

# Part II: Cultural Expressions

Because many of the families living on Turtle Mountain were Métis, a unique culture and lifestyle distinguished the Metigoshe community from other nearby settlers.

## Traditional Foods

“My brother was the cook, he could bake bread and cakes and everything. Wild rabbit; we used to eat *so* much rabbit. We used to shoot them with a slingshot.” *Elmer McCorrister*

Food is a central aspect of any culture and it was no different for the Métis. Their diet was mostly made up of what they could grow, pick, hunt, and bake. Baking was common for special occasions; biscuits, cakes and fruit pies appearing in abundance! Other more everyday things like homemade bread were also common. Roger Goodon remembers that his sister Maggie could bake bread at eight years old.

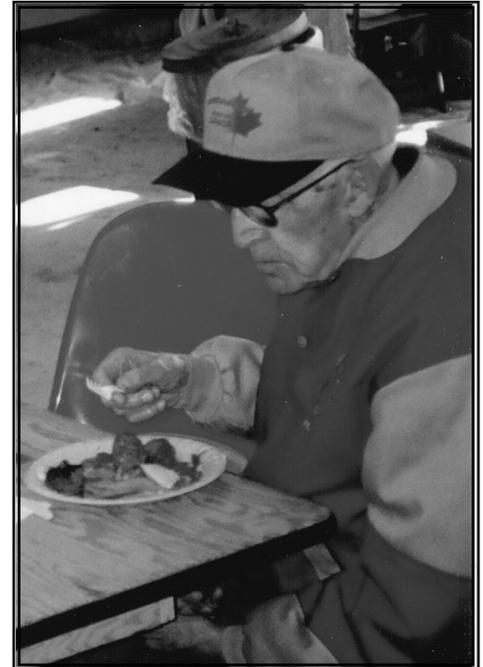
Bannock was the traditional mainstay of the Métis. Bannock is essentially uncut biscuit dough that is cooked as one big biscuit. It could be easily made when a household ran out of bread, usually appearing on

the table at least once a week. Bannock bakes in half an hour (much quicker than bread) and could cook in the oven while supper was being prepared. If fresh from the oven, bannock was not sliced, but simply broken into pieces.

Bannock dough fried on the stovetop in a pan of oil produced something known as Bangs. Fried bread, or fry bread, is another similar dish made out of fried bread dough.

Boulettes were (and still are) a mainstay Métis meal, in addition to being a standard addition to holiday feasts. They are a dish of meatballs with lots of gravy, nearly like soup. The meat balls, made out of any kind of meat, were boiled in lots of water, and the broth thickened with flour. Standard at all feasts and dinner tables, boulettes are served on potatoes, bread or with bannock.

Most families supplied themselves with wild meat by hunting on Turtle Mountain. Deer was probably the most common type of wild game eaten in Métis households, along with fish. Also



▲ Tom Ducharme enjoys a traditional Métis meal of boulettes and bannock (early 1990s).

familiar on many tables was rabbit, which could be prepared in almost any way: baked, fried, boiled, roasted or put in a soup. Spring and fall ducks were also hunted and their eggs harvested. Other wild game that was eaten included beaver, muskrat, deer, pheasant and moose.

### RECIPE: *Boulettes*

— Ella Canada

1 to 2 lbs deer meat  
1 med sized onion, chopped fine  
½ tsp pepper  
½ tsp salt  
Flour, to coat  
About 1 qt boiling water

Mix well and shape into balls about size of walnuts. Roll in flour to coat them. Drop into saucepan of boiling water. Boil for ½ hour. Thicken with flour .

## A Brief History of Bannock

Though bannock is often understood to be a tradition of Aboriginal cultures, the bread-like food in fact has its roots in Scotland. The word “bannock” itself is Gaelic for bread. Scottish fur traders brought bannock with them to North America. The Scots took Aboriginal wives who learned to make bannock and passed down the tradition to their children.

Bannock was especially popular due to the readily available and long-lasting ingredients the recipe called for: water, salt, lard and some type of flour. Earlier Aboriginal recipes used corn or nut flour, or a flour that was ground out of plant bulbs. Some recipes added baking powder to make it fluffier.

Source: Munn, Richard. “Bannock 101.” Canadian Canoe Routes Inc. 2006. Retrieved 29 July 10. <[http://myccr.com/press/articles/article.php?article\\_id=9&printer=1](http://myccr.com/press/articles/article.php?article_id=9&printer=1)>

# Holidays and Celebrations

“In the bush we celebrated by visiting. New Year’s is big for Métis.” *Betty Canada*



*Anna and Ole Olsen (left) stood up for Gladys McCharles and Buddy Nelson (right) for their wedding day in April of 1950.*

It is widely remembered by all who grew up in the Turtle Mountain bush that life had its trials and tribulations. Making a living was often hard work. But when it was time for some good fun, the Métis community certainly knew how to celebrate. The year’s traditional holidays were welcomed as legitimate excuses to eat great food and visit with family and friends.

Christmas was a time of good eating and visiting family. This sometimes included some back and forth across

The whole day was one of socializing as people travelled from home to home.

the Canada-United States border as friends and relatives took part in the festivities, parties and dances of the season. Christmas concerts were put on by all the rural schools and were always a big hit. Performances included songs, plays and skits that everyone acted in.

Extended families gathered for a generous meal on Christmas day. This meal always featured meat of some sort, be it chicken or wild game such as turkey or deer. Mothers and grandmothers applied themselves in the kitchen baking up a mountain of cakes, puddings and pies for the special occasion.

Some families had Christmas trees, decorated with handmade cloth and paper decorations, or streamers. As far as gifts were concerned, many children did not receive much for toys. Sometimes they got an orange and some candies.

Where Christmas focused around family, New Year’s celebrations centered around the community. New Year’s was a time of food and socializing. Families travelled around to all of the neighbours’ homes to eat, drink tea and visit. As Lorne Conway remem-

bers: “We would go to the neighbours and they would have something on the table for you to eat.” Visitors would stay for a while before moving on to the next neighbour’s house. The whole day was one of socializing, as people travelled from home to home, usually in horse-drawn sleighs. Someone from the household, usually the mother or grandmother, would stay at home to host people who came by and serve

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## Yuletide

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“We would get things put in our stocking that mother had cooked. I believed there was a Santa for a long time.” *Murray King*

“Once I got a woollen sweater [for Christmas], itchy sucker!” *Elmer McCorrister*

“Christmas was a big deal to Grandma Goodon. She always made a fruit cake. All the family got together and we would have a big meal. We had lots of people come in to eat cake because it was a big three-tiered cake.”

*Betty Carey*

“We went to Frank’s for Christmas one year and he said he had beaver for dinner. You never knew with him. The meat was dark. It tasted alright. He went to the cook stove and came back with a beaver tail. So maybe it was and maybe not.”

*Gordon Pratt  
(Brother of Betty Carey)*

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“I remember in Boissevain my sister and I each got a doll and candy in our stocking. We put out milk and cookies for Santa too.” *Betty Canada*

“For toys we got whatever our parents could afford. We each got something. Sometimes Santa would come on New Year’s Day.” *Francis Goodon*

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## Bring on the New Year

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“At New Year’s we’d hitch up the team and go house to house and get back to have people over. We’d have a cup of tea and a piece of cake at each place.” *Murray King*

“New Year’s we’d go around all over. We’d start from our place and go to Gosselin’s first and eat. Then they’d come with us and we’d go to Racines and Goodons, stop for awhile, then across to Henry and Howard Conway and then start heading home. It would be completely dark by that time.”

*Elmer McCorrister*

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tea and cake. Baking and cooking was abundant for these festivities: pies and cakes, cookies and bread, chickens, ducks, turkeys and always boulettes.

Christmas and New Year's were by far the most widely and enthusiastically celebrated holidays among the Turtle Mountain Métis. Easter was a holiday that was observed by some, though certainly not all. Annie Gosselin Harvey remembers her father (Billy Gosselin) getting up early

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### Trick or Treat

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“For Halloween we went out once and never again, because we got in trouble. Ole and Henry Nelson and us. We went in to the house to talk to Mrs. Hoff to keep her busy and Mr. Hoff was outside watching the boys upset the [hay] racks. Mr. Hoff told Dad and we got a lickin'. Then we plugged Aunty's stovepipe when she was gone to town with her family. They came home and made a fire and smoked themselves out. Dad unplugged the pipe and we got another licking, he was so mad. We had to stay home for a month.”

*Martha Bourgeois*

“I stayed home to look after the kids. They would go around and scare people. The boys went all out with tricks. They plugged Ole Nelson's stove pipe, he came out with a gun (not loaded) and they had to unplug it.” *Gladys Burney*

“At Halloween, we ran around and played tricks. We used to move the toilet off the hole at the school. We didn't get many treats. We never got into town when we were kids.

“We played tricks on Buddy Nelson. We threw a bunch of tin cans into Bud's house where he was sleeping on the couch. He came running out and shot some shots into the air and [my cousin] Shirley said 'Buddy, don't shoot, it's me, it's me.' So he caught Shirley.”

*Harvey Conway*

on Easter morning to draw water from the well before sunrise to get it blessed by the priest. They did not go to church because it was too far away. Some families celebrated the holiday by having a picnic and ballgame, and eating ice cream. For some it was a low-key holiday; eggs were coloured and hidden, perhaps treats such as hot cross buns were baked, a special meal was prepared, and maybe children would receive a chocolate rabbit or an orange. Elmer McCorrister recalled that the only good thing about Easter was that they got a week off school and it was close to muskrat-trapping season. Many Elders didn't remember any special celebration occurring around Easter time at all.

On Halloween, Métis youths had fun playing tricks on their neighbours, sometimes getting into varying degrees of trouble. Harold Alberts remembers that “we played all of the tricks you could imagine. One time we put a baby calf on the barn.” Some kids dressed up and went door to door, and folks would give out candy to keep their house from being the subject of a trick: “At Halloween the kids would play little tricks. They gave candies not to do tricks, even in the old days” (Roger Goodon). There were parties and dances at the school, but outside of that some families didn't do anything special.

Though not a holiday, per se, weddings in the community provided a legitimate reason to throw a party. In general, weddings held in the 1950s on Turtle Mountain were not the elaborate celebrations we're familiar with today. In the early years couples could arrange a justice of the peace to marry them with little fanfare. The official ceremony was sometimes followed by an intimate family dinner. For many couples in the early years, no celebration was held at all.

As time went on, marriages in the Métis community became more cele-

brated affairs. Most couples travelled to Deloraine to get married by a minister in a church. Some couples could not afford the trip so got married in the bush instead. Sometimes bush weddings were held in a school, then after the Turtle Mountain Bible Camp started up in 1947 couples could be married by the minister there. Ceremonies were often followed by a big meal put on with the help of the community. Then a dance party was customary, though not all couples had one.

Honeymoons were not common as most folks could not afford to travel or take time off.

However, sometimes a function was thrown by the community for a couple before their wedding, at which cards and bingo were played. Someone would make a cake for everyone to eat.

Many members of the Metigoshe community lived hard lives and relaxed by having frequent celebrations. Celebrations were called for at the drop of a hat – babies being born, weddings . . . someone coming to visit was enough of an excuse for a celebration.

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### Down the Aisle

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“We were married in a Catholic church then had a reception. No one had money for a honeymoon. We had one month later, went to Winnipeg and bought a stove.”

*Madeline Wall*  
(Wife of Dave Wall)

“When I got married I had my wedding at my sister's house. We had a big meal and then took the table down after we were done and danced around the house. Some people got their dresses from across the line [United States].”

*Jean Goodon*

# Recreation

“For recreation we skated, played ball, and skied. Brother Bill was good at that. He used to ski behind someone riding the horses.” *Gladys Burney*

The Metigoshe Community worked hard to make a living, but they played even harder: they enjoyed their recreational activities.

Dancing was one of the most common recreational events among the Métis. There wasn't one specific place where the dances were held; they took place all around the bush in different people's houses. Whoever was hosting the dance would often put on a lunch, and families attending could bring something to contribute.

Dances were especially common in the wintertime. Nearly every weekend somebody hosted a dance or house party, and all of their friends, relatives and neighbours came out to have a good time. Most dances were alcohol-free. There may have been



▲ Music was in high demand at dances. Pictured here: Rose Gosselin (left) and Ida Gosselin (right) in the late 1940s.

some home-brew present, but not in any great abundance. The point of the dances was to socialize, make music and dance; gathering together as a community in one house was reason enough to have a good dance.

There was a lot of musical talent within the community, and people brought instruments and voices to wherever the dance was being held. Fiddles, guitars, even sometimes an accordion played tune after tune as everyone took a turn on the dance floor. Gladys Burney remembers that “everyone danced with everyone. Dad said if we didn't dance then we couldn't go next time.” She also remembers travelling to the location of the dance in a sleigh in the wintertime, and picking up folks along the way. Upon arrival, all of the furniture in the house would be pushed up against the walls to make room for the dancers. It was at these dances that people showed off their Red River jigging skills. Some members of the community who are remembered as being the best at the jig were Louis Racine Jr. and Lena Grandbois.

Families who hosted dances often were the Alberts, Hathaways, Conways, and Jim Stone. But the most often remembered “dance hall” was the home of

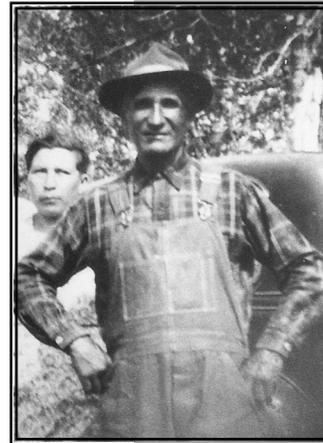
## Billy's Point: More than Dances

Billy Gosselin's home wasn't referred to as “Billy's Point” until 1938. Over the years, it became much more than a place to dance, though; it became a meeting place for the community. Many young people met and courted their life partners there. Edward Canada describes some of the activities that went on besides dancing: “Yeah we went [to Billy's Point] a lot to fish. We went there when Billy wasn't home and took his boat. We got out there and tipped it over. Mom used to take radish and onions and we would cook out there during the day and eat outside. Lena and Tommy would bring radishes and bread and Lorne and Clarence would come. We went swimming and had fires. They had a lot of dances and house parties. They put a nickel in the cake and whoever got it got the next dance. They were tricky; they'd work it out so Billy got the nickel.”

Billy and Rosna had a log house with two rooms: the larger one was used as a kitchen. They had a stove, and a table with a few chairs and tin dishes. In the smaller bedroom there was enough room for one bed going one way and another bed going the other way. Outside they kept a garden, horse and buggy, and a little barn.

In the early 1940s Billy and Rosna moved to Dunrae for a few months. They soon moved back to the Point where Billy eventually died in 1953. Billy's funeral

was held in Deloraine. Rosna survived her husband until 1960. After their passing, Billy and Rosna's home was lived in by various Métis families, including their daughter, Ida, and her family.



Billy Gosselin with his wife, Rosna to the left.

Billy Gosselin. Billy was well known for his talent with the fiddle. He lived on a small stretch of road allowance right on the edge of Lake Dromore. The home that he built there with his wife Roseanna (Rosna) became known as Billy's Point. He and Rosna had a house with one of the biggest

## Music and Dance

“Dances; we had to be 12 to go. We danced with everybody and everybody danced with us, all kinds of dances, even square dances.”

*Martha Bourgeois*

“There were lots of musicians, Billy Gosselin, Bill Goodon, Nels Nelson fiddled. Catlins, the whole family played and sang. There were lots of dances; we'd just go to houses. You were welcomed everywhere you went. We had a very good childhood, we were all in the same boat, nobody had too much, we all got along so good. We got along with everybody. Not a bunch that were wealthier than the rest.” *Murray King*

kitchens in the community, thus it made for a perfect place for friends and family to gather to enjoy an evening filled with music and jigging. During certain periods, Billy's Point wouldn't go a week without seeing the table and chairs getting thrown out of the house to make room for those gathered to make music and dance. Annie Harvey, Billy's daughter, remembers that "Every Sunday Dad would dress up in dress pants and shirt and wait for somebody to come."

Playing cards was another important social pastime for the Métis, mostly among the older generation. Small gatherings got together at people's houses and played all night or until the coal oil ran out. Popular games were King Pedro, Rummy and Rook. It was a great winter activity because it made long, cold eve-

nings pass much more quickly. People played at each other's houses or at home with their own families.

Children were mostly responsible for supplying their own entertainment. Though some toys were handed down from friends or siblings, most were homemade. Toys such as slings were made out of wood, and wooden thread spools could be made into spinners. Willow boughs were cut from the forest and transformed into horses by a child's imagination. Elmer McCorrister claims that his favourite toys were his .22 rifle and his trapline.

Outdoor activities were popular among the young: sledding, skating and skiing in the winter time. Skis were often homemade. In summer there was always baseball. It was played among kids in the school yard and at field days.

Ball games were a popular form of recreation for all ages. It was the most common sport in the bush, played both competitively and for fun. On most fair-weather Sunday afternoons ball players would gather to play a game or two. The teams that came from Turtle Mountain played other teams in the area (Bayview, Hazeldean, Mountainside) at tournaments, sometimes hosting games at Jim Stone's field, where they most often played. It was mostly men who played during competitions, though some women joined in for recreational games.

Other than Stone's field, players and onlookers gathered for games beside Canada Creek or at a field that straddled the international boundary. When they played right on "the line," friends and relatives from the States could come up and be a part of the game. Though they weren't too careful about who went where across the line during those ball games, they didn't receive any trouble from the authorities.

Lots of times, the very best form of recreation was to go visiting. People living in the bush went to see each other often. Martha Bourgeois remembers the neighbourly relationships that were abundant in the bush:

"Catlins came to our place to go skating on the lake and we went to their place to learn to play the gui-



▲ Winter Recreation: friends and a pair of skis (1940s).

tar. We always drank tea; later on we got coffee when we had more money. Just about everyone came visiting and we went around as well. We used to go to Alberts' for corn roasts lots. He'd have corn cooked in a boiler, as soon as corn was ready, he'd invite people. We had a good life when you think of it."

Coming together for a quiet cup of tea or coffee and a conversation eased loneliness and made the hardships of life easier to bear. Everyone lived close together so friends and relatives would call on each other regularly.

## Playing Ball

"We had fun every Sunday. Dad [Billy Gosselin] and Tommy would play ball. We'd meet with cousins and have a picnic lunch. Sometimes somebody would make ice cream."

*Annie Harvey*

"We played lots of ball; I pitched. We had a mixed team. Our school took prizes at the field days. Billy Gosselin was a great player, even when he was older. If Billy hit that ball it was gone." *Roger Goodon*

## Backyard Games

"We threw a ball over the roof of a house and caught it on the other side. We liked to do three legged races. We also had second hand toys from our friends. A lot of the time we would have to make whatever we wanted."

*Esther Canada*

"I never owned a doll. For toys we used to make match boxes into wagons. We'd cut little cardboard wheels and have stick axles. We'd hook them to the cats with string and make them pull it around. Mom would make rabbit shadows on the wall when we had lamps.

"Uncle Norman made skis for us. I'd just sit on them and go down. Tom and I would get a head start and then Pete and Irvin would come on horses and scoop us up on to the horse."

*Betty Carey*

"We never had toys, maybe some made of wood. We used to slide down hills, everybody would get together. We made skis and skied. I made my own skis, out of a black poplar log and cut them out. It was a lot of work. We all got together and skated, first with skates you tie to shoes, then later we bought skates."

*Roger Goodon*