BALANCING OTIPEMISIWAK AND WAHKOHTOWIN:
MÉTIS WOMEN AT ST. FRANÇOIS XAVIER, MANITOBA, 1790-1840

A Thesis Submitted to the
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts
In the Department of Indigenous Studies
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By

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Abstract

Centering the principles of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin, this thesis examines the role of Métis women in the development of the community of St. François Xavier. While recent historiographical shifts have emphasized community-engaged histories and women’s voices, the role of Métis women within the Red River region during the first half of the nineteenth century remains largely underexplored. This research addresses this gap by highlighting how women were instrumental in shaping the community’s identity during the period of 1790-1840. Utilizing the worldviews of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin offers a nuanced understanding of how Métis women embedded these concepts into the collective identity, asserting their independence whilst nurturing kinship. Ultimately, this thesis sheds light on the enduring significance of Métis women’s leadership and their vital role in shaping Métis identity, offering a deeper understanding of the community of St. François Xavier as a whole.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Allyson Stevenson, for her unwavering guidance, invaluable insight, and steadfast support throughout the duration of this project. Her expertise and dedication have been instrumental in shaping this research. My additional gratitude to Dr. Robert Innes and Dr. Winona Wheeler for their contributions as members of my thesis committee, and Dr. Carmen Gillies for graciously accepting the role of my external examiner.

Thank you to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Gabriel Dumont Graduate Institute, and the University of Saskatchewan for the financial assistance I received to complete this study.

Throughout this journey, I have engaged in countless conversations about the essential role Métis women have played and continue to play today across our Nation. I must thank my family, friends, colleagues, and community for the encouragement and support, which has been invaluable to this process. This project has been a labour of love, and as Dr. Stevenson described it in the early days, “heart work.” I am incredibly grateful to all those who have played a role in its success.
Dedication

For my own Métis mother.
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The Legend of White Horse Plain

In an early period of the seventeenth century, when only Indians roamed the western plains, the most northerly nation, the Crees, were being pushed farther and farther towards Hudson Bay by their traditional enemies, their fierce neighbors to the south, the Sioux.

Finally the Sioux gained a foothold in the wealthy Cree country as far north as Lake Winnipeg and the point north of the tip of Lake Superior, now known as Sioux Lookout. It was a serious situation for the Crees. They were desperate. In this barren land they faced near starvation and possible extinction.

Then came their salvation, the arrival of the white men at Hudson Bay with whom they soon began to trade. Before long they had the white man’s guns and were making effective war with them against the bows and arrows of the Sioux. So the invaders in turn were pushed farther and farther back into their own territory, and the Crees became the great warriors, more invincible than ever the Sioux had been.

As a consequence of this, the Crees’ nearest neighbors to the south, the Assiniboines, a branch of the Sioux who formerly had protected the Sioux from the incursions of the Crees, were glad not only to make peace but later to ally themselves with this powerful and irresistible nation which fought their enemies with fire. Against this alliance the Sioux, though flaming inwardly, could do nothing. Nevertheless they kept a jealous eye on the movements of both.

Early one summer in the 1690s, a large band of Assiniboines was camped on the banks of the Assiniboine river about ten miles west of the site of present day Winnipeg.

The chief of these Assiniboines had a beautiful daughter, and to his lodge came two suitors for her hand - a Cree chief from Lake Winnipegosis and a Sioux chief from Devil’s Lake.

The Cree was the favored suitor for he had to offer in exchange for a bride that rarity, that coveted prize of the prairies, a horse as white as the winter snows, a Blanco Diablo which came from that famed breed in Mexico. Nimble of foot, swift as the wind, strong and sturdy, a “white devil” could out-run and out-last any other horse, and go three or four days longer than any other without food or water. The prospect of such a gift was irresistible, and the father succumbed.

But not all the Assiniboines in the camp favored the alliance with the Crees, notably a powerful medicine man. The memory of Cree war parties with Assiniboine scalps flying in the wind was ever before his eyes and he nursed in his heart the old bitterness.

“Is it not enough”, he thundered at his chief, “that you should make peace with the enemies of our forefathers? Now you will disgrace us by mingling our blood with that of our foes!”

But his protests were in vain. So he sought by his magic and exhortations to strengthen in the camp the hatred against the Crees.
The marriage was planned for a time when the Sioux chief was to be on a war expedition, but they counted without the medicine man. Secretly he sent off word of his rival’s success to the young Sioux.

On the day appointed for the ceremonies, the Cree bridegroom, gorgeous in the trappings of his chiefdom, arrived from Lake Winnipegosis mounted on a fine grey steed, and leading the white horse loaded with additional presents for his prospective father-in-law.

The gifts were presented and the Cree claimed his bride. Then, with the feasting and merrymaking scarce begun, suddenly there was an alarm - a cloud of dust in the distance. The flouted and vengeful suitor with an escort of Sioux warriors was fast approaching over the prairie.

All was confusion in the camp. Cries of Sioux and Cree sympathizers alike filled the air. “Up, up! Away! It is your only chance!” cried the father to the Cree. “Take your horses and flee!”

The bridegroom ran with his bride to the tethered horses, helped her mount the white steed, jumped to the grey in a flash and they were off. Westward they flew, but not unobserved. The Sioux with his party was quickly in pursuit.

But even the time gained at the start and the swift pace of their fleeing ponies did not save the bridal couple. Though they doubled back on their tracks to mislead their pursuers and at times were hidden by patches of bush, once out on the open plain again the white horse was the mark that betrayed them.

On, on they sped over the prairie. The frightened girl held back the pace of her horse to that of her husband’s grey, and the Sioux were gaining on them. Finally at a point just east of the present day village of St. Francois Xavier, the avenging arrows of the Sioux sped to the hearts of the fleeing couple and killed them both.

The grey horse was caught, but the white steed escaped into the deep woods. For years it roamed the plain, thus giving its name to the region, and the Indians, believing that the soul of the girl had passed into its body, feared to approach it. As time passed the belief grew that, in ghostly form the white horse continued its wild wanderings.

Today there are old residents in the district who recall the tragic story of the Cree chief and his Assiniboine bride, and relate the legend of the Blanco Diablo, which some believe still haunts the plain.¹

¹ Margaret Arnett MacLeod, “The Legend of the White Horse Plain” Manitoba Pageant(2) Volume 3, 1958. Used with permission.
Introduction

The Legend of White Horse Plain is a story of relationships, particularly highlighting the role Indigenous women played in forging alliances, strengthening diplomatic ties, and keeping peace between different peoples. Moreover, the story underscores the leadership, resilience, culture, and spiritual significance of Indigenous women within their communities. While examining the Métis community that later came to settle in the region of White Horse Plain, it is critical to remember that the land has memory. Whether or not one chooses to believe that the white horse still roams the area, the matriarchal structure of the Métis community certainly led to the success of it. As one of the larger and more populous parishes within the Red River Settlement, St. François Xavier has been referred to as the founding community of the Métis Nation. Through the influence of renowned Métis leader Cuthbert Grant, families from Pembina who found themselves on the southern half of the newly formalized forty-ninth parallel migrated northwest to the region in the early 1820s. Scholars have noted that Métis families who resided at Pembina, then came to settle in White Horse Plain held an unmatched level of autonomy within Red River, being referred to as “much their own Masters.” St. François Xavier was the first westward extension of the Red River Settlement along the Assiniboine river, located some

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2 St. François Xavier is the official title of the municipality in Manitoba today, stemming from the parish that was built in 1823. The region is still referred to as White Horse Plain after the legend. It has also been referred to as Grantown, after Cuthbert Grant. These three names are used interchangeably throughout the text.


6 Governor George Simpson to John Warner Dease, March 25, 1822. HBCA Archives, D.3/2 Reel #3M3 Letter 63
twenty-seven kilometres from the forks, a distance that allowed the families that settled in the region to maintain a level of political and economic sovereignty. Moreover, through the worldviews of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin, Métis women of St. François Xavier fostered the principles of independence and kinship within the community that cultivated Métis identity.

As a distinct Métis settlement, the region continued to attract a significant number of families including a number of prominent leaders such as Cuthbert Grant, Pierre Falcon, and Pascal Breland called St. François Xavier home, which further contributed to the attention to and importance of the region. Despite the role all three of these men have in the articulation of the Métis as a distinct people and distinct nation, up until this point, little has been known of the women of St. François Xavier. The identities of matriarchs such as Margaret Utinawasis, Marguerite Ahdik Songab, Marie McGillis, Louise Gladu, Helen Poitras and their many daughters who built the community of St. Francois Xavier have been dominated by narratives of the fur trade, colonial resistance, and male leadership.

As a Métis woman, it is easy to recognize the gendered gap within the larger Métis nationalist historical narrative. Scholars examining the fur trade period, from the early-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century in Canada, have primarily included women as the assistants in the male trade economy, making women largely absent from the paths that men travelled. The focus on Louis Riel and the Métis nationalist agenda that emerged through 1869-70 and 1885 Resistance narratives has more recently been expanded by scholars using Riel as a

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7 Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 21.
8 MacLeod and Morton, *Cuthbert Grant of Grantown*, 94.
cultural representative for the social, economic, and political circumstances that led to the development of the Métis Nation as a whole. While undoubtedly, Louis Riel remains an essential component of the Métis story, the recognition of him as the sole representative of the Métis nation works as a means of erasure of other Métis leaders, especially Métis women. Since the 1980’s, the conversation has shifted to contemporary identity, and more specifically Aboriginal rights. But again, although Aboriginal rights and practices are pertinent to larger discussions of sovereignty, disputes such as R. v. Powley (2003) focused on men’s hunting practices, further erasing women’s traditional practices from the larger picture. These ongoing narratives tend to centre colonial renderings of individualism, capitalism, and patriarchy and leave minimal space for the histories and voices of Métis women.

In recent years the inclusion of community-engaged histories, oral histories, studies of cultural practices, and the inclusion of women’s voices have challenged the nationalist historical narrative. And yet, despite these advancements in methods and approach, the role of Métis women throughout the Red River has remained largely unknown. However, by refocusing attention on the women and families who left Pembina to establish the community of St. Francois Xavier, it is apparent that Métis women were critical to establishing the identity of the region during the fifty-year period of 1790 to 1840. This timeframe is identified in the literature as a period when widespread recognition of the “mixed blood” children as a distinct

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demographic group occurred. The Métis established themselves both socially and economically and formed a distinct culture and way of life. This shift, along with the establishment of a Métis social and cultural order enabled the new peoples the space and political power to negotiate their own self-determination. The shared experiences and organization that occurred within this fifty-year period laid a foundation that enabled future generations of Métis to continue to assert themselves as Indigenous peoples. The period of economic transition from the fur trade towards a market economy, and integration into capitalist society in the 1840s marks the conclusion of this study.

Due to both their geographic location and collective position within the larger social and economic atmosphere, the distinctive Métis community established at White Horse Plain enabled Métis families to define and affirm an identity on their own terms. By introducing the Nehiyawak concepts of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin, this study grounds both independence and kinship as the defining features of Métis identity. The English translation of wahkohtowin can best be defined through terms such as “kinship,” or “relationship,” but the concept encompasses a wider set of ideas about how things are related within Cree philosophies.

Examining the Métis community of Île à la Crosse, Métis scholar Brenda Macdougall states that, “as an expression of cultural identity wahkootowin [sic] provides structure to society; infuses

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15 Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 18.
16 Gerhard Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*.
17 It is conventional to italicize words and phrases in other languages, but an active choice has been made not to italicize Indigenous terms within this analysis as it has begun to be recognized as a means of “othering.” See Natasha Beeds, “although most styles italicize ‘foreign’ languages, it is my position that Nêhiyawêwin must be placed beside English in an equal textual position. I am using English as a means of discourse; however, I am placing nēhiyaw language within this text as a theoretical and a living space – a space where words carry spiritual power and a space that I call home.” “Rethinking Edward Ahenakew’s Intellectual Legacy: Expressions of nēhiyawimânîtonêyihciwân (Cree Consciousness or Thinking)” in Tolly Bradford and Chelsea Horton (eds) *Mixed Blessings: Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016): 119.
institutions with meaning; establishes protocols and frameworks for interaction and behaviour; is the foundation for pursuing any economic, political, social, or cultural activity; and is essential for the creation of an alliance.”¹⁹ Wahkohtowin not only mediates interactions between people, but extends “to the natural and spirit worlds, regulating relationships between humans and non-humans, the living and the dead, and humans and the natural environment.”²⁰ The connections established by Métis at St. François Xavier with one-another, the surrounding First Nations and settlers, the land, and the institutions of the church and trade allowed the Métis to curate an identity founded on wahkohtowin.

The title of otipemisiwak is a Cree term granted to the Métis, meaning “the people who own themselves.”²¹ Adam Gaudry explains that “the origins of kaa-tipeyimishoyaahkan [sic] can be traced to the economic structure of the fur trade, an economic system that nurtured the ideal of self-ownership… alongside a more urgent desire among Métis to own themselves and trade independently.”²² When this thesis was proposed in the Winter of 2020, otipemisiwak as a principle had been used throughout the academic work of Adam Gaudry, Heather Devine,²³ and Diane Payment;²⁴ the name of the national Métis women’s organization “Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak;”²⁵ and one political event, “Otipemisiwak, A National Conference on Métis Self-

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¹⁹ Macdougall, One of the Family. 7.
²⁰ Macdougall, One of the Family. 8.
²² Adam Gaudry “Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahkan - 'We are those who own ourselves': A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Victoria, 2014), 80.
Government,” hosted by the Métis Nations of Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Three years later, otipemisiwak has become a highly representative term for Métis across the homeland, as modern Métis Governments have utilized the term in their fight for sovereignty. But, as the term has been broadly incorporated into the contemporary context, it is argued here that the oversaturation and politicization of otipemisiwak has led to a misunderstanding of the true nature of the term. Grounding otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin within the historical context of this work aims to locate the origins of the worldview of the early Métis in the contributions of Métis women while contextualizing how Métis communities balance both responsibilities to community and independence.

The utilization of Nehiyawak concepts for Métis research reflects that Métis communities were steeped in the lands and languages of their First Nations foremothers. The history of St. François Xavier expands beyond immediate area of the parish and settlement, and before the first Métis families arrived in 1820’s the history of the region, which is also commonly referred to as White Horse Plain, has been told through a Cree legend of a chief’s daughter. Furthermore, as late as 1860 it is said that the women residing at St. François Xavier “spoke mostly Cree.” The concepts of wahkohtowin and otipemisiwak reflect the regional specificity of this study and works towards privileging the voices and stories of these women that have otherwise been written out of the larger history. Positioning myself within this work, the choice of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin is reflective of my own experience and familial connections to both the land

27 In 2019, the Métis Nation of Ontario, Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, and Métis Nation of Alberta signed a Self-Government Agreement with the Government of Canada. More recently, in November 2022, the Métis Nation of Alberta ratified it’s “Otipemisiwak Métis Government Constitution.” and as of September 19th, the Métis Nation of Alberta will have fully transitioned to the “Otipemisiwak Métis Government.”
28 Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 91.
and language. Applying Cree terminology acts as a means of reconnecting to my ancestors and resisting the colonial history that has been written on their behalf.

In this thesis, otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin act as the defining principles of Métis identity. Taking this one step further, I am arguing here for the feminization of both terms. By examining the autonomy and agency in Métis women’s roles as life-givers, knowledge-keepers, makers, healers, midwives, elders, we can begin to examine not only how Métis women embedded the principles of otipemisiwak into the collective identity, but how they were the original people who owned themselves. Coupling this worldview alongside wahkohtowin allows for a complex explanation of both individualism and kinship which allowed Métis women to curate a distinct identity in their children and families that is expressed in the distinctive political actions in the later nineteenth century and cultural expressions in Métis art and fashion.

Chapter one provides an initial review of the literature which is required to articulate the historiographical gap, specifically of the roles, experiences, and contributions of Métis women in the Red River during the period of 1790 to 1840. Chapter two examines the overarching social structure of the fur trade period from 1790-1840, and the positions of Métis women as producers of goods and networkers across the homeland. Chapter three identifies the original Métis families at Pembina who were “so much their own Masters,”29 and examines how families were uprooted from the area due to the colonial boundaries that were established. Chapter four follows the Métis to St. François Xavier and provides a deeper analysis of the interconnectedness and structure of families in the region. Using genealogical reconstruction to situate families, this

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29 Governor George Simpson Correspondence, Letter to John Warner Dease. (Forks: March 25, 1822) Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (D.3/2) Reel #3M3
study identifies the Métis matriarchs who engrained worldviews of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin into the larger collective, establishing a distinct nation.

This research sheds light on the lives, experiences, and contributions of Métis women in the establishment of their communities, particularly in the community St. François Xavier. Through an examination of primary sources and scholarly research during the period of 1790 to 1840, it is clear that Métis women were essential to the development of a distinct Métis identity. Utilizing the terms otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin, we can appreciate the vital role of Métis women in shaping the social, cultural, and political landscape of the Métis community. Ultimately, this thesis offers important insights into the ongoing discussions around Métis identity and highlights the crucial ongoing importance of their leadership and presence in Métis communities.
Chapter 1: A Review of the Literature

Situating This Work

This study contributes to the greater body of Métis studies that has flourished over the last decade, articulating the fundamental role that Métis women played in the establishment of their communities. Today, the field features both historical and contemporary work that has largely succeeded in overturning racialized accounts of the past, as Métis scholars and community members have increasingly utilized Métis concepts and research methods to undertake Métis specific research. Scholars such as Maria Campbell, Emma LaRocque, Brenda Macdougall, and Nicole St-Onge have spent their lives countering the violent erasure of Métis women and their ancestors and worked to highlight the centrality of Métis women to the Métis Nation, and this study builds upon the solid foundation they have provided.

Maria Campbell’s 1973 autobiography *Halfbreed* is the foundational text in the area of Métis studies and a landmark in what would shortly after become contemporary Indigenous Studies. Exploring her own lived experiences of poverty, oppression, alcoholism, addition, tragedy, and discrimination, the memoir opened the doors to a heightened level of understanding both Métis historical and contemporary truths while at the same time tying together a story of resilience, love, joy, kinship, and identity. Campbell continues her work as a storyteller, filmmaker, writer, and community member, advocating for issues related to justice, women and youth, community development, identity, language, and land. Kim Anderson in the foreword of the 2019 revised edition wrote that Maria “is a leader who works with an expansive range of people, always in the spirit of wahkohtowin, an interconnected web of relations in which

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everyone has responsibilities - for as she has often said ‘you never get anywhere unless you take your people with you.’”

Building upon this foundation, Laura Forsythe describes a “wave” of newcomers whose work “comprise a large cohort of Métis women researching a wide range of topics, the full scope of which will only be known in the fullness of time.” Scholars such as herself have sought to “uncover the attempted points of erasure of the grandmothers and aunties of Métis scholarship.” Concurrent with this wave, Métis scholar Jennifer Adese has worked to “reject the narrow scope through which the history of Métis politics has been viewed and portrayed,” and reveals “the significant impact of Métis women on Métis political organizing and on Indigenous politics more widely, arguing that Métis women have played a vital role in the development of Métis-Canada relations.” Situated within this realm, this study continues the ongoing work of filling the gaps within the historiography which has diminished the essential role of Métis women. More importantly, this research clearly articulates the fundamental role that Métis women played in grounding the principles of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin within Métis identity.

**Emerging Métis Studies**

Despite the contemporary richness, Métis history was initially widely determined by colonial figures and ideologies. George F.G. Stanley’s 1936 text, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions*, remains the foundation in which the historiography of Métis

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33 Laura Forsythe, “It Needs to Be Said,” 2.
Studies has been built upon. Incorporating a racialized understanding of Métis as a “half-wild and half-civilized” people taking a “last stand” against racial and economic assimilation into Euro-Canadian society, Stanley’s work proved to be deeply influential in both the development of both Métis Studies and Western Canadian history. While Stanley ultimately opened the door to further Métis involvement in the history and establishment of western Canada, *The Birth of Western Canada* acts as the primary narrative in which this thesis aims to rewrite. Between a racialized understanding of Métis identity, primitive notions of Indigenous savagery, and a lack of incorporation of any women at all, George F.G. Stanley has provided the framework which contemporary Métis scholars have actively worked against. While I would prefer to write a Métis historiography without mention of Stanley and his correspondents at all, a brief analysis of their work is required at the very least to act as a reminder of how far the field of Métis studies has come.

Interest in the Métis and the history of western Canada sparked a new generation of scholarship which followed two primary streams in the latter half of the twentieth century. Focusing predominantly on the “civilizing” influences of the church, the fur trade, and Euro-Canadian connections found in the Red River society, the first stream featured scholars such as Marcel Giraud, and W.L. Morton who continued to perpetrate an understanding of Métis identity shaped by tropes of Métis as “a people in between,” “half-breeds,” and “mixed-bloods.” Adhering to the tendency at the time to position communities along a spectrum of civility, Giraud argued that the Métis were an incompatible mixture of primitive customs and civilized

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traditions who were constantly at risk of regressing to the instincts and mentality of “primitive peoples,” despite the “moral regeneration” offered by the Roman Catholic clergy and other civilizing influences.39 Opposingly, W.L. Morton believed that the Métis were the ultimate expression of balance that could be achieved between the civilized and savage halves of the Red River Settlement.40 Giraud and Morton adopted what Cree Métis scholar Emma LaRocque labelled the “civ/sav dichotomy” as an explanatory framework.41 Indeed, the Métis as a people defined strictly by their mixed-blood genetics continues to problematically perpetrate misunderstanding of Métis as being simply mixed has led individuals make false claims to Métis identity.42

While scholars in the field of Western Canadian history attempted to identify how colonial structures of civility shaped social order, a growing field of Indigenous Studies developed largely out of the civil rights era of the 1960s in response to Indigenous students and community activists. Powered by Indigenous writers and scholars such as Maria Campbell, Howard Adams, and Emma LaRocque, new perspectives initiated a direct resistance against colonial narratives that had been prescribed by scholars such as Stanley. Writing from an anti-colonial critique and lived experience, Maria Campbell’s 1973 memoir Halfbreed,43 Howard Adam’s 1975 Prison of Grass: Canada from the Native Point of View,44 and Emma LaRocque’s

42 Chris Andersen, “Métis”: Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014)
43 Maria Campbell, Halfbreed, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973).
44 Howard Adams, Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View, (Toronto: New Press, 1975)
1975 *Defeathering the Indian*, were groundbreaking works that set the stage for Métis Studies, and Indigenous Studies more broadly. Among the first to be written from a Métis perspective, the works of Adams, LaRocque, and Campbell actively addressed topics of colonialism, indigeneity, racism and stereotypes, womanhood, poverty, and oppression. Grounded in Indigenous worldviews and experience, these early works played a foundational role in what developed into the discipline of Indigenous Studies.

**Classifying Métis Identity**

Alongside the continued growth of both western Canadian history and Indigenous Studies, a body of scholarship emerged around how to properly “classify” the Métis came to dominate the field. Emma LaRocque has appropriately dubbed the polarity of classification as the “civ/sav dichotomy,” which she defines as a “long-held belief that humankind evolved from the primitive to the most advanced, from the savage to the civilized.” Civilization is consistently associated with “settlement, private property, cultivation of land and intellect, industry, monotheism, literacy, coded law and order, Judeo-Christian morality, and metal-based technology.” She continued that, “Indians, then, by contrast, are delineated as wild, nomadic, warlike, uncultivating and uncultivated, aimless, superstitious, disorganized, illiterate, immoral, and technologically backwards.” As can be seen through the works of early scholars such as Giraud and Morton who had a race-based understanding of the Métis, the mixed-blood genetics of the population growing across the northwest was a serious complication to this attempt of categorization based upon racialization.

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47 LaRocque, *When the Other is Me*, 39.
48 LaRocque, *When the Other is Me*, 39.
49 See also Camilla Charity Augustus’ “Mixed Race, Legal Space: Official Discourse, Indigeneity, and Racial Mixing in Canada, the US, and Australia, 1850-1950,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 2013), in which she argues: “Racial mixing, as the periphery, ultimately defines racialization, or the centre. In this case, the
Despite LaRocque’s critique of the limitations of colonial definitions of Indigenous identity, a shift towards examining Métis identity in terms of “whiteness” took place.\textsuperscript{50} This perspective is represented in John E. Foster’s work which focused on paternal influence on the development of the Métis as a distinct people. Foster credits a French-Canadian male “ethos” which “emphasized the necessity of being a man of consequence in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of one’s fellows.”\textsuperscript{51} In his work “Wintering, the Outsider Adult Male and the Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Métis,” Foster notes that “concepts of patrifocality and male centrality suggest explanatory insight into which freemen families would succeed as Métis,” and yet Foster fails to recognize that the “essential relationships” he outlines are all a result of maternal relations.\textsuperscript{52} Foster has been described as having played a “major role” in the re-imagining of Western Canada that took place between the 1960s and 1990s, introducing new perspectives and questions to the field.\textsuperscript{53} However, his work has been widely critiqued by Indigenous studies scholars such as Rob Innes who counterargues that Foster’s concept of “proto-Métis” is “built on the assumption that the Red River Métis culture is the only Métis culture and those Métis groups who exhibited a higher level of First Nations cultural characteristics than European must reified identities produced by colonialism (colonizer/colonized; Newcomer/Native) are defined in relation to the hybridized identities. Referring back to the notion that mixed race defies the common sense of race, I argue that it also defies the idea of racial categories… Ultimately, this is evidenced in the process of attempting to place individuals of mixed ancestry into one of those two existing (and imagined) racial categories: Native and Newcomer.” 98-99. 

\textsuperscript{50} “The history or anthropological tradition has been to study “the other” or the exotic – those societies unrelated to Western European societies. The Métis, a so-called hybrid people, are considered too much like their paternal forebearers and therefore too white to merit anthropological attention. Reinforcing this view is the historiography of the Métis in Canada, which assumes that their whiteness is their most dominant social and cultural trait.” Brenda Macdougall, “Speaking of Métis,” 32. 


\textsuperscript{52} Foster, “Wintering, the Outsider Adult Male, and Ethnogenesis,” 189. 

therefore not be Métis.”

In other words, the prioritization of defining Métis identity around what Morton and Giraud discussed as “civilizing factors,” such as the Catholic Church or French language for Métis diversity, has “made it difficult to acknowledge the possibility that a diverse range of Métis cultural forms exists.”

Above all else, the blatant disregard for Indigenous women in favour of a romanticized narrative of white (in this case French-Canadian) masculinity is not reflective of Métis cultural identity or experience.

**Great Men and Climactic Events**

In his 1988 literature review of Métis studies at large, J.R. Miller outlined the limitations of the fascination of what he deems “Great Men” and “climactic events.”

Critiquing this “from-the-top-down” historical methodology, Miller argues that the Métis population “only received serious attention when its activities intersected with European commercial companies or Canadian politicians.”

This limited scope of examining Métis history has created a nationalist narrative which centres around a colonial-Canadian fixation of resistance. Perhaps the best example of this is the 1816 Battle of Seven Oaks, which Chris Andersen has stated was “probably the first foundational event associated with the creation of the Métis people... Indeed, the Métis Nation is often narrated to have been born in battle during a crisp spring day on 19 June 1816.”

While it can be said that this was the first organized effort of Métis military resistance, a nation cannot be born in a day, nor can a people be created. The culmination of events in 1816 was a result of continued animosity between two distinct groups of people. The

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57 Miller, “From Riel to the Métis,” 1.

58 Andersen, *Métis*, 111.
Métis Nation already existed, but our colonial lens which adheres to a “from-the-top-down” historical methodology has limited us to believe the defining element of peoplehood is resistance. Continued focus on events such as the 1849 Sayer trial, the 1869-70 Red River Resistance and 1885 North-West Resistance continue to project this narrative which promotes a nationalist structure. Ultimately, this nationalist approach to identity adheres to a very settler-colonial perspective of nationhood in which a unified people must assert themselves politically and militarily in order to be recognized.  

Further contributing to this nationalist approach is the focus upon “Great Men” such as Louis Riel that attracted attention to the Métis community. The literature on Riel is vast and dense, and can be described using the words of Adam Gaudry, “identification with or against the Métis people is an identification with different mythologies about Louis Riel.” When portrayed in a positive light, Riel encompassed a French Catholic diplomat rather than the leader of a Native resistance. Importantly, it is these categorizations of whiteness; language, religion, and civility, that have perpetrated the narrative of Métis history for generations. And yet, as outlined by Gaudry, “Canadian identification with Riel has also been expanded to include an identification with Métis people as a whole, using Riel as a kind of cultural representative for the social, economic and political circumstances that led to the development of métissage, and later the Métis Nation.” Described by J.R. Miller, as a fascination of “climactic events” and “great men,” the fixation on figures such as Riel limits our understanding of Métis identity. Opposingly, the movement away from this fascination leads towards a social history which focusses instead

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59 Andersen, Métis, 17.
60 Miller, “From Riel to the Métis,” 5.
62 Miller, “From Riel to the Métis,” 5.
on the examination of life in numerous communities. Furthermore, as Jennifer Adese contrasts, “Métisness cannot be dislocated from our maternal relations.”

**Métis Women**

Out of resistance to colonial narratives and a growing feminist research, a branch of Métis studies emerged focusing on Indigenous social structures and men’s and women’s separate experiences. Jennifer Brown’s 1980 work *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* provided a social analysis of fur trade families, ultimately arguing the existence of a highly gendered society. Conceptualizing these patterns, Brown identifies familial patterns of “patrifocality - white fathers pulling sons more than daughters into the orbits of their own lives and ‘civilization’” and “matrifocality, daughters remaining, more often than not, with their mothers in the Indian country and having that familiar tie as a continuing core of their lives.” In later work she returns to this idea, arguing that “the study of women’s roles, social, economic, and symbolic in the critical years before the mid-nineteenth century ascendancy of white settlers, missions, and rampant officialdom, requires further attention and will repay us in broadened insights and understandings of the human background, and consequences of métissage,” once again reiterating the importance of understanding the roles of women in order to better understand the collective. Answering Brown’s call towards matrifocality, this work positions women at the center of not only Métis communities, but Métis identity as a whole.

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64 Miller, “From Riel to the Métis,” 10.
68 Brown, “Women as Centre and Symbol,” 41.
Simultaneous to Brown, feminist scholar Sylvia Van Kirk focused specifically on the roles of women within fur trade society. Van Kirk’s 1980 *Many Tender Ties Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* established a chronological approach of the evolution of fur trade wives from First Nation to Métis, and finally the impact of the arrival of white women into “Indian Country.” Similar to Brown, Van Kirk focusses predominantly on the relationship between fathers and daughters stating that, “in their desire to ensure that their daughters remained within fur-trade [white/civilized] society, many fathers came to play an instrumental role in promoting their marriages to incoming traders or to the mixed-blood sons of their colleagues” The underlying argument of Van Kirk’s work is that through the process of “civilizing” their daughters, they were placed in a vulnerable position “by making them increasingly dependent upon white male protectors and the comforts of the fur-trade post.” And while the enhanced role of fatherhood at the turn of the nineteenth century certainly brought forward upper-class company men to marry-off their young daughters, Van Kirk’s work fails to recognize the significant number of girls who were raised, as Brown states “in Indian country” with their native mothers.

While it remains important to study families living both within and outside of company posts, more recent developments have made clear that a collective understanding of Métis identity developed within communities such as Pembina and St. François Xavier that existed largely independent from company rule. Through a focus on these communities, alongside a deepening understanding of Métis motherhood, this study argues against Van Kirk’s idea of

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70 Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties,* 95.
72 Brown, “Women as Centre and Symbol,”: 42.
vulnerability, instead suggesting Métis women held positions of agency within their
communities.

The synchronous work of Brown and Van Kirk acted as a feminist resistance that
identified power within the social and familial spheres against the pre-existing Métis
historiography. Interrogating the existing narratives which focused on men, Brown and Van Kirk
began to lay the groundwork for a distinct feminist history. While it remains important to
recognize the colonial ideologies and gendered components of this period, it is also critical to
acknowledge the essential role that women played within fur trade life. This idea resonates
throughout both the work of Brown and Van Kirk, who highlight roles women played in hunting,
harvesting, making clothing and footwear that men were ultimately dependent upon for survival.
Sherry Farrell Racette has expanded upon this, stating that by the early nineteenth century fur-
trade posts consisted predominantly of women of mixed-descent, and that, “by 1840 the female
residents of the fur-trade posts were described as ‘the only tailors and washer women in the
country, and make all the mittens, moccasins, fur caps, deer skin coats etc., etc., worn in the
land.’”73 Taking this one step further, Racette goes on to argue “is there not also power in the act
of dressing? If the meaning of dress is constructed through multidirectional discourse between
maker, wearer, and audience, ‘maker’ holds an equal position in that communication.”74 Through
the work of Racette, the previous suggestions of women holding both agency and authority
within their communities is strengthened.

As the subject has continued to grow, scholars have answered Brown’s call to a focus on
“more detailed family histories” which would “bring out important and subtle comparisons and

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73 Sherry Farrell Racette, “Sewing for a Living: The Commodification of Métis Women’s Artistic Production,” in
Katie Pickles and Maya Rutherdale (eds) Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past
paths of change, as the experiences of these native families accumulated, and as persons outside them in turn responded and reacted to them, helping to confer on them a new ethnicity. More broadly, such studies would also contribute to better knowledge of Metis demographic profiles. Brenda Macdougall’s *One of the Family* provides an analysis of four generations of Métis families living in the Île-à-la-Crosse region of Saskatchewan. What stands out in particular within Macdougall’s work is the introduction to an Indigenous worldview of wahkohtowin. Importantly, Macdougall argues that Métis women fostered this worldview, suggesting that Métis women “continued to ‘live in the lands of [their] mother who was originally from the lands of [her] parents.” Steeped in both the land and language of their maternal cultures, Métis worldview and philosophy of life developed. Wahkohtowin therefore framed the way in which Métis negotiated their place in relation to the external institutions of the fur trade and the church, as well as the Indigenous lands in which they traversed.

**Métis Matriarchs**

The concept of motherhood has become influential in contemporary Métis Women’s Studies. Lucy Eldersveld Murphy’s “Public Mothers: Native American and Métis Women as Creole Mediators in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest,” highlights how Métis women during this period used their positions to not only mediate between cultural groups, but also negotiate overlapping ideals of womanhood, serving their communities in roles as “public mothers” which

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75 Brown, “Women as Centre and Symbol,” 45.
76 Macdougall, *One of the Family*
77 Macdougall uses the spelling “wahkootowin” in her work. Because of the oral traditions of the Cree language, differences in spelling are common based on differing teachings and dialects. In recent years, there has been a move to standardize the spelling of the term – “wahkohtowin” has become more common.
78 Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 95.
79 Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 243.
ultimately granted them positions of respect and appreciation.\textsuperscript{81} Similarly, Saunders and Dubois writing “\textit{Lii Faam di Naaysoon di Michif: Mothers of the Métis Nation},” place women at the center of their analysis of Métis politics and governance.\textsuperscript{82} Highlighting the custom of matrilocality, they ultimately argue that “the centrality of women in the fur trade economy and in the birth of Métis identity and nationhood lives on in contemporary political practice.”\textsuperscript{83} Even outside of Métis Women’s Studies, the wider field has seemed to pick up on the concept of matrifocality. Jean Teillet’s \textit{The Northwest is Our Mother: The Story of Louis Riel’s People, the Métis Nation},\textsuperscript{84} which despite being largely just another narrative surrounding climactic events and great men, pays its dues to the role of women and motherhood.

While “motherhood” has seemingly taken hold of Métis Studies in recent years, the concept has been widely critiqued within the larger discipline of Indigenous Studies. Outlining gender and power within Cree communities, Emily Snyder has stated that, “motherhood is often treated as something that opens up Cree women’s access to citizenship and law – particularly as an act of decolonization, revitalization, and reclaiming of gender roles and responsibilities, yet I suggest that, as configured in the materials, it creates a shutting down,”\textsuperscript{85} limiting women to be defined by their bodies. In hopes of mitigating this intricacy while also recognizing the historical reality of motherhood during this time period, this study draws on the work of Lina Sunseri, who states, “Although one understanding of mothering is related to the literal meaning of biological reproduction, mothering also encompasses other roles, such as caring for all the children of one’s own clan, caring for the earth, and sharing responsibilities with others for the wellbeing of the

\textsuperscript{81} Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, “Public Mothers” 153.
\textsuperscript{82} K Saunders and J. Dubois, “\textit{Lii Faam di Naaysoon di Michif: Mothers of the Métis Nation},” in \textit{Métis Politics and Governance in Canada} (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019): 104-123.
\textsuperscript{83} K Saunders and J Dubois, “Mothers of the Métis Nation,” 121.
\textsuperscript{85} Emily Snyder, \textit{Gender, Power, and Representations of Cree Law} (Vancouver: UBC Press: 2018)
community.”86 Ultimately, this definition enables a multifaceted understanding of motherhood which extends beyond biological reproduction whilst also recognizing community obligations under wahkohtowin.

Interestingly, there has been little work done specifically on Métis matriarchs. This may be due to the fact that little is known about the specifics of Indigenous women of this period, oftentimes only being referred to as “Indian Woman” in records. Of course, matriarchs can be the female head of families, but I argue here for a definition that coincides synonymously with Murphy’s use of the term “public mothers” in which women took on “activities related to charity, hospitality, healing, and midwifery.”87 Writing about her own family, Zoe Todd identifies her great-grandmother as a matriarch who was described to her by her father as “always present in the background, running everything from behind the scenes.”88 Todd continues on to state that “this notion of Métis women in my family working insistently in the background to shape and determine how relationships unfolded across kinship entanglements is very real and visceral for me. I come from a family of strong women who are unafraid to vocalize their views and to challenge the status quo.”89 This struck a chord with me, as it is reflective of my own experience with Métis women in my family, including, but not limited to my own mother. Coupling the title of matriarchs with the role of public mothers as defined by Murphy grants a space to renegotiate the aforementioned patriarchal context of motherhood,

87 Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, “Public Mothers” 153.
89 Zoe Todd, “Honouring Our Great-Grandmothers,” 175.
paying tribute instead to the mothers, grandmothers, aunties, sisters, and other Métis women within their communities that “worked insistently in the background”90 to establish a nation.

Theoretical Framework

Indigenous Feminisms

As scholars have continued to work to overcome the gendered gap within the Métis historical narrative, an Indigenous feminist framework critiques masculinist narratives in Métis Studies including the romanticization of a certain type of Métis life with the “overtones of machismo, perhaps a consequence of the vigorous physical demands fur trading, voyageuring, and buffalo hunting.”91 Utilizing an Indigenous feminist framework reflects and captures the ways in which power relations animated by gender and race, shape Indigenous lives.92 Sarah Nickel argues that “Indigenous feminisms have the potential to expose and destabilize patriarchal gender roles and the structures that sustain and promote continued Indigenous dispossession and disempowerment through colonialism.”93 While Métis men’s role in the creation of new communities was undoubtedly important, Brenda Macdougall explains that “the lack of attention to Indigenous world views, and the role of Métis women in the development of their children's social world have been overlooked as contributing factors in the creation of a style of life.”94 Exploring this time-period through an Indigenous feminist framework interrogates colonial narratives and creates space to examine the roles of women.

90 Zoe Todd, “Honouring Our Great-Grandmothers,” 175.
91 Macdougall, One of the Family, 93.
The literature that does feature Métis women focusses predominantly on traditional
gendered roles within the family and prioritizes the masculinized external sphere. Working
against this traditional structure, Lucy Eldersvelf Murphy in her work “Public Mothers: Native
American and Métis Women as Creole Mediators in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest,” states
that Métis women “found ways to mediate between cultural groups, by negotiating overlapping
ideals of womanhood common to both Anglos and Native-descended people, serving their
communities in roles as ‘public mothers.’” Within this position, women’s roles as nurturers to
neighbours, newcomers, travelers, and kin positioned themselves within both “public and
private, social and political” spheres. It is within this reconstruction of spheres, both public and
private, collective and individual, that we can begin to incorporate the principles of wahkohtowin
and otipemisiwak as theoretical frameworks.

Wahkohtowin

Concepts such as “kinship” and “relationality” have been used extensively across the
field as theoretical constructs. Wahkohtowin used in this study specifically engages with
Brenda Macdougall’s conceptualization which states that wahkohtowin “is a theoretical and
conceptual, rather than literal, construct that explains the Metis style of life or how actions and
reactions to internal community relationships were expressed intergenerationally through the

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95 Foster, “Wintering, the Outsider Adult Male and the Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Métis;” Ens, Homeland
to Hinterland; Heather Devine, The People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family,
1660-1900. (University of Calgary Press, 2004), amongst others.
96 Murphy, “Public Mothers,” 143.
97 Murphy, “Public Mothers,” 148.
extended family.”9⁹ Leah Dorion expanded the concept, arguing that wahkohtowin contains “the original laws and principles that guides how families function.”¹⁰⁰ Applying the term to family and child-rearing practices, Dorion focusses on community support systems and reminds us that the term is not restricted to familial relations and “we are related to everything in Creation.”¹⁰¹ Overall, the existing literature of wahkohtowin encompasses a theoretical framework of order, harmony, and reciprocity. Importantly, there is a gendered component to the concept, Kathy Hodgson- Smith and Nathalie Kermoal emphasize that Métis women’s kinship relationships play a fundamental role in the transfer of knowledge to the next generation: “While community Elders play an important role, kinship ties also play a significant part in the transmission of traditional knowledge. Gender is a significant element of this transmission as girls help their mothers, aunts, or grandmothers.”¹⁰²

This study adopts wahkohtowin as a conceptual framework along with an Indigenous feminist analysis to examine inter-communal and inter-familial relationships, as well as the connections between women and institutions such as the fur trade and the church and critique the inherently gendered hierarchy that placed men at the top. While it may be true that “colonial agents,” were “confident in their assumptions about their cultural and economic superiority enforced patriarchal social forms,”¹⁰³ it should be equally acknowledged that Indigenous women utilized these structures, oftentimes to their advantage. The 1821 merger of the Hudson’s Bay and North West Companies, alongside the 1823 establishment of the Roman Catholic mission at

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St. François Xavier in roughly the centre of the proposed timeline permits a thorough examination of the shift in social order following the colonial religious and economic solidification in Red River. Utilizing an Indigenous feminist framework, engrained with the theoretical principles of wahkohtowin sheds light on how these structures impacted women, as well as how women may have influenced on these structures in turn.

Otipemisiwak

Interrogating Métis women’s authority communally and institutionally builds upon the existing literature which focusses predominantly on women’s social networks. Through the utilization and feminization of otipemisiwak within this analysis, the roles of Métis women become central not only in the fur trade economy through their labour and kinship connections, but to the development of their communities as a whole. The “immense power” of Indigenous women as mothers bringing forth life has been analyzed by scholars such as Jeanette Armstrong who states, “the earliest instruments of governance and law to ensure social order came from the quality mothering of children.”104 In a recent analysis of Métis women as “mothers of the nation,” Janique Dubois and Kelly Saunders contend that “Métis women held economic, social, and political power in their communities that was unparalleled in the lives of their European counterparts.”105 Introducing a feminized conceptualization of otipemisiwak works to move past colonial understandings of gendered roles and recognizes that within their positions as mothers and caregivers, Métis women are empowered and represented both within historical and contemporary time and space.

105 Saunders and Dubois, “Mothers of the Métis Nation,” 110.
The collective self-consciousness of Métis nationhood and distinct peoplehood has been articulated through the Cree concept otipemisiwak, “the people who own themselves.” Diane Payment first utilized this term in 1990 in *The Free People, Otipemisiwak: Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930*. Focussing on the 1885 resistance era and its aftermath, Payment’s public history utilized both oral and written source material to argue that Métis society at the turn of the twentieth century was “determined to direct its own economy and which, by political means, asserted its ‘rights.’”106 Utilizing the term otipemisiwak, Payment argues there was a common understanding of peoplehood within Batoche during the 1885 resistance era, and continued to shape the community in the aftermath. Heather Devine’s *People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1660-1900* traces her free-trading Desjarlais family down the paternal line. Devine applies Otipemisiwak more broadly to a generation of free traders who “were not employed as servants of fur trade companies but operated independently, coming and going as they pleased.”107 Most recently, Adam Gaudry’s 2014 PhD dissertation “*Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk* - ‘We are those who own ourselves’: A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870”108 conceptualized the michif translation of otipemisiwak utilized as a grounding philosophy in an emerging political identity primarily within the major events leading up to the 1869/1870 Red River Resistance.

As can be seen within the work of Payment, Devine, and Gaudry, the application of otipemisiwak conceptualizes Métis experiences and actions in climactic events by men. Not only

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108 Adam Gaudry, "*Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk* - ‘We are those who own ourselves’: A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Victoria, 2014).
does this study introduce otipemisiwak as a fundamental principle in the development of a new people; I argue that Métis women embodied otipemisiwak and passed on this intrinsically Métis value system to their children. There is an inherent gendered component of otipemisiwak which has not been examined by scholars. I argue that the autonomy and agency in Métis women’s roles as life-givers, knowledge-keepers, makers, healers, midwives, elders, demonstrates how Métis women embedded the principles of otipemisiwak into the collective identity, and that they truly were the people that owned themselves. Otipemisiwak as a theoretical construct within this study allows for the examination of the power and authority women held within their roles. This builds upon previous work that emphasizes women’s labour and kinship as essential to the fur trade, and additionally argues that Métis women held a significant level of autonomy within their communities.

While wahkohtowin examines the relationality between women, community, and colonial institutions, otipemisiwak recognizes the power within these positions that women exercised as individuals who owned themselves. Anchored within an Indigenous feminist framework, these compatible principles explain how women who worked to benefit the community, were empowered through their roles in the community. This approach moves past colonial understandings of gendered roles and recognizes that Métis women were empowered and represented both within historical and contemporary time and space. Indigenous women purposefully used their positions, drawing on acceptable language of community caretaking and “mothering a nation,” to promote their political and community development.109

Methodology

Métis researchers have effectively demonstrated the value of archival research for uncovering Metis histories. While archives are collections of materials that archivists consider to be of historical value, and consequently often reflect traditional beliefs about who and what are important, they nonetheless hold clues to the Métis past. Indeed, while records relating to women and other marginalized groups were frequently not preserved in their entirety, researchers who apply creativity and imagination can locate their stories. As such, it was necessary, as scholar Bagele Chilisa describes, to read “against the grain to uncover blind spots and recuperate evidence of subaltern agency.” Using data from the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, and the Manitoba Provincial Archives, the goal of this research was to find accounts of women between 1790-1840 who have connections to the parish of St. François Xavier. The expectation that most of this correspondence will be recorded in the letters and journals of company men, proved to be correct, as examining maps and family-trees only provided a very surface-level narrative of Métis women during this period. Jennifer Brown has stated that the analysis of Métis history “must begin with the family the dynamics of relationships between women and men, parents and children, and their close kin and contemporaries,” and that “the development and roles of semi-autonomous female-headed family units need further attention in looking at Métis emergence.” Records such as letters and journals provided the foundation to beginning to explore these family connections.

As one of the largest, and the second oldest Roman Catholic parish from Lake Superior to the Pacific Ocean on the western coast, St. François Xavier has complete parish registers

112 Brown, “Women as Centre and Symbol,” 45.
beginning in 1834, and partial records dated back to the parish’s origin in 1824. Using this data, as well as available census data, I was able to utilize a genealogical reconstruction method to establish visual kinship connections and family ties during this period. What aided this process further was the work of D.N. Sprague and R.P. Frye’s 1983 *The Genealogy of the First Métis Nation*, and Nicole St-Onge’s “Digital Archive Database (DAD)” project that contains transcriptions of Protestant and Catholic sacramental registers, census data, and fur trade records to “document the lives and experiences of a variety of peoples in contact with the institutions that created the original documents.” The Digital Archive Database contains sacramental records from St. François Xavier between 1834 and 1889, Red River censuses as early as 1827, western North American fur trade documents from 1793-1858, and a voyageur contracts database which includes data from over 36,000 fur trade contracts signed in front of Montreal notaries between 1714 and 1830. Compiling and connecting this data allowed me to identify family names, marriages, baptisms and deaths in order to reconstruct family genealogies. A primary focus was placed on the family lines of foundational leaders of the St- François Xavier, Cuthbert Grant, Pierre Falcon, and Pascal Breland, who all connect through blood or marriage to the family line of Cuthbert Grant Sr. and his Cree wife, Margaret Utinawasis.

The importance of genealogical reconstruction has been outlined by Cheryl Troupe, stating, “Métis kinship systems are fundamental to this research. Knowing who you are related to...

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117 Nicole St-Onge, “Digital Archives Database Project,” https://dadp.ok.ubc.ca/summary
118 St-Onge, “Digital Archives Database Project.”
and where you come from locates individuals and histories in specific families, communities and places.” She continues on to describe:

One of the benefits of this type of research is that it reveals the life experiences of illiterate or marginalized peoples who left few or no written records, but appear in church and government records recording births, marriages and deaths. From this perspective, family reconstruction or genealogical reconstruction methods are useful for examining Métis lived experiences. Church records and government documents reveal traces of these experiences, and when pieced together are useful for studying family and community formation patterns and the relationship between gender and community formation and for exploring Métis social, cultural and economic traditions.

Archival research, through a framework of wahkohtowin, then is essential in understanding Métis family ties and connections rooted in place. Brenda Macdougall utilized this method not only to reconstruct kinship ties, but also to establish a “pattern of female-centric cultural development and outsider male acculturation through marriage.” As such, genealogical reconstruction is a method in which these complex family units, specifically the connections of women, can be visualized.

Still though, I was left feeling as though I was not doing enough to include the voices of actual Métis women. My first instinct was to pursue an oral history project, but I was warned early on that this would be difficult as there would be no one alive to give first-person accounts of the proposed time-period. Instead, I had the idea to pursue a series of conversations with Métis women to provide a foundation to the feminization of the terms wahkohtowin and otipemisiwak.

There has been quite extensive work done by scholars such as Nicole St-Onge “Memories of

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121 Macdougall, One of the Family, 112.
Metis Women of Saint-Eustache, Manitoba- 1910-1980,””122 as well as a Provincial Archives of Manitoba “Metis Women of Manitoba Inc. oral history project.”123 The archival project consists of approximately sixty hours of audio taped interviews of Métis men and women as part of an oral history project sponsored by the Cultural Heritage Committee of Métis Women in Manitoba in 1993. The objective of the project was to “capture and preserve a record of Metis traditional methods of imparting history and culture; promote culture for Metis youth and generations to come; educate Metis and others on the essence of being Metis; establish a formal Metis "Cultural Communications Network" throughout the province; and begin building a foundation of material, on the basis of which other projects could be initiated.”124 A focus was placed on the interviews with Rose LaFreniere of St. Francois Xavier, and Therese Breland of Winnipeg, who had direct relations to Pascal Breland and the early community of White Horse Plain. Utilizing this work enabled me to solidify the principles of wahkohtowin and otipemisiwak within the lived experiences of Métis women.

Terminology

The term “halfbreed” was first used in the North West Company context in the first decade of the 1800s, becoming more commonplace in the following decade.125 Jennifer Brown explains that the increasing use of the term “along with the older French Canadian terms métis and brulé, to refer to North West Company offspring as a group, corresponds temporally with some early efforts by members of this group to assert themselves socially and politically, particularly in the Red River area where… they were beginning to settle as semi-independent

122 Nicole St-Onge, “Memories of Metis Women of Saint-Eustache, Manitoba- 1910-1980,” Native Studies Review 17, 2. (2008): 45-68. St-Eustache is considered to be the “sister community” of St. Francois Xavier, and many of the families that had initially settled in SFX later migrated to St-Eustache.
123 Provincial Archives of Manitoba, “Metis Women of Manitoba Inc. oral history project records,” (1993)
124 Provincial Archives of Manitoba, “Metis Women of Manitoba Inc. oral history project records.”
125 Brown, Strangers in Blood, 172.
buffalo-hunters and suppliers of the fur trade, as well as intermittent North West Company employees.” As decades of scholars have navigated the field of how to proper “classify” the Métis, terms such as “proto-generation,” “proto-Métis” have emerged to identify the initial generation of “mixed” children from a First Nations mother and European father. This racialized understanding of Métis identity has been challenged by scholars such as Ruth Swan who argues instead that European men marrying into First Nations women’s kinship networks should be viewed as actual Métis as they acculturated to First Nations norms, whilst maintaining their European cultural heritage. Of course, these men cannot be considered racially Indigenous, but by challenging colonial understandings of Métis ethnogenesis, Swan displayed the complexities of identity which Innes later conurs, “depending on the location and period… more than one kind of Métis culture must have emerged.” Implementing the Cree concepts of wahkohtowin and otipemisiwak within this study answers the calls of studies scholars such as Macdougall, Miller, and Innes to move away from the denial of Métis indigeneity in favor of whiteness. Within this analysis which focuses on Cree worldviews and maternal relations, the term “Métis” will be used intentionally throughout this analysis to describe the families that relocated from Pembina to St. François Xavier who exhibited principles of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin within their day-to-day lives.

Returning to Red River

In an effort to move past the colonial influences and free the field from what has been referred to as “Red River Myopia,” scholars increasingly examined Métis communities across

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127 Macdougall, *One of the Family*.
128 Foster, “Wintering, the Outsider Adult Male, and Ethnogenesis”; Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves*
the homeland that developed independent of Red River. But even as scholars such as Macdougall established the influence that the Métis played on the church, the fur trade, and both their First Nations and European kin, there has been no significant study of this level of agency within the Métis elsewhere, and more specifically the Métis women of Red River. Furthermore, as can be seen within this review, existing literature of Red River has been limited to racial understandings of Métis identity, focusing on evaluating degrees of Metis adherence to notions of Victorian civility and whiteness. As Macdougall states, the racial paradigm which has perpetrated the field for decades is still with us today, “and we need to move past this preoccupation with whether the Metis were more European than Indian or more French than British because it undermines the authenticity of their identity as Aboriginal people who established a culture intrinsically linked to their homeland.”

Returning to Red River within this project is a reflection not only of the changing times, but of all the work that still needs to be done. The role of the church, language, and the trade are unavoidable within this research, but examining the influence that the Métis had on these “civilizing” elements of Red River has yet to be examined.

Looking Forward
Today, Métis Studies is a rapidly growing interdisciplinary field. Responding to this growth, institutions have founded Métis-specific research programs such as the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research at the University of Alberta. Recent self-government agreements, separation of the Manitoba Métis Federation from the Métis National Council, and largescale identity-fraud taking place across Canada and the United States have further contributed to the growth of the field. While this study is historical in nature, cementing the essential role that women played within the establishment of the nation accounts for the roles that they continue to

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131 Macdougall, One of the Family, 14.
play today. Unravelling the partial understanding of Métis identity that has been portrayed in the nationalist narrative which fixates on great men and climactic events, this work grounds Métis identity in Indigenous maternal relations and worldviews.
Chapter 2) Fur Trade Families

Historians have completed extensive work on both the Hudson’s Bay and North-West Companies and their relationships with Indigenous peoples. The primary differentiation between the groups until the late eighteenth century was technique; the Hudson’s Bay Company established posts, predominately at the mouths of major rivers flowing into the bay, whereas the North-West Company traversed inland. Increased competition between the rivals led to the Hudson’s Bay Company pursuing an aggressive policy of inland expansion and the establishment of Cumberland House on the lower Saskatchewan River in 1774. By the turn of the nineteenth century, both companies had established themselves in the northwest. The map below outlines what was referred to as Rupert’s Land, which was a large mass of land granted to the Hudson’s Bay Company by the English in 1670.

Figure 1: “Canada: Rupert’s Land.” City of Edmonton Archives, EAM-107
At the centre of the map is the Red River Settlement, which covered much of the southern part of what would later become Manitoba, the southern corner of Minnesota, and a large chunk of North Dakota. The region was officially “founded” in 1812 when the Hudson’s Bay Company granted Thomas Douglas, the Earl of Selkirk, some 185,000 square kilometers of land in the region. Contemporary references to Red River often are limited to the settlement at the forks of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, which is now modern-day Winnipeg. However, the region expands much further than this. The map to the left outlines the land referred to as “Assiniboia” or what this work calls the Red River Region. This provides the setting for this chapter and the following, as both Pembina and St. François Xavier are located within the larger Red River region.

This chapter outlines the larger social and economic context of Red River Region from 1790 to 1840. While the Hudson’s Bay and North-West Companies had different policies toward marriage, by the late eighteenth century

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there was a recognizable shift within family dynamics. By the early 1800s, the children of the unions between European men and First Nations women were recognized by both companies as members of a distinct social and racial category.\textsuperscript{133} Within the Hudson’s Bay Company, children of fur trade families began to be referred to as “natives of Hudson’s Bay.”\textsuperscript{134} The changing social dynamics led to a pattern of heightened hierarchal and gendered structures in the North West. Highlighting the role of women in facilitating community and cultural creation, this chapter argues that Métis worldviews of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin were passed down through the teachings of Indigenous maternal relations.

The turn of the century marked an important shift towards a more involved paternal role. Whereas Jennifer Brown has argued that it was common for mixed children to be left in “Indian Country” with their mothers, beginning at least in the 1790s, several children of North-West Company men arrived in Montreal for baptism and presumably some education.\textsuperscript{135} Resultingly, the turn of the nineteenth century presented a changing family dynamic in which European fathers were more involved in the upbringing of their children who were recognized as being distinct. Recognizing a large upcoming labour force in a competitive trade economy, the shift towards paternal involvement is both hierarchal and gendered. Brown highlights the “patrifocality” of fur trade society in which upper-class fathers would choose or be obliged “financially to favour certain children to education and a ‘civilized’ upbringing… sons were selected over daughters for such attentions by a margin of two-to-one.”\textsuperscript{136} Similarly, “paternal concern for their sons’ futures led officers to make efforts to provide for their travel, education,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{134} Brown, \textit{Strangers in Blood}, 159.
\textsuperscript{135} Brown, \textit{Strangers in Blood}, 171.
\end{footnotesize}
and advancement; for daughters they were more likely to try to arrange a secure fur trade marriage.”\textsuperscript{137} Expanding upon the relationship between fathers and daughters, Sylvia Van Kirk has stated that, “in their desire to ensure that their daughters remained within fur-trade society [as opposed to “Indian country”] many fathers came to play an instrumental role in promoting their marriages to incoming traders or to the mixed-blood sons of their colleagues.”\textsuperscript{138} So while increasing numbers of company sons were being sent away- either to eastern Canada or Europe-for further trade education, daughters followed a pattern of matrilocality, in which they would remain “more often than not, with their mothers in the Indian country, and having that familial tie as a continuing core of their lives.”\textsuperscript{139} It was within this setting, steeped in both the land and language of their maternal cultures, Métis worldview and philosophy of life developed.\textsuperscript{140}

By the nineteenth century, it was common practice for company men to find their fur trade mates among the daughters of their senior colleagues. By 1806, there was an official motion made to put a stop to marriage à la façon du pays, when a resolution was passed at the North West Company’s annual meeting that stated:

No man whatever, either Partner, Clerk, or Engagé… shall henceforth take or suffer to be taken, under any pretence whatsoever, any woman or maid from any of the tribes of Indians now known or who may hereafter become known in this country to live with him after the fashion of the North West.\textsuperscript{141}

Despite it being said that fur trade daughters who were brought up among their mothers’ people became “virtually indistinguishable from the Indians,”\textsuperscript{142} they found themselves to be exempt

\textsuperscript{137} Brown, Strangers in Blood, 152.
\textsuperscript{139} Brown, “Women as Centre and Symbol,” 42.
\textsuperscript{141} W. Stewart Wallace, Documents relating to the North West Company (Toronto: Champlain Society, XXII), 211, in Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, 88.
\textsuperscript{142} Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, 92
from the policy. The justification for this policy was multifaceted. Firstly, it has been viewed as an attempt to ensure that the large number of marriageable mixed-blood girls now available would find husbands within the fur trade to support them. And secondly, it was said that in well-established areas marriage alliances were no longer a significant factor in trade relations, and the families of the trade put a financial strain on the company.

The physical features of fur trade daughters seem to have been preferred by European fur traders. This can be seen within the descriptions provided by company men in which a daughter has been described as:

neither bold, nor bashful, her behaviour was free, unconstrain’d and remarkably modest. She was, with regard to her person, a handsome brunette, fine black expressive eyes, arch’d eye brows, high forehead, shaded with natural ringlets of black flowing hair, an aquiline nose, pretty mouth, teeth exquisitely beautiful, and the contour of her face an oval form…

compared to her mother who was:

naturally lazy and dirty; she is so headstrong she will do only as she pleases and she is very fond of men… The best way is to give her to the whites… They take women, not for wives- but use them as Sluts- to satisfy the animal lust & when they are satiated, they cast them off, and another one takes her for the same purpose, & by & by casts her off again, and so she will go on until she becomes an old woman, soiled by everyone who chuses to use her. She is foolish- she has no understanding, no sense, no shame.

These contrasting descriptions both encouraged and enforced the 1806 North West Company resolution, as the “modest” daughters were thought to make better wives. Expanding on these racial descriptions, Sherry Farrell Racette in her work exploring the later nineteenth century, stated that “this system might be visualized as concentric circles ordered by varying degrees of

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143 Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, 101
144 Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, 88.
First Nations ancestry,”147 and more specifically, proximity to whiteness. She goes on to explain the hierarchy of this structure in which “fairer women married to company officers working for their own families, possibly with servants of their own; Métis, and occasionally First Nations women, married to company servants working for both their own family and the company; and finally “Indian” women working with the men in the field.”148 Here, Farrell Racette is able to articulate a pattern in marriage trends across time where the women of white skin were associated with men in higher positions and would therefore enjoy greater privilege.149

Whether or not the company men truly believed the mixed-blood daughters to be “modest” compared to their mothers, it remains clear that despite their “lighter skin and sharper features”150 Métis women maintained deep connections to their First Nations kin. Evidence of this is shown in a letter from Hudson Bay Company officer John Lee Lewis, in which he describes his wife stating, “She is the daughter of an Indian woman, and much more the squaw then the civilized woman herself, delights in nothing so much as roaming around with her children making the most cunning snares for Partridges, rabbits and so on…. “151 While the white appearance of some of these women may have been more appealing to racist-colonial company men in terms of their understanding of “civility,” it is clear that Métis women maintained the cultures, practices, and lifestyles of their native mothers and families.

150 Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties 105
This culture of maternal knowledge sharing is further heightened in the communities of Pembina and St. Francois Xavier during this period due to the lack of formal schooling for girls. While schools for girls in the east, such as at Michilimackinac, opened in the early nineteenth century, it was not for another few decades that this trend trickled into Red River.\footnote{Sherry Farrell Racette, “Sewing for a Living: The Commodification of Métis Women’s Artistic Production.” in Katie Pickles and Maya Rutherdale (eds) Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005): 19.} A school for girls was opened in St. Boniface by two sisters from Pembina in 1829, and another at St. Andrews around 1840.\footnote{Farrell Racette, “Sewing for a living,” 20.} While the missions in Pembina and St. Francois Xavier were opened in 1818 and 1823, respectively, there is no clear record of official schooling in the areas. Gerhard Ens has outlined within his study of White Horse Plain that by the 1830s, the Parish of St. Francois Xavier had become a focal point in Métis society, with “its own school and communal life,”\footnote{Gerhard Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century, (University of Toronto Press, 1996): 26.} but he offers no evidence of what this would have looked like, especially for girls. And even when a second, more substantial school was built in the region in 1845,\footnote{Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 22.} the St. François Xavier community guide states that in 1850, Bishop Provencher, concerned with the religious education of the children in the parish, invited three Grey Nun sisters to the parish to provide further schooling for all children in the area.\footnote{St. François Xavier Roman Catholic Parish, “Liber-Historicus – Historical Glimpses Parish of St. François-Xavier – White Horse Plains, 1824-1931,” https://www.sfxrcparish.ca/history.html} This further leads to the assumption that the formal schooling system in the region prior was substandard. Even as late as the last half of the nineteenth century, female enrolment at local schools in the Red River Settlement was typically in the range of only twenty to forty students per year.\footnote{Farrell Racette, “Sewing for a Living,” 21.} As a result it is safe to assume that, within the families that migrated to St. Francois Xavier during this period, the experiences...
women in the intimate circle of home and family would have provided the basis of mentored learning.\footnote{158}

Wahkohtowin

Building on the concept of matrifocality, Macdougall describes that the women that grew up in the region remained in their communities to marry incoming traders or young Métis men leading to a “pattern of female-centric cultural development and outsider male acculturation through marriage.”\footnote{159} While Macdougall’s work focuses on the community of Île a la Crosse, similar patterns can be seen across Rupertland in which marriages were often secured by fathers, but, the married couple usually remained in the communities of the wives and their families. This notion of female-centric cultural development can be seen through the worldview of wahkohtowin in which grandmothers, mothers, wives, and sisters established the foundational base from which intercommunity and interfamily socio-cultural, religious, and economic alliances were formed.\footnote{160} It should be stated that the Métis “were born into a world where a degree of reciprocity and group cohesion was necessary,”\footnote{161} and the connections that resulted from the relations of Métis women led to a certain degree of political autonomy in which Métis collectively found themselves increasingly in a position in which they were able to negotiate and assert their identity and independence. The importance of these relationships cannot be understated, as increasingly throughout the nineteenth century, Métis communities grew to structure themselves around a core group of sisters within their motherlands.\footnote{162}

\footnote{158} Farrell Racette, “Sewing for a Living,” 23.
\footnote{159} Macdougall, \textit{One of the Family}, 112.
\footnote{160} Macdougall, \textit{One of the Family}, 126.
\footnote{161} Nicole St-Onge and Nicole Podrucny, “Scuttling Along a Spider’s Web: Mobility and Kinship in Metis Ethnogenesis,” in Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podrucny, and Brenda Macdougall (eds) \textit{Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility, and History} (University of Oklahoma Press: 2012): 62.
\footnote{162} Cheryl Troupe “Métis Women: Social Structure, urbanization and political activism, 1850-1980,” (Master’s Thesis, Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 2009), 55.
Métis lifeways, instead of being shaped by the economic system of the time, moulded the social structure of the trade. Brenda Macdougall expands on this stating that the worldview of wahkohtowin emphasized familial loyalty, and the roles and responsibilities of family members towards one another oftentimes “created a tension within the HBC hierarchy, as large, interrelated families asserted cultural solidarity within the workspace afforded them, which was oftentimes at odds with Company interests. Economically, men served as much as possible the interests of their relatives.”163 This can be seen extensively through examples of company men defending the roles of women to the London Committee of the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1802:

The women are deserving of some encouragement and indulgence from your honors, they clean and out into a state of preservation all beaver and otter skins brought by the Indians undried and in bad conditions- they prepare line for snowshoes and knot them also without which your honour’s servants could not give efficient opposition to the Canadian traders. They make leather shoes for the men who are obliged to travel about in search of Indians and furs and are useful in a variety of other instances- in short they are virtually your honors servants and as such we hope you will consider them.164

While letters such as this are often framed in a perspective adhering to the economic benefit women played to the Companies, there is an underlying sense of obligation in which men felt compelled to provide a sense of both social and economic security for their wives and families. And while this may sound inherently paternal, it is quite the opposite; company men depended not only on women’s labor to clothe them, but also their familial connections to aid trade partnerships.

Métis women often acted as intermediaries or liaisons due to their familiarity with First Nations customs and traditions after being raised in the lands and languages of their mothers. Paying tribute to the Métis wives of company men, Isaac Cowie in 1825 wrote that “the gentlemen owed much of their success in overcoming difficulties and maintaining the Company’s influence over the natives to ‘the wisdom and good counsel of their wives.’” Noting the specificity of the term “counsel” it is clear that Métis women maintained a degree of authority within the interactions between their husbands and families. Taking the argument that wahkohtowin shaped the trade one step further, it was ultimately the women who implemented this structure.

Families who associated with either company often made strategic marital alliances with other Company families. As was the case with families in St. François Xavier, embodied by wahkohtowin, a complex web of interfamilial alliances worked together and supported one another in the reciprocal family model. This in turn supported the Company by establishing a chain of connection upon which it could call for additional labour, supplies, and general assistance. These familial connections shaped the nature of the trade as it was expected that all relatives, no matter how far removed from direct genealogical ties, were recognized as family members, and, as such, were obliged to provide social and economic assistance and hospitality to one another. Using the metaphor of a spider’s web, Nicole St-Onge and Carolyn Podruchny outline that identifications based on expansive and extensive webs of kinship enabled Métis

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165 McCord Museum, Montreal, Robert McVicar Correspondence, 19 July 1825. Quoted in Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, 104.
166 Macdougall, “‘The Comforts of Married Life,’” 23.
167 Macdougall, “‘The Comforts of Married Life,’” 23.
168 Macdougall, “‘The Comforts of Married Life,’” 23.
people to endure, survive, adapt, and prosper within their environment.\textsuperscript{169} They state that kinship “was an effective basis for group identification that could transcend local and regional ties and allow for economic pursuits predicated on mobility to flourish and, in turn, reinforce the far-flung kin-based structures.”\textsuperscript{170} In other words, utilizing wahkohtowin as a basis for group identification allowed the Métis to flourish as a people. And as Métis families continued to intermarry amongst each other, they created a further degree of separation as a distinct people.

Material Culture

Nearly all we recognize of Métis material culture today stems from the work of women. The sash, flower beadwork, capotes, moccasins, and embroidery are all the result of Métis women’s labour during this period. Living in the lands of their maternal relations, Métis women repeated the gestures of their grandmothers, who in turn taught their daughters and granddaughters; creating new methods in order to meet the increasingly pressing market demands.\textsuperscript{171} Women created clothing that specifically addressed the challenges of the Canadian climate and were innovational in what became the customs of the country. Travellers and newcomers generally emulated Métis dress. In Pembina in 1819 Father Dumoulin wrote to the bishop of Quebec asking, “is it necessary to be very particular about saying Mass in moccasins out here where nothing else is worn?”\textsuperscript{172} This indicates not only the customary nature of Métis dress in Pembina, but also suggests an acknowledgement of Métis cultural practices as influential in shaping church rituals.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{169} St-Onge and Podruchny, “Scuttling Along a Spider’s Web,” 82.
\item \textsuperscript{170} St-Onge and Podruchny, “Scuttling Along a Spider’s Web,” 82.
\item \textsuperscript{171} Nathalie Kermoal, “De la chasse au bison à l’art métis : une contribution de la Métisse à mettre au jour,” Francophonies d’Amérique 7, (1997): 20
\item \textsuperscript{172} Grace Lee Nute, Documents Relating to Northwest Missions, 1815-1827 (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Published for the Clarence Walworth Alvord Memorial Commission by the Minnesota Historical Society, 1942): 189. Quoted in Farrell Racette “Sewing for a Living,” 67.
\end{itemize}
Sherry Farrell Racette challenges us to question, “is there not also power in the act of dressing?” explaining that:

If the meaning of dress is constructed through multidirectional discourse between maker, wearer, and audience, “maker” holds an equal position in that communication, simultaneously initiating and responding with garments that attract the consumer. The volume of Métis women’s production also speaks to their economic and aesthetic influence. While women across indigenous North America produced useful and beautiful clothing and other decorative items, no other group of women had their work commodified to the same extend. Through a network of fur-trading posts and camps, Métis women dressed most of the men engaged in trade or seeking adventure in the West. 173

Scholars such as Jennifer Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk have articulated the necessity of Indigenous women’s labour to the fur trade not only for survival, but for economic gain. Invoking a sense not only of autonomy but authority, Racette renegotiates traditional notions of power concluding that, “Métis women can be seen as creators and manufacturers who used their work to inscribe their voices on the canvas of the male body.” 174 This is critical to examining Métis history as women have been largely excluded from the written record. And yet, examining the creations of Métis women tells a story.

While it has been said that Métis women developed beadwork patterns which combined the technique taught to them by their mothers and grandmothers with the floral embroidered patterns introduced by nuns working in local missions, 175 Sharon Blady has alternatively argued that “it is too easy to concern oneself with the arrival of the Europeans and their relation to the appearance of floral patterns.” 176 Noting that floral patterns are common amongst Anishinaabe work as well, Blaney instead argues that “floral imagery for the Métis was the deflection of

174 Farrell Racette, “Sewing for a living,” 42.
institutional symbols of authority and power back upon themselves by means of extracting them from their habitual associations and reassigning them to entirely new purposes.”

Métis artist Christi Belcourt argues that the nature of their homelands and local plants inspired Métis bead-workers, showing their interconnectedness with the land. Ultimately, whatever the origin of the floral pattern, the diversity of Métis women’s voices can be seen within their craftsmanship. As beautifully articulated by Métis poet Marilyn Dumont in her work “Beads the Rights Size and Colour:”

If you follow the trail of yellow seeds
fixed by her nimble fingers
in the dark velvet earth
you will surface in the sun-swollen prairie
where buttercups blink open
coneflowers nod their heads
and dandelions ignore you completely

If you follow the trail of blue seeds
pushed into the nap of loam
by her callused fingertips
bold crocus will raise their furry heads in the raw air
bluestem will feather in front of you
and slough grass will inflict paper cuts if you yank them

And if you bend to examine a buttercup
your eye will follow the rim of its inner eye
convex and pollen-swollen
then, you will finally understand
why she searched countless beads
for the right size and colour

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178 Christi Belcourt, Rita Flamand, Olive Whitford, Laura Burnouf, and Rose Richardson, Medicine to Help Us: Traditional Métis Plant Use: Study Prints & Resource Guide (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2007)
Company Tensions

While the individual stories of Métis women’s work inscribed in their creations may have not been recognized within the highly capitalist setting of the fur trade, the economic benefit of their labor was essential to the trade. As tensions rose between the Hudson’s Bay and North-West Companies, women’s labour was the first to be discredited. This contradiction placed the work of Métis women both as simultaneously integral to daily economic life, and as a burden on company provisions, much of which their own labor provided. When friction peaked in 1814 when Miles Macdonell, governor of the Red River Colony, issued the “Pemmican Proclamation,” which prohibited the export of pemmican from the colony for the next year alongside the restriction on the hunting of buffalo on horseback, the Métis, especially the women were targeted. While buffalo hunting was a family affair, women were directly responsible for the making of pemmican. Émilie Pigeon and Carolyn Podruchny outline the process stating:

They placed dried meat on a buffalo hide and pounded it into a fine powder before adding melted fat to create a paste and adding dried and crushed berries to the mix. While still hot, the pemmican was poured into air-tight bison-skin bags and left to cool and dry in the sun...Women shared the labour of preparing pemmican. Some pounded the meat. Others melted tallow and boiled bison bones to extract fat from their marrow. Another group packed the pemmican into bison-hide pouches that would have likely been prepared in the winter.

Figure 3: Drying Moose Meat for Pemmican. Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, R-A-1011-1

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Elsewhere, Pigeon and Podruchny argue that “pemmican making was a time and space where Métis women controlled both the means of production and the natural resources required for its production.”

Despite the critical role women played in the making of pemmican, there has been no work done on how the Pemmican Proclamation and the resulting Battle of Seven Oaks affected Métis women at all. The missing presence of Métis women in the historical record may not be surprising, but despite the victory at Frog Plain widely being declared “the Birth of the Métis Nation,” dominant narratives surround men such as Cuthbert Grant, Pierre Falcon, and Peter Fidler. Not only does this leave a gap within the Métis narrative, both historical and contemporary scholars have failed to acknowledge the impact of the Pemmican Proclamation on Métis women. Furthermore, it reinforces the previous argument that the nationalist narrative which focuses on great men and climactic events provides an ineffective and incomplete telling of the Métis experience. While the most evident impact on Métis families would have been economic, it is hard to know the extent to which Métis women continued to work to ensure that families were properly fed, dressed, and housed during the turmoil.

Métis women and their kinship ties become the targeted narrative within the broader historiography with the 1821 merger of the Hudson’s Bay and North West Companies. Revisiting the previously mentioned contradiction between Métis women being both an asset and a burden, the new Governor of Rupert’s Land, George Simpson, tended to take the latter perspective. Simpson showed little appreciation for the binding nature of customary marriages, and it was his tendency to regard fur trade wives as “mistresses or concubines.”

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183 Brown, Strangers in Blood, 126.
concerned with the financial state of the Company, during a tour of inspection to the Columbia River region, Simpson wrote:

Almost every man in the District has a family. Which is productive of serious injury and inconvenience on account of the great consumption of Provisions; but by changing the men this evil will be remedied and the Women and Children sent to their Indian relatives.\footnote{Frederick Merk, \textit{Fur Trade and Empire, George Simpson's Journal 1824-35}. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968): 131.}

Notwithstanding the fact that it was actually the men who were living in “Indian country” with their wives and families, the introduction of Simpson’s new, white, wife to the region in 1830 added a further complexity for Indigenous women.\footnote{It should be further noted that Frances Simpson returned to England in 1833. With this, it “became apparent that white women could not adapt to fur-trade life,” and the prospect of mixed-blood wives was once again favoured. This was further supported by Simpson himself by the late 1840s when he “began to seriously doubt the desirability of bringing white ladies out to Rupert’s Land.” Van Kirk, \textit{Strangers in Blood}, 183, 187.}

Sylvia Van Kirk explains that “The status now attached to having a white wife was considerable,”\footnote{Van Kirk, \textit{Strangers in Blood}, 164.} and while she states they were “active agents in the growth of racial prejudice,”\footnote{Van Kirk, \textit{Strangers in Blood}, 173.} there is an argument here to be made regarding the segregation of the Métis within the Red River, which would further allow for their distinction as a people. This is supported by the work of Camilla Augustus who argues that “the reified identities produced by colonialism (colonizer/colonized; Newcomer/Native) are defined in relation to hybridized identities.”\footnote{Camilla Charity Augustus’ “Mixed Race, Legal Space: Official Discourse, Indigeneity, and Racial Mixing in Canada, the US, and Australia, 1850-1950,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 2013), 98.} So while the Métis were neither viewed as “Indian” or “White,” this thinking in fact reiterated their distinct identity as Métis. Furthermore, when examining the geographical separation of both Pembina and White Horse Plane from the Red River colony, which had envisioned itself as being “a little Britain in the wilderness” with a clear class structure,\footnote{Van Kirk, \textit{Strangers in Blood}, 131.} it makes sense that both...
communities would be a space in which Métis identity and culture could establish itself independently.

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined the changing social norms in the Canadian northwest which created a setting of matrifocality. Fur trade daughters being raised in “Indian Country” fostered an environment of mentored learning in which mothers and grandmothers passed along generational knowledge of kinship and creation. These skills empowered Métis women to thrive in the fur trade world. Despite heightened racialization of Indigenous peoples as a whole, Métis women grounded themselves in wahkohtowin and otipemisiwak to carve out a niche space in the trade in which they had access to a vast kinship network, and the ability to express their voices and stories through their craftsmanship. While this chapter has provided a broad overview of existing economic and social structures within Rupert’s Land, the following will narrow in on how the Métis families living in Pembina and St. François Xavier fit in to this system.
Chapter 3) Mobility: Pembina to St. Francois Xavier

The movement of Métis families from Pembina to St. François Xavier in the early nineteenth century took place within a larger system of societal mobility. St. François Xavier has been deemed by community historian Margaret MacLeod as the “first farming settlement formed by natives of the northwest.”190 However, the Métis families who came to settle at White Horse Plain maintained the buffalo hunt and continued to work as voyageurs and freighters within the trade. Despite the use of the term “settlement,” the farms were intended to provide interim shelter and additional food source for families who were otherwise very mobile. Established only in 1824, it is important to recognize the history of the families of St. François Xavier, and their notable origin in the region of Pembina. This chapter sets the scene of Métis families in Pembina, and then moves through the variety of factors of why they left for White Horse Plain. Furthermore, it analyzes how Métis, especially women, embodied and utilized the concepts of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin in defining themselves as a distinct people. Lastly, through genealogical reconstruction, this chapter situates the foundations of Métis families through deep kinship ties and matriarchal structures.

The economic structure of the trade combined with a social organization of wahkohtowin led to a lifestyle of high mobility for the Métis. Communities embraced a mode of life that happened to be mobile, traversing through the mercantile world of the fur trade and its contact points within the continental interior.191 Nicole St-Onge has contended that “there is a growing consensus among scholars that they key spatial expression of Métis life in the nineteenth and

190 Margaret MacLeod, Cuthbert Grant of Grantown (Mc-Gill-Queen’s University Press, 1963): 94
early twentieth centuries was mobility. The Métis economy included the harvesting of meat, fish, and other country produce, but it was also based on trade and transport activities. This kind of economy resulted in spatial organizations along networks of travel between specific locations for a variety of purposes.”

The success of the Métis within this structure encouraged both the preservation and adaptation of kin-based networks. Brenda Macdougall and St-Onge have stated that the central issue of mobility has not been systematically studied as a style of life, concluding that “our scholarly myopia that privileges settled spaces as homelands…denies the possibility that mobility is in fact what defined a people.” Ultimately, the high mobility and spatial organization of Métis life in the fur trade set the stage for the development of communities like Pembina.

**Pembina**

The word Pembina derives from the Ojibwe word “Nipiminan” meaning “High Bush Cranberry.” The region was historically occupied by the Sioux to the south and the Cree and Assiniboine to the North. Following the 1780 smallpox epidemic, the Cree and Assiniboine welcomed the allying Ojibwe to the area, who had expanded both north and south around Lake Superior following the Fur Trade inwards. The arrival of the Ojibwe pushed the Sioux westwards, but the historic rivals continued to conflict. At the same time, Canadian traders began arriving in the area. Peter Grant, a North-West Company trader, established the first known fort

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193 St-Onge and Podruchny, “Scuttling Along a Spider’s Web,” 68.
in the Pembina area in the early 1780s. In the coming years, numerous posts were established in the region from Pembina south to Grande Forks at the mouth of the Red Lake River, west to the Pembina Hills to trade with the Plains Cree and Assiniboine, and north to the Morris River at the mouths of tributaries along the Red, Rat, and Roseau Rivers, to trade with the local Ojibwe.\footnote{Swan, “The Crucible,” 7-8.} Pembina’s specific geography, bordering both the plains and parkland attracted huge buffalo herds along with deer, birds, and fish, which granted a level of independence to the groups within the region.\footnote{Swan, “The Crucible,” 10.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{pembina_forts.png}
\caption{View of the two Company Forts on the level prairie at Pembina on the Red River, 1822. Library and Archives Canada: 2835805.}
\end{figure}
Making the Medicine Line

The diplomatic understandings that established the forty-ninth parallel as the border between United States and British territories in 1818 were not in consultation with Indigenous peoples nor did they recognize the vast networks that constructed their homelands. Within his extensive work of Métis communities on both sides of the medicine-line, Michel Hogue states that “the contours of these homelands were contested and shifting, to be sure, and were defined by competing geographies, complete with their own borders and boundaries, and with their own histories independent of their interactions with different state agents.” And yet, these colonial boundaries have continued to shape Métis Studies even today.

Expanding beyond the fact that Métis residing in the United States are not recognized as an Indigenous People like in Canada, the significance of communities such as Pembina have been downplayed within the historical narrative. Ruth Swan and Edward A. Jerome state that this is due to public history displays of the North Dakota State Historical Society describing the residents as “Euro-American” as opposed to Métis, and that local descendants and their supporters have had to invite Canadian experts to support their efforts towards recognition. And yet, Hogue argues that “the experiences of these borderland Metis communities therefore offer a fresh perspective on the political, economic, and environmental transformations that reworked the northern Plains across the nineteenth century.” And furthermore, “their experiences show that these efforts to craft racial and national categories were ultimately based in conversations that were multivocal and resolutely local but that ultimately gave rise to

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201 Hogue, Metis and the Medicine Line, 9.
racialized markings of belonging.”\textsuperscript{202} So while the introduction of the border aimed to “classify” who was American and who was a British subject, the Métis distinguished themselves as a diverse people who defied classification. The map below shows the major trails in the lower Red River region during the 1850s, but more importantly the location of Pembina in relation to the border is put into perspective.

\textsuperscript{202} Hogue, \textit{Metis and the Medicine Line}, 10.
Material Culture

The presence of Métis at Pembina can be seen through strands of material culture that have both been left behind and described within the historical record. Métis Studies archaeologists have argued that materials such as clothing is highly indicative of Métis lifeways. Similarly, in her analysis of Pembina, Ruth Swan deems moccasins as a key “ethnic marker” of the Métis. Primary sources such as North-Wester Charles Chaboillez journal make multiple references to shoes during this time-period, providing moccasins to company men to ensure their expeditions would be productive, it is never specified whether it was the handiwork of Métis or First Nations women. Nonetheless, the required skillsets for making moccasins would have been passed down through generational maternal knowledge-sharing, and by the turn of the century, moccasins were said a staple of both Métis apparel and labour.

![Figure 6: A Pair of Moccasins from Pembina, North Dakota. National Museum of the American Indian, 21/2656](image)

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Also notable is that the Red River Cart, a key cultural feature of the Métis today, was first created in Pembina. Swan also describes the carts as an “ethnic marker,” stating that the Red River Cart is “a symbol of the transition from voyageurs to buffalo hunters.” As early as November 1801, Alexander Henry reported that families in Pembina were using carts with solid one-piece wheels, and by September 1802 they have:

a new sort of cart which facilitates transportation, hauling home meat, etc. The wheels are about four feet high and perfectly straight; the spokes are perpendicular, without the least bending outward, and only four to each wheel. These carts carry about five pieces (of 90 pounds) and are drawn by one horse.

As the carts increased in popularity into the nineteenth century, they granted the Métis another opportunity of economic and mobility freedom as they came to dominate the transportation industry.

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Due to competition in the Pembina region between both Companies and the local First Nations, Métis found themselves in a favourable position in which they could utilize company tensions to their advantage. Because of this, oftentimes the Métis would not take company contracts and instead trade freely to their advantage as freemen. Scholars such as Heather Devine have stated that:

most Canadien freemen were former engagés [company servants] who had managed to establish a measure of commercial autonomy for themselves apart from the established trading companies. In doing so, they were heirs to the entrepreneurial ethos fostered in the early days of New France, where only those were daring, ambitious, and skilled could achieve the reputation and wealth needed to become ‘men of consequence’ in Canadien society.  

Similarly, John Foster contends that “usually was an engagé who had established himself as a man of consequence among his fellows. Physical prowess counted for much, but not all; generosity and a penchant for an evocative song and an entertaining story were recognized as well. The man of consequence influenced others and affected the image of being less influenced by others. The man of consequence acted to become a ‘master’ of his own affairs and circumstances.” Both accounts deem that there was a certain “ethos” resulting from their French-Canadian “ethos” that enabled free-traders to foster a lifestyle that resulted in the physical and economic separation necessary for their children, the Métis, to be truly independent.

Marriages such as the one between Canadian trader Peter Grant who established the first known fort in the Pembina area in the early 1780s, and his Ojibwe wife Marguerite Ahdik


Songab\textsuperscript{211} had a total of seven children in the Pembina region.\textsuperscript{212} Promoted within the work of both Devine and Foster is an entrenched paternal understanding of Métis culture which fails to recognize the role that First Nations mothers played. Brenda Macdougall explains that while the role of freemen in fostering creation of new communities was undoubtedly important, “the lack of attention to Aboriginal world views, the physical location of Metis communities in maternal lands, or the role of Aboriginal women in development of their children’s social world have been overlooked as contributing factors in the creation of a style of life. As Aboriginal women married outsider adult male fur traders, they brought to their marriages attitudes and beliefs – indeed, a world view [wahkohtowin]– about family and social life that influenced the creation of a Metis socio-cultural identity.”\textsuperscript{213} Ultimately, it was this worldview of wahkohtowin, which Foster fails to take into account, that provided the foundation for these relationships. The Grant Family tree as seen below is one example of a growing Métis family in Pembina, raised in the lands of their Ojibwe mother and her relations.\textsuperscript{214}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{211} “Ahdik” suggests that Marguerite belonged to the Reindeer clan and her Ojibwe name was “Clear Sky Woman.” She was born in the vicinity of Lake of the Woods. Swan “The Crucible,” 130-131. Her husband Peter Grant noted that “native women were indispensable to their husband’s ability to be a good hunter and provider; for a fur trader new to the country, she could teach him survival skills and help him make it through the long Canadian winters. Her work included making and mending his shoes [moccasins], scraping the skins, carrying home the meat, pitching the tent and cooking the food.” Quoted in Swan, “The Crucible,” 90.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Swan, “The Crucible,” 6, 90, 134.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Marguerite Songab was remarried to Charles Bottineau in 1797, and they had four sons, and a total of thirty-seven known grandchildren. She was the matriarch of a large extended Métis family. While much is unknown about her children and grandchildren, the scale of the family trees shown here display the pure size of the family unit. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the large families that could be found at Pembina were Métis who had followed their fathers' economic footsteps with the enhanced aid and success of their mothers’ kinship connections.

Métis increasingly opted for positions as freemen in the early 1800s for several reasons. Firstly, the amalgamation of the North-West and XY Companies in 1804 resulted in large
numbers of unemployment.\textsuperscript{215} Ruth Swan contended that “they adopted the Indian lifestyle because it was more attractive than the routine labour and the constraining social hierarchy of the post,”\textsuperscript{216} but what is not recognized here though is a connection to the lands and families of their maternal relations. While it has been said by scholars such as Swan that the Métis “had an obvious advantage” as they were familiar with the languages, customs and traditions, and geography of their maternal relations, there is no recognition of wahkohtowin.\textsuperscript{217} Group solidarity among the freemen can be seen as early as 1807, when Nor-Wester Alexander Henry wrote “we saw all the different gangs of Freemen along the hills.”\textsuperscript{218} Métis freemen resided in the area did so not only out of the “ethos” discussed by Devine and Foster, but out of communal obligation to make a living not only for themselves and their families, but their extended communities as well. The combined worldviews of wahkohtowin and otipemisiwak, “being one’s own boss,”\textsuperscript{219} which can be seen in the increasing numbers of free traders at Pembina, is the foundation upon which Métis established themselves as a people.

\textbf{Métis Diplomacy}

The success of the freemen inevitably led to tensions with company men. As early as 1803, Alexander Henry wrote that, “those freemen are a nuisance in the country and generally a parcel of scoundrels. I never yet found an honest man amongst them.”\textsuperscript{220} In late summer of 1807, Henry noted forty-five freemen and their families residing in Pembina, and his increased frustration reflects his concerns over the effectiveness of their competition.\textsuperscript{221} By the spring of

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\textsuperscript{215} Swan, “The Crucible,” 174.  \\
\textsuperscript{216} Swan, “The Crucible,” 192.  \\
\textsuperscript{217} Swan, “The Crucible,” 146.  \\
\textsuperscript{220} Henry Coues, “December 20, 1803,” in New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, 151.  \\
\textsuperscript{221} Swan, “The Crucible,” 196-197.
\end{flushleft}
1809, traders were advising men working for the companies to move north to the Forks as opposed to Pembina due to increased tensions with the Sioux in the region.\textsuperscript{222} Although Pembina was closer to the buffalo migration route, Company men increasingly chose to reside at the Forks, as they could get the provisions they needed from the increasing number of freemen who resided at Pembina who frequently travelled to the Forks of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers to bring provisions to the traders inland.\textsuperscript{223} The increasing number of freemen at Pembina though, reflects that the tensions between the Sioux and Métis were manageable. Recalling Hogue’s commentary on competing geographies, the Métis found themselves in a region in which both groups attempted to assert their own boundaries. The negotiation of these Indigenous territories with varying levels of conflict, is reflective of the history of intermittent conflict between the Sioux, Chippewan and Cree tribes.\textsuperscript{224} Raised within these dynamics, Métis learned the rules and protocols of these relationships through wahkohtowin, which enabled them to take up space in the contested area of Pembina.

This nature of diplomacy led to the negotiation of a Peace Treaty between the Métis and Sioux in 1844.\textsuperscript{225} Prior to the peace treaty, the threat of Sioux attacks required the Métis to band together, forming strong communities. Swan explains that the Métis invented “new ways to offset local military problems such as hunting on horseback in large groups, they became economically successful and independent of the control of their former employers.”\textsuperscript{226}

\textsuperscript{223} Swan, “The Crucible,” 249.
\textsuperscript{225} While throughout the text wahkohtowin it is utilized in a kinship setting, it is important to remember that wahkohtowin outlines relationships with everyone and everything. Despite the Sioux being an “enemy” tribe, wahkohtowin would provide the framework for existing in opposition. The Sioux would have had similar kinship obligations and protocols under a different name.
\textsuperscript{226} Swan, “The Crucible,” 228.
she indicates the principles of both wahkohtowin and otipemisiwak, there is a lack of acknowledgement for the role that women played within these tensions. As noted previously, Métis women were seen to be “counsellors” whilst navigating trade relationships. And yet, the diplomatic skills, ability, and efficacy of Métis women are usually underrated and tend to be overlooked in the political and military histories of the Métis Nation.227

Pigeon and Podruchny argue that “both in peaceful times and in conflict, Métis women contributed significantly to their family’s and community’s diplomatic endeavours. Métis women’s conduct in times of both war and peace was governed by their efforts to secure the health and safety of their families, communities, and wider Métis nation.”228 Looking at the latter-half of the nineteenth century, Pigeon and Podruchny examine what they deem the “Bannock Diplomacy” of Métis in North Dakota. These skills that the Métis women utilized at the height of Sioux conflict were, as put by Pigeon and Podruchny, “acquired from her mother and grandmothers”229 who were knowledgeable in the historical dynamics of inter-Indigenous relations. Pigeon and Podruchny use the example of Sarah Nolin, who, “knew that peace could take the form of an appeased stomach.”230 While travelling, Sarah Nolin, her husband, ChWeUm Davis, and their children, were invited by the Lakota to a buffalo-based feast. The story goes that:

After the Davis family completed the visiting part in this feasting ceremony, it was their turn to invite and host their newfound company. To entice and appease the appetite of the Lakota, Sarah Nolin began baking Bannock throughout most of the night. The memory of old battles between the Métis and Sioux meant that their relationship was tense, and peace had to be carefully tended… She baked Bannock in a pan over a small fire until she made enough to feed the entire Lakota group. She knew peace required that the family part with some of its previous flour storage. Nolin’s culinary skills provided a diplomatic

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avenue for continued collaboration, as the Lakota invited her family to travel with them… The Davis family was able to continue on their way because of the hospitality they both provided to and received from the Lakota.231

This example of Sarah Nolin’s culinary diplomacy, and knowledge of community practices and relations, underscores the vital role Métis women played in securing peace and fostering cooperation with other Indigenous communities.

Company Merger

Interest in Pembina heightened following the Hudson’s Bay and North-West Company merger in 1821. Conflicting factors of financing and competition created a renewed concern between the Métis and the Company. Within the outwards correspondence of Governor George Simpson, there are countless references of him writing to post officers to reduce the number of company men across the north west:

“None of the men whose contracts expire next season are to be re-engaged;”

“Next season I hope we shall be able to make a very considerable reduction in the Establishment of Servants (at least 250 men) you will therefore be pleased to bring out all those whose engagements expire and leave no more inland than are absolutely required for the blessings of the department”

“I highly approve of your intervention to clear the district of as many hands as possible next season the country is at a present [overburdened] with men and officers and all those whose engagements expire in Spring should be bought out, at the lowest calculation. I think we should discharge 250 servants next summer and those clerks whose services were considered temporary (during the heat of opposition) and took advantage of the timed must be allowed to retire.”232

And yet, the more men that the company laid off, the more turned to free-trading, which led to additional issues for Simpson and the Company. In 1822, Simpson wrote:

I understand it to be the intention of the Committee that Freemen and retiring servants should be sent either to Montreal or Red River Settlement and not permitted to (colonize)

232 Governor George Simpson Correspondence, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (D.3/2) Reel #3M3
in whatever parts of the country they think proper, it is necessary that this should be
generally understood and acted upon as they not only interfere seriously with the trade by
keeping Indians hunting and fishing for them instead of procuring furs for the company
but they carry on a traffic with our Voyageurs which is very injurious to the interests of
the concern.\textsuperscript{233}

Within this specific passage, Simpson’s concern can be seen not only for Company resources,
but the level of success the freemen had in establishing a culture of wahkohtowin, as he
articulates that Indigenous kinship ties were prioritized over company work. The surrounding
First Nations communities preferred to trade with them opposed to the Company, which is an
identifiable element of kinship and good relations. This success led to Simpson referring to the
“men at Pembina are so much their own Masters,” stating that it was impossible to get them to
follow orders.\textsuperscript{234}

\textbf{Transition to White Horse Plain}
In an attempt to control the Métis at Pembina, Governor Simpson reached out to Cuthbert
Grant. Born in 1793 to Cuthbert Grant Sr., a North-West Company partner, and Margaret
Utinawasis, Grant quickly became a prominent Métis leader within his community. He joined the
North-West Company at the age of nineteen and was a key contender during the inter-company
strife stemming from the Pemmican Proclamation and is credited for the success of the Métis at
the Battle of Seven Oaks. Following the Company merger in 1821, Grant was employed with the
Hudson’s Bay Company, and in 1823 he was appointed as a clerk at Fort Garry where the
Company made him a special constable. The following year, Grant resigned and accepted a land
grant on White Horse Plain. The common narrative of the transition of Métis families from
Pembina to St. François Xavier describes Grant as a respected man who “persuaded” the Métis

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\textsuperscript{233} Governor George Simpson Correspondence, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (D.3/2) Reel #3M3 (1821-1822) (HBC D4)
\textsuperscript{234} Governor George Simpson Correspondence, Letter to John Warner Dease. (Forks: March 25, 1822) Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (D.3/2) Reel #3M3
\end{footnotes}
who resultingly decided to follow Grant to White Horse Plain. But the historical record complicates this understanding. In 1824, Governor Simpson wrote:

I’ve considered it highly necessary proper to withdraw the halfbreeds from Pembina and encourage them to adopt a more settled mode of life, in furtherance of which I have released Mr. Grant at his own request from his engagement to the company and he has thus established himself as a regular settler at the White Horse Plain on the East Bank of the Assiniboine River, about 14 miles from here and has got upwards of fifty families of halfbreeds to join him already.

There is indication that there was a degree of force to leave Pembina, when Simpson continued on to state, “the few who are still at Pembina do not consider themselves safe there and will remove in the course of the summer.” And while it is unclear why the Métis felt unsafe, it is clear that the popular narrative that has romanticized Grant and his role in the Battle of Seven Oaks and “settling” the Métis is much more complex.

The Hudson’s Bay Company utilized Cuthbert Grant and his community leadership as a pawn within a larger relocation scheme which removed the Métis from the Pembina area. Simpson in 1824 described him as “very serious [religious] and by management will become a useful man to the Colony and the Company.” And while Grant was respected by the Métis because of his role in the Battle of Seven Oaks, Simpson used him to the company’s advantage by offering him land, title, and authority over the Métis. This equally benefitted Grant, as he became “The Warden of the Plains,” and the Company, as the displacement of the Métis was a clear attempt to assert authority on a group who had increasing expressed both economic and cultural independence over the years.

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235 Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 21.
236 Governor George Simpson Correspondence, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives Microfilm 3M4 D.4/7
237 Governor George Simpson Correspondence, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives Microfilm 3M4 D.4/7
238 Potentially because of tensions with the Sioux in the region, but also it is clear that the Company at this point was not offering any assistance.
239 Governor George Simpson Correspondence, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives Microfilm 3M4 D.4/7
At the same time, the United States had sent surveyors to the region to ascertain the forty-ninth parallel to determine the boundary between territories. Pembina, which sat atop the boundary between British and new American claims had long been claimed by the Hudson’s Bay Company as part of its charter covering the Hudson’s Bay basin. In 1823, the U.S. Secretary of War sent Major Stephen H. Long to determine and mark the location of the forty-ninth parallel. After four days, the American surveyors, with the placing of an oak post, determined Pembina to be United States territory. Hogue outlines the mixed reactions of the Métis; while some skeptics determined to move north to join other Métis at White Horse Plain, others rejoiced to be on the same side of the border as the vast buffalo herds. When deciding whether or not to maintain a company post in the region in 1824, Simpson wrote, “if there is a post at Pembina it will have the effect of attracting the halfbreeds to that neighbourhood and expose us to differences with the Americans,” concluding that the Métis were “nearly all settled at the White Horse Plain.” Ensuring that the Métis “settled” on Canadian territory was economically beneficial to the company as it guaranteed a labour pool of free-traders who would now have no choice but to work with the Hudson’s Bay Company over American traders. Métis residing on the Canadian side of the forty-ninth parallel guaranteed a continued supply of bison to the Red River Settlement which ensured Company workers with pemmican, which fueled the trade. Furthermore, the peace-treaty with the Sioux would have ensured protection of the area with Métis settlement.

Aware of the principle of wahkohtowin within Métis communities, the Hudson Bay Company recognized that families would follow Grant out of community obligation. While some

241 Hogue, Metis and the Medicine Line: 27.
242 Governor George Simpson Correspondence, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (D.3/2) Reel #3M3
families did remain in Pembina, the clear utilization of Grant and his kinship ties to relocate families North of the forty-ninth parallel was intentional. Furthermore, it should be recognized that this falls under a much broader theme of Métis displacement, in which colonial authorities and institutions have for generations attempted to remove the Métis from their traditional territories. So, while the Métis lived a highly mobile lifestyle, the movement of families from Pembina to St. François Xavier is not an example of this. Instead, it is a case of displacement, an effort made by the Hudson’s Bay Company to try to “settle” the Métis to meet their colonial standards of civility and reduce economic competition from the free traders.

Conclusion

Through the exploration of the complex history of the movement of Métis families from Pembina to St. François Xavier in the early nineteenth century, this chapter has highlighted the broader context of societal mobility. While St. François Xavier played a significant role in Métis history it is crucial to recognize that the Métis families who settled at White Horse Plain maintained their mobile way of life, continuing to engage in buffalo hunting and trade activities as voyageurs and freighters. The economic structure of the fur trade and the social organization centered around wahkohtowin, contributed to the high mobility of the Métis. This mobility, coupled with an increased transition of Métis into roles of freemen, provided the economic independence and opportunity for Métis to establish their own communities. A mobile life depended upon wahkohtowin and diplomacy. This chapter outlines the critical role Métis women in particular played both in times of peace and conflict, utilizing their knowledge of community practices and relations to secure peace and cooperation with other groups. Ultimately, the movement of Métis families from Pembina to St. François Xavier was not a simple act of settlement but a complex process influenced by economic, social, and political factors. It sheds
light on the enduring resilience and adaptability of the Métis in the face of changing circumstances and external pressures.
4. Life at St. François Xavier

The region of White Horse Plain where Métis families came to reside has a much deeper history as a cultural gathering place. The western boundary, defined by a ridge which was almost completely out of the sight of intruders, was known to be an old First Nations encampment. Often referred to as *coteau des festins*, the region from time immemorial had held dog feasts, celebrations, and ceremonies on the site. The ridge provided a wide southward view over the plains towards the lands of the Sioux, ensuring an advantage point for the Cree and Assiniboine who often camped there. The area flourished with hardwood groves provided wood for fuel and building, lumber for carts, and maple for sugar; whilst the river provided a means of transportation both to company posts and inland. Legend has it that in the 1690’s tensions between the Assiniboine, Cree, and Sioux in the area peaked as the Chief of the Assiniboine who were camped in the area had a beautiful daughter, and both Cree and Sioux suitors presented themselves. The full story, which can be read in the foreword of this text, led to the region being referred to as White Horse Plain, as it is said that the white horse that was gifted by the Cree suitor, in ghostly form, has continued to wander the area.

The multiple names of the region follows a similar pattern in communities throughout the Canadian northwest, in which the geographical area is named in reference to people’s relationship to the land. What was originally documented as, *coteau des festins*, because of the feasts that were held there, was followed by the Legend of White Horse Plain. The Métis in the named the area Grantown, and the parish officially became known as St. François Xavier.

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244 MacLeod, *Cuthbert Grant of Grantown,* 90.

Étienne Rivard explains that often in Métis communities, multiple names coexist for the same place, stating, “the Native place name [White Horse Plain] was used for a while in parallel with the hagionym Saint-François-Xavier as well as another ‘official’ toponym, Grantown, named after Cuthbert Grant.”246 While the official name St. François Xavier indicates a shift in power towards colonial institutions, the fact that the region is still referred to today as both St. François Xavier and White Horse Plain reflects the strength of Indigenous oral histories within the region.

This chapter provides a deeper analysis into the lives of Métis families who settled at White Horse Plain, and how they utilized the concepts of wahkohtowin and otipemisiwak to establish themselves as a distinct people. In particular, this chapter uses genealogical

246 Rivard, “‘Le Fond de L’Ouest,’”160.
reconstruction to reiterate the importance of Métis matriarchs within these communities. From there, an analysis of the role that the parish of St. François Xavier played within the community, and how the Métis interacted with Roman Catholicism more broadly. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the changing economic structure in Red River towards the mid-nineteenth century, and how the Métis utilized the worldviews of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin to carve out a niche place for themselves which allowed them to thrive in the evolving system.

Families at St. François Xavier

Governor Simpson granted Cuthbert Grant a tract of land twenty-seven kilometers from the forks. The settlement extended six miles westward along the river to the coteau and six miles back from the river front. Each male head of household who had migrated from Pembina was assigned a river lot which ran 241.4 meters wide, and 3.22 kilometers (two miles) back from the river. As the son of Cuthbert Grant Sr. and Margaret Utinawasis, Grant was born into the fur

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247 MacLeod, Cuthbert Grant of Grantown, 92.
trade. His father was a long-time employee of the North West Company, and Grant followed in these footsteps, being sent to Montreal for a formal education before entering the company’s service. During the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816, and the events leading up to it, Grant’s leadership and respect within the community was utilized to the North West Company’s advantage to persuade the Métis to join their cause against the Hudson Bay Company. Following the merger, Grant was appointed “Warden of the Plains” by the company council, and his home was positioned at the centre of the settlement named after him. To the east was his father-in-law Angus McGillis, and beyond that was the lots of “all prominent French Metis and freemen” including: Pierre Falcon, poet and songwriter, who wrote the famed “Le Chanson de la Grenouillère” following the success of the Métis at the Battle of Seven Oaks; and Pascal Breland, fur trader and buffalo hunter who would later be elected to the first Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, representing St. François Xavier. The lots to the west were reserved for the Catholic mission.

The kinship connections that brought the families from Pembina to White Horse Plain, requires a deeper genealogical reconstruction. These “prominent men” mentioned above are all connected through blood or marriage to Métis matriarch Margaret Utinawasis. Born in the Qu’Appelle district ca. 1775 to a fur trade father and either a Cree or Assiniboine mother, Utinawasis was married to Cuthbert Grant Sr. around the year 1789. They had six children together: Marguerite, James, Marie, Josephte, Cuthbert, and Marie-Suzette, who followed common trade-family patterns in which the sons were sent to Montreal for a formal education, and daughters remained inland before marrying other traders. Little else is known about Utinawasis, and she is regularly mixed up within the historical record with Marguerite Ahdik.

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Songab, assumably due to the fact they both married Grant men, and the name Margaret/Marguerite is synonymous depending on whether the translation is English or French. And yet, this mistake can be fixed easily when we take into account language and location. Utinawasis, which is Cree for “Wind Child” is said to be a mixed-blood woman from the Qu’Appelle district; and Ahdik Songab, which Anishinaabe for “Clear Sky Woman” is said to be of the Ojibwe Reindeer tribe, which has its roots in the Great Lakes region. Despite these considerations, both are regularly still listed in the historical record as unnamed “INDIAN WOMAN.”

Figure 12: Cuthbert Grant Jr. was known to have been married three times and is suspected of an additional marriage à la façon du pays with an unknown woman. His first wife, Elizabeth McKay and son James disappeared during the trial following the Battle of Seven Oaks, while the reason is unknown, it is said to be because of his relationship with Marie Desmarais, à la façon du pays. Grant was married to Marie Mc Gillis in 1823, and they had eleven children who continued to engage in the fur trade and intermarried with other Métis families.

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249 Outlining early traders in the Pembina region, Swan identifies both James and Peter. She states that because their genealogies and backgrounds are not identified, it is difficult to say if they were related, but “It seems more likely that James Grant was the older brother of Cuthbert Grant Sr., because Cuthbert Sr.’s son James was baptized in Montreal in 1798 and James Grant was one of the witnesses.” Ruth Swan, “The Crucible: Pembina and the Origins of the Red River Valley Metis,” (PhD Dissertation. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2003); 136.

250 Thank you to my committee member Dr. Winona Wheeler for assisting with the Cree translation of “Utinawasis.”


While both women can be considered Métis matriarchs, there is little information to be found on either of them. It can be assumed that their names are only on the record at all due to the popularity and success of their male descendants, opposed to the many identified “INDIAN WOMAN,” who existed during this same time-period. Genealogical reconstruction is essential to building an understanding of who these women are, and the impact they had within a society that did not even value them enough to write down their names. This issue has continued to infiltrate contemporary Métis culture, in which a misunderstanding of Métis identity has led to an influx of self-proclaimed Métis based upon the finding of “INDIAN WOMAN” within their genealogy.\footnote{Darryl Leroux, \textit{Distorted Descent: White Claims to Indigenous Identity.} (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2019)} What has become an exploitation of unnamed Indigenous women within the historical record can only be halted by learning more about them; their names, where they came from, and who they were. Attempting to understand and differentiate between Utinawasis and Ahdik Songab is an attempt of doing this, whilst establishing the deep networks that Métis families created both within and outside of their direct units. A shift occurred here in which marriage and birth become more identifiable, due to the influence of the church, easing the process of genealogical reconstruction into the nineteenth century. And while it is necessary to
While there is no clear answer on how many Métis settled at St. François Xavier in 1824, sources typically say anywhere from sixty to one-hundred families followed Grant from Pembina to White Horse Plain. Among these include, Angus McGillis, Cuthbert Grant’s father-in-law, who resided in the neighbouring lot and had eight children of his own. His eldest son, Alexandre married Marguerite Mendemoya Bottineau, also from Pembina, the daughter of Charles Bottineau and his first wife Marie Techomegood. The increasing rate of intermarriages in the following generation of Métis at St. François Xavier can be seen within the case of the Grants and Gariepy. Three of Cuthbert Grant and Marie McGillis’ children Marie, Caroline, and James

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married in to the line of Francois Gariepy and Louise Gladu, another family migrated from Pembina.

![Gariepy Family diagram](image)

Figure 14: Gariepy Family. Highlighted in grey are the children of Cuthbert Grant and Marie McGillis who married in to the family. 256

The intermarriage between Métis families in the nineteenth century is an identifiable trend across the northwest. In her analysis of Île a la Crosse, Brenda Macdougall explains that “because of the frequency of intermarriage between these families, it would be difficult to consider these unions accidental or even random. Clearly, these are choices that were deliberately and methodically undertaken.” 257 Continuing that, “perhaps one of the overriding purposes behind such crossover marriages between families or, more precisely, interfamilial intergenerational marriages, was to build community loyalty and regional unity among this new


The same could be argued here, as the families that migrated from Pembina to White Horse Plain continued to intermarry amongst one another. These marriages not only provided a community stronghold within St. François Xavier, but reinforced the worldviews of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin. The Métis who resided in the area reinforced their distinct identity through intentional partner choices, heightening the already existing kinship and community obligation.

**St. François Xavier Parish**

Genealogical Reconstruction becomes much simpler in the nineteenth century largely due to the role of the church. The marriages that took place in St. François Xavier were documented from the point of arrival in 1824. A register was started in January 1834 for baptisms, marriages, and burials, but sacraments performed at the mission in the decade prior to this were all registered in the Parish of St. Boniface and can be easily accessed. Utilizing these records, Gerhard Ens established what he referred to as a family reconstitution model to evaluate demographic characteristics between the Catholic parish St. François Xavier and Anglican parish St. Andrew’s. While Ens provides a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between Catholic and Anglican Métis communities, his narrative does not outline social structures or family connections. While parish records are useful, and increasingly aid in the ability to provide genealogical reconstruction, they only provide one element of the narrative, which is largely a colonial one. The relationship between Métis and the Catholic Church heightened throughout the nineteenth century, but the dialogue has too often focussed on the

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258 Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 124-125.
259 Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*
influence the church had over the Métis and avoids the possibility that Métis principles of otipemisiwak and wāhkohtowin could have influenced the church at St. François Xavier.²⁶⁰

Much of what we know about the families that migrated from Pembina to St. François is through the written correspondence of Reverend Sévère Dumoulin and Bishop Provencher. In 1818, Provencher and Dumoulin were sent to Pembina “to resume the work of the Catholic missionaries in the Northwest and begin the work of Christianizing and pacifying the turbulent bois-brûlés.”²⁶¹ However, the residents had petitioned for a Catholic Mission in 1817.²⁶² In 1819, Dumoulin reported that there were forty families and three-hundred people at the Pembina Mission.²⁶³ In fact, Pembina was bigger than St. Boniface at this time,²⁶⁴ which further explains why the Hudson’s Bay Company was so concerned with it. When it was found that Pembina lay south of the forty-ninth parallel, John Halkett a Hudson’s Bay Company Director of the Selkirk Estate wrote to Provencher, ordering the “removal of settlers, of their own accord, occupied the lands at Pembina.”²⁶⁵ He argued that: Pembina was in American territory; Pembina was a cause of “mischief to the Indians;” and the Métis in Pembina were driving the buffalo away from the forks.²⁶⁶ In his response, Provencher noted that moving the Pembina mission would cause great hardship not only to the church which had invested money and labour there, but also to the families who had built their homes there: “There are several persons established at Pembina who

²⁶⁰ This study primarily focuses on Métis Catholicism, as this is largely the data that is available. Interestingly, Chantal Fiola’s work, Returning to Ceremony: Spirituality in Manitoba Métis Communities (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021), states that “St. François-Xavier has had extensive relationships with Roman Catholicism since its inception” (74). And while this is not to say that Métis did not participate in alternative spirituality practices, St. François Xavier “is the oldest Métis community in this study with the longest Catholic parish presence” (90).
²⁶³ Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 20.
²⁶⁴ Swan, “The Crucible,” 300
have gone to a great deal of expense here, because until now the question of abandoning it had never been thought of. These persons are going to find themselves worse off than when they arrived, which is the case with us. The establishment at Pembina is a great deal more valuable than this one.”

Father Dumoulin also tried to persuade Halkett to keep the Pembina Mission, but he would not change his policy.

Gerhard Ens argues that “Bishop Provencher ordered the Pembina mission to close and encouraged the Metis there to move to the Red River Settlement. With no trading post or mission left, most Metis followed their priest to the Red River Settlement.” Provencher’s original suggestion of Lake Manitoba was ignored, and he ultimately adhered to the community's decision to settle at White Horse Plain. Furthermore, an advocacy for the Métis in the region can be viewed through his correspondence on the closing of the Pembina Mission. Macdougall contends that “in the early nineteenth century, individual and communal, private and public expressions of socio-religious activities across the northwest reinforced wahkootowin by placing family within the context of a religious and spiritual environment.” It can be seen in this case that through expressing a type-of communal obligation to the Métis, Provencher was engaging in the spirit of wahkohtowin.

In 1824, the Métis at White Horse Plain first received church services from Father Picard Destroismaison, who was stationed in St. Boniface. Since the settlement did not have its own church, services were conducted in the home of Cuthbert Grant. In 1829, a chapel was built

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267 “Provencher to Plessis, August 11, 1822” in Grace Lee Nute, Documents Relating to Northwest Missions, 364.
268 Nute, Documents Relating to Northwest Missions, xvi.
269 Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 20.
270 Macdougall, One of the Family, 134.
271 Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 22.
and in 1834 the mission officially became the Parish of St. François Xavier, served full-time by Father Charles-Edouard Poiré, who often accompanied the Métis on their buffalo hunts.\textsuperscript{272}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{secondchurch.png}
\caption{The Second Church of St. François Xavier Built in 1832. Libre Historicus, Glimpses of St. François Xavier Parish.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{ll}
M. l’abbé Thomas-Ferruce Destroismaisons dit Picard & 1824 to 1827 \\
M. l’abbé Jean-Baptiste Harper & 1827 to 1831 \\
M. l’abbé François Boucher & 1831 to 1833 \\
M. l’abbé Charles-Édouard Poiré & 1833 to 1838 \\
M. l’abbé Jean-Baptiste Thibault & 1838 to 1839; 1852 to 1869 \\
M. l’abbé Georges-Antoine Belcourt & 1839 to 1840 \\
M. l’abbé Joseph-Arsène Mayrand & 1840 to 1843 \\
M. l’abbé Jean-Édouard Darveau & 1843 to June 18, 1844 \\
Père Louis-François Richer-Laflèche, O.M.I & June 26, 1844 to March 1846; 1849 to 1852 \\
\end{tabular}
\caption{List of priests who served at the mission of St. François Xavier. Libre Historicus, Glimpses of St. François Xavier Parish.}
\end{figure}

There is an inherent complexity to understanding Métis Catholicism. As outlined above, there is a conflicting narrative of missionaries being sent in to the northwest to civilize the Métis,

\textsuperscript{272} Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 23.
yet at the same time in places of settlement we see Mètis petitions for missions to be built, and missionaries joining the Mètis on buffalo hunts. Brenda Macdougall explains that “nineteenth-century missionaries and contemporary scholars alike have accepted the idea that the European paternity of the Metis made them more ‘naturally’ Christian or, at the very least their mixed ancestry made it easier to instruct them in proper Christian values and behaviours.”\textsuperscript{273} In an attempt to rewrite this narrative, she highlights that the social foundations of the Mètis worldview in the northwest were grounded “in the social philosophy of Cree cultural experiences and spiritual knowledge.”\textsuperscript{274} So perhaps these two structures are not as incompatible as we are led to believe. Macdougall observes that “Catholicism as a religion that also privileged family – natural and spiritual – and Homeness was wholly compatible with the worldview of the Mètis, and, as such, was easily incorporated into the region’s prevailing socio-religious structures.”\textsuperscript{275} Examining these relationships through the lens of wahkohtowin grants a positionality in which the narrative of Mètis being assimilated into Catholicism can be renegotiated, arguing instead for an acculturation of belief systems.

Catholic imagery presented a social structure in which everyone had a role to play. Both within teaching of the Holy Family, and clergy titles of Father, Brother, Mother, and Sister, the Catholic church established both symbolic and spiritual family positions.\textsuperscript{276} The integration of both wahkohtowin and Catholicism within Mètis communities can be seen through the role of godparents. On top of having a spiritual responsibility, godparents were also guardians of children if their parents should die, establishing an additional form of extended family.\textsuperscript{277} The

\textsuperscript{273} Macdougall, \textit{One of the Family}, 128.
\textsuperscript{274} Macdougall, \textit{One of the Family}, 129.
\textsuperscript{275} Macdougall, \textit{One of the Family}, 245.
\textsuperscript{276} Macdougall, \textit{One of the Family}, 134.
\textsuperscript{277} Macdougall, \textit{One of the Family}, 151.
role of godparents was easily accepted as it was compatible with existing wahkohtowin notions of communal responsibility and holistic understandings of family that extended into the spirit world. While the communal obligation of these relationships existed prior to the entry of Catholicism in the northwest, the clergy provided written records of these connections which enables researchers to situate individuals within a familial context.

The maternal nature of Catholic teachings may have appealed to the Métis who had been raised in a matriarchal family structure. Macdougall explains that some women were godmothers to thirty or forty children, which “was unusual in the context of godparenting in the Catholic church, but it seems to have been characteristic of Métis life. It was a way of extending the family as it is in the Indigenous world.” But furthermore, the messaging of the Holy Mother Mary would have appealed to the Métis. Métis Religious Studies Scholar, Paul Gareau, recently examined the flexibility of Catholic popular devotion, specifically to the Virgin Mary, and compared this to the diversity of Métis religious practices. But surprisingly, there has been no work done on the specific role of the Virgin Mary in appealing to Métis Catholicism. Gareau states that “for the institutional Catholic Church, the Virgin Mary was promoted as the central and distinguishing symbol of Catholicism, personifying the Catholic Church itself. She is arguably the most identifiable, yet complex and often contradictory, symbol of Catholicism.” And while Mary’s position within the hierarchal system of the church is often ambiguous, and always falls below the position of God and Jesus, there is an evident gap here in a further

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281 Gareau, “Mary and the Métis,” 203.
understanding of Métis Catholicism. At the same time, Gareau’s work is essential in establishing an understanding of how the Métis shaped the contours of their own religious and cultural lives and identities.\textsuperscript{282} He states:

while the institutional Church is ambivalent about Mary as a symbol, the laity see her as the driving force of intercession and religious salvation. This lends a tremendous amount of power to Mary within popular devotion and gives pause to the institutional Church… Mary is not controlled by anyone but rather exists in relationships that reflect cultural definitions and differentiations in which negotiated meaning is nuanced by lived experience. For the Métis…this relationship with Mary helps raise religious devotions above the web of discursive power inherent in religious structures of moral authority such as the Catholic Church. Theoretically, this allows the Métis to develop their own religious worldview and conviction, which can weather the brunt of institutional power and coercion.\textsuperscript{283}

These insights allow us to move past previous notions of the church being sent to “civilize” the Métis, and instead renegotiate the narrative to focus on the level of agency Métis families had in determining their own faith.

Changing Trade Dynamics

As Red River increasingly became a place for retired Hudson’s Bay Company workers to settle in the 1820s, the heightened population led to the Council of the Northern Department of the Hudson’s Bay Company recommending in 1822 that former company servants land grants be restricted to thirty acres, or three chains.\textsuperscript{284} In return for a land grant, settlers were expected to cultivate a portion of their plot, and provide six days of labour for the upkeep of the colony’s roads and bridges.\textsuperscript{285} Alternatively, settlers could buy their land outright for the fixed price of

\textsuperscript{282} Gareau, “Mary and the Métis,” 205.
\textsuperscript{283} Gareau, “Mary and the Métis,” 206.
\textsuperscript{284} R. Harvey Fleming (ed.) Minutes of the Council, Northern Department of Rupert’s Land, 1821-31 (London 1940): 37.
\textsuperscript{285} Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 32.
five shillings sterling per acre.\textsuperscript{286} When the Hudson’s Bay Company took over administration of the colony in 1835, this was the established policy towards land tenure. But St. François Xavier was an exception to this. Cuthbert Grant viewed the land as his personal seigneury and parcelled out land to the Métis in twelve-chain lots.\textsuperscript{287} By 1827, the settlement consisted of nineteen permanent families with a total of one-hundred-eleven inhabitants.\textsuperscript{288} By 1832, the settlement had grown to fifty-seven families (two-hundred-ninety-four individuals) and by 1835, to one-hundred-two families (five-hundred-four individuals).\textsuperscript{289} Families supplemented the produce of their buffalo hunts and river-lot farms with seasonal labour for the Hudson’s Bay Company, hunting, and fishing. After a few years of bad luck, the years of 1827-1835 provided a succession of good crops which stabilized the region’s economy, which can be seen in the rapidly increasing population.

The following table provides further details into the specific communities that resided in St. François Xavier in 1835. Amalgamating data from Frye and Sprague’s \textit{The Genealogy of the First Métis Nation: The Development and Dispersal of the Red River Settlement, 1820-1900}, specifically “Table 1: Genealogy of Red River Households, 1818-1870,” and “Table 2: Family Size, Personal Property, and Geographical Location of Land Owners, 1835,” a more in-depth analysis of the families of White Horse Plain is provided.\textsuperscript{290} Information was initially drawn from table two, to get a better sense of who exactly was living in the region and where. From there, data was pulled from table one to get a better sense of the demographics of St. François

\textsuperscript{287} Ens, \textit{Homeland to Hinterland}, 33; MacLeod, \textit{Cuthbert Grant of Grantown}, 92-93.
\textsuperscript{288} Ens, \textit{Homeland to Hinterland}, 22.
\textsuperscript{289} Ens, \textit{Homeland to Hinterland}, 22.
Xavier. Gaps were left in the chart either because there was no coordinating data in Table 1, or there were too many of the same name to clarify exactly who was being referenced. The records show that nearly everyone living in White Horse Plain in 1835 was Métis. In alternate cases such as Charles Gladu, a European, it was his Métis wife, Marie Ross, who connected him to the larger community. Similarly, although Angus McGillis was European and his wife Marguerite is listed as “Indian,” he is directly connected to the community through his Métis daughter, Marie, who married Cuthbert Grant. The table allows us not only a glimpse into who was living in the region, but also where they were located. For example, Cuthbert Grant owned lot number 183, and his father-in-law, lot 184. Likewise, Henry Poitras owned lot 200, next to his widowed mother, Margaret in lot 199. By analyzing the names and locations of these individuals, we can begin to create an image of how they related to one another.

Landowners in St. François Xavier, 1835

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Lot Number</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Wife’s Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambrose Allard</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Marie Vestreau</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Arcand</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Angelique Delorme</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Belgarde</td>
<td>172</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francois Bonneau</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Emilie Wells</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Brelan</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Angelique Methot</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Baptiste Boisvert</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptiste Bruyere</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Delorme</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brigitte Villebrune</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre Falcon</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Marie Grant</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoinne Fagnant</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Josephte Pelletier</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Fagnant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Fiddler</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Flammand</td>
<td>159+160</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marguerite Moreau</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francois Fournier</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Angelique Methot</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh Baptiste Gariepy</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Judith Cardinal</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Gariepy</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Josephte Ducharme</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Gladu</td>
<td>141+142</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marie Ross</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoine Goneville</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marguerite Labine</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuthbert Grant</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Marie McGillis</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoine Houle</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Josephte Louzon</td>
<td>Métis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Esop Ladoux</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>Louise Desjarlais</td>
<td>Métis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the 1820s, organized buffalo brigades began to replace more individualized hunting, and as the population within the Red River Settlement increased, so did the size of the hunts. The first hunts in the 1820s comprised five to six-hundred carts; by the mid-1830s this had increased to nearly one thousand; and by 1840 more than twelve-hundred carts accompanied the summer hunt.\footnote{Ens explains that: “The buffalo hunt out of Red River comprised three different parties. One was the Pembina Metis who had not moved to St Francois Xavier in the 1820s. Pembina was not only the rendezvous where all three parties met in council before heading out onto the plains…The second group was the 'main river party,' which consisted of those Metis who lived outside of Red River.”} Ens explains that: “The buffalo hunt out of Red River comprised three different parties. One was the Pembina Metis who had not moved to St Francois Xavier in the 1820s. Pembina was not only the rendezvous where all three parties met in council before heading out onto the plains…The second group was the 'main river party,' which consisted of those Metis who lived outside of Red River.”\footnote{R.P. Frye, D.N. Sprague, \textit{The Genealogy of the First Métis Nation}: \textit{Homeland to Hinterland}, 39.}
along the Red River northward from St Boniface. The third group was the Metis hunters of St Francois Xavier. By the 1850s, the size of the hunt had increased to such an extent that the St Francois Xavier hunters formed a separate expedition.”

The opening of the American fur markets after 1844 further transformed the Métis economy in Red River, allowing for the specialized Métis to politically assert themselves.

Families such as the Gariepy’s, Falcon’s, Landry’s, Beaudry’s, Dumont’s, and Trottier’s who resided at St. François Xavier were largely defined by the buffalo hunt. This is to be expected, as many of the families who had lived in Pembina to begin with had migrated there specifically for the hunt. Macleod describes that “The White Horse Plain’s hunt would come down to the Passage and proceed southward along the same trail as the main river party to the rendezvous. Their start would be slow, confused, and noisy, as the whole settlement, except for the very old and very young- men, women, dogs, horses, and carts- moved out.”

There has been a fixation on the political and military traditions of the Métis on the hunt, but Brenda Macdougall and Nicole St-Onge argue that the buffalo hunts are both a representation and a product of the family structure of the Plains Métis: “we need to reframe the paradigm by not just looking at regional economies, but also at who engaged in this economy and evaluating how a socio-cultural network to support this complex economic activity was established.”

By the 1850s, the brigade comprised of thirty families, and approximately three-hundred people. While we are unable to identify all the individuals, at the core of the brigade were three Laframboise sisters, Ursule, Philomene, and Angelique.

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293 Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 44.
294 MacLeod, Cuthbert Grant of Grantown, 110.
The work of Macdougall and St-Onge has revealed that women held agency and authority within the brigades. As St-Onge stated, “A single Métis women could butcher upwards of ten bison carcasses a day. Métis women were thus crucial both for their roles of bringing together a brigade and for their skills in the transformation process needed to produce the pemmican and robes.” Furthermore, we see increasing examples during this period of women expressing their agency. For example, Cecilia Boyer, wife of buffalo hunter Norbert Welsh, both seen in the figure above, refused to prepare the meat and hide from a buffalo he had taken in sport rather than out of necessity. While regulations were established in the 1840’s through the “Laws of the Buffalo Hunt,” Cheryl Troupe further explains that “by refusing to fulfill her economic role in the hunt, Boyer was asserting her own political will and understanding of traditional protocols related to killing animals.”

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298 Mary Weekes, The Last Buffalo Hunter (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1994): 43.
held by women in their communities demonstrated by their contributions to the transformation process and active expression of agency is exemplified by Boyer’s refusal to engage in wasteful hunting processes.\textsuperscript{300}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Métis Traditional Laws of the Hunt</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No buffalo to be run on the Sabbath-Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. No party to fork off, lag behind, or go before without permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No person or party to run buffalo before the general order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Every captain with his men, in turn, to patrol the camp, and keep guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. For the first trespass against these laws, the offender to have his saddle and brindle cut up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. For the second offence, the coat be taken off the offender’s back and be cut up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. For the third offence, the offender to be flogged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Any person convicted of theft, even to the value of a sinew, to be brought to the middle of the camo, and the crier to call our his or her name three times, adding the word “Thief,” at each time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17: John Burrows, "Métis Legal Traditions," in Indigenous Legal Traditions in Canada, explains that "it is also important to note that this set of laws was not a complete Code for the hunt. There were in addition significant customary law principles involving the respectful killing and use of an animal. Métis law also extended to trade, family obligations, political organization and land use.” (Law Commission of Canada, 2006): 53-54.

The changing dynamics of the fur trade, and the niche economic roles that Métis had carved out for themselves, the growth of the buffalo hunt, population growth, and overall prosperity granted the Métis an independence from the Hudson’s Bay Company. At the same time, as the Hudson’s Bay Company tried to cut back on spending, there was a recognition that locally sourced goods provided an opportunity to reduce expenditures.\textsuperscript{301} In 1822 the council for the Northern Department noted the presence of women’s labour as a means to move to local

\textsuperscript{300} While this one example does not mean Boyer’s actions were the norm, it could potentially indicate a trend amongst Métis women.

manufacture: “Our Slops [cheap ready-made clothing such as cotton and flannel shirts, jackets, coats, vests and trousers] are generally of good quality and by no means extravagantly priced, but as other measure of Economy, we have it in contemplation to make up the Clothes principally at this place…”

And by 1840, the women residing at fur-trade posts were described as “the only tailors and washer women in the country, and make all the mittens, moccasins, fur caps, deer skin coats, etc., etc., worn in the land.” So it can be seen that in addition to dressing their own families, Métis women dressed a steady stream of men coming to the northwest as travellers, adventurers, and hunters. As White Horse Plain was located at the edge of the Red River Settlement, Governor Simpson usually directed travellers going long distances to Grant. And while the women have not been included in this narrative, it can be assumed that just as they did across the northwest, the Métis women would provide clothing, shelter, and hospitality to travellers.

The power of dressing is reflected within the historical narrative as travellers and newcomers generally emulated Métis dress. Hudson’s Bay Company trader Robert Ballantyne described:

After donning a pair of deer-skin trousers, he proceeded to put on three pair of blanket socks, and over these a pair of moose-skin moccasins. Then a pair of blue cloth leggings were hauled over his trousers, partly to keep the snow from sticking to them, and partly for warmth. After this he put on a leather capote edged with fur. This coat was very warm, being lined with flannel, and overlapped very much in front. It was fastened with a scarlet worsted belt round the waist, and with a loop at the throat. A pair of thick mittens made of deer-skin hung round his shoulders by a worsted cord; and his neck was wrapped in a huge shawl. . . A fur cap with ear-pieces completed his costume.

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305 MacLeod, Cuthbert Grant of Grantown, 106.
Ruth Swan explains that “This is an example of material culture because dress was often the most obvious outward expression of mixed heritage. The Métis adopted the most practical of Aboriginal elements and moccasins were at the top of the list for those who valued comfortable footwear.” Travellers described Métis dress as “both comfortable and ornamental,” and by the mid-nineteenth century, Métis women in Red River were described by Robert Ballantyne as “generally very pretty; they make excellent wives… with beads, and brightly coloured porcupine’s quills, and silk, they work the most beautiful devices on the moccasins, leggings and leather coats worn by the inhabitants; and during the long winter months, they spin, and weave an excellent kind of cloth from the wool produced by the sheep of the settlement, mixed with that

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308 George Winship, “My First Flat-Boat Ride down the Red River, and Incidents Connected Therewith,” (1914), 2. MG3 B15, AM.
of the buffalo.” The intricate and practical expression of Métis material culture through their distinctive dress served as a tangible representation of their distinct identity, and ability to adapt to a changing economic landscape. Métis women asserted themselves and their voices within their work, negotiating power within their roles as makers.

The mid-nineteenth century marked an economic shift within the northwest. Gerhard Ens has deemed this a “Transition to Market Capitalism,” that occurred from 1840-1870, claiming that “with the rise of manufacturing and production for market, the Metis family was no longer a closed unit of production and consumption; instead, it became enmeshed in a complex network of commerce.” He further states that this new system “fragmented Metis communities,” but the increased rates of intermarriages between families seems to say otherwise. Alternatively, the success that the Métis found within the changing economic system was owed largely to shared worldviews of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin. The combined principles of wanting to establish oneself, alongside a kinship-based community enabled the Métis to flourish in the buffalo hunt and heightened trade. This is especially true for the Métis women at St. François Xavier who continued subsistence production for their own needs while simultaneously producing for a market, managing both resources and the means of production.

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310 Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 73.  
311 Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 74.  
Conclusion

This thesis conclusively establishes the authoritative and indispensable role of Métis women in the formation of a distinct Métis identity. Through examination of primary sources and existing research surrounding the Red River Settlement, it is clear that Métis women played a fundamental role in the development of their communities. The principles of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin acted as guiding principles throughout this research, emphasizing the agency, autonomy, and interconnectedness of Métis women in shaping the social, cultural, and political fabric of the Métis Nation. Through their roles as life-givers, knowledge-keepers, makers, healers, midwives, and elders, Métis women embedded the principles of otipemisiwak into the collective identity, asserting themselves as the people who owned themselves. Furthermore, the concept of wahkohtowin established the framework for kinship and relationships both within the community and beyond.

By illuminating the experiences and contributions of Métis women, this research fills a significant gap in the existing historiography, which has predominantly focused on male leaders and narratives of colonial resistance. This thesis challenges the dominant colonial narratives of individualism, capitalism, and patriarchy that have marginalized their histories and voices. It underscores the urgent need to recognize and value leadership and the presence of Métis women within their communities. Moreover, this study emphasized the significance of community-engaged histories, oral traditions, and the inclusion of women’s voices in historical research. By placing Métis women’s experiences and stories at the forefront, this thesis contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Métis identity and its ongoing significance. It serves as a call to continue the exploration of Métis women’s roles and experiences within the broader context of Indigenous history and the fight for self-determination.
The chapter on “Fur Trade Families” provides valuable insights into the social and economic landscape of Red River during the period from 1790 to 1840. It reflects the evolving dynamics within fur trade families, particularly the shifting roles of fathers, whilst emphasizing the significance of Indigenous maternal relations in passing down Métis worldviews and life philosophies. The chapter explores the hierarchal and gendered structures within the fur trade society, where sons were favored for education and advancement, while daughters often remained with their mothers in their homelands. It underscores the cultural development fostered by women and the significance of wahkohtowin, a worldview that emphasized familial loyalty and shaped the social structure of the fur trade. Ultimately, the chapter deepens our understanding of the development of Métis culture and identity within complex dynamics of fur trade social structures.

“Mobility: Pembina to St. François Xavier” explores the dynamic and multifaceted nature of Métis society in the nineteenth century. It highlights the significance of St. François Xavier as the “first farming settlement formed by natives of the northwest” and emphasizes the transitional nature of the farms, which provided temporary shelter and additional food sources for the mobile Métis families. The chapter examines the factors that led to the migration of Métis families from Pembina to White Horse Plain, underscoring the role of the fur trade and the mobility it engendered. Additionally, this work identifies the transition of the community as a piece of the larger narrative surrounding Métis displacement, recognizing the move as part of a colonial relocation scheme which would benefit the Red River Settlement. It delves into the way in which Métis, particularly women, embraced and embodied the principles of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin, defining themselves as a distinct people within this structure. The chapter acknowledges the impact of colonial boundaries on the historical narrative of the Métis Nation,
underscoring the efforts of local descendants and Canadian experts in reclaiming and recognizing the Métis heritage in places like Pembina. The presence of material culture, such as moccasins and Red River Carts, further accentuates the distinctiveness of Métis lifeways and their economic autonomy and freedom of movement. Moreover, the chapter examines the emergence of freemen in Pembina and the complex kinship ties that shaped Métis families and communities. Most importantly, this chapter moves away from masculine narratives that attribute the success of the Métis to a certain “ethos” and instead underscores the significance of Indigenous worldviews, such as wahkohtowin, in the creation of a Métis socio-cultural identity. Lastly, the chapter explores Métis diplomacy and the negotiation of relationships with First Nations, emphasizing the role of Métis women as key contributors to diplomatic endeavors. Ultimately, this chapter offers valuable insights into the historical context, social dynamics, and cultural distinctiveness of the Métis families in Pembina and their subsequent migration to St. François Xavier.

Examining White Horse Plain as a significant historical and culture gathering place, the chapter “Life at St. François Xavier” explores the deep connection between land and people. Emphasizing the importance of methods such as genealogical reconstruction, it highlights the role of Métis matriarchs and the interconnectedness between families. The deliberate intermarriage between Métis families served to reinforce community loyalty and regional unity, a testament to the enduring influence of the worldviews of otipemisiwak and wahkohtowin. Furthermore, it also explores the role of the Parish of St. François Xavier and the symbiotic relationship between the Métis and Roman Catholicism, recognizing in particular favourable messaging surrounding Mary as a Mother. The chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of the colonial narrative and the need to recognize the foundation of these communities, which often lie within the unrecognized influence of unnamed Indigenous women. Overall, the chapter
provides valuable insights into the social structures, cultural practices, and resilience of Métis families at St. François Xavier, highlighting their unique place within the evolving economic and social landscape of the mid-nineteenth century Red River.

In summary, this research illuminates the critical role of Métis women in shaping the identity and community of St. François Xavier and underscores the lasting impact of their contributions. By recognizing and amplifying the voices and stories of Métis women, we gain a profound appreciation for the complexities of Métis identity and can work towards a more inclusive and accurate narrative. As mentioned above, this research is particularly timely as the contemporary Métis Nation provincial organizations are working towards self-government agreement legislation. Within this fight for sovereignty, it is critical to ensure that we fulfill our kinship obligations to all our relations. We can only truly be otipemisiwak through wahkohtowin.


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