

Fish Lake Cemetery

A Part of the Turtle Mountain Métis Heritage



▲ An empty clearing is all that you will find at the Fish Lake Cemetery today.

Road 450 is the route to Lake Metigoshe, a popular summer destination situated right along the U.S. border. About a kilometre north of the lake an unmarked trail leads to an abandoned farm site. Nothing about the old house and crumbling shed would seem significant – and there are no markers or signs to indicate otherwise. But there is a story there.

It is the Elzear McLeod homestead, once home to one of the founding families of the Metigoshe Métis Community. If you were to turn back the clock a few decades and take the trail southwards through the bush to a clearing, then up another narrower trail through the bush, you would come to a small clearing on a hilltop and see a few weathered wooden crosses. It is a beautiful site, with Dromore Lake close by to the west, hidden by the trees.

Today you can take the same trail but see no signs of the purpose of this little clearing. You might see some depressions near a

fallen tree, but it's hard to say for sure. You likely wouldn't know what you've found, and except for some scattered reminiscence in the recordings of interviews with Métis Elders that have kept the story alive, the importance of the site could have been lost to history.

This small cemetery was established around 1910, likely as a resting place for Louis McLeod's baby daughter.

Although informal burial grounds were common in rural areas in the days when many of the existing municipal cemeteries hadn't yet been established, there are indications that the site was consecrated, that a priest was in attendance at some burials, and that the municipality recognized the site as a cemetery. Others recall visiting the cemetery long after it had ceased to be used and seeing the old crosses.

Métis Elder Steve Racine, whose grandfather was buried

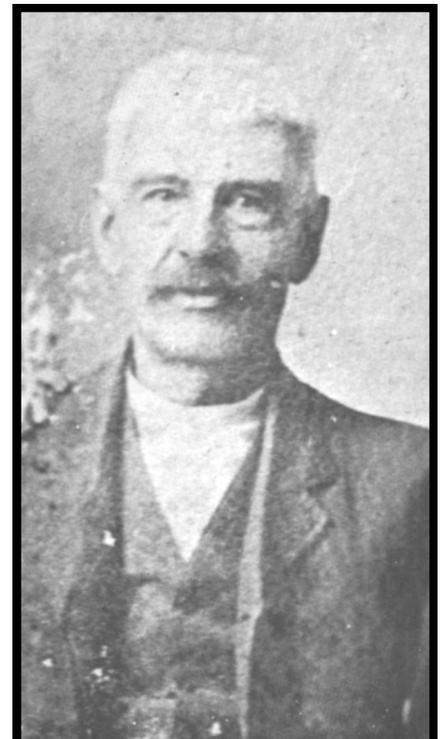
there, was a compelling advocate for recognition of the site: "We believe that there should be something erected there to symbolize the historic meaning of that cemetery. For myself ... that's where I came from. Without that old man Racine, there would be no Métis of us, the Racines in this area, because the Racines are a very new Métis. We're only a couple of generations."

His aunt told him about seeing the wooden crosses at the site, the names long since eroded or weathered out.

Over time it has been called the McLeod Cemetery and the Nelson Cemetery, after two successive owners of the land. To some it is the Partridge-Racine Burial Site. Local historians prefer to call it the Fish Lake Cemetery, Fish Lake being the earlier name for nearby Lake Metigoshe.

Sources:

Deloraine History Book Committee. *Deloraine Scans a Century 1880 - 1980*: Altona. Friesen Printers, 1980.
Personal Reminiscence. *Oral History*. Boisvevain Library and Archives & TM-SPHA Collection.



▲ Métis Elder Louis Racine Sr. is one of the confirmed burials in the abandoned Fish Lake Cemetery.