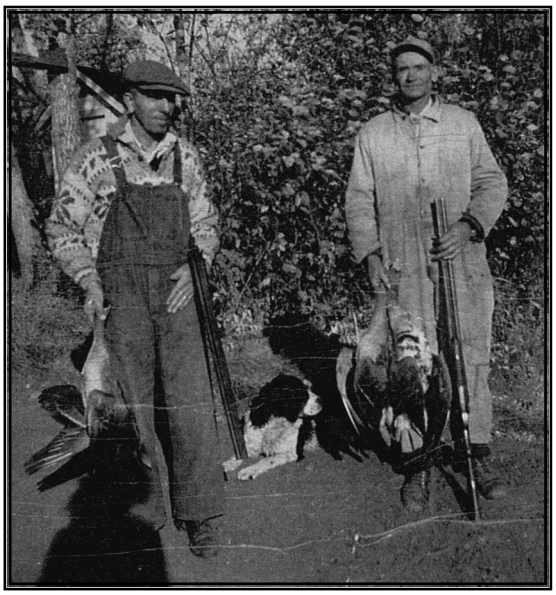
Harvesting

Not afraid to get their hands and aprons dirty, members of the Metigoshe community did plenty of manual labour to save themselves money. The Métis supported themselves with a variety of hunter-gatherer activities in the wild, and grew gardens at home. Though most of these activities didn't actually *make* money, they kept families from spending money on meat, fruit and vegetables.



▲ *Hunters show off the geese they've bagged (1960s).*

Hunting

"We could shoot partridges with a slingshot. When you heard them drumming, you could sneak up on them and shoot them between the wings. Run and get them, that was your dinner." *Murra y King*

Hunting, like trapping, was a major activity in the bush. Wild game was plentiful and made frequent appearances on Métis dinner tables. Because the Métis hunted to feed themselves, the activity occurred both in and out of season—people had to eat. Hunting off-season or inside the boundaries of the Turtle Mountain Forestry Reserve was frequently practiced, but had to be done discretely, as it was against the law.

A popular hunting activity was coordinating deer runs. Several families or groups of neighbours would get together to do this: "Hunters would be put in certain places and riders on horseback would go around and chase the deer out to the hunters" (Lorne Conway). Sometimes horses weren't involved, and everyone would go on foot if the snow wasn't too deep. Betty Canada remembers taking her turn walking the bush during deer runs: "I had my own rifle. Tom [Ducharme] would pick us up with the team and we'd spend all day out west. At least 10 people would go. We'd have a fire at noon and roast our frozen sandwiches, and tell stories. Sometimes we bagged a couple of deer and sometimes we didn't."

Children were also a part of the hunt, doing what they could to put food on the table. Harold Alberts was only seven years old when he shot his first deer. Betty Carey remembers setting snares for rabbits on the way to school with her brother. In the afternoon on their way home they would collect the rabbits, and their mom would fry them up or put them in a soup for dinner. As a child, Norman Goodon (Lorraine Goodon's husband) didn't have time for pastimes such as playing cards. He was always running around with his slingshot, seeing what he could get. "My dog would chase a rabbit under a brush pile, and I'd get him in the head when he'd stick it out. The dog would chase a partridge or a squirrel up a tree and I'd get under him and shoot him."

Credit: Melita-Arthur History Committee. *Our First Century.* Altona: Friesen Printers, 1983. pp 306.

◀ *A fresh kill*

Having such a constantly available source of food eased the pressure on families to make money to spend on groceries. More than saving money, hunting created a lifestyle.

"When we were younger, Uncle Charlie Lilley would take 3 or 4 kids and go shooting rabbits. We would have to carry them home and skin them. Then Auntie Gladys would cook them up. We used to like spring ducks, when they first come they are nice and fat. Then we'd take only the green heads [male mallards] because the other ones were making babies. We also shot geese. There are certain times of the year to shoot anything; you can't shoot them all the time, just certain times. We ate beaver meat, the hind legs and the back, that was good." *Lorne Conway*

"There was a good buck to doe ratio then. Not as much trophy hunting, they hunted for food." *Ken Leforte*

Fishing

"We got spawn fish every spring. Mom canned lots. I cleaned lots of fish, I was glad to clean fish, I liked canned fish." *Francis Goodon*

Many Elders remember sunny summer days spent sitting on the banks of a lake or creek with a homemade fishing pole in hand. These fishing poles were sometimes no more complicated than a string with a hook tied onto the end. "We fished with a hook and a line. You could use any kind of bait or hook, even a bent pin would work." (Roger Goodon). The most common type of fish coming out of the lakes in the summertime was perch, though Lorraine Goodon recalled that "they were bigger then than they are now." Summer fishing was no problem; there was no limit to the amount of fish anyone could catch. It was during the spring spawning run that people had to be more careful.

. . . Homemade fishing poles in hand . . .

For a few weeks every spring, masses of spawning fish came crowding from Lake Metigoshe through Canada Creek to Lake Dromore where they were heading to lay their eggs. When the time came in spring, the word was excitedly spread by mouth throughout the community and everyone headed down to Canada Creek with nets, gunny sacks, washtubs or copper boilers to fill up with fish. The spawning fish ran thickest between the banks of Canada Creek and were easiest to catch there. Murray King remembers they ran so thick that "we would just get into the water and throw them out. You could shoot into the water and they would float to the top and you could throw them out."

There were two kinds of fish that swarmed up Canada Creek during the spring spawn: jackfish (known also as Pike) and suckers. Fishing for suckers was perfectly legal because they generally weren't sought after to eat. However, fishing for spawning jackfish was against the law because of the impact it had on the fish species' reproductive cycle. Killing fish that have not yet laid their eggs impact the numbers of the next generation. The game wardens of the Turtle Mountain Forestry Reserve knew that these activities were happening in the Turtle Mountain bush. They knew that the Métis were technically poaching the spawning fish in addition to the larger game they hunted inside the Forestry Reserve. But though they knew this, they didn't go to the area to investigate it unless there was an official report. Métis weren't selling the fish they caught, only using it for their own personal food stores. For the most part, the game wardens saw no reason to intervene. (See *The Legalities of Wildlife Harvesting,* on the next page*).*

"Mom tried to can fish a few times. Everyone went out and got fish in the spring run. We used to make a long net out of window screen or something. We would make a fire and have a frying pan and cook them right there. If there were lots, we'd take some home and fry them up there. I used to hate cleaning fish." *Martha Bourgeois*

"We always got fish in the spring fish run in [Canada] creek. The suckers would start about the 23rd of May. Dad would get big pails full and we'd can them. We were not supposed to get Jack but if they got in the way we took them too." *Lorne Conway*

"We caught them with a fish net. We weren't supposed to keep the jackfish because it was illegal. The men would have to clean the fish and the women would pack them. We would can about 25-30 fish which would last us 1-2 years. In the summer we went perch fishing and caught as many as we wanted because there was no limit." *Cecil Canada*

RECIPE: *Canned Fish*

1 quart	cleaned fish
1 tsp	salt
2 Tbsp	vinegar
2 Tbsp	oil

Fill quart jars with all ingredients and cook for 3 hours in a stovetop canner.

The spring spawn run was also a great excuse for a community get-together. Elmer McCorrister remembers: "Canada Creek was good because it was running between two lakes. Everyone went when [the fish] were spawning, brought a potluck and had a fish fry. I can't remember bringing home that many fish. Sometimes they ran for three weeks, and we'd go three Sundays in a row." Any fish that weren't eaten up on the banks of Canada Creek were taken home, cleaned and canned in salt and vinegar or ketchup. It was common opinion among the Métis that canned suckers tasted just like salmon.

Credit: Melita-Arthur History Committee. *Our First Century.* Altona: Friesen Printers, 1983. pp. 306.

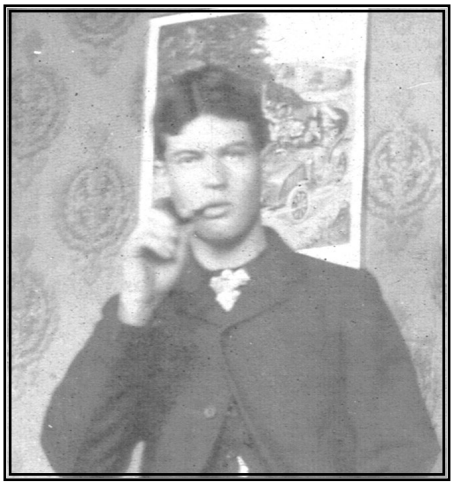
A fresh catch of fish being strung up to dry.

The Legalities of Wildlife Harvesting

"The game warden only came if you were reported. We had to hunt to live." *Betty Canada*

"Fishing licence – half never had a licence, just went outside and dropped a line in the lake. We didn't need a deer license at first but later they came in and Dad always got a license. He wouldn't go out and get caught." *Martha Bourgeois*

"[The game wardens] didn't bother unless you were reported. At Harold King's they shot a deer [every] week. They used to share deer with Conways, Catlins and Kings. We only hunted when we needed meat." *Harold Alberts*



Herb Henderson was a game warden at Turtle Mountain.

Credit: PG7 E4. Boissevain Community Archives.

"We had a pet deer and [the game wardens] came out and said she couldn't be locked up. But she never was; she could come and go as she pleased. Dad found the baby deer, and we raised it on the bottle. We had her for about three years, and she slept in my brother's crib. She used to run and jump in the crib and never land on the baby. She would come to school with us and eat sandwiches. We used to walk to meet Dad at the gate; us kids, a sheep, a deer and a dog. Dad would put the end gate down, we'd all jump in, deer, dog and sheep and kids, and ride up to the house." *Betty Carey*

Folks in the bush seldom got in trouble with the law for the legal transgression of hunting or fishing out of season or without a licence. It was the job of the game wardens to keep the peace in the Turtle Mountain Forestry Reserve. They knew that illegal hunting and fishing (even within the Turtle Mountain Forestry Reserve) was going on, but in general they looked the other way when it came to upholding these laws.

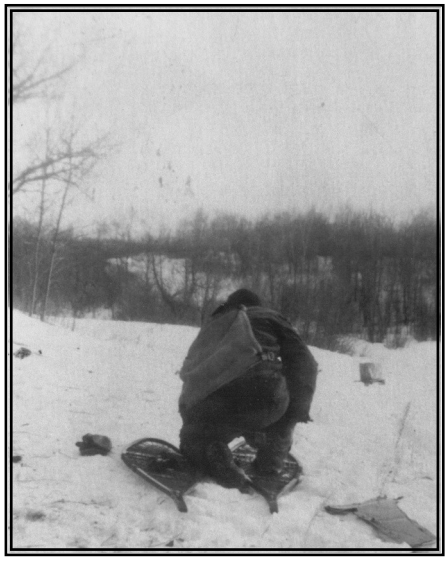
Almost everyone in the bush hunted out of season.

Almost everyone living in the bush hunted out of season and very few people held fishing licences. The game wardens only gave out fines if particular cases were reported. They knew that the Métis were harvesting only what they needed to survive. They understood that the game was being eaten in Métis households, not being sold for profit. Harold Alberts remembers having a very good relationship with this game warden: "Herb Henderson was the first [game warden] I remember. Sometimes he'd come for coffee. He didn't bother anyone unless you got reported." Herb Henderson is remembered as a good guy who knew that everyone was just trying to survive. He understood that sometimes survival meant crossing the line of the law. There was no reason for the law to get involved if "you shot a deer, cleaned it up and ate it" (Lorne Conway).

Even in instances when the evidence was right in front of their eyes, the game wardens didn't fine the Métis for hunting out of season. Edward Canada's uncle Melvin Conway had two deer in his trunk with the feet sticking out when the game warden came by. He didn't get a fine but was told that he better "cut them off." Betty Canada also remembers an episode in which the game warden came by the house when she was young, and she told him that they had a deer hanging in the bedroom. "He didn't pay me any attention."

If someone got reported for hunting or fishing without a licence, they were at risk of receiving a hefty fine. In general, though, law enforcement in the bush was lenient and accommodating.

▼ *Ernie McLeod heading into the bush on snowshoes (early 1940s).*



Present-day Métis Harvesting Rights

The hunting experiences of the Turtle Mountain Métis have been affected by recent legal battles over Métis harvesting rights.

Will Goodon grew up on Turtle Mountain with an appreciation for hunting as a way to feed one's family. His family has lived on Turtle Mountain for generations: his grandfather, Willie Goodon, was in fact one of the founding members of the community at Metigoshe. Perhaps you have heard about Will Goodon and his duck. If you haven't: in the fall of 2004 Goodon was charged for shooting a duck while hunting on Turtle Mountain.

Goodon was not purposefully hunting without a licence; he believed he was hunting within his rights as a Métis person. Though he did not have a government-issued hunting licence, he did have with him his Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) Harvester's Identification Card, which he thought would be sufficient for subsistence, non-commercial hunting. His faith in the acceptability of the card was also not ignorant: He had just returned from the MMF's Annual General Meeting where he had heard a moving address from the Premier of Manitoba, Gary Doer. In his speech the Premier had promised that the government of Manitoba would respect Métis harvesting rights. To add to this, Conservation Minister Stan Struthers had very recently voiced his commitment to work towards recognising the MMF's harvester card system.

Yet despite the promises from these politicians, Goodon began hearing troubling accounts of incidents between conservation officers and his Métis neighbours. As the Chair of the Cherry Creek Métis Local (based in Boissevain) Goodon felt it was his responsibility to look into these reports, which led him to make an appointment to speak to two local conservation officers. However, he felt personally secure in the knowledge that both the government and conservation ministry were finally on the side of the Métis, and went hunting on the weekend at Turtle Mountain.

During Goodon's meeting with the conservation officers the next morning, he learned that the words and assumed intent of the politicians at the top had not worked their way down to the conservation officers on the ground: there had been no change in the officers' instructions regarding Métis hunting. According to them, with or without a harvester card, it was still illegal to hunt without an official hunting licence. Goodon realised that he himself was guilty of this offence, due to the duck he had shot just the previous day. He asked the conservation officers if they would charge him if he happened to have a duck in his truck right then. They replied that they would.

An early postcard from Deloraine advertising a good hunting season in the Turtle Mountain region.

Right then and there Will Goodon decided to take the issue through the courts. He pointed out the duck that was sitting in the back of his truck to the conservation officers, who charged him for poaching. Goodon took on a legal battle with the Province of Manitoba in order to clarify the province's policy towards Métis harvesting rights.

> Conservation officers still have the right to charge Métis who hunt without an official hunting licence.

The MMF put its full political support behind the case and hired two top Métis lawyers to voice the Métis' concerns. The case lasted five years and ended in January of 2009 when Judge Combs released his verdict: in favour of Goodon. The ruling reaffirmed that Métis harvesting rights are protected by the Canadian Constitution, and identified an area covering most of southern Manitoba where the rights of Métis hunters – equipped with an MMF harvester's card and following the Interim Métis Laws of the Harvest – would be honoured.

Goodon's battle served to benefit the Métis of southern Manitoba, but what of other regions? Are constitutional rights region-specific?

The battle for government acknowledgement of Métis harvesting rights has been a long one. For over a century Métis people in Canada have been telling their governments that they have an Aboriginal right to harvest Canada's resources in order to feed their families and communities. The Métis have a long history of doing just that: for generations they have fed their families by the fruits of the hunt. The relatively recent laws imposed by government are seen as an infringement on the traditional Métis way of life.

The 1982 revision of the Canadian Constitution protected and affirmed the existing rights of the Métis people. Discussion regarding what exactly those "existing rights" entail has been a hot topic ever since. The Métis community has long insisted that they have an ancestral right to hunt for food be-

cause they are a distinctive people who had a separate cultural identity prior to Canada becoming a country – the same right First Nations have to harvest food for their families.

Goodon's story is just one piece of the puzzle. The issue of Métis harvesting rights reached the courts for the first time in 1993. It began when Steve and Roddy Powley were charged with unlawfully hunting a moose north of their residence in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. They pleaded not guilty, arguing that they had an Aboriginal right to hunt food for their families – a right that was upheld by the Constitution of Canada. From the lowest court in Ontario, the case moved up over a period of several years to the highest court in the country, the Supreme Court of Canada. In September 2003, almost a full 10 years after the moose had been shot, the jury revealed their decision in favour of the Powleys. The ruling of the Powley Case was a landmark event: the first time in history that Métis hunting rights had been upheld in court.

At that time events in Manitoba were also looking up for Métis rights. Just before the Powley Case released its ruling, the Minister of Conservation and the MMF signed a memorandum of understanding that they would implement a structure that would recognise harvesting rights while giving the principles of conservation specific consideration. Negotiations began as soon as possible but the issue went nowhere. The MMF was adamant that it reserved the right to say who is Métis – not the government of Manitoba.

As negotiations continued, the MMF went forward with the implementation of their harvester identification card system. Extensive contact and discussion between the MMF and the Métis people of Manitoba occurred through a series of local and regional workshops, surveys, elder conferences and the Commission on the Métis Laws of the Hunt. From these meetings the Interim Métis Laws of the Harvest were designed. They reflect an acknowledgement of the fact that with the right to harvest natural resources comes the responsibility to protect those resources so that future generations can rely on them.

Métis hunters have always had written and unwritten laws to guide their hunting practices. One prime example is the historic laws of the bison hunt. Present-day hunting guidelines have been designed with this same principle in mind: hunt responsibly, and don't waste – eat what you kill. Métis people themselves expressed a need for a management structure that would ensure responsible and conservation-minded hunting practices. The Interim Laws are exactly that: a collection of common sense, Métis-made rules based on the actual amount of wild meat Métis households use.

The Interim Laws of the Harvest are in many respects much more mindful of conservation than government legislation as it applies to sport hunting. Though the Laws allow Métis harvesters to hunt all year round, there are restrictions during calving and nesting seasons. The Laws also include bag limits and appropriate tagging of big game for recording and conservation purposes. Hunters are also not exempt from meeting all health, safety and firearm regulations.

To receive an MMF harvester card, a genealogy must be supplied to prove an ancestral connection to the historic Red River Métis. Once the card is issued it is good for life, though it must be revalidated every year. Revalidation has no cost except for a mandatory $25.00 donation towards the Conservation Trust Fund.

Though over 1,000 harvester cards have now been issued by the MMF, they are not fully respected in all parts of the province. The journey towards governmental acknowledgement of Métis harvesting rights across Canada is far from over. Regardless of whether or not a Métis hunter abides by every guideline laid down by the Interim Métis Laws of the Harvest, they can still be charged by a conservation officer if discovered to be hunting without a government-issued hunting licence. Conservation officers deal with Métis hunters on a case to case basis, using their own judgement.

Ultimately, the MMF, along with the Métis Nation at large, is still working towards ensuring that Métis harvesters can hunt food for their families without harassment and without being penalized for practicing this historic right. The Goodon Case was not about the duck itself, just like the Powley Case was not about the moose: it was about recognising a people's rights – rights that have already been confirmed by the courts.

Though the courts have now repeatedly ruled in favour of Métis harvesting rights, levels of government are not so willing to accommodate the court's ruling on a practical day-to-day level. It will be a longer battle to have the confirmation of the courts work its way into legislation, conservation officer practice and non-Métis community acceptance.

Rules of the Bison Hunt

The historic laws of the bison hunt existed for a very good reason: to ensure a safe and orderly hunt for everyone. These rules were strictly abided by:

1. No buffalo is to be run on Sundays
2. No one is to break away from or go before the party without permission
3. No one is to run buffalo before the general order is given

There was a strict process of punishment for those who trespassed upon these rules: for the first offense, the culprit's saddle and bridle would be cut up. For the second offense, the culprit's coat was to be cut up. For the third offense the culprit was to be flogged.

If anyone was caught stealing, the punishment was most severe: a public shaming in the middle of the camp.

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Photo: Mary Conway's Archival Collection.

Gardening and Gathering

"I remember rows and rows of potatoes and we had to pick potato bugs off them." *Francis Goodon*

Most Métis households grew gardens in the summer to provide food for their own tables. Sometimes when there was extra produce, families would sell a few bags of potatoes, but mostly what they grew was for themselves and neighbours. Elmer McCorrister remembers what happened when someone ran out of potatoes: "[They] were the main meal. You had to have a lot, so if someone ran out you would trade with them for something else. If you ran out, you'd go to someone else who still had lots of potatoes." Neighbourly gestures were common among the Métis.

Virtually everything under the sun was grown in Métis gardens. Potatoes were the mainstay of most meals, so there was usually a big plot of them. Planting potatoes often fell to the men. Other vegetables grown mostly by women included turnips, beets, radishes, corn, carrots, cucumber, peas, beans, lettuce, cauliflower, tomatoes, pumpkins, rhubarb and onions. The Alberts family was known for having a big garden, and the Shereski's had an orchard of fruit trees.

Rhubarb grown in the garden was used to make sauces and pies. Any surplus food usually got canned and put away for the winter. Winters were likely to be tough if a family didn't have canned or preserved garden vegetables. Everyone who grew a garden knew the importance of canning and preserving. In addition to storing vegetables in the root cellar, they canned tomatoes and pickles. Deer steaks would keep for about a week lowered down the well, but to store it long term it had to be canned.

"We took lettuce and radish sandwiches for lunch when we went to pick berries. We'd be gone all day." *Martha Bourgeois*

Harvesting squash from the garden (1960s).

Berries grew wild and in abundance on Turtle Mountain, and the Metigoshe community was keen to take advantage of the free foodstuffs that the bush offered. Families went on berry picking expeditions, sometimes gathering pailfulls of cranberries, chokecherries, saskatoons, wild plums, pin cherries or strawberries. Sometimes if they were lucky, they'd even find wild raspberries. Francis Goodon remembers picking pails of fruit and taking them down to Lake Metigoshe on a Sunday afternoon to sell to visitors. With the money he made his family could then go buy sugar so the rest of the fruit could be canned. The berries were also made into jams, jellies and sauces that were enjoyed during the long winter months over freshly-baked bannock.

Mushrooms grew in great numbers in the bush at certain times of the year. Some people didn't know how to tell which ones were edible and left them all alone out of fear of picking the poisonous ones. Others waited for the season when the morels came out and picked many of them. Morels grow more abundantly in the years closely following forest fires, which were not unknown occurrences on Turtle Mountain.

In general, the Métis community was not wealthy. Rather they built a lifestyle that did not require lots of money and many families managed to live comfortably. Many Elders remember happy, though comparatively simple, childhoods. The Métis historically have been masters at adapting to changing circumstances. The Turtle Mountain Métis' resourcefulness at finding ways to put food on the table – through earning money or working for food – is another example of the strength of the people as a whole.

"Mom sent away for seeds and they would send an odd special pack of something new. In the majority of homes the mothers were the biggest bread winners, they did a lot of work." *Murray King*

"Dad tried to can [fruit] once. We heard bang, bang, it fermented and blew up. We thought it was a gun up in the attic. Not enough sugar or something. Dad and Mom both tried to can. He dried saskatoons once, he spread them on a white sheet and put another white sheet on them and dried them. Then he put them in a white bag and later took out a cup and boiled them and they swelled all up and made them into pies." *Annie Harvey*

"Once Jim and I picked two big milk pails of blueberries. There was no sugar, so we canned them without sugar and used them later to make pies." *Jean Goodon*

A group of berry pickers show off their day's haul (1960s).

Women in the Household

"Women did a lot of work, from morning till night." *Roger Goodon*

Women in the Metigoshe community worked very hard. Generally their duties were at home, looking after children and taking care of the house. In the average household their chores included milking cows if the family had any, cleaning the house and cooking. Sometimes they hauled wood and went berry picking in the summer. The gardens which were common in Métis backyards were largely the women's domain: they took care of the planting and growing of garden vegetables and the preserving of food for the winter. In some families the women helped with trapping or cutting and hauling posts, though these activities were predominantly men's duties. Families often worked together to keep food on the table and the household running smoothly.

Mary (Peltier) Catlin ironing, 1954.

The load of work on women's shoulders was partly a result of the times. Household chores today have been simplified by running water, not to mention inventions such as the washing machine. Martha Bourgeois remembers that before plumbing became common on Turtle Mountain in the 1970s, "Washing clothes was work, it took all day but you washed them. In the winter we had to melt snow. Sometimes we made the soap, but mostly bought bars of soap. We had to go easy on it. We boiled clothes in a boiler."

Sewing was a resourceful way for households to save money. Some women sewed for their families and many girls picked up the skill from women in their family or from school. Esther Canada learned how to knit and sew by hand. She used to make her children's clothes, mostly using scrap bits of fabric, though "sometimes I would make a dress for myself and then I would use a pattern." Her daughter, Betty Canada, also used to sew for her kids. When money was tight or fabric was hard to come by "we dyed flour bags and made dresses and shirts for the boys."

"Women took a big part in daily life, at least my mother did. We never would have survived if she didn't." *Murray King*

"Women stayed home and raised the kids. They did the gardening, even got wood out of the bush and cut it up with the swede saw. We all had gardens, canned deer meat and hung the meat in the well. Women would haul the water and wash clothes on a wash board, most people did. Mom got a washing machine later, with a gas motor that wouldn't start. I remember her kicking it over." *Betty Canada*

Relief

For some families ends were difficult to make meet, no matter what combination of efforts was made. When this happened there was the option of relief (welfare). To go on relief, a visit to the municipal office in Deloraine or the store at Mountainside was made. There they gave out vouchers that could be traded for groceries and clothes. Though relief was an appreciated break from the stresses of putting food on the table, it was not handed out generously. Cecil Canada explains: "Relief was sometimes necessary for me, but it was very hard to get. People were prejudiced against the Turtle Mountain people. We were referred to as 'dirty half breeds.'" Edward Canada reinforces this thought with his family's experience: "Going on relief would help out with groceries a bit. But they were very prejudiced in Deloraine until the 1960's. My grandpa went to the relief office once and they said that if you weren't eating bark off the trees then you weren't that hungry."

In the eyes of the outside community it was easy to see a family living off of citizen's tax dollars with resentment. What most people did not understand was the disadvantaged position the Métis were in, not only on Turtle Mountain but throughout Manitoba and the prairie provinces. There was not a lot of work available in the area, and sometimes farmers refused to hire the Métis as workers because of racial discrimination.

"If people were not ambitious, they went on relief. If you made up your mind to work, you didn't have to go on relief. We always had a garden, and shot rabbits and never went on relief. They didn't give much anyway." *Lorne Conway*

"Once I got 12 dollars for a family allowance. But it wasn't enough so in 1953 I went on welfare and asked them to help me get a job and they couldn't. A woman from welfare from Brandon came down and asked to see our cupboards. She asked if she could look in them and so I showed her. She asked if that was all the food we had, I told her we had potatoes in the floor. She said she had never seen poor people like that and that we would be getting help. Two hours after she left the other welfare came and looked around, he cried because he didn't know it was that bad. We ended up getting an extra $12 a month for 6 months and then they cut us off." *Dave Wall*