

made their way to "William Henry's Old House," the Governor records, and beyond. Then came the traverse. "The Mountains now encrease to a stupendous Size; the Summits of many obscured from our sight by Clouds and of others covered by eternal Snows." At the Great Divide Simpson noted a little lake, or twin lakelets side by side, from which two streams flowed away. He named the spot the "Committee's Punch Bowl," in honour of the far-away Governor and Committee of the Company in London. Descending through the Athabaska Pass, he reached Boat Encampment by way of the Wood River and embarked on the last lap of his journey. On November 8 he reached Fort George (the renamed Fort Astoria). Altogether it had taken eighty-four days for his trip, twenty days less than the previous record, for Simpson always prided himself on the speed of his travel.

Still another famous traveller who passed this way was a young Scots botanist, David Douglas, after whom the huge firs of the Pacific slope were named, and are still called, Douglas firs. He, too, kept a notebook or journal, and in it he has left some descriptions of the huge glaciers on the traverse that give the reader to-day a vivid picture of the immensities through which the early travellers made their way.

"At noon," he writes, "on April 27th, we had the satisfaction of landing at Boat Encampment at the base of the Rocky Mountains. How familiar these snowy mountains have been to us, so that we might be expected to lose an adequate idea of their immense altitude, yet on beholding the Grand Dividing Ridge of this mighty continent, all that we have seen before seems to fade from the mind, and be forgotten in the contemplation of their height and indescribably rugged and sharp peaks, with the darkness of the rocks, their glaciers and eternal snows."

On May 1, walking on snow shoes, they reached the summit and began to descend the eastern side of

what Douglas and others referred to as the "Big Hill." His *Journal* continues:

"Being well rested by one o'clock I set out with the view of ascending what seemed to be the highest peak on the North. Its height appeared to be no less than 16,000 or 17,000 feet above the sea level. After passing over the lower ridge, I came to about 1,200 feet of by far the most difficult and fatiguing walking I ever experienced, the utmost care was required to tread safely over the crust of snow . . . the view from the summit is of too awful a cast to afford pleasure. Nothing can be seen in every direction, far as the eye can reach, except mountains, towering above one another, rugged beyond all description, while the dazzling reflection from the snow, the heavenly azure of the solid glaciers, with the rainbow tints of their shattered fragments and the enormous icicles suspended from the perpendicular rocks, and the majestic and terrible avalanches hurling themselves from the more exposed southerly rocks, produced a crash and groaned through the distant valleys with a sound only equalled by that of an earthquake. Such scenes give a sense of the stupendous and wonderful works of the Almighty!"

Shortly after Douglas wrote this, through the development of direct water communication with England and the removal of the Hudson's Bay Company's Pacific headquarters to Victoria, the Columbia route gradually fell into disuse. Soon the trails through Leather and Athabaska Passes were known only to Indians. They did not come into prominence again until the years 1857 to 1860, when the Palliser Expedition was in the area, exploring and mapping for possible railway routes. The gold excitement, it is true, brought a little flurry of excitement to the Columbia, but much of it did not reach Boat Encampment, for steamer navigation ended far below that point. In 1872 Walter Moberly was sent into the mountains to carry out exploration work for the Canadian Pacific. Thus the railway era was ushered in and Boat Encampment was forgotten until 1940, when the motor road brought it once more into the paths of the world.

Aerial view of the Big Bend of the Columbia, looking up the valley of the Canoe River. The Wood is the river coming in from right centre. Compare with the photo opposite, and note the difference in the appearance of the peaks. R.C.A.F.



THE SIEGE OF FORT PITT

by Elizabeth M. McLean

MY father, W. J. McLean, was sent to take charge of Fort Pitt in October, 1884. He had been stationed at Isle à la Crosse, and my mother and we children had to go from the Red River Settlement to Fort Carlton to wait for him. From there we travelled together to Fort Pitt with horses and a covered wagon. We found it a strenuous trip, for cold weather and heavy snow came early that fall. The horses broke through the ice in the creeks, and the wagons stuck in the mud. We reached Fort Pitt on October 29. The winter that followed was long and cold with a great deal of snow.

But what a place to call a fort! It was situated on the flats on the north bank of the Saskatchewan River with hills rising beyond. There was no wall or stockade around it, and only about six houses, built to form a square. Besides the few employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, there were stationed at the fort twenty North West Mounted Police, with Captain Francis Dickens—son of Charles Dickens—in command.

It was a lonely and quiet place, so we had to make our own amusements. Fortunately for us, my father had arranged to have an organ brought along for my mother's benefit. She was very fond of music, as we all were. We would often spend an evening singing and playing together. Sometimes when we had gone through most of the songs we knew I would get my sister Amelia to sing some of the old songs translated into Cree or *Saulteaux*—such songs as "The Lost Chord," and "I Stood on the Bridge at Midnight." We whiled away many a long winter evening playing the banjo and fiddle and organ, or amusing ourselves with cribbage or checkers.

We had two or three visits from Chief Big Bear during the winter. My father always sent him over to our kitchen to have something to eat. Barley soup was his favourite food. I remember his saying, "Eat all you can while you have a chance. You never know when you may be starving." Little did we know then that we would be considering the possibility of starvation before another year had passed.

As the winter wore on, my father realized that there was some unrest among the Indians. They seemed to be very much dissatisfied with the treatment given them by Indian Agent Quinn at Frog Lake. He mentioned this to Captain Dickens, who replied that he didn't think they were any more discontented than usual, and that there was no cause for anxiety. We didn't know then that Louis Riel was sending couriers back and forth, and that they had been crossing the river at Pipestone Creek, two miles east of the fort. He had sent word to the Indians at Frog Lake that if the moon turned black on the night of April 1, it would mean that the Great Spirit was with them, and they were to kill the white men. They did not understand, as he did, that an eclipse of the moon was expected on that date.

As spring approached, my sister Kitty and I were very anxious to see more of the country, as we had been so shut in during the winter. After much coaxing, we were given permission on April 2 to pack a picnic basket and leave early the next morning to walk along the crest of the hills where most of the snow had

melted; but we were told we must keep in sight of the fort. However, this picnic never materialized. We were awakened by Mother at one o'clock in the morning, and told that Mr. and Mrs. Quinney, and Mr. and Mrs. Mann and family, had arrived from Onion Lake. They had been brought down by some friendly Indians with the warning that, that morning, all the white men at Frog Lake had been massacred, with the exception of two employees of the Hudson's Bay Company.

We immediately went to work to barricade the windows with sacks of flour, leaving the centre pane of each window for a loop-hole. The men worked very quietly and quickly, for there was the possibility of attack at any moment. We older girls had to hold the lamps and candles to light the way for the men, who finished their task before daybreak.

Sentries were posted at different points around the buildings. Then we set up a sort of barricade between the buildings forming the square of the fort, with carts, wagons and cordwood. It was a very poor defence, but the best that we could hurriedly set up at such short notice. The next day every civilian in the fort was sworn in as a special constable by my father, who was a justice of the peace. This included myself and two sisters and a brother. Sentries were placed in each of the five buildings in the fort, each one doing duty for two hours at a time. The watchword was passed every fifteen minutes, my two sisters and I taking our places regularly in the watch, which lasted two weeks.

During this time we practised shooting with our rifles and revolvers. We were constantly on our toes, expecting at any moment that the Indians might come. Incidentally, I passed my sixteenth birthday while we were barricaded in the fort, and though I didn't expect the usual party, I greatly appreciated all the good wishes for a happier birthday next year.

We could not have withstood a siege even for a few days, since the fort was built on a flat with the hills around us; and though there were lots of provisions in the store, we had no water in the fort, but had to get it up from the river in barrels—a distance of about four hundred yards. It seems strange for a Hudson's Bay fort that no well had been dug within its walls.

I used to be on sentry duty from three to five every afternoon, looking north toward the hills over which the Indians would be likely to come. One day, quite a way to the right of the regular road, I saw something black thrown up in the air. I knew it fell too heavily to be a crow on the wing, so I called to my father downstairs to come quickly, all the time keeping my eye on the spot.

In a few minutes we saw a man dragging himself over the ridge. At once there was great excitement in the fort. Some of the men ran out and brought him in. It turned out to be young Henry Quinn, a nephew of Indian Agent Quinn of Frog Lake. He was to have been shot too, but he managed to make a get-away by running into the woods. He told us that for seven miles he had crawled through scrub brush, on his hands and knees. Making a long detour to get to the fort, he had travelled about thirty-five miles in all.



The two principal chiefs in the Rebellion of 1885 are shown here after their capture. Front row: Horse Child, Big Bear's youngest son; Big Bear; Chief of Police Stewart of Hamilton; Poundmaker. Back row: Cst. R. Y. Black; Father Cochin; Supt. R. B. Deane, N.W.M.P.; Father Andre; Beverly Robinson, K.C. R.C.M.P.

He could not speak, for his tongue was badly swollen; but when he was brought around that evening, he was able to tell us of his experience, and how he saw his uncle and the others being shot down—which horrified us all. This man seemed to have a charmed life. He later had two other narrow escapes. One of them occurred when Captain Dickens decided to send out scouts, as I shall tell further on.

One dark night, a mounted policeman, nick-named "Grizzly" because of his beard, was on sentry duty on the east side of the house. From his position he could see dark patches of earth near the house, where the snow had melted. As he watched, he presently saw three crouching figures making their way along the ground, right up against the house. They would move slowly, stopping at intervals as they came. Grizzly shot off his gun to give the alarm. The whole fort was immediately aroused and everyone ran to his post. I remember how sleepy I was as I picked up my rifle to "fix" the sight—which meant wetting my finger, then the sight, and then rubbing the sight with the sulphur end of a match, so that it would glow in the dark. I had hardly finished this when it was discovered that the three figures were three pigs which had got out of their pen! You can imagine the shouts of hearty laughter that followed.

On April 14, for some unexplained reason, Captain Dickens insisted upon sending out two of his men, Dave Cowan and Clarence Loasby, and one civilian, Henry Quinn, to locate the Indians. The Reverend Mr. Quinney sided with him, but my father strongly opposed this plan. He felt they didn't know the country well enough, nor did they understand the Indian tactics. He gave his opinion that the Indians would thereby gain three saddle horses and as many rifles and revolvers, while we would be greatly weakened. But all my father could say to dissuade them seemed useless. Sergeant John Martin, was just as much opposed to that unfortunate move on the part of his superior officer, but it was not for him to remonstrate.

The men were sent out that evening. They were to follow the bank of the river, going west toward Frog Lake. We anxiously awaited their return, hoping to see them back by dawn, but the morning wore on and there was no sign of them. Had the Indians got them, or what had happened?

At three o'clock that afternoon the Indians, fully two hundred and fifty strong and all mounted, made their appearance on the ridge about four hundred yards north of the fort. Their first act was to shoot several of the Company's cattle, which had strayed in that direction. They then made fires and commenced to cook some of the newly killed beef. Shortly after this we saw, approaching the fort, an old Indian who had once been an employee of the Company. He brought a note to my father from Big Bear, written by Mr. H. R. Halpin of Beaver River post, now their prisoner. They asked for tea, tobacco, a blanket, and some kettles, all of which they got.

Another message followed, requesting my father to meet some of their head men at their camp. He agreed to go out on condition that they would meet him half way, which they did. They came forward and shook hands with him in a very friendly manner, spread a blanket on the ground and asked him to sit down. The pipe of peace was passed around. But there seemed to be one Indian that was very suspicious. He thought my father was trying to protect the police. There was some heated argument as the other Indians told him he was wrong. At this, he placed the muzzle of his rifle at my father's temple; but an old woman who had been sitting in the outer circle, like a flash, thrust herself between the rifle and my father and said, "You can't shoot this man. He's a friend!" She then told them this story:

In midwinter she had stopped at the fort on her way from Battleford to Onion Lake, with her son-in-law and little six-weeks old grandchild, whose mother had died at its birth. The baby had been fed only on rabbit brains and was very ill. As the old woman sat

in front of the Carron stove in the shop, trying to get warm, my father found out her sad plight through his interpreter. He told her to come and see his wife, who would give her something to help the baby. My mother always kept some very simple remedies on hand. In a short while she had the old woman feeling much happier, having told her how to make this simple food; and had sent her on her way with the baby wrapped up in clean warm clothes.

After hearing this story, the Indians standing by severely reproved the hot-headed one who had been so ready with his gun. They then told my father that they had been sent to tell him that all the chiefs and head men wanted to have a serious talk with him the following morning. They were not permitted to say anything more. Arrangements were made to meet at the same place. He was then told to return to the fort and to keep his family close to him, and to sleep well, as we would not be disturbed during the night. They shook hands and returned to their own camp.

Everything was quiet during the night, but we kept watch as before. The next morning my father and Captain Dickens held a long consultation. Both were very anxious to use every reasonable endeavour to get the Indians to go back to their reserves. This would give us some respite at least, during which time we were hopeful of being reinforced from Battleford or elsewhere. Meanwhile, the sentries in our house were watching the Indians where they were waiting. Before going out, my father told them that if they saw the Indians laying hands on him forcibly, to fire upon them, even at the risk of killing himself.

You can imagine how we McLeans felt, seeing him walk out, unarmed, to meet them. We knew he was ready to sacrifice himself to protect us, and remembering that there were some hotheads in the camp, we waited with bated breath to see what sort of a reception he would be given.

As he approached the Indians, they came forward, and we were relieved to see them shake hands with him, as before. But after a few words, he went on with them, towards their camp. This puzzled and rather alarmed us, as the agreement had been to hold the parley in sight of the fort. But before he had taken many steps, he turned and waved his handkerchief, which was the prearranged signal that all appeared to be well.

We learned afterwards that the chiefs were not there, as arranged, but were waiting for him beyond the ridge. They assured him that he had no reason to fear, as they were all friendly with him. Knowing full well how the Indians despise a coward, he decided to go on to their camp. When he arrived there, a long consultation followed. But in the midst of the deliberations, some women and boys rushed in, shouting out: "The Redcoats! The Redcoats! They are going to shoot us!"

In an instant, every man was in his saddle, and they rushed upon the three unfortunate scouts whom Captain Dickens had sent out the day before—for it was these men returning. Finding that the Indians were camped between them and the fort, they were riding in at full gallop, hoping to gain the safety of the barricade before the Indians could hit them.

But watching from my loop-hole, I saw Cowan and Loasby knocked off their horses. Both of them lay very still. Some of the Indians approached them, dismounted, and removed their rifles, revolvers, and cartridge belts.

In the meantime, Henry Quinn, who was riding "Firefly," a most beautiful horse belonging to the Mounted Police, had wheeled round and galloped back into the woods, with the Indians in full pursuit. This was his second miraculous escape.

When they had ridden away, I suddenly heard my sister call out: "He's moving! He's not dead!" It was Loasby, who had feigned death while the Indians were taking his weapons. But he was badly wounded. Stanley Simpson, a Company clerk, at once ran out, managed to get him to his feet, and half carrying him, brought him into the fort.

There seemed to be confusion everywhere. Inside the fort, Loasby needed immediate attention. My mother sent us to bring clean sheets to use for bandages. The box of a buckboard was lifted down to the ground and a feather bed placed in it to make him as comfortable as possible.

We were all very anxious to know whether my father was still alive, so my sister Amelia and I went up to the camp. Some of the Indians came forward to meet us and seemed astonished at our nerve.

"Aren't you afraid?" they asked us.

"No! We were never taught to be afraid of Indians," we answered.

This was a good introduction, since the Indians always have a great respect for courage. At this point I cannot remember everything very distinctly, because of our feeling so deeply at seeing Dad safe, but we had to control our emotions in front of the Indians. I remember our standing beside him for a few minutes while he gave us a message to take to my mother—a few words of advice on what seemed best to do at the time. With this message we returned to the fort.

Meanwhile my father asked permission from the chiefs to write a note to his wife. They gladly consented, but insisted that his letter be translated to them by the interpreter. Several such notes passed back and forth between Father and Mother, and at last there was found a way out for all. Father explained in the first note that the Indians had decided to keep him a prisoner, and made him swear that he would not leave them. They sent word that our family must come to the camp, and we would be well taken care of. Big Bear had consented to our bringing the democrat and team of horses and a tent.

My father inquired what would happen to the other Hudson's Bay employees. It was decided that they could make their choice whether to go to the camp or stay with the Redcoats. They decided to leave.

Big Bear said as long as our family were in the fort they would not attack the Redcoats, and the family would be safe. Captain Dickens sent a message asking the Indians to allow them two hours to get away. This they consented to do. In the next note we received, my father had advised that we take as long a time as reasonable in getting ready to leave the fort. My mother understood this message as she was just as anxious as he was to give the police time to get away.

There seemed to be more confusion than ever in the fort. But through it all my little mother remained so quiet and composed that we all felt her steadying influence. She began at once to do what she could to help everybody. What ages it seemed before the police were ready to leave! Their only means of escape was to use the flat boat or scow which my father had had the employees build during our two weeks' barricade. Getting the scow down to the river was slow work. Loasby was carried down in the box of the buckboard

and safely laid in the boat. All this time we anxiously watched from the fort, busying ourselves with our own preparations till we were sure they had reached the river. We continued to watch as we ourselves slowly moved out of the poor old deserted fort. The river was a raging torrent with huge slabs of ice piling up. It was a miracle that they ever got across safely. It seemed to us that the scow might be upset any minute.

As if that were not enough, a new danger now assailed the police. We were no sooner out of the fort than some of the young bloods who were on horseback raced down to the river bank and began to fire upon them. For our own safety's sake we couldn't show any anxiety for them. We couldn't tell whether any of them were shot or killed. The Indians kept firing until they were out of range. We saw them land safely across the river. That was our last view of them as we went over the hill to the camp. How did they get along?

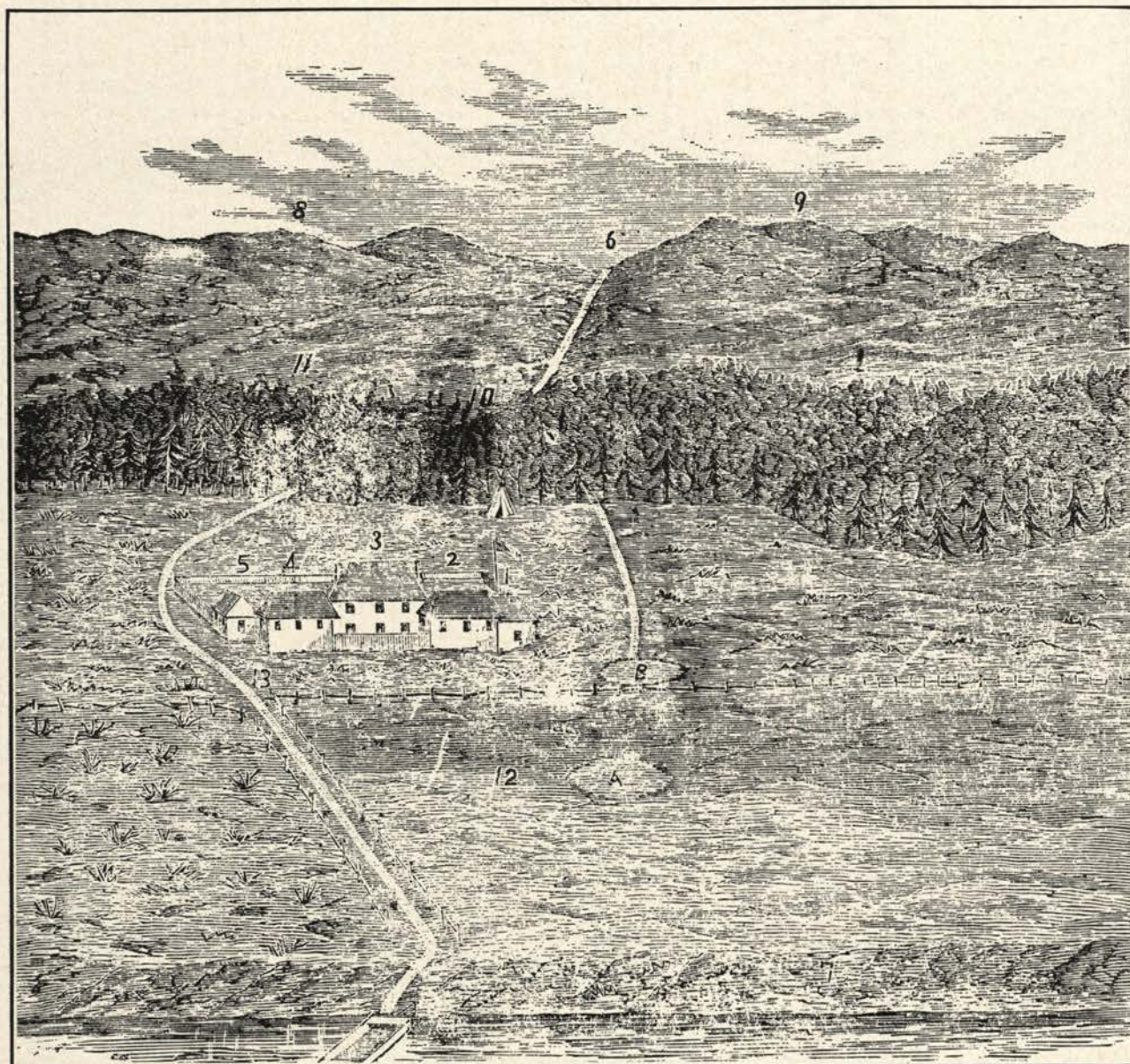
Had anyone been killed or wounded? These questions crossed our anxious thoughts continually in the weeks that followed.

We were all dressed warmly, since my father had advised us that he was sure there was going to be a change in the weather. As we were nearing the camp, some of the Indians came out to meet us, showing my mother all the respect they knew how to. They gave a hand in setting up the tent which she had sent out ahead of her, and rendered very useful little services in view of the impending snow-storm, which came upon us during the night as expected.

So was closed the brief chapter of our life at Fort Pitt, and thus began our two months of discomfort and anxiety as prisoners of Big Bear.

In a subsequent instalment, Miss McLean will relate the story of her family's captivity among the Indians, and of their rescue.

This sketch of Fort Pitt by Cst. Smith appeared in the special Rebellion number of the "Winnipeg Daily Sun." It is not entirely accurate. 1 is the police barracks; 2, fur store; 3, the McLean's house; 6, trail from Frog Lake; 10, where Loasby was shot (the trees should be leafless poplar); 11, where Cowan was killed. Compare with photo, page 4, Dec. 1945 "Beaver." Courtesy Fred H. Stewart.



ALONG MACKENZIE'S



On her voyage to the Arctic sea, the SS. "McKenzie River" stops to unload freight at Fort Wrigley.



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Metis searching for their past

By DAVE TRUSCOTT
Neighbors Reporter

History is a personal thing to the president of Edmonton's Louis Riel Historical Society.

Sheila Hayes has been studying her own family's past since 1984 and has managed to search back as far as 1667 — the year her grandmother's ancestor arrived in Canada from France.

She is a past president of the Edmonton branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society.

The search for her family tree led Hayes to the Louis Riel society — the only group presently dedicated to gathering and preserving Metis history, she says.

The society, formed in 1986, plans to build a home for Metis documents and artifacts.

It presently has a small collection of old official papers and some family records.

Other small collections exist in many places at present, such as the Provincial Museum of Alberta and St. Albert's Musee Heritage Museum, but there is no one key museum for the Metis people, Hayes says.

"If you want to research, you have to seek out the places that exist . . . and then you have to be prepared to travel."

Some documents are stored as far away as Scotland, where many former Hudson's Bay company workers retired, she adds.

Other museums also just don't



GORDON POITRAS, treasurer and founding member of the Louis Riel Historical Society, stands in a costume he wore for a recent multicultural meeting.

have much interest or expertise in Metis history, adds Gordon Poitras, treasurer and a founding member of the society.

He decided to help form a Metis history group after visiting

the Glenbow museum's Metis display in the spring of 1986. "I just wasn't satisfied with the display."

He wrote a letter to the Glenbow pointing out the errors he saw and then decided an independent Metis collection was needed.

The society is presently hoping to have a museum built soon after much lobbying to federal and provincial governments for funding, Hayes says.

Hayes is also trying to interest more people in Metis history and is offering her own expertise in tracing family trees to help others get started.

A beginners' course for those specially interested in Metis ancestors will be offered by the Louis Riel Historical Society starting the evening of Feb. 27, she says. The \$35, five-evening course should allow most people to look back at least two generations with directions on how to go further, she adds.

Hayes hopes it will also help many people get more interested in history generally. She would like to see such courses taught in school.

"The kids would probably understand and appreciate history a whole lot better if they could relate it to their own grandparents."

The Louis Riel Historic Society can be contacted by phoning Sheila Hayes at 452-6100, or by writing to Box 1601, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 2N0