" alias Dressy Man; Charles Ducharme, alias Charlebois; and Louison Mongrain. Dressy Man and Charlebois had killed a witigo or cannibal woman while in Big Bear's camp with the Mann family and other captives.<sup>129</sup> Although the whole camp sanctioned the killing, many whites included, the men were convicted of murder and sentenced to death by hanging in Regina on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1885. After some debate, it was eventually decided that the level of "civilization" of the accused was insufficient to deem them criminally responsible based on the Indians' "superstitious" belief system, and the

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<sup>128</sup> For further discussion of the dramatic shift of Euro-Canadian perceptions of Indians immediately after 1885, see Carter, *Capturing*, 20-23.

<sup>129</sup> NAC RG 13, v. 1423, 44967. Letter and petition from Indian agent George Mann to H. D. MacDowall, M. P., 15 November, 1887.

sentence of death was eventually commuted to life in prison.<sup>130</sup> As the testimony of Amelia McLean indicates, at least one of these men, Louison Mongrain, had been instrumental in the Mann family's safety during the troubled times in 1885. To maximize the effect of the petition, Mann had also carefully worded the letter to emphasize the farm work and progress being made by the Indians of Onion Lake. In other words, it appears he knowingly increased their potential for success by emphasizing points with which government officials keen on civilizing Indians could relate. George Mann and Amelia McLean were under no obligation to act on the Indians' behalf, outside their personal sense of debt to these men who had helped them in desperate times. This story of understanding and mutual respect was not the dominant narrative of the day, and the release of two of the men received only anecdotal attention in the newspaper. "Dressy Man and Louison Mongrain, who were sentenced to imprisonment in Manitoba penitentiary for offences committed during the rebellion of 1885, have been released and are on their way home."<sup>131</sup>

Hudson Bay Company clerk Angus MacKay's daily journal provides important insight into the activities of the Mann family in Onion Lake from a point of view outside the government of Canada. MacKay wrote a lot about the day-to-day activities on the reserve, most of which involved George Mann. Mann was always coming and going from the agency, and traveling countless miles to inspect the cattle, farms and houses on the reserves.<sup>132</sup> Joseph Dion, a Metis man that grew up in Onion Lake, corroborates this in his book where he described Mann as "the only Indian Agent who did not mind

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<sup>130</sup> NAC, RG 13, v. 1423, file 206A, Letter from J. Thompson, Minister of Justice to Magistrate Rouleau.

<sup>131</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, 4 September, 1890.

<sup>132</sup> *Archives of Manitoba*, microfilm reel IM 1015, Onion Lake Post Journals, Hudson Bay Company, 1893-1900.

traveling around on a saddle horse to personally inspect the work in the reserve and to visit with his people.”<sup>133</sup>

Dion also described the extensive farm operations that grew in and around Onion Lake during the fifteen years Mann was the agent. Ranches were opened in Onion Lake, Frog Lake and Kehiwin, and cattle multiplied rapidly as far away as 20 miles east of Kehiwin in what was known as the Long Swamp. Mann held ration day every Saturday, and used this occasion to encourage those who were doing well and reprimand those who were lagging behind. Every home had good feed supplies, wood for their stoves and buildings and fences always kept in good repair. Although Dion characterized Mann as “strict,” he also said he was fair, and took a personal interest in the day-to-day lives of the people of Onion Lake.<sup>134</sup>

It seems that Mann did have a close relationship with the people of Onion Lake, and as I have mentioned earlier, his family spoke the Cree language. It is not surprising then that the Mann family were involved in creating a sense of community in Onion Lake through celebrations of holidays and special occasions. For example, Onion Lake continues to have a strong tradition of a weekend of festivities on 1 July to celebrate Canada Day. My mother, Eveleen Long (nee Mann) remembers going to this event with her family many times to enjoy sports and horse races, well into the 1950s. Our ancestors most likely initiated this celebration in Onion Lake sometime after 1886 when George became the agent in charge. On 1 July 1893, HBC employee Angus McLean wrote the following in his diary:

A fine day with only a shower in the afternoon. The sports commenced at 2pm. A good program was got up for the occasion and purses to the value of \$28.00 was [sic] given. Mr. Mann who treated his Indians to a beef, several bags [of] flour, a chest of tea and a cuddy of tobacco and they spent a very pleasant day and finished off with a tea and fiddle dance[,] each to his own taste and Mr. Mann

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<sup>133</sup> Dion, 122.

<sup>134</sup> Dion, 122-123.



joining in the fun with the best of them. He apparently thinks all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.<sup>135</sup>

Joseph Dion, who grew up in Onion Lake, also talks of the significance of 1 July, the only day of the year they were allowed to go home from residential school. "Dominion Day as far back as I can remember was always a day of celebration at Onion Lake. Races and sports of many kinds were pulled off; also, a government telegraph pole was greased, and whoever could climb it to its top received a new hat for the prize."<sup>136</sup> It seems the Mann family enjoyed play, in every sense of that word, in a place where community was created in defiance of other forces that create barriers.

According to my kokum (Mary Whitstone), George Mann Junior continued his personal relationship with the community long after fathering a child there in 1898. Kokum said Mann Junior visited several times after his family left there in 1900, and that he continued to encourage the farmers as he and his dad had done in the past. She had seen him on Canada Day, speaking Cree to her parents, sometime in the 1920s. A portion of Mann Junior's diary has survived that chronicles the daily exploits of his family from 1910 to 1916, his first years on the family homestead now occupied by my uncle Frank Mann. During this time, Mann Junior worked for the government telegraph, and his job was to care for the line from Onion Lake to North Battleford. He reports going to Onion Lake at least once a month to inspect the line, and perhaps used these trips to visit his old haunts in Onion Lake. On 1 and 2 July 1914, he reports going to Long Lake and Onion Lake to work on the telegraph line, and perhaps used this as an excuse to attend Onion Lake's 1 July celebration.<sup>137</sup> According to stories told by my grandfather Pete Mann, his father George Mann Junior loved the people there and they loved him, and he liked to party and drink on occasion with his Cree friends. My uncle remembered

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<sup>135</sup> *Archives of Manitoba*, microfilm reel IM 1015, Onion Lake Post Journal, 1 July 1893.

<sup>136</sup> Joseph F. Dion, *My Tribe The Crees*, (Calgary: Glenbow Alberta Institute, 1979) 119,120.

<sup>137</sup> George Mann Jr., diary in possession of the author.

that in one story, Mann Junior had ridden into the middle of an Indian camp firing a pistol and shouting and screaming at the top of his lungs. People scattered in all directions fearing for their lives, but when they realized who the culprit was, all had a good laugh and then “the party was on!”<sup>138</sup>

This strong historical relationship between the Mann family and the people of Onion Lake represents an opportunity to understand Native-newcomer relations history in a more personal way. The search for this narrative began with the playwriting process as I contrasted this evidence with the dominant versions of the past where Euro-Canadians and Indians are presented as binary opposites. Our contrasting narratives were the products of segregated communities that progressively weakened the bond between the Mann family and the people of Onion Lake. The play was a partial investigation into how that bond was weakened and why it has taken so long to begin a reconnection process. Over the years, I and many other members of the Mann family have felt a pull back to Onion Lake, but something has always prevented us from making a meaningful effort to reconnect. Members of both families have held onto knowledge and stories, but have been reluctant to delve deeper to find the roots of our connection to each other. It seems that as settlers increased in numbers, so did suspicions about the dark-skinned “others” that were their new neighbours. In the face of the unknown, people began to develop fears of one another and the segregated reserve society slowly moved us further apart.

Joseph Dion states that this segregation began very quickly after George Mann left Onion Lake, and what followed was a “drastic change in our way of life.” As more settlers arrived, “No Trespassing” signs were erected on all roads leading into Onion Lake reserve. The Crees were required to account for everything in a strictly enforced permit system, which made them feel as though much of what they had did not belong to

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with Frank Mann, January 2006.

them anymore. Visitors were watched closely, taxes on sales of grain and livestock were imposed, and outside dealers were made to feel that debts owed to them by Indians would not be repaid. The large herds of cattle and horses were sold off, and the Indian people's meat supply vanished. However, according to Dion, what ultimately transformed the people there from "industrious" to "listless" was that they now had to "squat down and wait." Dion describes an Indian agency that was transformed from a place that encouraged hard work and respect, to a place that ignored them and denied them the basic means to making a living. The man that had opened his door to them was replaced by a new agent who made the Onion Lake Cree wait in a small room with a peephole as the new primary communication link between the Indians and the outside community. According to Dion, "an Indian had to make several trips to the agency before he could get a hearing. Yes, many treaty Indians could truly say that half their lives were spent in waiting, waiting till they lost interest."<sup>139</sup>

Dion presents a compelling eyewitness account that supports my argument that George Mann had a strong and sympathetic connection to the people of Onion Lake. The combined legacy of cultural genocide and isolation on reserves has meant many people there have lost hope and respect through no fault of their own. The question I have often asked is: if Mann had remained in Onion Lake after 1900, would he have enforced the debilitating policies placed on the people he had helped prosper?

Mann was transferred in 1900 in an exchange of positions between himself and agent W. Sibbald of Saddle Lake, Alberta. In 1902, Mann was the subject of some intense criticism from Indian Department bureaucrats who claimed the Indians on his reserve were killing their cattle for food, and apparently not farming in a manner that pleased the government. Mann admitted in his report that he had little control over them

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<sup>139</sup> Dion 133.

killing cattle, as they were the Indians' private property.<sup>140</sup> In a memorandum to Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs J. D. McLean, accountant D.C. Scott recommended that someone else be given an opportunity to control the Saddle Lake Indians. J.J. Campbell (office unknown) defends Mann in another memorandum to McLean where he points out that these Indians are very independent of the ration-house and, as the cattle are their private property, Mann's only means to prevent the slaughter is "the exercise of moral suasion." He furthermore states that as Mann has only been in Saddle Lake for two seasons, he cannot "reasonably be expected to have acquired much control over the Indians."<sup>141</sup> After receiving the memorandum from Secretary McLean, assistant Indian Commissioner J.A.J. McKenna sent a letter directly to Deputy Minister J.A. Smart in which he backed up Accountant Scott as he felt "Mr. Mann's admission of his inability to handle the agency is to my mind tantamount to a resignation."

The preceding bureaucratic nightmare reveals much about the top down nature of the Department of Indian Affairs. It shows the lack of support and understanding of the agents in the field, and a general lack of compassion for the Indian people or regard for the treaty promises. Mann was not alone in his protest of excessively coercive government policy. Agent Finlayson of the Touchwood Hills reserve was fired because he let his Indians use labour saving machinery at harvest.<sup>142</sup> Mann had somehow avoided the ire of department officials while in Onion Lake, but felt their wrath while in Saddle Lake. Several months later, assistant Commissioner McKenna stated that after conferring with Inspector Chisholm in Winnipeg who spoke highly of Mann, he was inclined to postpone any action until the Inspector had time to visit and report on the

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<sup>140</sup> NAC, RG 10, Volume 3733, Reel C-10128, File 27115.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 10 April 1902.

<sup>142</sup> Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) 46,47. Carter cites Deputy Commissioner Hayter Reed as particularly insensitive to the plight of Aboriginal farmers.

Saddle Lake and Onion Lake Agencies.<sup>143</sup> In 1904, Inspector W.J. Chisholm's report of Saddle Lake does not mention any disappointment in the way Mann was handling his duties there.<sup>144</sup> Mann was eventually transferred to Hobbema, Alberta in 1905 in another department shuffle, and a local farmer was hired to replace him in Saddle Lake on a probationary term at a reduced salary, as the government continued to cut Indian reserve funding.<sup>145</sup> Mann was the agent in Hobbema until his retirement in 1915, and he died there in 1916 of pneumonia. He is buried in the Wetaskawin cemetery.

I have no evidence that he or Mann Junior spoke out against the coercion of the Onion Lake people, but my mother remembers my grandfather Pete's disgust that the people on the reserve were forced to farm with antiques, while outside the reserve farmers had access to modern equipment. One uncle said of my grandfather Pete Mann, "he knew every Indian on the reservation it seemed like to me. ...he was busy shaking hands the whole time we were there..."<sup>146</sup> My mother and her brothers also have fond memories of 1 July sports day in Onion Lake, and the Cree people who would occasionally stop at their farm to work or visit on their way to Onion Lake. These stories have become nostalgia as our communities continued to drift apart, and the human role of Indian agent Mann and his family increasingly became lost and misunderstood by my generation.

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Dominion of Canada, Sessional Papers Vol. 39, No. 27. Ottawa, 1905. 194-196.

<sup>145</sup> Cuts in funding for reserves began in 1889, but it appears Mann was able to avoid this until after 1900 in Saddle Lake. For more discussion see Sarah Carter, "Two Acres and a Cow: 'Peasant' Farming for the Indians of the Northwest, 1889-97." The Canadian Historical Review, vol. 70, 1989, 27-52.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with George Mann, June 2006.

**CHAPTER SIX:**  
***FRIENDS OR FRIENDLIES?:***  
**NARRATIVES AND DRAMA IN JUXTAPOSITION**

The drama of 1885 and the “escape to Fort Pitt” seem distant from these narratives of human beings working together for the greater wellbeing of everyone. Engaging and investing in the preceding stories can help our family change our memory of the Mann family in Onion Lake from nostalgia to a meaningful shared history. The stories speak to each other and to Mary Whitstone’s narrative of George Mann Junior and his commitment to the people and to his daughter. These stories are engaged with my present sensibility in this moment of time, and have deepened my connection to the place my ancestors lived, worked and shared a community with the Cree. They are an alternative to the quagmire of dramatic narratives that have kept us from speaking to one another, and can be the basis of new metaphors for interpreting the past.

As previously mentioned, I wrote a play that took the dramatic narratives of 1885 and allowed them to come into contact with contemporary narratives and my experience of trying to reconcile my family’s history in Onion Lake. The main sources were the newspaper and magazine stories from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, early dramatic literature that was the precursor to the dominant historical myth, the various forms of the Mann and Chief eyewitness accounts, current views from members of both families, and my own thoughts, opinions and poetry. What I chose to do was to put as many of these voices on stage as possible, and let them debate it with me (the Student character) in the middle trying to negotiate among the divergent opinions, and understand the motivations behind the various voices. The dramatic play, *Friends or Friendlies?*, brought together the competing voices from the past with the competing views of the present into one room with an audience.

At the beginning of the play there is a period of time where the characters take turns competing for the audience's attention as the audience enters the theatre space. During this time the Student sits blindfolded in the centre of the circle, while George Mann Senior observes everything from an elevated position. These are symbolic images, the Student as blind and naïve, and George Mann as the man in charge or primary subject of the proceedings. The play begins with dialogue about the events of 1885 and the Student's connection to this history. As he debates the history with the other characters, he reveals my personal opinions about this past, and the difficulties he encountered as he researched the past. Some of the dramatic narratives are also introduced, mostly through Mabel and Blanche, and then there is a long poetic section where the Student describes my experience at the chicken dance ceremony. Finally, the Student confronts the dramatic past, and the play launches into a fury of excerpts from the various dramatic narratives with all characters participating in their re-enactment. Although it is not completely obvious in a dry reading of the play, I am trying to create a host of conflicts and visual images that can only be fully realized in an extended rehearsal process.

Although this is an uncommon way to work in drama, I am certainly not the first to experiment with text in this way as a means of reconciling one's identity in his or her country of origin. Although artists all over the world recognize him, the late Heiner Müller's experimental style is not well known in mainstream Canadian theatre circles. In Müller's last works especially, he approached controversial topics in non-conventional ways, and created stark images as a starting point in his process. Müller grew up in the East and witnessed the arrest of his father, something that traumatized him most of his life, and, as a result, he became obsessed by traumas inflicted by the German people on the German people. Although Müller began as Germany's new Brecht, and similarly sought to alter the consciousness of the audience through a direct address, agitprop-

style theatre, he soon developed his own style and left the Brechtian model behind.<sup>147</sup> Most of his work since 1971 has been called “deconstructionist” in nature, or as Müller described it, “synthetic fragments.” He took seemingly unrelated scenes and bits of scenes and put them together without any concern for the coherence of a linear plot structure. Rather than attempt to manipulate the audience as Brecht did, Müller “refuses to give answers; he offers the problem, poses the question, presents the conflicting attitudes and opinions, and challenges the spectator to take sides, or to withhold involvement.” He did not pretend to know his characters, but rather spoke through their masks; “I’m neither a dope nor a hope dealer.”<sup>148</sup> His post-modern style was what I chose to emulate in part of the play-creation process.

The purpose of this style was to show the wide space between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal narratives, and how the British culture’s need to define the ‘other’ to fit its desires and assumptions has created dominant narratives that deny Aboriginal communities a meaningful stake in the past. By presenting these dramatic accounts in juxtaposition with contemporary narratives, I hope to separate my work from the dramatic plays of past non-Aboriginal Canadian writers in the 1960s and 1970s, which also attempted to expose the faults in the Canadian historical myth. Aimed at a primarily white audience, this work helped to shake up past historical assumptions by stressing the culpability of dominant society in the destruction and victimization of the Aboriginal community, but did not address the complexity of cross-cultural narratives of the past as I have tried to. For instance, in the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* by George Riga, the central conflict pits a young uneducated Aboriginal woman against an unapologetic

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<sup>147</sup> Brechtian theatre was overtly educational. In this epic style, actors were detached from their characters and used direct address to instruct the audience about social issues. For further reading see Bernard F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1974) 847-854.

<sup>148</sup> Heiner Müller, *Hamlet Machine and Other Texts for the Stage*, Carl Weber (ed. & translator) (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984) 15-19.



Canadian justice system with no hope for escape or reconciliation. As was typical of plays of this time, the purpose was to show the incredible power imbalance in Canada between Aboriginal people and dominant society. This imbalance in Canada perhaps still exists, but my desire was to reveal the stories that created this imbalance (British style dramatic/romantic historical narratives), and show how this may still influence current sensibilities. For example, near the end of *Friends or Friendlies?*, I juxtapose a parody of Blanche Mann as Laura Secord with Blanche's written narrative of their escape, and then inject my own panic-stricken version of what may have transpired.<sup>149</sup> Rather than create a revisionist perspective that presents the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal power imbalance as a simple us-versus-them conflict, I hoped to engage history in a way that exposes the complexities of the Canadian colonial past, and encourages the audience to be curious about this.

I have used the play to expose the Canadian culture of myth-making, a pervasive sensibility that has helped us create a disconnection from our history with Aboriginal people. It represents my visceral reaction to what I perceive as my non-Native family's denial of the past, and I hope this personal connection—or bias—has aided the creation of a version of history that will connect more intimately to people no matter what their idea of history may be.<sup>150</sup> If I had chosen to create a play that did not acknowledge this disconnect, then the work would lack vulnerability, often a key aspect to an engaging dramatic performance. Because I have only recently reconnected with the Aboriginal stories, I feel a certain amount of embarrassment over my inability to treat our Aboriginal friends with respect and dignity when it comes to history and historical thinking. If I expose this embarrassment through my own personal struggle with the past, I allow the

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<sup>149</sup> In particular see Appendix 1, page 25-26.

<sup>150</sup> For example I expose people's disinterest in history through conversations with present day members of the Mann and Chief family, through the Cowboy and the Cree Man characters, Appendix 1 page 98.

audience to see a human side of historical writing that they may not have considered before. This is how I can use my family's connection to Onion Lake in a meaningful way. Director Anne Bogart regards vulnerability and embarrassment as key to any authentic performance: "In the case of a mediocre performer who executes mindless imitation, the discomfiture of the original creative moment is missing. In search of authenticity, one cannot find security and safety inside inherited forms [...]." At the start of the play I reveal my ineptitude through the Student character's musings that in spite of the Aboriginal story being available to him most of life, he has failed to acknowledge it. Throughout the play's opening pages the Student is constantly interrupted by voices from the past and present interjecting their stories and opinions. Particularly important are the uncensored dramatic narratives of the past, which expose the Student's connection to the culture of dramatic storytelling that has helped shape his identity.

Within these dramatic stories are the stereotypes that were initiated by the British culture's investment in the historical authority of the dramatic voice. In *A Director Prepares*, (American) Bogart describes her realization that stereotypes are three-dimensional concrete shapes, and through them "images and even prejudices can be entered and embodied, remembered and re-awoken." In her production of a traditional American Vaudeville show, Bogart describes the traumatic experience of three black actors who put on the black-face/white-mouth make-up and performed this very racist but also formerly popular archetype. The result of their bravery was a very powerful reminder to the audience of their own history. "The audiences encountered a documentary embodiment, shapes of history filled with the reverberation of our actual engagement, sorrow and freedom." Bogart concludes that if we acknowledge and embrace stereotypes openly, we can transcend them and perform an "exorcism" of our

past attitudes.<sup>151</sup> We can laugh together, show our disgust and feel whatever emotions these characterizations bring to the surface. As actors and directors grapple with these voices on stage in terms of how they speak them to the audience, they too become actively engaged in a meaningful historical process. They become another part of the cacophony of voices emanating from this past that together deepen and enrich our understanding of history in terms of identity, and not just as a source of so-called facts and events.

A character in the play that I am very interested in developing further is Mabel, George Mann Junior's daughter that, according to the testimony of her family, Mann Junior placed in an Onion Lake Residential school when she was three years old. Unlike the testimony of many Aboriginal students of these institutions, Mabel reported that she enjoyed her time there, and even returned to the school after graduation as a teacher.<sup>152</sup> Throughout the play I have Mabel speaking racist and sensational narratives, because I have envisioned her as the link between the Mann family who lived and worked in Onion Lake, and the contemporary family that has been removed from this past. Mabel's relationship with the Aboriginal cast members is an uneasy one, while her relationship with the Mann family represents one of longing for acceptance. For example, in one passage the Cowboy, who represents a contemporary member of my own family who is reluctant to engage in my fanciful musings about the past, reveals to the Student that he knew George Mann Junior had an Aboriginal daughter. Mabel immediately begins to flirt with the Cowboy in an effort to gain his acceptance, with the Historian, Indian One and Indian Two watching this shocking spectacle. In her dialogue, which is taken from a University of Alberta student's prizewinning short story from

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<sup>151</sup> Bogart, *A Director*, 91-111.

<sup>152</sup> Alan Long in conversation with Richard Gardipee, February 2006.

1915,<sup>153</sup> she presents herself as a romantic Métis maiden who has the gift of a close commune with nature from her Aboriginal heritage, but who also enjoys a sense of superiority and higher intelligence, attributes taken from her white father.<sup>154</sup> Within her lies the racial divide between our communities, a divide drawn by dramatic narratives, and realized in stereotypes. At the end of the play, reconciliation seems possible when the Cree Man finally reveals that his family saved George Mann and his family's lives. However, Mabel jumps back in with another fictionalized version of Blanche's account and an argument ensues which remains unresolved, and the play ends in a cacophony of voices.

Acknowledging and understanding the separation between our communities is perhaps best defined by Mabel's attempts at reconciliation through what she thinks are beautiful stories. Many characters have the opportunity to embody stereotypes, as I was inspired to do by Bogart's work. The Aboriginal men that play the Indians in the excerpts taken from *Laura Secord* and *Tecumseh*, also have an opportunity to make light of stereotypes used by gifted playwrights to increase the dramatic tension, and heighten the superiority of the white leaders of Canada. Although Mabel's words and the words of the dramatic Indian characters could both potentially offend the audience's sensibilities, I hope that the live embodiment of these stereotypes will move the audience to feel a range of emotions, as together we explore and explode what were once thought of as accurate representations of Indians.

These are personal musings about a play that has yet to be proven in a full production process. I hesitate to delve much further into this speculation without the benefit of a community of actors and audience, ideally from a wide variety of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal backgrounds, to share this process with me. However, even the act

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<sup>153</sup> T. F. Foley, "The Call of the Blood," *The Gateway*, December 16, 1915 Vol. VI, No.7 pp. 1, 10.

<sup>154</sup> Appendix One page 108.

of writing down historical narratives in this way has forced me to grapple in a more visceral way with a complex and controversial past. Only an audience can decide if this style has artistic meaning or merit, or has moved the historical debate along in a beneficial way. Although I have extensively explored the issues raised by the play in the preceding chapters, in the future I hope to have an opportunity to explore this further in a play rehearsal process.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### CONCLUSION

“They lost our tracks when we drove through the swamp.”<sup>155</sup> The swamp could be likened to the Canadian historical myth that allowed our family to lose our past in Onion Lake as a distant memory not worthy of remembering. The authority vested in dramatic historical events allowed the colonizers to distance themselves from the plight of the Indians, and take the new land as their rightful due in the New World. Newcomers did not wish to compete with Indians for land or jobs, and the fact that the Indians had prospered only a few years before was not a story that held interest in the modern press. Wild tales of days gone by were the popular stories in the early twentieth century, stories that changed to tall tales of reserves full of “lazy chattering redskins,”<sup>156</sup> who had no interest in farming or making an honest living: the imagery of the wild and uncivilized that was fed by the British dramatic tradition.

The Mann family who lived in pre-twentieth century Onion Lake was soon caught in the middle of a rapidly changing society that equally devalued their Indian friends and the Manns’ own humanitarian work on reserves. While in Saddle Lake, Alberta, between 1900 and 1905, the Manns were characterized in the press as government employees who could only sit back and watch the lazy Indians waste their lives away. The Manns’ work held no apparent meaning with outside society, and the Indians were not at all the industrious, hard-working people described by Joseph Dion in Onion Lake. According to Augustus Bridle of the *Canadian Graphic Magazine*, the men had fertile land but no interest in farming it, and only longed for the days of the buffalo while they let their “squaws” do all the work for them. Bridle stated that for the Indians, the abundant cattle

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<sup>155</sup> SAB, S-A751, George Gwynne Mann Fonds. Blanche Mann’s account entitled “Episodes of the Riel Rebellion, 1885.”

<sup>156</sup> Author unknown, *In The Last West*.

were “a bother and no sport. No it is better to be gloriously lazy on the reservation. Indolence becomes a virtue. Work is a strenuous and unpopular vice. Everybody is highly virtuous.”<sup>157</sup>

An analysis of the historical and the dramatic literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have revealed that the two genres had a similar purpose. Drama was a primary vehicle that British culture used to define the dark skinned ‘other’ in an immediate and tangible way – “white” people painting themselves dark and living the experience in front of their peers in a theatrical setting. This tradition lived on in North America, as American and Canadian playwrights continued to try and translate their personal experience of contact and conflict with Indians in a form that they were familiar with, and that appealed to a wide audience. Historians in turn borrowed from this form and the Canadian historical myth was born. The newspaper and magazine articles that initially related the events of Frog Lake and Onion Lake had the common goal of defining Indians in a way that pleased the predominantly British newcomers to Canada. Once Indian protests of unfair government policy were crushed by this hegemonic narrative the need to continually define Indians fell away, and pageant style dramas referred to their way of life as a romantic dance with nature that had inevitably come to an end. Revived debates about the history of Aboriginal people began again on stage in the 1960s and 1970s in Canada as non-Aboriginal writers again used theatre to try and connect with their audience. This revisionist style began a debate about how Aboriginal people fit into a shared history of Canada, a debate that I have entered into in this interdisciplinary project.

Rightly or wrongly, I have embraced the theme of dramatic writing as a way of understanding how the non-Native Mann side of my family’s relationship to the people of Onion lake changed from engaged, to nostalgic, to apathetic. I have used the play

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<sup>157</sup> Augustus Bridle, “The Brown Folk...”

writing process to launch myself into a process that complicates the past, which I hope challenges those who read this work to rethink their assumptions about the past. In this regard, it seems to me that drama can be both the cause and the cure of our present situation. The play foregrounds humour in its characterizations. I know from experience that members of both sides of the Mann family have a great sense of humour and enjoy laughing at themselves as much as anyone else. Critics may claim that this analysis is weakened by the fact that I have not fully investigated the disconnection created by dramatic history in the Aboriginal community, and have primarily named my own family as the group who have lost their connection to the past. This is a fair concern. I have, perhaps, privileged the Aboriginal voice. But I have done this because I still do not feel that I can speak for the Aboriginal family, for, other than Peter and Mary, many have been reluctant to share their view of history with me. After spending more time in their community I might be able to achieve a more balanced perspective.

The play is the vehicle that transforms the 'escape to Fort Pitt' into a post-modern quagmire of voices lost in the swamp at Onion Lake. R.G. Collingwood suggests that the past can set us free only if we engage all its voices; so that we can escape our own personal biases and perspectives and acknowledge history's complexity while letting go of manufactured identities. In combination with the Student character's theorizing and the variety of voices past and present, poetry was used to attempt to build visual images of that cold night in 1885. It was a partial effort to think the thoughts in the past in the present, and to imagine from my present sensibility what happened in the minds of the Mann and Chief families during those few difficult hours. This part of the creative process represents my effort to visualize the past and share this vision with an audience.

There are several questions this project has attempted to answer, both through theorizing and through dramatic composition. I think I now have a better sense of why my family and I have denied this past for so long. I now am able to begin to personally



take responsibility for the dreadful treatment of First Nations. Toward this end, this project is meant as a preliminary effort at reconciliation. Post-modern theorizing has led me to believe that equality of voice and a common identity lie not in what “actually” or “authoritatively” happened, but in a place where as many voices as possible speak and debate to allow us a broader understanding. The discoveries I have made and have yet to make, in Onion Lake, in the play, and in my now expanded cross-cultural family are fed by a desire to achieve the freedom Collingwood said history could provide. I hope I have engaged Collingwood’s idea of the historical imagination as a “self-dependent, self-determining, and self-justifying form of thought.”<sup>158</sup>

Conceived from this perspective, the way each family has remembered the stories of the “Escape to Fort Pitt,” have intrinsically linked to the dramatization of the history of the time, especially because of its connection to the so-called Frog Lake “Massacre” and subsequent captivity. The highly dramatized captivity narratives and harrowing stories of battles in the bush were popular reading for generations of white settlers, and at the same time were a source of pain and frustration for generations of Onion Lake and Frog Lake Aboriginal residents. By embracing these stereotypes in order to expose them, I have attempted to create a living version of the past that allows us as a community to transcend our assumptions and exorcize our held attitudes about one another. Although drama and the Canadian historical myth of the Wild West do not completely explain the divide between our communities, they continue to live in our communities—and a more varied and nuanced version of our past is long overdue. After all George Mann was not a cowboy and Seekascootch was not an Indian until Columbus landed in 1492.

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<sup>158</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea*, 249.

## **Appendix One:**

### ***Friends or Friendlies?***

Note on this draft: This play is still very much in the development process due to limited time and funding. The intention is to continue re-writing and develop the script further through more workshops and dramaturgy. The first dramaturgical workshop is notated here as Appendix Two. A rough draft of the Cree translations of certain passages is also listed there.

#### ***List of Characters***

Note: Each character comes from a different time period, which is their home base; some leap back and forth in time and play other characters. They are all on stage for the duration of the play so costumes do not change, except for maybe a hat, or a similar simple change.

STUDENT (Central Character who is orchestrating this whole thing. Cree name is Mokahusiw (mo-ga-hus-oh—emphasize 2<sup>nd</sup> syllable) and is a descendant of George Mann)

A young man 25 to 35.

MANN SR (Farm Instructor and later Indian Agent of Onion Lake Reserve. Came there in 1879 alone and was later joined by wife and three kids in 1883. After the 1885 rebellion he was promoted to Indian Agent. Cree name is also Mokahusiw.)

An older man, 45 to 55, suit and tie of late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

MANN JR (Mann Sr's son, he was 8 years old in 1885. Grew up on the reserve, fluent in Cree)

Young man, 20 to 25. Suit and tie of late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

BLANCHE (Mann Sr's oldest daughter, and was the last surviving member of their family. Her account's of the escape to Fort Pitt were a major source for the play. She was 10 years old in 1885)

Older woman 50 to 65, dressed in classy upper-middle class 1950s clothes.

MABEL (Mann Jr's half Cree daughter, born on reserve in 1898 before the Mann family left in 1900)

A young woman, 17 to 25, dressed in 1915 to 1920s clothes.

CREE MAN (He is a descendant of Chief Seekascootch, the Cree Chief that kept George Mann and his family safe during the trouble. He often presents the present day Cree view)

Native man, 30 to 45. Jeans and button up shirt, plain clothes that fit from present back to 1950s.

HISTORIAN (He or she is the typical sloppy professor not too coordinated. This present day person adds details and does some role playing Man or woman, 30 to 55.

COWBOY (He is a descendant of George Mann, and has lots of opinions about history. He represents the student's non-Aboriginal family.)  
40 to 55 year old man in decent shape with Wranglers, boots, cowboy shirt & hat

INDIAN (He is many characters, but mainly speaks from the past. Mabel's son, Chief Seekascootch, Reverend Edward Ahenakew)  
Native man, 30 to 40. He wears a suit and tie and has feathers he can put in his hair for certain characters.

INDIAN 2 (He also plays many characters. Seekascootch's son-Misahew, Joseph Dion)  
Young Native man, 20 to 25, dressed in buckskin and beads with feathers in his hair.

Notes to the reader:

The **Chicken Dance** is an important Lodge in the Cree ceremonial tradition. In the ceremony I participated in, the Lodge consisted of a centre pole for the creator and six other poles surrounding the centre. Cloth offerings were tied to the poles, and white cloth was tied to the centre pole; white represents God or Creator. Four pipes were used in the ceremony. After the elders had prayed with them, all the men in the lodge smoked the pipes. People could offer cloth and tobacco and ask for prayers for loved ones that were sick or in need. Every so often the drummers would drum and sing, and some of the men would grab a rattle or a bundle of feathers to shake, and danced on the spot in a semi-circle behind them. The women sat around outside edge of the lodge throughout the ceremony, and some would stand and dance when the men did; to me they felt like a circle of protection. On both days of the dance there was a feast, with food supplied by the family hosting the lodge. The Chicken Dance Lodge Ceremony can go on for 3 days or more. On the last day, the host family held a give away for all the people present. More significant gifts were given to those who had made valuable contributions such as praying, singing and drumming. These are simply my observations of the one and only chicken dance I was asked to be a part of. It is a very simplistic description of a very old and sacred tradition. Pictures of these and other Cree ceremonies are not allowed.

A **Smudge** is sage or sweetgrass that is burnt slowly emitting a thin wisp of smoke. The smudge smoke is passed over bodies and objects with a waving motion of your hands. This cleanses people and objects. As one prays, thier prayers are carried up to the creator with the smoke as it rises.

**Tobacco** and certain colours of **cloth** are sacred to the Cree. It is proper protocol to make an offering of tobacco, sometimes with cloth, accompanied by a gift such as a blanket, to an elder in return for prayers or stories.

## ACT ONE

*The play is done in a large empty hall or out of doors. Chairs are placed in a circle and four isles are left open that lead to the centre, one to the North, South, East and West. A pail of sand is placed at centre, and a chair on a raised platform is just off centre at the end of the North-facing isle. A blanket and some tobacco are placed at the base of the sand pail. Powwow drum music plays quietly in the background. All the characters are in the space when the audience enters. Some wander and interact with the audience, some do not. Those that wander compete for the audiences' attention, especially Mabel and Blanche.*

*STUDENT sits in the centre of the circle blindfolded. The wandering characters come by him once and a while and say some of their lines to him.*

*HISTORIAN takes tickets at the door, asks people if they've ever heard of the Frog Lake Massacre, and gives them a basic run-down if they have not.*

HISTORIAN: Have you heard of the so-called Frog Lake "Massacre?" Well, nine men were killed in Frog Lake in the morning Thursday April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1885. They died at the hands of Plains Cree warriors who were fed up with being hungry and having their treaty promises broken, among other things. Later that day, two men were sent to kill farming instructor George Mann in Onion Lake, but he was warned about the trouble by men loyal to Wood Cree Chief Seekasootch, and escaped to Fort Pitt that night.

*CREE MAN repeats the following dialogue in Cree to the audience as they arrive.*

CREE MAN: Come in. It's open. There is plenty of room. Welcome to this place. Sit down and relax. We are here to tell some stories, and to laugh with the white people. There is a young man here with a lot of pictures of Onion Lake from a long time ago. His relatives were the Indian Agent and his family. When he came to us he brought some tobacco and asked for stories about George Mann. Some of these stories were not what he expected, and now with our help he is going to talk about what happened. We will have fun telling them.

*BLANCHE roams about the space, alternating reciting the following dialogue with singing a verse and chorus of Clementine in Cree, in a loop till the play begins.*

BLANCHE: I'm Blanche, the oldest. e-kakwe-nehiyeweyan (I am trying to speak Cree) Cold, dark, no moon. White. Sheets and plaster, but outside cold and dark. Voices and drums, echoes in side my head my room my...shhhh George stop sniveling and go to sleep. I pray for sleep for daylight and pots clinking and eggs frying playing outside with them my friends in the snow and the mud and father said

namoya don't kill a cow while eyes looked down and men stood in a group and tension...go back inside...but I wanted to sing... *She sings* "In a cavern, In a canyon, excavating for a mine. Dwelt a miner forty niner and his daughter Clementime. Oh my Darling, Oh my Darling Oh my Darling Clementime Oh my darling Clementime. There she was and like a fairy, and her shoes were number nine. Wearing boxes without topses, sandles were for Clementime...etc<sup>1</sup>

*MABEL also roams about repeating the following dialogue to people as they enter.*

MABEL: Farming Instructor Mann, who was stationed at the Onion Lake Reserve, between Frog Lake and Fort Pitt, was warned by a friendly Indian, in the dead of night, to flee for his life as a number of Big Bear's Indians were close at hand, coming to kill him. He fled at once with his family and got into the Fort at two o'clock in the morning of the third of April, and gave the dreadful news that the Indians were up in arms, and had massacred all the white people at Frog Lake, and that it would be only a matter of a few hours until they would be upon us.

*GEORGE MANN SR sits on top of a pedestal in white boxer shorts observing everything around him. MANN JR wanders around observing and shaking hands, but says very little.*

*INDIAN 2 wanders, telling this story to whoever will listen.*

INDIAN 2: Big Bear you know he was hungry, his people were getting hungry and they had to do something. And the story I heard about Big Bear was of what happened in Frog Lake after the massacre. Seekascootch heard about it so he thought he'd go and check here at Onion Lake. And what happened is, after he left, there were two braves that went after him, right to Onion Lake. They followed him, but he got back safely. But that's the only thing I remember. I know some of the stories that the elders told me even along Frenchmen Butte hill what happened, they used to tell me that. And them rifle pits where that fight happened. Have you ever went there, where them rifle pits are?

*COWBOY is trying to teach INDIAN how to rope a plastic steer head. INDIAN tries to teach him some Cree words.*

*The drum music gets louder and the CREE MAN places a tree in the sand pail in centre of the circle. INDIAN & INDIAN 2 bring on white cloth and tie it to centre pole, and the take their place on the perimeter of circle as the other actors stop speaking take their place in the perimeter as well. BLANCHE comes in last continuing to sing Clementime in Cree. She has found a smudge, and goes to each person so they can pray. MANN SR refuses smudge, HISTORIAN smudges, but very awkwardly.*

*Blanche stops singing, and in full white light and silence it begins.*

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<sup>1</sup> Words and music available from itunes. Clementime (funky) by *In Harmony's Way*.

*CREE MAN removes STUDENT'S blindfold. STUDENT offers a blanket and tobacco to CREE MAN. CREE MAN bows his head and begins to pray in Cree. At the end of his prayer he offers his hand to the Student, shakes it and says:*

CREE MAN: Mokahusiw, congratulations. I am your relative, we need to talk.

*Lights change. STUDENT speaks plainly and directly to the audience.*

STUDENT: Six years ago I quit farming to come to the city. Why? I wanted to take drama, I wanted to find myself, I wanted I wanted...to get the hell out of Lloydminster. I also wanted to look into some history my ancestors were involved in. So when I told my Native history professor I was doing a paper on my great great grandfather George Mann as a farm instructor and Indian Agent in Onion Lake he said "why don't you talk to Darwin, he's from Onion Lake." So Darwin and I became friends because well, I talked and he listened. I knew Darwin for about a year before he decided it was time I knew who he really was.

CREE MAN: You know, my ancestor was Chief Seekascootch. He sent his son Misahew and two other men to warn George Mann that men were coming from Frog Lake to kill him.

STUDENT: Wow. Intrigued? I was. And humbled. I knew from some of my family's stories that "Friendly Indians" had gone there to warn them about what had happened in Frog Lake, and that they had to drive through a swamp because it was spring time, but I had never heard names. I didn't really know what to say. I did some more research and found that a local farmer, Edgar Mapletoft, had recorded this story from elder Jimmy Chief back in the 80s. It was written in the local history book *Fort Pitt History Unfolding*, published in 1985, the year I graduated from high school. Why has it taken me 20 years and some friendly persuasion to finally take the time to read it? Why has my entire family, including me the self-proclaimed new guru of history, failed to acknowledge this. Failed to include names when we tell stories. Friendly Indians. After Pete told me this it wasn't long before I dropped the story again. I was in Saskatoon to find myself, remember? I didn't want to chase my ancestors through a swamp, I wanted to learn some acting skills, meet some people, have some fun, not get down on myself because of some history. But the friendly swamp story would not go away. I would find myself telling people, anyone who would listen, this incredible escape story and the new friend I had found from Onion Lake. Finally, 3 years after meeting Pete, I called him and told him I had decided to do a masters on the story. Pete said that his 94 year old grandmother had some stories to tell me. Wow. This was exciting. Maybe it's not too late to learn more about the escape to Fort Pitt, maybe I can find a way to tell a story that my family will get interested in. It turns out when you work at U of S, you can't just show up at an elder's house and ask for history. The University needs to have its gigantic ass covered by a 350 page document they call ethics approval. After taking the time to read it, and consult a campus elder, I eventually come up with a

three page consent form, that explained in great detail to the Onion Lake elders that I would endeavor to use any information they gave me with greatest respect. Clumsy, awkward and a little patronizing but necessary nonetheless. I just hope it doesn't kill the conversation before it even starts. I also decide that before I go there, I better understand as much of the mainstream history as possible. If there is one thing I've learned from Native Studies classes, the oppressed know a lot more about history than the oppressor. So I read some books, some journals, old newspaper articles and visit the archives---all to get some perspective on the 1885 conflict. In the archives I met ancestor Blanche, she was George Mann's oldest daughter, and she tells a pretty good story.

BLANCHE: My father the late George G. Mann came out from Ontario with a Government survey party about 1879. Making the journey overland from Winnipeg to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. He remained in the West taking a position with the Dominion Government, he resided at Carlton, Frog Lake, and Onion Lake Indian Reserves. In 1883 he was joined by mother and three children, who made the trip from Swift Current to Onion Lake overland, 310 miles.

During the winter of 1884 – 1885 Louis Riel visited the Indians on the Western Reserves, and a great deal of unrest followed, Big Bear's Indians would not settle on a Reserve, but wished the Government to feed them. The Indians...

MABEL: (*cutting in*) One of the best known, and at the same time one of the most remote from the ways of civilization is Indian Agent Mann, who at present acts as over-lord to the Crees at Onion Lake. Mr. Mann has the distinction of being the only Indian Agent who not only took part in the rebellion of 1885, but with his wife and family went into captivity in the carts of Big Bear after the capitulation of Fort Pitt. They had barely escaped through a swamp, fleeing to Fort Pitt in the night to avoid certain death, being pursued there by two of the murderers from Frog Lake.

STUDENT: The ways of civilization. From mired in a swamp to Homo erectus, yes, that's why George Mann came here. He had a job to do, and as a humanitarian and Canadian Patriot who had fought in the Fenian Raids, he had a sense of duty and obligation.

INDIAN: Duty and obligation to fulfill the promises made in the treaty, teach people how to farm so they could make a good living again.

COWBOY: But what good has the treaty done, not too many good farmers on the reserves, just high unemployment and welfare.

INDIAN 2: Ever hear of the pass system? Permit system? Pretty hard to be a farmer when you're not allowed to sell your grain. The treaty was supposed to guarantee our place in the economy. Pretty hard to make money while the fucking Indian Agent sits on his ass and lets our people starve.

COWBOY: Hey watch your mouth you...

*STUDENT jumps between them.*

STUDENT: I hate colonial history. I mean there are always many versions of events, but in Canada there are often disagreements between the so-called winners and losers of history. The problem with the old history is it tended to make us British folk look really good, and those pesky Indians look really blood -thirsty. Each new generation of historians is supposed to question all these stories and search for truth, try to think the thoughts of the past in the present. It's not really the dates and facts, it's what they say, and why they said it. Massacre. Escape to Fort Pitt. Rebellion. Sounds fascinating, but when you really start to ask some hard questions about these "events" in history you can see people's eyes glaze over. Let me give you some examples. *(to the Cowboy)* So it maybe wasn't really a simple bloodthirsty massacre, there's lots of evidence to suggest Agent Thomas Quinn was making starving people work for rations.

COWBOY: *(pause)* Hey are the Oilers playing the Flames tonight? Probably be a couple good scraps in that one.

STUDENT: I heard a story that my ancestor wasn't a typical Indian Agent. He used to ride around on his horse and encourage people who were doing good farm work.

INDIAN: *(pause, looks at his watch)* Holy, I gotta go to the Band hall, me and some buddies are playing Texas Holdum. You ever play that game?

STUDENT: Ok, maybe not everyone is that disinterested, but that old one-sided version of events, the ahh...I don't want to go there... attitude, it has become our Canadian culture. Most of us define ourselves separately, those other guys... they aren't like us. But, whether we want to admit it or not, the blatant racism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is not that far removed from us. I used to worry a lot about this...why don't people get it? Why don't they get the idea that the past is always changing and must change, because it can only be viewed from a constantly changing present? Progress in technology is allowed, why not in history. But, in reality, most of us don't want to get it, we don't want to engage the past and question the acts of our ancestors, we just want to validate our own existence and keep the status quo...you know, skim the surface of the past, I'm the son of a pioneer, my grandparents were homesteaders, my ancestor was a treaty chief, we have the right to be in charge here, that's my land, we've lived here the longest. We all have our own version, our own way of understanding who we are. Not so long ago people created our history together, like that story about being warned by friendly Indians, and escaping to Fort Pitt. So where do I start? Who said what to who? What's important and what's just bullshit? Anybody?

HISTORIAN: In 1885 then farm instructor George Mann said:



MANN SR: "The Indians were holding councils for no good, although I did not expect they would go as far as they did."

HISTORIAN: In Frog Lake a warrior said:

INDIAN 2: "Tomorrow I am going to feast on two legged meat. What do you say to that?"

HISTORIAN: Nobody answered him. People were starving, people were desperate. According to my research, every one of those guys at Frog Lake were killed for a reason.

STUDENT: Killed for a reason? You mean it wasn't just a massacre? There were after all some "friendly Indians." And what about George Gwynne Mann, why did he get spared? I guess this is where my story will begin, my selfish story. I want to be the one to set it all straight on George Gwynne Mann...be the saviour that rediscovered a hidden past that will finally interest everyone and make them all love and respect me for my wit and courage. Good work Alan, thank God somebody finally got it right. Let's all stop this "us and them" nonsense, lets have a common story and identity... *Sings* "oh why can't we be friends, brown and white again..." Could happen. Truthfully, I just want to appear clever to my Professors and colleagues so I can get another scholarship. Sorry I digress. Lots of people have tried, good people that wrote some wonderful insightful work on the Frog Lake "Massacre" and the escape and captivity of my ancestors, great work that faded into the past because it doesn't fit the mold cast by Pierre Burton et al. It's like...I'd like to...if only people would...shit...you know what I mean? Let's just say I've read all those damn books but nobody in my family or in Onion Lake has. So to hell with it, I'll put it to them. There must be something I'm missing here. I bet my grandpa Pete, grandson of the great George Mann Sr said something to someone interesting and new about Onion Lake...

COWBOY: No

STUDENT: Didn't tell you any stories about...

COWBOY: He had some stories but I can't remember what they were.

MABEL: He talked about the Gatling Gun, when they were up on the hill.

COWBOY: That really scared the Indians, the big gun that's what they called it.

MABEL: Three of them got shot, when they were in the rifle pits. It took one's legs off, shot one through the stomach, and killed the other one. The one shot in the stomach died too; he kept calling for water.

COWBOY: But that's what really scared 'em then.

STUDENT: ya

COWBOY: They could see they couldn't fight against the big gun as they called it.

HISTORIAN: In 1861, Dr. Richard Gatling patented the Gatling Gun, a six-barreled weapon capable of firing an impressive 200 rounds...

STUDENT: EEEEEEEEE (buzzer). Trap door. So nobody in my family knows much, and the factual history that many of us cling to in times of doubt will not seduce me this time. Time to throw out the trash. Time for the local white guy to go to Onion Lake and ask them what their perspective is. Problem number two is I'm scared. Ever since Darwin politely pointed it out to me that the Friendly Indians had names, I've been looking into the local history situation. Other than the efforts of Edgar Mapletoft to record some Cree oral history, much of the Onion Lake reserve's history has been...how do I say this...overlooked? Like why does the map in a local history book that supposedly shows all the schools in the Tulibee Lake/Onion Lake area in the 20<sup>th</sup> century not show even one residential school? Why does the first 30 pages talk about Indians, and the last 400 talk about settlers. Why do most local museums have acres dedicated to tractors and combines, and one or two display cases of trinkets dedicated to Indians? You need a license to practice law, but apparently anybody can write "history." Ah the old Canadian historical myth, that pioneer identity is the comfy story for most of us white folk. Except for me, remember me I'm the saviour. I guess what I want to say is come on you guys, what is it about the history of reserves and Aboriginal people anyway...we all know what happened, why don't we talk about it in a meaningful way. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century is it really still radical to talk about "them" as meaningful contributors to society, not just relics of the past? I mean, let's get over this Canadian colonial history controversy! Come on!

CREE MAN: My grandfather was the only grandfather that could read. He read that book, *Blood Red the Sun*, by Cameron and he said that Cameron didn't tell the whole story about Frog Lake. When they started shooting, Cameron hid under a woman's skirt. Cameron was a liar, he didn't tell what really happened.

MABEL: The white women in Big Bear's camp were under a constant threat of a fate worse than death. They were made to be the slaves of the Indians after their husbands were murdered at Frog Lake.

HISTORIAN: Big Bear did not have control of his men after War Chief Wandering Spirit took over, and not even Indian Agent Thomas Quinn, who was part Sioux and married to a Cree wife, understood this. Cree political structures were subtle and complex at the time.

COWBOY: What the hell is subtle about killing nine men. It was a mob mentality takin' over, you see it today all the time in the news, people killin' and breakin'

heads. There's no honest fights any more, its stabbings. What they did back then they're doing again now, and there's still no justice. What was that guy in the rebellion, Dumont? He came back to Canada and was pardoned here, after all that killing he did in the rebellion.

INDIAN 2: Oh right, all the Indian's were villains. Wandering Spirit was not a villain, he was just trying to feed his family. History has been very unkind to this great man who fought for what he felt was right. General Steele murdered my ancestors at Loon Lake.

BLANCHE: Gentlemen, please! Let us stick to the topic at hand. The Mann Family was there to aid the Indians in their transition to a settled way of life. The news from Frog Lake was terrible, but we believed our Indians would not harm us. Some said that father was "not in favour with the Indians," but we knew better.

INDIAN: Ya, well its well known in our community that Frog Lake farm instructor John Delaney was having sex with some of our women. He fathered more than one child in...

STUDENT: (*addresses the characters directly*) Whoa slow down. Nine men were killed that day, April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1885. Now we all agree that Big Bear tried to control his young men but to no avail. Ok, so let's focus on what happened later that day. Why were men sent to kill my great great grandfather George Mann Sr? (*The student turns to Mann Sr...*) Why did those friendly Indians warn you? How did George Mann and his family escape to Fort Pitt? Did Government employees and Indians actually get along in this case, or was something else at play there? Are you listening up there?

MANN SR: A friendly Indian came and warned me, told me they were all killed at Frog Lake. I left everything and took my family to Fort Pitt in the night. Some of the Indians followed me but could not catch me.

STUDENT: The problem with the old man was he pretty tight lipped. Those Government employees had a very specific audience they were writing for...those higher ups in the Indian department who had specific goals and budgets to meet. No time for names of Indians or stories about who was good to who, Indian reports were all business. So I had to ask around, do a little digging to see if anybody wrote about the mystery man.

INDIAN 2: My Grandmother used to take me with her on her weekly trips to the Agency when she went after her rations. I was very much afraid of Mokahusiwi, the money chief, he was such a big man and seemed so fierce looking. I knew him in later years as Indian Agent G. G. Mann and wasn't such a bad scout after all for he was always kind to me.

STUDENT: Turns out a few people thought he was good at his job, and not the typical uncaring, unfeeling Indian Agent. At first I was scared to ask Native people about my ancestor because of that revisionist history which has vilified employees of the Indian department, especially Indian Agents. So there was some evidence that the people of Onion Lake liked George Mann. I mean they did save his ass from certain death, didn't they?

MABEL: You kids don't drive through the Indian reserve if you can help it. Oh, and for God's sake don't stop there, those Indians are mean sometimes, they fight dirty you know. Yes, we used to go there when we were young to the sports days, but it's different now.

STUDENT: Ya, that's the other thing. I was brought up like lots of kids in Lloyd, to fear Indians. There is still a lot of that irrational fear and hatred out there, but it wasn't always that way in my family, was it?

COWBOY: The old man knew every Indian on the reservation. When we were young some Indian boys used to come and help out on the farm. They taught us some Cree words to say, but I never knew what they meant. When we said the words they would laugh and laugh. But it's different now. You know what they need now? Boot camp. Those kids need discipline, not welfare, Christ, they don't even know how to work any more.

STUDENT: Boot camp? That seems kind of harsh. My cousin Dusty played hockey in Onion Lake for their Junior B team. After he was tragically killed in a snowmobile accident three drummers from Onion Lake came to his funeral and drummed his spirit up to the creator at the end of the ceremony. Many of my cousins said it was the most powerful moment for them at the funeral. Some said their bodies shook uncontrollably, normally stoic men wept uncontrollably, my mom said she started to smile and couldn't stop...touched by an unseen presence. Seems like there is still a connection there...they don't just do that for anybody, do they? So I am about to go to Onion Lake for only the third time in my life. Lots of things go through my mind like why has it always been us and them, and why was I brought up that way? Why can Onion Lake have 80% unemployment while all around them the economy is booming? If we had this history together, worked together, why can't we talk about it now? I think we can. No fear anymore, no reason too, I'm not racist. Well...there were some off colour jokes in high school, but I'm an open-minded artist now. *(pause)* I'm terrified. They won't take me seriously at all. At least my cousins have worked there before, been there more than twice...I don't even have the Mann last name...will they care? Suck it up. I'll just keep going back until they trust me...its just some stories...right? Besides, I've got my secret weapon with me...ethics approval!!!! Take it away Mr. Professor

HISTORIAN: *(Hands CREE MAN a form, then speaks very quickly to him on the students behalf. CREE MANN looks at them dumbfounded)* The purpose of this study is to investigate my maternal great great grandfather George G. Mann's

relationship with the people of the Onion Lake area, with particular emphasis on the months and years following the so-called Frog Lake Massacre. This study will focus on elders in the Onion Lake community, and in particular people with knowledge or stories concerning George G. Mann, who lived and worked in Onion Lake from 1878 to 1900. I recognize that a bond is formed with an elder when I offer tobacco and gifts in exchange for the stories. According to Cree protocol and tradition we will then be required by the Creator to continue this relationship as I develop my work with the information I have received. (*War drums and singing begins, Cree Man's eyes glaze over*) I will, however, respect the participant's wishes regardless of their view on spirituality, be it Cree or another religious affiliation.

The length of time spent with each you will depend on several factors that include your level of comfort with the intentions of the research and me as a person. I anticipate a two to three month period where we have two to three informal visits and get to know one another. These visits would be one to three hours in length. The actual length of the interview process will depend on the stories being told, two or three hours at the very most. Your involvement with the process will continue until a final draft is produced, which you will have the option of reading and approving or asking for changes. In total this process could take as long as 18 months.

CREE MAN: (*Speaks to two Indians*) This guy is an idiot.

INDIAN: Another University know-it-all.

INDIAN2: Did he at least bring some tobacco? (*The STUDENT reaches into his pockets, reacts. The CREE MAN hands him a pouch and rolls his eyes as singing and drumming begins. The drums morph into car sounds as the staging shifts. Perhaps the MANN JR, INDIAN2 and BLANCHE join MANN SR on his platform. As the sound fades the student begin to speak*)

STUDENT: Car.

With Pete.

Nervous vibrations.

Language on a cell phone,

foreign words as old as the hills and wind that blows by this little car,  
dancing across a tower to the reserve.

BLANCHE: This is my brother George Gwynne Mann Jr. All of us kids grew up in Onion Lake, and were fluent Cree speakers.

MANN JR: I pray for your safe journey and I will watch over you. Careful with that Indian in the car next to you though, he may try and take you to his teepee and steal your whiskey. (*laughs*)

STUDENT: Long silence,

Tobacco and cloth and headlights and thoughts...

COWBOY: We have a pipe that the old man says was given to him by Chief Big Bear, but like I said he liked to tell tall tales. My brother thinks its true but if you ask me, he could have gotten that thing from anywhere.

INDIAN 2: (*speaks Cree*) Your journey has begun. I also pray for a safe journey and for patience, understanding and wisdom. Listen to your ancestors, they will tell you what to do.

STUDENT: single houses standing lonely in the tall grass. Old cars, metal parts, jagged edges and barbed wire.  
We arrive. Home. His home.

MANN JR: (*to Indian 2*) I remember this place. We used to camp over there in the valley when the telegraph office was here.

STUDENT: A grin and eyes that sparkle.  
An old house, another hill and a long green access ramp. Paint peels by potholes a garbage collection site, and a one rail fence.

(*drum music go*)

CREE MAN: Seekascootch was a treaty chief. I am a treaty Indian, I have always been a treaty Indian and I always will be. At the Treaty he said:

INDIAN 2: "I am glad of the goodness of the great queen. I recognize now that this I once dreaded most is coming to my aid and doing for me what I could not do for myself."

(*drum music out*)

STUDENT: Its dim inside, warm inviting smiles and kisses and  
Strange looks at a stranger, she  
Shifts in her chair, shifts in glances

CREE MAN: He said that because they were getting rations that's the way it was. Once in a while they were getting a little beef and that's how it was. I remember that here.

STUDENT: we set up the piece of plastic with the glass eye that never lies...  
looking at the eyes that hold 94 years of dancing, stories, men, children, grandchildren, death, ritual, scorn, racism...  
history in a black, flower print dress with warm smooth wrinkled hands that hold each other and caress and gesture as the short consonants and long vowels of an ancient people fill the air with a story of family.

CREE MAN: She was saying that one day when she was young a white man came to her mom and dad and was speaking Cree to them. She remembers this very

clearly because she had never seen a white man speak Cree like that. While they were talking she asked her older sister Mabel who was this man?

MABEL: That white man there, that's my Dad.

CREE MAN: The white man's name was George Mann.

COWBOY: Oh Shit.

STUDENT: What do you mean, Indian Agent George Mann fathered a child?

CREE MAN: Namoya, she says she does not recognize the Indian Agent. Her sister said George Mann had a big broad hat with a beaded belt on it. He had a large moustache, but no beard.

STUDENT: So I showed her a picture of George Mann Jr, the Indian Agent's son.  
(*student grabs MANN JR and shows him to the Cree Man*)

CREE MAN: Yes, she says that's the one.

MANN JR: Ahow maka mina asamina! (Oh oh....here we go!)

STUDENT: My face turned beet red, I just looked at her in disbelief. Her and Darwin did the only thing they could do, they laughed their asses off. So you knew this the whole time and you're just telling me now?

CREE MAN: I wanted her to tell you.

STUDENT: I'm essentially speechless. (*to MANN JR*) And you managed to keep this little secret after you left Onion Lake? Was this just a little fling or...

CREE MAN: Actually, she has another story about how her mother was separated from George Mann by an old Indian man who met her on a path one day. Her mother was pregnant with George Mann's baby and the old Indian, he knew that.

(*Mabel and Indian 2 start to act Cree Man's story??*)

CREE MAN: She says this Indian man said you are going to be with me anyway. He would not let her pass, so she took a big stick and hit his horse. He said because of what you have just done to me you will be forced to be with me.

STUDENT: You mean this Cree woman, pregnant with his child, was taken away from him, forced to go with this man?

CREE MAN: Yes. She says that's how my mom and George Mann got broken up, they should have stayed together.

*(Mabel and Indian finish acting out the Cree Man's story)*

STUDENT: She says we are family. She said she watched him walk over with long confident strides...speaking Cree...She said this baby, George Mann's daughter, was her older sister...Mabel?

MANN JR: Aaayyiiiii!! Nikimiwemikok mikowahpik (Yeeehawww!! They love me in the teepee!!) *(Slaps the Indian on the back as the cowboy puts his face in his hands)*

CREE MAN: She was born in 1898. When she was three, George Mann Jr. took his daughter and paid to have her in the Residential school. She stayed there a long time, until her mom left the old Indian man and remarried a Métis.

STUDENT: So he took his girl...put her in the fortress of white is right and left.

INDIAN: Mabel was her name, she was my mother. She loved the residential school, said she was treated very well there. She stayed there till she was 19. She said she used to go visit her grandparents, but I never asked her if her dad came back to see her at the school. I guess he probably did.

STUDENT: Visits from him, visits to grandma, but he left. Homestead, instead. More "New land." New stern white respectable wife. Revered and held in higher regard on the pyramid of Darwin's expectations.

George Mann Jr. had a daughter, new life in the 'old land'

Spoke their language, grew up there, fathered a child there and then left.

CREE MAN: She says the Mann's got along with all the people here and she knows that because of her sister. People liked them because George Mann spoke Cree so fluently and his Cree would surprise a lot of Indian people. He had a good relationship because he helped them a lot to learn the way of a farmer. George Mann was like a relative to the people. A long time ago they were good farmers here. Sometimes they would hook up four horses to break up the land. Sometimes just one man would walk behind. There were a lot of good farmers here and they farmed a lot of land; where did that all go? She always wondered what happened to all the farming.

INDIAN: George Mann's daughter, your grandfather's half sister, your kokum. She died in 2000, at the age of 101 and 5 months. Mabel had a good education because George Mann paid for it. He put her in the residential school when she was three years old.

CREE MAN: She says she was not able to go to the reserve school because her dad, who was not a Treaty Indian, could not afford it like Mr. Mann could.



STUDENT: Great grandfather, homesteader, erect, tall and proud,  
A moustache of character, turned edges and white pressed clothes...The son of the  
1<sup>st</sup> Mann, captive of the Crees in 1885, held captive a Cree woman and his own half  
Cree child.

Two “squaws” buried with him in Northminster bubbling below the surface, kept  
under the wraps of respectability and distance, the chasm put there by us. So our  
kokum died only five years ago at the age of 101 and 5 months? Does anyone in  
my “white” family know about this?

COWBOY: (*a little sheepishly*) Well I’ve heard a little bit about that, but I know  
nothing about that.

STUDENT: What?

COWBOY: That I could give any concrete information on it.

STUDENT: Did Grandpa Pete say anything about it?

COWBOY: Absolutely nothing.

STUDENT: But you said you heard a little bit.

COWBOY: Well there’s no use me commenting cause I don’t know you know.

STUDENT Ya, ya.

COWBOY: So what year was she born?

STUDENT: Um 1898, died in 2000 at the age of 101.

COWBOY: And her dad was George Gwynne Jr., the second. She had a family  
with a man up north near Peirceland. I met one of her sons.

STUDENT: Really.

COWBOY: Ya, someone said do you want to meet your cousin? And I said sure. I  
guess he had spread the word, they all wanted to be associated with us (*laughs*)

STUDENT: Well you’re family. Did he have much to say or...

COWBOY: Oh no he was very quiet, you know how some Natives are, glad to meet  
you and...(INDIAN and COWBOY shake hands)

STUDENT: ya, ya...and a handshake, ya. So Mabel, Mabel who the hell was  
Mabel?

MABEL: (*Ignores her son, INDIAN, and performs for the COWBOY*) This wild May morning Metis Mabel presented a striking picture. From her father, a wandering son of an Indian Agent, she inherited a fairness of feature and a lightness of hair which are rarely characteristics of the native. Indeed, except for the noticeable broadness of nose, a rich hazel brown of neck, and a slight darkness underneath the eyes, she might easily be mistaken for an Italian beauty. A wreath of lilies, wild roses and blue bells encircled her head, while a girdle of the same flowers was fastened around her waist, the loose ends thrown back over her shoulders to form sort of a double sash. Now and again the sun shone on the mass of breaking waters, which threw down their jewels in homage.

STUDENT: YOU KNOW. THEM. THOSE Indians.  
YOU KNOW. THEM. THOSE Whites.

YOU KNOW how they are don't you ever go there, what if you are left alone in the dark with no history, no connection, in this void of respectable segregation for the sake of economy land and YOU KNOW, us.

COWBOY: I guess it's true, but the old man didn't say anything about her. He was always one to spin a tale though, the old bugger loved to Bull Shit. My brother believed a lot of it, but I don't. How can we know what happened in the past, we can't. And we will never know. The old man knew every Indian on the reservation and he talked a lot about that stuff, about our family in 1885, but I don't remember much.

STUDENT: Us on the outside and them on the inside. Them outside of our insides...

But now wisdom in a Black print dress we are inside. We are family. Brown, half brown, bush apes, cowboys, injuns, grannies, kokums---all are treaty people, all are just plain fucking people.

INDIAN: We all like to think we can walk this straight path, ignore the past and live in the present, think of the future. But the things that we have done, the things that have happened in the past, they'll come back to you, they always do. People are the same everywhere, I always say chill out bro, you're nothing special, its been happening for the past 65 million years.

STUDENT: George Mann standing on a step looking down grasping life in his hands.

First friends and trust then a daughter, his brown daughter.

Cree and English, he mixes up things easily and then leaves it in the past...

In hearts and minds to smoulder under ball caps, Stetsons, bonnets, brown hair and blonde locks...in firm hand shakes and soft ones, both with purposes, but no common history.

MABEL: (*She flirts with the men, especially COWBOY and HISTORIAN*) In refinement, education and appearance "Metis Mabel" was much superior to the

other girls of Onion Lake. She had been at the mission school and spoke English, French and Cree with equal felicity. Hers was the beauty of the half wild, half civilized. With the constant quarrel between the Crees she had little sympathy, and her reprimands of the Chief, who was one of her admirers, often drove that poor individual crestfallen and bitter to the shelter of his tepee (*She slaps INDIAN 2 who was looking at her ass*). She enjoyed little popularity in that primitive community. The girls were envious of her good looks, and the men sensible of her deserved reproaches.

INDIAN: AHHHEMM. (*clears his throat*) I feel it my duty to speak for my race where they are obliged, through lack of education, to sit like a dumb nation, while opinions concerning them are being formed throughout the continent and those opinions based on startling magazine stories and of writings of literary gifted ones who see only the surface part of their life.

STUDENT: Robbed, stolen, drifting in ashes of Indian agencies, stables, schools... All residential, all for the good of all people. You must be like us but STAY HERE! Lost voices, language floating away beaten out of you and dumped on the dust in the tall grass.

A Mann. That Man (*Points at MANN JR.*) He stood by and spoke Cree and watched...

Worried? Loved? Held? Soft hand shakes with a firm hand.

Trust. Mutual trust. Hope. Mutual hope.

He walked among them, bent but proud, muscles and sweat and laughter and dust and hard work.

COWBOY: (*To the STUDENT*) One time George Jr. and your grandpa Pete stayed the night and the Indians were talking Cree and laughing at them, so he never said a word till morning. And then when they left the next morning George Jr. talked to them in Cree. Pete said you could have heard a pin drop. (*laughs*) They'd been calling him asshole and everything else.

MABEL: What was this?

COWBOY: The Indians were talking Cree and didn't realize the old George Gwynne Jr. could talk Cree. So he let em go all night and the next morning when they left, he talked to them all in Cree and Pete could still remember how they all looked...they would wouldn't they (*laughs*)

STUDENT: And hope. And a grand daughter. Then pressure and it's a job and stories that shift and dance and play with your sensibility.

Move on.

They will be fine here and we will meet our new hope our new country.

A land cleared, divided, a conquered virgin waiting for the first plow.

Then fucked. Ripped up lines are torn. Us becomes Barr Colonists and them becomes them...those others, the quaint the romantic...

MANN JR: (To STUDENT and COWBOY) May 11<sup>th</sup> 1910, moved out to the homestead, May 19<sup>th</sup> plowed garden, May 20<sup>th</sup> planted 3 bushels of potatoes. (Now to INDIAN) Kaki Aymihewikisikak ki-yotin maka namoya ki-kimiwan.

STUDENT: One life lost a new life reborn and a daughter...a warm pale hand clutches a browner one as a white one waves goodbye.

Lost. Longing. Memories. Smiles.

Fort Pitt Onion Lake Frog Lake Frenchmen's what?

Land of hope. Land where we first met.

Land where we fled as bullets hissed and balls exploded and water chilled us to our bones.

*(Blackout then immediately a spot on MABEL and MANN SR., Drum music starts loudly and fades under her speech)*

MABEL: It was in March 1885 after the Massacre of Frog Lake. Mr. Mann was then Farmer Instructor in Onion Lake when a few Indians arrived to his home with an order from the rebels to kill him, but Mr. Mann was not the person to dishearten at the least of danger. He went boldly out and inquired what they were at, and what they desired. At the sight of Mr. Mann the Indian that had mission to kill him lost his nerves and began joking with his followers, after which Mr. Mann gave them a ration.

BLACKOUT *(All actors exit, except for the student. A warm wash comes up on him at the centre of the circle, he is blindfolded again. Drums change to a more celebratory song, the STUDENT shakes a rattle and dances on the spot as he says the following dialogue.)*

STUDENT: Chicken dance.

Warm and sunny, old pickup truck, scrub poplar grass and

Tobacco and a prayer, a gift. He gives and we give back in silence

Twigs snap, looking up clear and skyward and crisp

A wood pile and a cabin then to ceremony. Trees in sand pails a circle a centre

More warm smiles hand shakes tobacco and questions,

More questions more tobacco, then sit here and pray and pray and pray

And pray four directions in a circle with the sun then BOOM and

Lift your voices up for him going up BOOM

In the centre up the pole always face

The centre together united all for him the only one and

Always in a circle with the sun. Pass it with the sun.

Outside around us watching us warm faces—

Smiles and shawls and strength—they stand

And watch and pray. Theirs is the nourishment, the tall warm pots

Tinfoil shines steam rises past mountains of bannock, fruit and treats and

Feast till you are full enough for all and all are welcome

I am not alone they are here with me,  
They, those Indians, they those ancestors,  
Them. They watch, we pray they are here  
Strength to the centre cloth for him and  
Song and dance and drums altogether exact precise beautiful  
Then its time  
*(drums and dancing stop)*  
More gifts tobacco for him, for a Cree name  
Oh my God is here I can't speak I can't look up  
Legs shake from the weight of this honour  
Humbled pale overwhelmed humbled  
I won't cry, I cannot cry, words fill the air  
Mokahusiw, George Mann, my uncles, my relations, my grandpa, my kokum Mary,  
Mabel, Blanche...  
All with us. And with me at the centre another pale one prays  
While this pale one shakes, vibrations of joy of  
Ceremony of this foreigner back home then silence  
A smile a handshake—Mokahusiw—congratulations you  
Are my relative too...then eyes all look and silence but inside  
Speech speech speech voices inside me  
Tell them. Why you are here. Tell them, who sent you? But silence  
Legs are cement lips that freeze a voice said Mokahusiw and  
I cry and cry and cry and I can't stop crying

*(Beat, blackout, beat house lights. After the applause fades, the INDIAN SPEAKS he and the others come back in from outside the circle)*

INDIAN: The elders say you have a gift from the creator, and that's your memory. When you see ceremonies performed, that is also a gift; not just anyone can do it. That's why I don't go to many of these ceremonies now. Just like a Christian minister, you must pray everyday that you will do things right. In the future you will have children, and if you don't do things right you will bring a curse to them. Some of these guys that perform sweat lodges, and then go out drinking after...that's why things are so messed up here. Your story is not over yet mokahusiw...keep going.

STUDENT: The reserve was no honeymoon for history either. Just like everywhere else history and religion are highly interpretive and always controversial. What started as a quest to find stories about Farm Instructor Mann and his family's escape to Fort Pitt after the so-called Frog Lake massacre, has turned into a giant family reunion. Although in my culture Mabel would be my grandfather Pete's half-sister to Cree people her and all her sisters are my grandmothers. As I pursue the escape story, I can't find any other elders that knew who George Mann was, or maybe I don't want to find them, hard enough trying to meet all the new relatives. I've only been coming here a year and I only have another year to finish the Masters. Now they bestowed upon me the name their ancestors gave my ancestor. Mokahusiw niya nitisiygasoyan! Holy crap I like the sound of that. Holy

crap now what? I do want to investigate this escape story more but I can't stop thinking about Mabel and my elder, sorry, my kokums, and all the time and social "norms" that have separated us. I'm trying to learn Cree but holy, its no piece of cake either. Separate lives separate history, story after story intersecting colliding messing with me and you and...sorry, I digress. Do you want to know what happened with the escape story? You want to visit the swamp? Which story do you want? Do you like Mabel's story the best? Why not, it's fun.

*(As she speaks, MANN SR and INDIAN 2 come together and stand stoically in the middle of circle. Lights fade to them in a spot light, while MABEL kneels below them and finishes her speech.)*

MABEL: *(Go stormy sound cue with drums!)* Rough and rugged were the shores of Lake Onion, and wild and stormy was the angry rush of the waters against them. Down in a dark hollow danced the restless painted savages, eager for the taste of blood and the thrill of the chase. But among them was a noble one, Chief Saskatchewan, who was the friend of that stalwart soldier of civilization Mr. Mann, who had no fear of any sort of a man that wore a blanket. Chief Saskatchewan, with a broad nose, rich hazel of brown neck and a slight darkness underneath the eyes could easily been mistaken for an Italian emperor.

STUDENT: She can sure spin a tale. But what about the reason all of this happened. What was it like for the old George Mann who came here in 1879? You got anything to say cowboy?

MANN SR: Mann alone leaves. Go west young mann. I left three kids and a new wife. A new life in Onion Lake?

Prairie, shrubs vast open nothing for miles of nothing. No echo, no landmarks, no clues.

Farm Instructor, Dominion Government for Patronage and for Duty and for...money? Wild, these Indians are wild, but I feel wild too.

MANN SR: Black nights, cold, new smells, new words and new boots too tight on my feet trying to ground on new earth. Communicate? Oh boy.

Wood. Build house. Earth, the dirt. Crops seeds plant and reap and eat. Eat. Micisow. Eat. Treaty rules, my job and lonely nights. Tipiskaw. Night. Writing in my journal. Mann was here. Mann is here. Remind them of God and duty.

INDIAN 2: *(Speaks Cree)* How much Mokahusiw? How many? Where? When can we ....?

Too many, not enough food. Cows and crops, we planted and prayed.

INDIAN 2: *(Speaks Cree)* Why now? Hunting is now is first with still so many and not enough.

MANN SR: Day to day. Morning to noon...a little beef please. Back breaks sweat to the plow. And they learned and I learned and together we ate dirt and beef, a little beef and bacon, and some of our own flour, some grain some hay and a little beef.

STUDENT: These Indians, trying to understand farming from some guy from Ontario who probably didn't know a whole lot more than they did about farming. Then one night in 1885, everything changed.

HISTORIAN: After hearing that the whites had been killed at Frog Lake, Chief Seekascootch or Cut Arm as he was known, then sent his son Louisan Mongrain to escort the Mann Family off the reserve. Seekascootch himself went to Reverend Quinney and made sure that he and his family also escaped to Fort Pitt.

The Onion Lake Bands became the protectors of the hostages from Frog Lake and Fort Pitt until the cessation of hostilities in 1885. Said Kitty McLean: "Their chief Cut Arm made a vow that he would shoot the first Indian who killed a white man, and they restrained the Plains Crees."

BLANCHE: About nine o'clock the same evening, Father was writing up his diary, when three friendly Indians forced their way into our house, and told us of the massacre at Frog Lake. They came to warn us that Big Bear's warriors, were then a quarter of a mile away, coming to kill father, and they wished to help us get away, they would show us a way out to the Fort Pitt road, as the main trail was guarded. Having a narrow escape from being shot the night before, Father accepted the assistance of these friendly Indians for the protection of his family.

STUDENT: Every time a story gets told it changes, it depends on who your audience is.

COWBOY: They had one blanket, the whole family , one blanket and one...what the hell did... I think they'd been there and got his team, but they'd left an old horse, so that's what he used, he hooked the old mare or what ever it was up to a...they had something with shavs on it I guess and drove out into a slough to avoid them, it was dark out so they would...

BLANCHE: (*speaks to STUDENT and COWBOY*) On going to the stables he found the horses had already been taken away, except a gray mare. She was harnessed to a single buckboard. Father took us children out of bed wrapping us in blankets and put us in the back of the buckboard.

MANN SR: They would ask me, why is this so hard George Mann? I stood there and said work – atoske – work. Indians sweat and pray and some say Mann you don't know. Treaty? Word from Riel? Is this the time, their last chance to stand up. The signs the talk the missionaries / what about their life their pride they are not children.

(At / then speak together)

INDIAN 2: what about our life our pride we are not children. Men that sweat with no honour, for grain and crumbs and a little beef---no meat. WAR? TREATY.? You say Work don't talk, work. Tension. Agents of grievances not treaty. Stand and talk, no more crumbs we want meat. Treaty, don't talk listen.  
NO. Namoya. NO. Not good enough.

CREE MAN: (*To the STUDENT*) But names you know I can't remember, I heard about the Mann story, and I remember my grandfather telling that. You know he used to talk a lot about Manns.

BLANCHE: In the evening the Reverend went along the Frog Lake road with his gun after some geese he had seen, and it was nearly dark when he met two Indians coming at full gallop. These men were bringing the message of the Frog Lake murders. The Indians then held a council at which they talked of murdering the farming instructor, but he escaped with his family to Fort Pitt that night.

HISTORIAN: The Reverend exclaimed: "We only lived 300 yards from him, but he was afraid to come and tell us, being so eager to get away."

BLANCHE: Going to the stables we found the horses had already been taken, except one gray horse with one eye we called "Blind Kate". Father hitched her to a buckboard, then came and took us out of bed, wrapped us in blankets and robes and put us in the back of the buckboard.

INDIAN 2: Blood, anger, revenge, excitement, new life...men again not children, my land, our land, our people, our language, our fight. (*to MANN SR*) Frog Lake, many are dead.

MANN SR: Tousaint Calling Bull. A saint. Ran and ran, men coming to kill George Mann. Warned Seekascootch then warn Mokahusiw. Why kill me too? Government broke treaty? I will warn police? Clean slate? Feed Onion Lake?  
I should die?  
But they helped George Mann.  
Why did they help George Mann?

COWBOY: At that time if they had got a hold of George Mann and his wife they'd killed them. Just because they were so worked up, it's just like mobs, what one person won't do, but look today in society, cheering for the Oilers or whatever you get into, the excitement of mob making and...

(*Over the next while intensity and volume builds*)

MABEL: The Plains Crees had risen with the intention of joining Louis Riel and Poundmaker, who were in open revolt, and further that, under the leadership of



Mistahamusqua or, as he was better known to us, Big Bear, they had marched on Frog Lake, where they massacred nearly all the whites.

BLANCHE: April 2<sup>nd</sup> in the afternoon, our Indians came to the house and were very excited—they had expected to see Indian Agent Quinn from Frog Lake who didn't arrive—he had been killed that morning. The Indians moved from their homes into one encampment along the main road near the Government buildings. Then, about nine o'clock in the evening, three friendly Indians forced their way into our house, and said they had come to warn us that Big Bear's warriors were then a quarter mile away, coming to kill our father. They told us that the Government people at Frog Lake were all dead, and said they would help us get away.

MANN SR: Cold, dark, black, no moon, ice, snow, mud stiff, wood steps creek.

STUDENT: A knock? Burst in? Three friends or three friendlies? Speak Cree or English or both?

INDIAN 2: Mokahusiw must abandon nest. Now. All whites dead in Frog Lake – RUN!

MANN SR: Some blankets and clothes and leave the rest and run.  
Fear and questions but focus.  
Stables, one horse a wagon children wide-eyed terrified.  
Black. Swamp in circles splashes of ice and fear. Lost.

STUDENT: Now we're getting somewhere. What about some drama...early 20<sup>th</sup> century style!

### **Secord Parody Scene 1:**

INDIAN: Woman! What woman want?

MABEL: *Leaping forward and seizing his arm.* O Chief, no spy am I, but  
Friend to you  
And all who love King George and wear his badge.  
All through this day I've walked lonely in the woods  
To do you service. I have news, great news,  
To tell the officer at Fort Pittious.  
This very night the rebel Crees leave Frog's Landing  
To take him by surprise, in numbers more  
Than crows on ripening corn. O help me on!  
I am Blanche Secord Mann, Inspector Mann's daughter,  
Of mighty Onion; and Saskatchewan your great chief,  
And Tecumseh are our friends.

INDIAN: White woman true and brave, I send with you

Mish-ee-hayo-ya, he know the way and sign,  
And bring you safe to mighty chief Dickens.

MABEL: O Thanks, kind chief, and never shall your braves  
Want aught I can give them.

INDIAN: *To another.* Young chief, Mish-ee-hayo-ya, with woman go,  
And give her into care of big white chief.  
She carry news. Dam bad Indian come in dark  
To eat him up.

INDIAN 2: Ugh! Rascal! Dam! *Exeunt Mish-ee-hayo-ya and Mrs. Mann*

BLANCHE: One Indian guided us down a back trail for a short distance, then left us to find our way. After driving through a swamp of snow and water for some distance, father found that he was driving in a circle, and decided to stop until the moon rose to get the direction of Fort Pitt. From where we were waiting we could hear the shrill war whoops of the Indians and the firing of guns, they were already plundering our house. The suspense was terrible, fearing every minute the horse would winnow or the dog which had followed us would bark and reveal our location.

MANN SR: Breeze in circles through trees like sticks. Cries in the crisp air, no echoes and...Godamn dog. Don't bark. Shit! Shit! Shit! Silence. Then panic. Heart pounding in my ears in my chest, smooth leather clutched in frozen hands steam rises off her grey back. Sweat and prayers. Prayers and sweat. Sweat it out.

COWBOY: I think a friendly Native come and warned him there, or they probably would have shot him and captured the kids, hard to say what they would have done with those kids. They weren't killin' kids I don't think, but they'd a killed him yep.

INDIAN: AAAHHEMM! (*Clears his throat*) When I drive through the site of the massacre and see the eight mounds over the bodies of those killed on that fatal day, I feel sorry that such a thing ever did happen; but because I know the Crees, I do not put it down to sheer bloodthirstiness. I know that in his way of thinking, the Indian felt himself provoked to it. The eight mounds at Frog Lake are evidence of the last attempt of the Indian to register his disapproval of the ever -increasing power of another race in the land.

STUDENT: Ok, point taken. But Blanche makes it sound like her father was pretty brave. Did they really freeze in the trees in silence, while the Indians whooped and pillaged? There must have been some panic. Maybe it was it totally go, go get the fuck out of dodge panic. Maybe it was...

MANN SR: God damn lazy son of bitch fucking horse go "Hiya hiya!!"

STUDENT: Ya! GO YOU OLD BITCH!

MABEL: Daddy I'm scared!

MANN SR: SHUTUP!

BLANCHE: Honey calm down, stop crying, which way hurry hurry they're coming!! Godamitt George where the hell have you brought us!! (*realizes she has stepped out of character*) Two Indians had followed us for a short distance, but lost our tracks when we drove through the swamp. When the moon rose father got the direction of Fort Pitt, and we arrived there one o'clock the morning of the third of April.

HISTORIAN: They lost our tracks when we drove through the swamp. Well I don't know, it's possible

STUDENT: It's possible, but kind of boring.

HISTORIAN: Really, if you're in a swamp and it was wet you wouldn't be able to see the tracks.

STUDENT: But wouldn't it likely be frozen on April 1<sup>st</sup> and you would break through the ice and leave a track...but anyway, whatever.

COWBOY: Well there's no point in arguing about that because we don't have a clue about what they did.

BLANCHE: (*clarifies*) Two Indians followed us for a short distance, but lost our tracks when we drove through the swamp. We arrived at Fort Pitt at one o'clock the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the lone sentry opened the gate and roused the garrison which consisted of twenty five men under Captain F. Dickens, son of the great novelist.

### **Secord Parody Scene 2:**

MABEL: You are the captain, sir?

HISTORIAN: Captain Dickens at your service.

MABEL: I bring you news of great importance, sir.

HISTORIAN: I am indebted madam, for what I see  
Has been no common task. Be seated, pray. *US places a chair.*  
Chief will you also rest? *He indicates a chair.*

INDIAN 2: No. Woman, she  
Come far, to tell white chief great words.

HISTORIAN: I thank her much.

MABEL: I came to say that Chief Big Bear tires  
Of Dominion's inaction and the narrow space  
Around his works, he therefore purposes  
To fall upon your Fort here, to-night,  
With an o'erwhelming force, and take your stores.

HISTORIAN: Madam!

INDIAN: AAAHHHEEMMM! You, who are of the Anglo-Saxon race, who have never called anyone "Master," who, since the days of William of Normandy, have never had other manners and customs supersede yours—you do not know the feeling. We too, loved our ways, humble though they were. We, too, like to run the affairs of our own land, though we ran them but poorly. We, too, loved our freedom—can you conscientiously blame the feelings that those uneducated Indians, fresh from the wilds, entertained in those days?

STUDENT: So Blanche says it was silent. Oops those slow Indians lost the tracks of a blind horse dragging a family of five through a swamp with a dog running behind...

Well they did make it. Somehow to Fort Pitt by one am. Made it. They all agree on this. Did they let the dog in the Fort? Did they eat the old blind horse?  
Fort Pitt at one am...they all agree on this.

MABEL: The Manns lost their way in the dark night and had to stand still until the moon was up after which Mr. Mann found the way to Fort Pitt thirteen miles from their stop. After much hardship and cold that chilled them to their very core, they finally reached Fort Pitt at four in the morning where they remained for about a month.

STUDENT: So, the escape to Fort Pitt. We all know they escaped to Fort Pitt in the night. A story like this, I know my grandpa Pete must of heard some juicy details he was told by George Mann Jr...

COWBOY: Not that I know of. I remember hearing him say the horse never made a sound or anything, and they were out in a slough.

MABEL: Ya, didn't they find out they'd gone in a circle or something, and so they got in a bluff and waited till the moon came out or something.

COWBOY: So they could find Fort Pitt, ya something like that.

MABEL: And they could hear the dogs barking or something.

COWBOY: That would be the Indian dogs they could hear barking.

MABEL: Yes.

STUDENT: No, their dog didn't bark either, that's the thing. Silence.

MABEL: Oh, right. *(pause)* Which is absolutely amazing, it's got to be divine intervention that their horse didn't winnow, and their dog didn't bark.

STUDENT: Ya cause there's a lot of noise going on, Indians whooping and the like...

MABEL: Ya and with other horses around, like it would be just natural for them to call out to each other.

COWBOY: We're lucky to be here. *(laughs)*

### **Secord Parody Scene 3:**

*(COWBOY stands at attention beside HISTORIAN)*

HISTORIAN: And you, chief,  
What will you do? You've stood by me so long,  
So faithfully, I count upon you now.

INDIAN 2: White chief say true: we good King George's men.  
My warriors yell! Hide! Shoot! Hot bullet fly  
Like darts of annee-meekee.  
We keep dam rebels back. I go just now.

HISTORIAN: *Handing the chief a twist of tobacco,  
which he puts into his girdle with a grunt of satisfaction.*  
A Cree is my friend, and you are one. *He shakes  
Hands with the chief, who retires well pleased. To Mrs. Mann.*  
Madam, how may I serve to secure  
Your safety? Refreshment comes: but here  
Is no protection in our present strait.

MABEL: I thank you, sir, but will not tax you more  
Than some refreshment. I have a friend beyond  
A mile or two, with whom I'll stay to-night.

HISTORIAN: I'll spare an escort; Mr. Cowan here will...*Mrs. Mann faints*  
*COWBOY plays Cowan, he catches her.*  
Poor soul! Poor soul! She is exhausted indeed.

COWBOY: I wish I had taken more time to listen to the stories and stuff than what I did. Man, Grandfather, the stuff we could have got from him, but we never got to know him. Pete knew a lot of good stories that's for sure. My brother, he'd remember them better than me, quite a memory on him.

STUDENT: Actually I did ask him, and he doesn't remember either.

INDIAN: Our grandfather, what George Mann Jr you call him. I got a couple questions for him myself.

MABEL: Me too.

HISTORIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: Alright, fine. One question each. Who's first?

COWBOY: Yo.

STUDENT: OK.

COWBOY: This is truly an honour. So who did you love more, your first wife or your second.

MANN JR: Next question.

COWBOY: But...

MANN JR: NEXT!

CREE MAN: Finally. OK. Deep Breath. What's with the giant mustache Magnum, did you have some more girlfriends in Onion Lake we don't know about? (*laughs*) Just kidding.

MANN JR: Why do you think I went up there every month for? To check the telegraph line? (*laughs*) Just kidding.

MABEL: Dad! Ok. I have one. Did you tell your other kids about me or was I your little reservation secret.

MANN JR: (*pause*) No, I ...didn't tell.

MABEL: Why?

MANN JR: You know how it was, people back then were afraid of...I mean I was trying to present a respectable...I couldn't ok. Next question.

HISTORIAN: (pause) Sir. The telegraph line you manned after you left Onion Lake. How many poles were there between your homestead and the reserve and did you...

STUDENT: EEEEEEEEE! Trap Door. Memory. Grandfathers. Family. Since I've been going to Onion Lake this past year the family I have been visiting has lost 3 members. The pain on the reserve always seems to be under the surface. My ancestor survived Frog Lake, in fact in the years after his family thrived. \$1,000 per year was a good salary back then. All the Indians were punished as rebels after 1885, regardless of who they helped or what they did. Indians were just Indians. Chief Seekascootch, the chief who kept my ancestors safe, he paid the ultimate price.

HISTORIAN: McLean, the HBC Factor at Fort Pitt, had this to say about the death of Chief Seekascootch. "Next day the bodies of the Indians shot by Major Steele's scouts were brought to the camp and buried in one grave. Louison Mongrain, then became the provisional chief for the Wood Crees, and he asked me to attend to the funeral of their dead chief with him. Mr. F. Stanley Simpson and farming Instructor Mann, who had to assist to dig the grave, were instructed by Mongrain to conceal themselves until after the funeral, fearing that the spirit of revenge might incite the chief's relations to kill one or both of them. The scene of the funeral of the Chief was a truly pitiable one. The men of his tribe evinced much sorrow, and his wife and family were, as is characteristic of the Indians, loud in their lamentations for their dead.

MANN SR: Cries in the night. Two months wandering the back trails with Big Bear. The Chief of my reserve dead. I owe them my life, but will we be able to get past this? The Treaty, the reserve, my family will stay, we will start over, try one more time.

HISTORIAN: Thank you for participating in this study. You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort, without loss of relevant entitlements, without affecting employment status, without losing access to relevant services...

CREE MAN: EEEEEEE! Trap door. I must tell you what happened at Steele Narrows when Seekascootch got killed. My Grandfather he used to say, it wasn't the red coats that killed Seekascootch, you know it was Big Bear's men. And that was controversy here too. After that farmer wrote that book.

Chief Seekascootch's Death scene:

*Enter Saskatchewan, mortally wounded.*

INDIAN: Great Spirit, hadst thou spared me but one hour...  
Yet thy behest rules all.

*Enter Mish-ee-hay-oo also wounded*

INDIAN 2: What! Wounded too?

INDIAN: Yes, I am shot. Recall some warriors  
To bear my body hence. Give no alarm,  
Lest our poor braves lose courage; but make haste...  
I have not long to live. Yet hear my words!  
Bury me deep in the densest forest,  
And let no white man know where I am laid.  
Promise this ere you go.

INDIAN 2: I promise it Saskatchewan.  
Alas, alas, our bravest and our best!

*Exit Mish-ee-hay-oo*

INDIAN: The hour has come! These weary hands and feet  
Draw to the grave. Oh, I have loved my life,  
Not for my own, but for my people's cause.  
Who now will knit them? Who will lead them on?  
Lost! Lost! Lost! The pale destroyer triumphs!  
I see my people fly—I hear their shrieks—  
And none to shield or save! My axe! My axe  
Ha—it is here! No, no—the power is past.  
Oh, Mighty Spirit, shelter—save—my people!

*Falls dead.*

HISTORIAN: At a council in Frog Lake Seekascootch stood up to the war chief and said :

INDIAN 2: (*confronts INDIAN*) I will cut you to pieces. Although I only have one arm, I am not afraid of you. I used to be in front when we fought the Blackfoot Indians, you were behind me. It is a shame to see how you have butchered these innocent white people there, but you cannot scare me.

MANN SR: A friendly Indian came and warned me, told me they were all killed at Frog Lake. I left everything and took my family to Fort Pitt in the night. Some of the Indians followed me but could not catch me. At the...

CREE MAN: (*cuts Mann off*) Two rode in from Frog Lake and asked where Mokahusiw was. They were told they had escaped. They started out after them. When Seekascootch heard this he sent Misahew and another man to tell these two to let Mokahusiw and his family go. They caught up to them on the big flat past Joe



Taylor's and Mokahusiw was standing in the buckboard whipping the old white horse and yelling,

MANN SR: Hi ya, Hi ya,

CREE MAN: while behind them about a quarter mile were these two fellows trying to catch up but their horses were played out.

Chief Seekascootch's son Misahew and the other man told the two Indians who were chasing Mokahusiw to leave them alone and these two Indians answered.

INDIAN: Mokahusiw is lucky our horses are played out.

INDIAN 2: We would have killed him.

(SILENCE)

MABEL: (*breaks in*) No, no, no! When the Mann family was obliged to leave by night, there was but a horse left in the stable when Mr. Mann went out for them. He hitched up an old buckboard and in this they put a few blankets, and a supply of food. They bravely rode out alone, but instead of following the road they made a curve, and within a short distance had to cross a great swamp. Luckily the swamp was frozen, and the ice was over flooded so their tracks were hidden. As they drove across they heard all the cries of the Indians who had arrived at their home and found it empty. One of the Indians retraced the family but when he came to the swamp he thought they were drowned in it.

(SILENCE)

(A CACAPHONY BEGINS. EACH CHARACTER TRIES TO TELL THEIR STORY AT THE SAME TIME, THE STORY THEY WERE TELLING THE AUDIENCE WHEN THEY WERE ENTERING BEFORE THE SHOW. After a while, Blanche starts to sing Clementine in Cree very loudly. Eventually all the characters stop their ranting and let her finish the song)

STUDENT: Thanks Blanche, that was lovely. Mr. History...

HISTORIAN: (*To the Audience*) There are risks that stories told will be controversial in nature and may represent views not widely held in the Onion Lake or the surrounding non-Native community. In the coming months Alan plans to write about the stories he was told, drawing from what he learned during the time he was in your community. There is an inherent risk that he may present information in a way not agreeable to you, the participant.

STUDENT: Pass it on George Mann said. At the dinner table pass it on with the sun he said.

To your family, your friends, give it away and let it float on the air.

The laughter, the plates of steaming life in a warm kitchen with creaking floors and that smell---of family, of home.

Why with the sun grandpa? Why not? It's proper.

Oh and bye the way, sit up straight and don't smack your lips.

(pause)

Mann's, Chiefs. Homestead, reserve. Blanche, Misahew. George Jr., Louison. General Strange, Big Bear. Pete, Mabel. Soldiers, warriors. Government, treaty. Friends, friendlies. Us, them. Why did they call him Mokahusiw? Why did they keep him safe? Why did they care? Why do I care? Does anyone want to know?

(pause)

Mokahusiw niya nitisiygasoyan

MANN SR: Mokahusiw niya nitisiygasoyan

STUDENT: Man I love the sound of that.

MANN SR: Ya, me too.

THE END...or cut the tidy wrap up and let it end with the Cacaphony?

*A work in progress.*

## Appendix Two:

### *Friends or Friendlies?* (Staged Reading—Program)

#### List of Characters/Performers

Note: Each character comes from a different time period, which is their home base; some leap back and forth in time and play other characters. They are all on stage for the duration of the play so costumes do not change, except for maybe a hat, or a similar simple change.

STUDENT (Present day. Cree Name is Mokahusiw) —**JULES MERCIER**

GEORGE MANN SR (Past. Farm Instructor and later Indian Agent of Onion Lake Reserve. Came there in 1879 alone and was later joined by wife and three kids in 1883. After the 1885 rebellion he was promoted to Indian Agent. Cree name is also Mokahusiw.)—**ROB ROY\*\***

MANN JR (Past. Mann Sr's son, he was 8 years old in 1885)—**JARON FRANCIS**

BLANCHE (Mann Sr's oldest daughter, and was the last surviving member of their family. Her accounts of the escape to Fort Pitt were a major source for the play. She was 10 years old in 1885)—**PAMELA HAIG BARTLEY\*\***

MABEL (A relative of the Manns...you will soon find out how...)--**NATASHA MARTINA**

CREE MAN (Present day. He primarily plays a descendant of Chief Seekascootch, but does engage other voices from Onion Lake.)—**JOSEPH NAYTOWHOW.**

HISTORIAN (Present day. The academic that adds details and does some role playing)—**BRODY MORRIS**

COWBOY (Present day. He is a descendant of George Mann, and has lots of opinions about history. He represents the student's non-Aboriginal family.) – **MATT KEYES**

INDIAN 1(Past. Mabel's son, Chief Seekascootch, Reverend Edward Ahenakew)—**CURTIS PEETEETUCE\*\***

INDIAN 2 (Past. Seekascootch's son-Misahew, Joseph Dion)—**LANCE LAROCK**

PLAYWRIGHT: **ALAN LONG**

INSTRUCTOR/DRAMATURGE: **JAMES GUEDO\*\***

**\*\*Appear with permission of Canadian Actors Equity.**

**Note from Playwright:** Thank you for coming and helping us discover what this play might be. This has been a great way for me to delve into my family's history, and to try to understand how different people view the past from the present. Colonial history is always controversial because each cultural group has different things at stake, and different ways of talking about it and remembering. This is a short look at a troubled and complex past, and as I discovered, an equally troubled and complex present. This presentation marks the completion of the course requirements for an Interdisciplinary MA in theatre and history. I would greatly appreciate any comments you have about the piece; please stay after the show for a brief question and answer period.

Cheers  
Alan Long

**QUESTIONS from Jim and Alan**

Please be honest, and tell us what you saw.

Did you get any sense of the relationships between characters, and would you like to see more or less of this?

Did the random narrative structure of the play give you a sense of the complexity of the topic, and did this just cause you confusion?

Do you feel any one point of view was over emphasized? Under represented?

## CREE TRANSLATIONS:

(The translation appears in **bold** below the English text.)

CREE MAN: Come in. It's open. Welcome to this place. Sit down and relax.

**NEHIYO NAPEW: Pihtikwek. Tawaw. Miwasin e-takohtiyek. Apik, ayiwepik.**

We are here to tell some stories, and to laugh with the white people. There is a **e-pe-acimoweyahk ekwa tawicipahpimayahkik moniyasak. Oskinikew ota ayaw** young man here with a lot of pictures of Onion Lake from a long time ago when **wihcikaskisiyew sakahikanihk ohci mistahi masinipayihona ayaw kayas ohci kaki** his relatives were the Indian Agent and his family. When he came to us he **soniyawokimawiyit witisana. kaki-pe takohtet cistemawa ki-pe-tahkonew** brought some tobacco and asked for stories about George Mann. Some of **e-nitawehtahk ta acimostaht ohi George Mann ka-ki-isihkasowet. Koskomaw** these stories were not what he expected, and now with our help he is going to **e-pihtahk ohi acimowina ekwa ekwa wiya wi-acimow. Atiht ohi acimowina** talk about what happened. Some the stories aren't very nice, some are not true, **namoya ka-takihtenawaw ekwa atiht kiyaskehtakwanowa maka nikamociketan** but we will have fun telling them. **ta acimoweyahk.**

MANN JR: *Speaks in Cree while watching me.* I pray for your safe journey and I

**Nika-kakisimon ta-miyo pimacihoweyan,**

will watch over you. Careful with that Indian in the car next to you though, he **kwayask kika-kanawapamitin. Peyahtak asowem naha nehiyaw sehkepayisihk** may try and take you to his teepee and steal your whiskey. (*laughs*)

**ka-apit. Ahpo etikwe kika nitomik tayisiwicewat omikowapihk isi ekwa kakakwekimotamak kiminihkowin.**

MANN JR: *in cree*. I remember this place. We used to camp over there in the

**Nikiskisin mana eki nitawi kapiseyahk wayahcahk ite telegraph**  
valley when the telegraph office was here.

**Office Kaki astek**

MANN JR: Oh oh....here we go...

**Ahow maka mina asamina**

MANN JR: yeeehawww!! They love me in the teepee!! (*Slaps the cowboy on the*

**Aaayyii!! Nikimiwemikok mikowahpik**

MANN JR: May 11<sup>th</sup> 1910, moved out to the homestead, May 19<sup>th</sup> plowed garden, May 20<sup>th</sup> planted 3 bushels of potatoes. **Kaki Aymihewikisikak ki-yotin maka namoya ki-kimiwan.** (On Sunday it was windy but no rain)

## Appendix Three:

### Glossary

With the exception of “melodrama” and “white,” the following are terms that have multiple and complex meanings in history and Native studies. I use them interchangeably as their meanings often intersect with each other.<sup>1</sup>

**Aboriginal:** Any person descended from the first inhabitants of North America. Indians, Inuit and Metis are identified as the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada in the Constitution Act of 1982, Sec. 35 (2).

**First Nations:** Usually refers to a politically autonomous band under the Indian Act, a nation of First Peoples. If you identify as a First Nations Person it usually means you are a status Indian.

**Half-breed:** A derogatory term used to describe Métis people, used commonly in the early twentieth century histories of Canada. Similar to the derogatory term “mudblood” used in J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series.

**Indian:** A term with many usages. In this paper, for context reasons, it is most often used when referring to Aboriginal people in the past, as this was how they were always referred to in the press and in popular history well into the twentieth century.

**Interdisciplinary:** the act of drawing from and integrating two or more academic disciplines and their methods and insights in the pursuit of a common goal. Interdisciplinary approaches typically focus on problems felt by the investigators to be too complex or wide-ranging to be dealt with using the knowledge and methodology of a single discipline.

**Native:** An Aboriginal person who identifies as such. It is a more politically correct, common term for Indian.

**Melodrama:** The word “melodrama” comes from the Greek word for song “melody,” combined with “drama”. Music is sometimes used to increase the emotional response or to suggest characters. There is a tidy structure or formula to melodrama: a villain poses a threat, the hero escapes the threat (or rescues the heroine) and there is a happy ending. In melodrama there is constructed a world of heightened emotion, stock characters and a hero who rights the disturbance to the balance of good and evil in a universe with a clear moral division. In recent decades the term has taken on pejorative connotations.

**Métis:** The Métis are identified as people of mixed-blood ancestry, who self-identify as Métis and are accepted as such by Métis people. It is the most common modern term to describe the offspring of Indian-European unions in west-central North America.

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<sup>1</sup> I used as a reference the glossary of terms in Ron F. Laliberte et al (eds.) *Expressions in Canadian Native Studies*. (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Press, 2000) 565-572. The definitions for melodrama and interdisciplinary were taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org>

Status Indian: An Indian person who is registered as an Indian under the Indian Act and thus recognized by the federal government as an Indian and accorded the accompanying rights, benefits and restrictions of the Indian Act and related policies.

Treaty: A contract made between two parties, whereby each agrees to follow the terms. The Numbered Treaties in Canada were between the government (whose symbolic head was the British queen or great white mother) and the Indian tribes of what is now western Canada. They were primarily peace agreements between the two parties, where access to land was ceded in return for certain rights and services. The legal status of treaties is still under debate, and they have never been legislated by the Government of Canada.

Treaty Indian: An Indian person whose forefathers signed a numbered treaty in which land was exchanged for certain listed payments, such as money, tools, and health and education benefits. The term is often used in the Prairie Provinces as synonymous with status Indians, although some would argue that being a direct descendant of a treaty chief carries a certain amount of extra weight in the Indian community.

White: A blanket term used in the past to describe non-Native or non-Aboriginal people, the latter two terms being the more correct and modern. The Cree word for this is moniyaw which means white person.



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