a
Humanities
Discussion
Guide

MEDICINE*FIDDLE

a film by
MICHAEL LOUKINEN

MEDICINE*FIDDLE

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"The film shows the fiddle evoking memories of generations past. It calls forth wonderful stories of fathers and grandfathers and childhoods filled with music. The spoken narrative is amazing. It shows how Native mythology supports the music. It gives insight into Native Americans' lives throughout the years and shares some of their beliefs and convictions. It brings out part of their humanity seldom seen and allows them to be be viewed from a different perspective."

Mikel B. Classen
"Good Man Behind the Camera"
Above the Bridge (Summer, 1991)

Film Producer/Director Michael Loukinen (right)
Cinematographer Miroslav Janek (left)
at Belcourt, North Dakota during production
of the film *Medicine Fiddle*

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Of Loukinen, Maqua, "Elmer's Song" and Métis Symbols

By
Lillian Marks Heldreth

In October of 1989, when he had just finished shooting his film about Native American and Métis fiddle players, Michael Loukinen felt that his film needed a greater sense of direction. The music was lively; the players had wonderfully expressive faces, and the people had spoken eloquently about their music, but a cohesive work had yet to crystallize for Loukinen.

He took up his fall classes at Northern Michigan University confident that he had a few good films lurking "in the can," but unsure of which film would emerge when he edited the rough cut. Meanwhile, at Northern's Lee Hall Gallery, Canadian artist Peter Hornung Maqua was presenting his response to the vision of the First People of this continent in a multi-media installation, *Creation Cycle*. In the eastern and western ends of the gallery, two massive tepees of cast iron poles supported a slender line that ran between them, suspended above a flooring of red Hudson's Bay trading blankets. Arranged on the blanket, vessels of copper and wood held water, cedar boughs, grain, stones, partridge feathers, flowers. On the western wall a massive triptych radiated brilliance; on the other walls a progression of monoprints, many of them embellished with sketches and poetry, portrayed aspects of spiritual life. The background soundtrack surged with the sound of Lake Superior's waves, undulated to the howl of a wolf, then turned into an abstract progression of flutes, drums, and electric guitars.

When the appointed group had gathered, the artist, clad in jeans and T-shirt, fanned the smoke of sweet grass and cedar over his audience, then spoke to them in a blend of ceremony and explanation, transmitting to a predominantly white, town-dwelling audience the values of a people who thank the cedar before taking its boughs, the animals before taking their lives. Peter Maqua explained how Grandfather Sun and Mother Earth, and the people who revere them, had given him renewed life as a person and as an artist.

Michael Loukinen invited Maqua to his home, and told him about his concerns for the film in progress. Sitting on Loukinen's front porch, the artist told a story:

> In my village there's this guy, Elmer. He's good medicine for our community. In late winter, around March, that's Cabin Fever time, our people hold a fiddle dance. They invite Elmer, bring him tobacco. All the guides, the men who usually carry knives, they make a point of wearing their knife sheaths, but they leave the knives at home. That's a symbol of how it's going to be at this dance. Elmer plays tunes that everyone hears every year, and that fiddle makes sounds that hold whole generations of memory.

. . . that fiddle makes sounds that hold whole generations of memory.

And as he plays, we are waiting for this one waltz that can bring everybody, even the men, to tears, because it's Elmer's Song. In his many years of playing, Elmer has found one waltz that he's made in his own way, that he gives to us as a gift, as medicine. It's so sweet, so sad, that when he plays that song, people unleash all the year's hardship and anger into that song.

And each year that you hear it, Elmer's waltz gains greater power, and pain, and beauty and anguish — you take the pain you've been through and insert it into that song, and say, "Yeah, it's been hard, but we'll go on, we'll make it through." That's what Elmer does when he carries that fiddle. He makes people dance with each other who maybe can't even talk to each other. Elmer is carrying great medicine for our people.

Maqua woodburned pictographs into the surface of a child-size violin — trees and hills, the sun and stars, Bear and Turtle, and Thunderbirds

Detail from photograph by Devin Wm. Boble of still life created by Peter Maqua

Loukinen and Maqua talked all night, and the story of Elmer became a catalyst that helped bring the rough cut together for Loukinen. Many times, he realized, European culture had been forced on Native peoples, to their ultimate detriment and loss. But in the step-dancing and fiddle music of the northern Ojibwa and Métis, Loukinen had recorded an instance of Native people voluntarily adopting a European instrument and the European folk forms of waltzes, reels and jigs. The music, adapted and changed by each player, has served to draw Native people together, ameliorating to some degree the tremendous hurt they have sustained in the generations since European contact. Loukinen felt a sense of that healing synthesis drawing his film together as he edited the footage.

When ***Medicine Fiddle*** neared completion, Loukinen had no problem in finding an artist to produce a poster that would present the film's essence. Maqua, who incorporates a blend of European and Native cultures, was a natural choice.

Orphaned at birth, Maqua was adopted and raised by a white couple of German descent, who died when he was about sixteen. Dropping out of school, the young man led a roaming existence, becoming addicted to heroin and overcoming that addiction at twenty-one. During his wanderings he developed his interest in art and poetry. He found work as a hunting guide and as a policeman at a remote Native reserve. But his life was directionless and addiction-haunted until the people of the reserve reached out to him.

That fiddle — that's a non-Native thing that they made into a Native thing — that sums me up, too. I was such a mess when I met the people of my village, I didn't know a thing about most of anything. But they looked at me and said, "You're not from us, you're not native (like that fiddle is not native), 'but you've got awful good potential to make a good song, so we're going to take you in and give and receive and enter into a relationship." And I am very thankful for that. They gave me the spiritual food and medicine I needed to survive.

Subsequently, further integration came from greater disaster. Ten years ago, his body was so shattered by an automobile accident that he was listed as "dead on arrival" at the hospital. Resuscitated, spliced together by a long series of surgeries, he had the vision that has defined him as an artist, as a pipe carrier for his people, and as a teacher of the values given to him by his village. These became *Creation Cycle*, and, on a smaller but exquisite scale, the poster for ***Medicine Fiddle***.

Maqua was happy to be asked to create the poster, because it gave him an

opportunity to express the great beauty and dignity of Ojibwa culture, and his gratitude for what that culture has given to him. In order to perform the creative process in harmony with Native tradition, he asked Loukinen to bring tobacco, because the objects to be used in the poster symbolized sacred things.

On the sunny worktable in his studio in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Maqua placed many possible objects for inclusion in the photographic still life. Then he loaded one of his ceremonial Grandfather pipes with tobacco and smoked it to the four directions: East, for spring, morning, and sudden revelation; South, for summer, midday, and knowledge coming easily; West, for fall, evening, and the wisdom that comes from deep reflection; and North, for winter, deep night, and the insight that comes in dreaming. He raised the pipe above, for Grandfather Sun, and below for Our Mother Earth. He asked that all of the right elements might come together in harmony to communicate their sacredness both to Ojibwa and non-native people. He asked that their spirits accept his request that they participate in the event. In thanks to each, he offered the smoke of sweet grass and cedar, which cleanse both atmosphere and spirit.

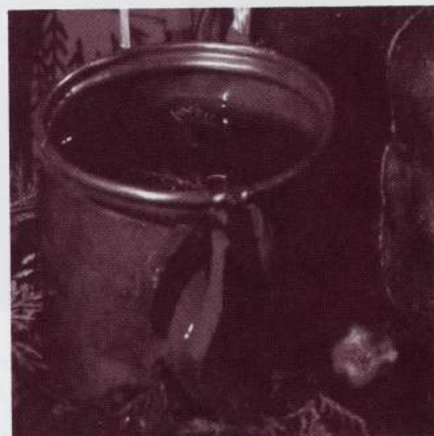
To represent the bi-cultural nature of the Native fiddle, Maqua took a new child-size violin and woodburned pictographs into its surface: trees and hills to represent the earth, the sun and stars; Bear (which is also the meaning of Maqua's Ojibwa name); Turtle, whose shell represents the continents of earth; Thunderbirds for each of the four directions.

In the finished poster, the objects seem to float in a black space. Maqua hoped that Ojibwa people, seeing the poster, would think, "That's us, man. Those are partridge feathers, for a woodland people. The things in that picture hold deep meaning for us."

Each element of the poster is significant on several levels. Maqua wants viewers to understand that no one person's explanation can carry the complete living meaning of any of the objects, but he suggests some of the ways they are important:

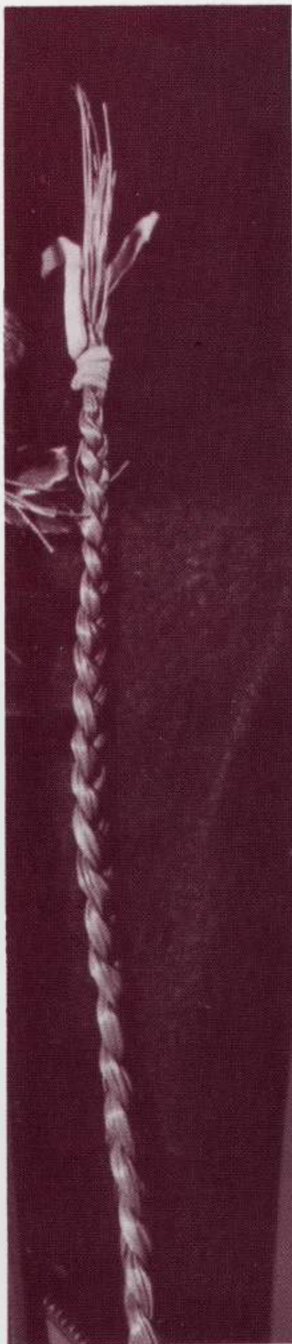
That little rock — not only does its face look like my Grandpa, it came from North Dakota, where a large part of *Medicine Fiddle* was filmed, so it stands for those people.

The copper vessel represents women, because copper is Our Mother's ornament; our people found it on Her surface. It's a very Ojibwa thing, found throughout our country. The water represents the fluid of birth, that must burst and cleanse the road before anyone is born to walk the path of life — and not just the water of human women, but of Our Mother who was here first — woman is the first thing, before anything else can be. In our ceremonies, young girls carry the water around for each person to drink.



Copper is Our Mother's ornament

Cedar is the tree most sacred to our people, because it is the one directly associ-



ated with the Creator. We burn cedar when we want to talk directly to the creator; we drink cedar tea to protect our souls when we fast. Sometimes women will carry a pan of burning cedar throughout a house to cleanse it.

The golden braid is sweetgrass. It represents the kindness and mercy of the Creator, who braided everything in the creation together, totally interdependent. When our people braid their hair, it means the same thing. Before we can have the sweet scent of sweetgrass for our ceremonies, we must make that braid.

The wrapped bundle behind the partridge tail is sage, which cleanses; its smoke empties out what is not good from the place, what is not alive. Sage is a healing agent, too.

That flat wooden bowl is covered with personal symbols from my own life. The hole in the middle denotes that it is for spirit use, not for everyday eating. It's where I put offerings that commemorate my ancestors, those who have gone before.

The red background cloth is for the blood of all people; it stands also for the bond between mankind and Mother Earth. And the megis shell is truly representative of our people, of the Mide lifeway, of the very earliest origins of life. Get into its symbolism, which is very deep, and you enter our physics.

And then, central to the composition, the non-Native fiddle, made a vital part of Native life by its adoption and transformation. Maqua hopes that his arrangement stands for a synthesis that is presented in ***Medicine Fiddle***.

In the cover of this book, Maqua restates a message that Western culture seems to have forgotten: the things that give us sustenance and joy — water, forest, animals, rocks, earth, fiddles, dances — are sacred, and should be used and enjoyed in a respectful and sacred manner, treasured as part of the garment of life that clothes this planet. For European-descended and Native people alike, it is a way to seek the beauty and vitality that are expressed in the music of ***Medicine Fiddle.***

The golden braid is sweetgrass. It represents the kindness and mercy of the Creator, who braided everything in the creation together, totally interdependent.

The Tribal Cultures of the People in the film MEDICINE FIDDLE

by
Michael M. Loukinen

Métis

Métis is a French word meaning "mixed-blood." It is used as a noun in reference to "all peoples of mixed racial ancestry." All of the fiddlers featured in ***Medicine Fiddle*** are Métis in this sense of racial blending. However, many identify not with the "mix" per se, but with either the European component (usually French) or the specific tribal culture (usually Ojibwa).

When capitalized, "Métis" refers to those who acknowledge and identify with the uniqueness of the "mixture"; in this sense the term refers to group of culturally and politically united people living in Canada. (Waldman, 1988:130). The term "Michif," sometimes spelled "Metchif" refers to the same people living on the United States side of the border.

Virtually all native people whose ancestors were touched by the fur trade are of mixed ancestry. There are many proud "Métis" in the Turtle Mountain area of North Dakota, the Rocky Boy Reservation, in various settlements along the Blackfoot River Valley in Montana, and throughout Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. Others of mixed ancestry identify exclusively with the European or Native aspects of their heritage, largely because they have found it more rewarding to do so. Frank Boyer, Steve Souliere, George

Unidentified fiddlers in a logging camp, Delta County, Michigan. The one on the left is obviously an Indian.

Photo: Courtesy Delta County Historical Society.

Savour—who all live on the Garden River Reservation in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario — consider themselves Ojibwa. Coleman Trudeau who lives on the Wikiwemikong Reserve in Ontario considers himself Ottawa, while Rene Cote from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, considers himself French-Canadian. Dick Gravelle, from the same area, considers himself "French-Indian."

Mike Page from Belcourt and Frank Poitra, from the Turtle Moutains of North Dakota identify themselves as "Michif." Lawrence Houle from Manitoba is "Métis." Fred Allery, who has a French surname, thinks of himself as

Ojibwa and says his French "blood" corrupts his Native blood and makes him "confused" at times.

"Métis" culture is a blend of French, Cree, Ojibwa, Scottish, Irish, and English culture expressed in language, visual art, music, and lifestyle. These cultural elements are expressed in varying proportions in different individuals. Some persons have a strong 17th century French vocabulary and dialect to their speech; in others, the Ojibwa dialect and vocabulary may be more evident.

Participants in an old time fiddlers' contest pose in front of Rindlisbacher's pool hall, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 1927. Ernest "Pea Soup" Guibord, lower right, placed third.

Photo: Courtesy of the *Rice Lake Chronotype*

A distinction of the "extremely structured" Michif language is the way in which the French and Native components are *combined*:

> the noun phrase is a French domain, verb structure is clearly and thoroughly Cree, syntax is Cree with French, and probably English influence. . . . Almost all Cree nouns have been replaced by French ones, and not only the nouns but articles and adjectives have been absorbed with them. . . . So pervasive is the domination of the French noun phrase that when English words are borrowed into "Michif," they occur with French articles. . . . A system of demonstrative pronouns operates in conjunction with the noun showing the Algonquian animate-inanimate gender distinction. **(Crawford, 1986:233).**

People of mixed Euro-Native ancestry, like "half-breeds" throughout history and around the world, have been scorned by both their white European and Native communities. "Michif" speakers have always been criticized and ridiculed for speaking "like a whiteman" and "for talking Indian." Racism and economic and political discrimination on both sides of their ancestry generated such incredible pain that the "Métis" identity was born perhaps as a psychic refuge.

The Menominee of Northern Wisconsin

The name "Menominee" has several spellings, and literally means "Rice Gathering People." Traditionally, women were the gatherers of wild rice (actually the seeds from a wild grass), berries, and wild plants, whereas the men hunted and fished.

The territory of the Menominee, an Algonquian language people, once entailed over 9,000,000 acres of land including what was later established as the entire Upper Peninsula of Michigan and northwestern Wisconsin. Their largest village was sited where the Menominee River flows into Green Bay in the northwestern part of Lake Michigan.

After a land cession treaty in 1854 the Menominees ended up with a 276,480 acre reservation centered around the Upper Wolf River in northern Wisconsin. The "discrepancy" between the 9,000,000 acres originally claimed and the 1854 settlement was paid for at the rate of 15 cents per acre.

The Menominee are one of two Great Lakes tribes whose land had never

been broken up into "allotments" and thereafter sold to individual owners. During the 1870's the Menominees began a logging operation that evolved into a major sawmill enterprise earning sufficient profits to support many families, a school, and a health care clinic. In 1981 gambling enterprises entered the reservation in the form of bingo, and in 1987 a higher-stakes casino opened, reporting two years later that profits from the gaming operations exceeded the logging and sawmill revenues.

Menominees were, relative to many other tribes, on friendly terms with the whites. At no time did the Menominee go to war against white America. Following a strong warrior tradition, they tended to fight for the same cause as did other Americans. Eighteen served in World War I, and approximately 500 fought in World War II. Recently, 103 Menominee reservists were activated for Operation Desert Storm, and twenty-seven actually were deployed to the Persian Gulf.

Menominees assimilated with whites more completely than did other tribes. According to United States Census counts in 1885, 52% of the 1,308 Menominee were mixed-bloods. In 1930 there were 74.8% of 1,968 tribal members of mixed-blood. **(Keesing, 1987: 226)**.

These counts were based on beliefs and claims of individuals. Some scholars doubt whether there are actually any full-blooded Menominee, as they also tended to intermarry with the Potawatami, Ojibwa, Sauk, Fox, and Winnebago.

In 1849, over 300 mixed-blood Menominees accepted the "Half-breed Payment" whereby, in return for a modest cash settlement, they gave up all legal rights often associated with tribal membership. (Keesing, 1987: 225). Their decision was made in the context of a belief that the United States government was going to force the Menominees to move to a distant location in the midst of hostile tribes. When the tribe earned profits through its lumbering operations, in a gesture of reconciliation, it purchased back many of these half-breeds' rights, even though they were seen as having been disloyal.

Everette ("Butch") Waupoose, fiddle; Lowell ("Chopper") Waupoose, guitar. Menominee Indian Reservation, Keshena, Wisconsin.

Photo: Michael Loukinen

Extensive contact with white Euro-Americans was due to the military roads constructed through the reservation first in 1821, and especially during the 1860s as a major military highway was built from Green Bay through the reservation to Lake Superior. This highway encouraged extensive interaction between lumberjacks and the Menominee. Much of the fiddling and dancing traditions resulted from Menominee men traveling northward to work in multiethnic lumbercamps where they were exposed to the expressive culture of the camps. This is where Dave and Alex Waupoose learned many of the tunes that were handed down to Everette, Lowell, and Irwin Waupoose who are featured in ***Medicine Fiddle***.

According to the 1990 census there are 1,745 males and 1,668 females totaling 3,413 Menominees on the reservation, while another 3,153 of the tribe live elsewhere, mostly in Wisconsin. We filmed and recorded the Waupoose family in the reservation towns of Keshena, Neopit, in a remote neighborhood known as "South Branch." Their

attempt to relearn their square dancing traditions after the death of their last caller, was filmed in the center of Keshena, at the Menominee Logging Camp Museum.

Ojibwa

The Ojibwa, otherwise known as the "Ojibway," or "Chippewa," call themselves "Anishnabeg," which means "original men." The name refers to a distinctive puckered seam on their leather moccasins. **(Cornell, 1988:88).** They were once in the same tribe with the Potawatomis and Ottawas. Despite hundreds of years of separation they have remained in a federation that the elders refer to as the "People of the Three Fires."

Dick Gravelle, far right, plays fiddle along with his father and brothers on Sugar Island, Michigan, ca. 1930. His younger brother strums a homemade guitar strung with fishing line.

Photo: Courtesy of the Gravelle family

The Ojibwa were one of the largest and most powerful tribes in North America. Originally they lived in the area around the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. Sometime near 900 A.D. they began a gradual westward migration which lasted centuries. They established settlements along the way, and built a major village near the St. Mary's Rapids where the eastern edge of Michigan's Upper Peninsula meets the Canadian border. **(Cornell, 1986:76).** From this historic site they dispersed and established villages throughout the Lake Superior Region. Usually, most of the village residents were members of the same clan.

In this harsh climate they lived in villages, catching fish during the spawning runs in the spring and fall; and in the summer months they gathered berries, wild fruit, and rice. During the winter they dispersed into the silence of forested interior to hunt moose, deer, and rabbits. Their clothing and moccasins were crafted from these animal skins. Most of their time was spent hunting and gathering out in the bush as a patrilocal (i.e. wife lives with husband's family) extended family unit. Usually, a party working together and searching for food were a husband, wife, grown sons with their wives and children, and perhaps brothers with their wives and children too. **(Shkilnyk, 1985).**

The French encountered the Ojibwa living in dome-shaped lodges and cone-shaped wigwams made of birch bark in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario in the 1620s, shortly after their village had been established. Becoming close allies with the French permitted the Ojibwa to be one of the first tribes to acquire firearms, which they used to expand their territory westward; they drove the Sioux further out onto the plains, and, in the southwest, drove out the Sauks, Foxes, and Kickapoos of what is now northern Wisconsin. **(Waldrun: 1988:58).**

Like other tribes who became deeply involved with the French, the Ojibwa became dependent upon the fur trade, alcohol, and access to the new firearms technology. Gradually, they became alienated from their traditional subsistence activities. Indian women married with French and French Canadian men working in the woods as trappers or lumberjacks. The celebration of the friendship, fairness, and harmony existing between the French and Native peoples is being ques-

tioned by revisionist historians who stress the economic exploitation. **(Cornell, 1986:90)**. Nevertheless, extensive mutual acculturation transpired.

Virtually all of our fiddlers have some French ancestry; and it was the French who first introduced the fiddle and step-dancing culture to Native peoples at fur rendezvous, weddings, and (two hundred years later as French-Canadians) in the lumbercamps, taverns, and dance halls.

The Ojibwa-French fiddlers featured in ***Medicine Fiddle*** include Frank Boyer, Steve Souliere, Dick Gravelle, and George Savour from the Sault Ste. Marie area. An important tune with a name that reflects this cultural history is "Whitefish on the Rapids," played by Coleman Trudeau on Sugar Island. Dick Gravelle plays an old unnamed French tune that his father used to play and sing in French when he was a boy. Although he can still find the fiddle tune, he has forgotten the words.

In 1825, a United States Treaty specified the lands of the Ojibwa, largely to halt their chronic warfare with the Sioux. Lumbering interests engineered a treaty in 1837 resulting in land cessions in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin. Mining interests prodded Congress to establish another treaty in 1842, resulting in more land cessions in northern Wisconsin and the Western Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Permanent reservations were established. **(Thannum, 1987:5)**. Although whites assumed vast areas of lands once sacred hunting territory, the Ojibwa were never displaced from their homelands as were many eastern tribes. Today, the Ojibwa live primarily in Ontario, Manitoba, Minnesota, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Montana.

Ottawa

Along with the Potawatomi, the Ojibwa and Ottawa were once the same people who migrated to the Great Lakes Region, where they dispersed. **(Walman, 1988:172)**. Prior to contact with the Europeans, the Ottawa wrestled a living from the environment along the north shore of Lake Huron. They followed in the subsistence pattern as did all the woodland tribes of the Algonquian language family living in the Northeast. However, owing to their slightly warmer climate, Ottawa women raised more corn and squash than their northern neighbors; hence, they traded their surplus, and that of the Hurons to the south, with their northerly neighbors who depended solely upon hunting. Indeed, "Ottawa" (Adawe) means "trader." **(Cleland, 1975:9)**.

Ojibwa-French fiddler Steve Souliere

Photo: Michael Loukinen

The Ottawa traded beaver pelts and other furs for centuries before the European fur trade developed. When French fur traders penetrated the northwoods, they became allies with the Huron, who traded with the Ottawa, who traded with the Ojibwa, Menominee, Potawatomi, Fox, Sauk, and others. Hence, the Ottawa became the second link in the chain of Native peoples which led to the European market. Beaver pelts were sent out of the woods to Europe. Firearms, metal hatchets, knives, pots, and tools en-

tered the Great Lakes Region via the returning canoes. Ottawa villages prospered during the early years of the fur trade.

The Iroquois Confederacy annihilated the Huron in 1649, in order to destroy their trading connection with the French. The Ottawa thereafter assumed this direct trading relationship with the French fur buyers, and benefited substantially for many years until they, too, were crushed by the Iroquois in 1660. The Ottawa migrated west, but returned to Manatoulin Island (where we filmed Coleman Trudeau) when the French promised to protect them from the Iroquois. **(Waldman, 1988:173).**

The Ottawa intermarried extensively with other Native peoples and with the French, and as a result, they learned to play the fiddle.

Perhaps it was their historic position as middlemen, between the northern Algonquian hunters and the Huron, that taught them how to relate culturally to different peoples; or, that their value system emphasized respect for the individual and extensive sharing of food and other wealth; or, the flexibility of their social organization (either patrilineal or matrilineal) that led the Ottawa to admit members of other tribes into their villages. **(McClurken, 1986:8).** Whatever the reasons, the social boundaries surrounding the Ottawa community were more permeable than were those of other tribes. They intermarried extensively with other Native peoples and with the French, and as a result, they learned to play the fiddle.

Chief Pontiac, an Ottawa, was one of the greatest leaders of all Native peoples who urged different tribes to unite in a common front against the British. This pan-Indian front dramatically brought victories in battle, but ultimately failed to defeat the British who were holding Fort Detroit and Fort Pitt. When he lost the support of the French, Pontiac's movement collapsed, but his courageous stand inspired other great chiefs to form a united front of Native peoples against the whites.

After a series of treaties, the Ottawa ceded most of their territory and ended up along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, on the Maumee River in Ohio, on Manatoulin Island in Ontario, and among the Potawatomi and Ojibwa in Illinois, and Wisconsin. **(McClurken, 1986:22).**

Their ancient trading instincts saved some Ottawa villages along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. They developed business and friendship relationships with whites, used these relationships to purchase parcels of land adjacent to their reservations, and thereby expanded their land base. Members of other tribes usually spent their annuity payments on consumer goods; as a result, their land holdings became fragmented and absorbed into white society.

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Old Native And Métis Fiddling: An Ethnomusicological Perspective

by
Anne Lederman

The fiddlers in this film are all inheritors of a musical tradition which began with the arrival of the first French and Scottish immigrants to Canada and the northern United States in the 1600's and 1700's. These immigrants brought fiddles and European dance music with them. They traded furs with Native people and married Native women, creating a mixed Native-European population and culture which has endured to the present day. The legacy of this culture can still be found in Native, Métis and French communities from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Alaska into the northern States.

Fiddling and dancing to fiddle music became the main social activity of many "Métis" (mixed) communities. Native and Métis fiddlers developed a repertoire and a style of playing which reflected both their Native and their European roots. In particular, the older tunes frequently combine melodies from the British Isles with the phrasing and structures of Native music, creating a truly hybrid style. Fiddlers in this tradition also developed a practice of "clogging" with both feet along with their playing, a practice which remains unique to the descendants of French and Native culture in North America. Over the years the repertoire has expanded greatly as new tunes were composed or learned from other fiddle sources, but the essential Métis style has been maintained to some extent to the present day. This fiddle tradition is the earliest and perhaps the strongest example of a blending of Native and European musics in the New World.

This fiddle tradition is the earliest and perhaps the strongest example of a blending of Native and European musics in the New World.

The relative degree of "Nativeness" in the fiddling of Native and Métis communities music has been diminishing in recent years as Native and Métis fiddlers are increasingly exposed to other styles of music. This change depends on many factors: how old the fiddler is, how isolated the community, who the fiddlers learned from and how influenced by radio and recorded music they were. However, in spite of the fact that the fiddlers in the film are from communities 1000 miles apart, they have much in common. All have a close connection to their Native/Métis heritage and all have been influenced by the old fur trade style. They have all had to choose a direction in relation to the "old" and the "new." While younger players such as Frank Boyer, Jr., have moved away from the old style with its "crazy rhythm," preferring a style that is more widely accepted outside of Native communities, others hang on tenaciously to playing in the "old- time" way.

I have worked especially closely with Lawrence "Teddy Boy" Houle, who appears throughout the film. Mr. Houle,

like many others, is a Native fiddler with a foot in two worlds. On the one side, he has the legacy of old tunes learned from his father, uncles and other members of his community, while on the other, he also learns much of the recorded fiddling which comes his way—American country music, "down-east" Canadian fiddling, even Cape Breton and French-Canadian tunes. The following profile may reveal something of his personal culture.

Lawrence "Teddy Boy" Houle

Photo: Bill Henry, Dauphin, Manitoba, 1986

"Teddy Boy," as he is generally known, is a Native Saulteaux speaker. He was born in 1938 in Bacon Ridge, Manitoba, a small non-status community beside the Ebb and Flow Reserve on the western shores of Lake Manitoba.

He learned fiddle mainly by watching his stepfather, Walter Flett, his uncles Charlie and Roderick and neighbor Willie Mousseau, all of whom were highly respected fiddlers in the community. He says no one, including his father, actually showed him anything, as seems to be typical in this tradition. "I would just play it and play it and play it, and . . . I used to cry beside this instrument, I wanted to learn it so bad." At first, he had to steal it from his father's hiding place when his parents went to town since his father had forbidden the kids to touch the fiddle, which was considered a rare and valuable possession. According to Teddy Boy, "Nobody had anything. If you had a fiddle, my goodness, you were a millionaire." In spite of the fact that he plays for dances and festivals throughout the prairies, he still says he will never play as well as his dad did. On the other hand, he believes everyone should have their own approach:

> See the three brothers here (Walter, Charlie and Roderick) . . . if you asked them to play the same tune, they all had different versions, so, that's when I decided I must have a version too . . . so I would never really try to copy anybody because I had my own style.

Teddy Boy has worked at a number of occupations over his life, including archaeological surveying, community development, social work and teaching elementary school. He is regularly asked to speak on issues related to Native culture and tradition and is respected as a healer. He also teaches workshops on jigging, social dancing and fiddling.

In spite of his exposure to recorded music, he prefers the "old-time" way of playing from his own community. He works with traditional dance groups in the communities of Hollow Water and the Cody Reserve and has recorded an album of tunes learned from his father on the Sunshine label in Winnipeg (SSBCT 442). In 1986, he

collaborated with the author on a project to record as much of the old style of fiddling in his community and the nearby community of Camperville as possible. These recordings were released as two double-album sets on an independent label, Falcon Productions (see Bibliography). In the past few years Teddy Boy has also been invited to appear at the Mariposa Folk Festival and the WOMAD Festival in Toronto, and at a special event celebrating Native heritage at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

The old repertoire favored by fiddlers such as Mr. Houle consists of Scottish and French-Canadian tunes, probably dating from the early days of the fur trade, along with original tunes, American and Anglo-Canadian tunes. According to written and oral reports, the repertoire in the early days consisted mainly of reels, jigs and hornpipes to which were danced various eight-hand reels (also called "quadrilles," and later "square dances"), six and four-hand reels, line dances and solo step-dances. Older fiddlers in western Manitoba have told me that their fathers played only "quadrilles" and "Scotch reels," no waltzes, "fox-trots," polkas or other kinds of tunes as they do now.

Most of the players of my acquaintance have no names for the old tunes unless they have particular dances or local stories associated with them. This applies especially to the Scottish tunes and what I have called the "Métis" tunes (not traced to any older cultural source). Although I have identified some of the Scottish tunes by their common names in Scottish tradition, there are undoubtedly many others which I have not recognized. In the case of the Métis tunes not traced to other sources, I have used names given by Andy de Jarlis (1914-1975). He was a Métis player from Woodridge, Manitoba who made, by my count, thirty-three LP recordings, most for the London label. Many of these recordings contain tunes from the old aural tradition of Manitoba Native and Métis communities. It is probable that he, himself, made up most of the names of the older tunes in order to list them on the recordings. De Jarlis's recordings were very influential throughout the prairies, especially in Manitoba. Many players have adopted his versions of older tunes, alongside or instead of their own older versions.

Excepting the first two American tunes, the names of the American and Anglo-Canadian tunes are more commonly known by the players. This may indicate a more recent source, or may simply be because the tunes have been frequently heard on radio and recordings in the past 50 years.

Older fiddlers in western Manitoba have told me that their fathers played only "quadrilles" and "Scotch reels," no waltzes, "fox-trots," polkas or other kinds of tunes as they do now.

Scottish

* **Haste to the Wedding** - ***often used for the opening dance at weddings.***
* **Fisher's Hornpipe** - ***used for "La Double Gigue," a step-dance for two couples.***
* **Keel Row** - ***used for the Broom Dance.***
* **Heel Toe Polka** - ***used for dance of the same name.***
* **MacDonald's Reel**
* **Soldier's Joy**
* **Flowers of Edinburgh**
* **Caber Feigh**
* **Braes of Auchtertyre**

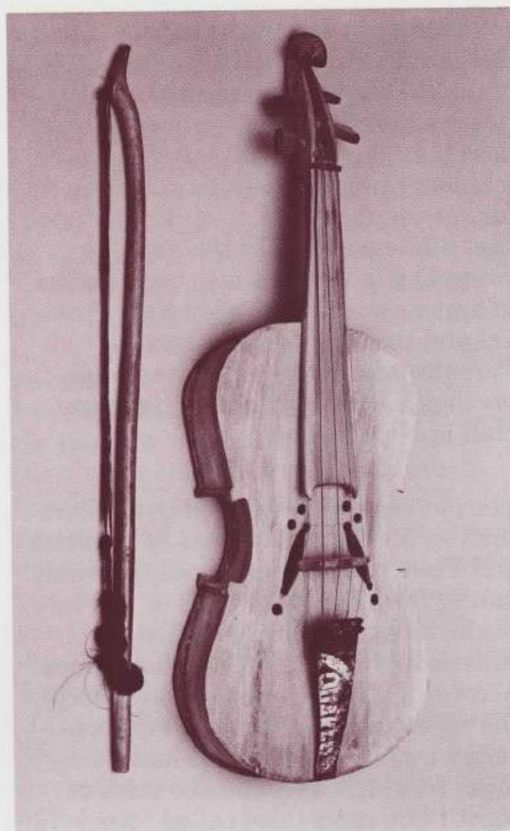
Métis, Native, or French Canadian

Native influence is evident largely in the form of the old tunes, which are often very asymmetric. In contrast to most Scots-Irish and Anglo-Canadian/ American tunes, the phrases vary in length and are combined in irregular patterns.

- **Red River Jig** - *used for solo step-dancing.*
- **Drops of Brandy** - *used for the Scottish line dance of the same name, but bearing little resemblance to the Scottish tune.*
- **Duck Dance** - *a six or twelve-hand reel.*
- **Devil's Reel**
- **Romeo's First Change**
- **Crossing the Ferry**
- **Grandpa's Whiskers**
- **Trading Post Reel**
- **Wind that Turns the Mill**
- **House Party Jig**

American

- **Year of Jubilo**
- **Wagoner**
- **Arkansas Traveller**
- **Whisky Before Breakfast**
- **Turkey in the Straw**
- **Girl I left Behind (originally Irish)**
- **Buffalo Girls**
- **Little Brown Jug**
- **Crooked Stovepipe**
- **Boil the Cabbage Down**
- **Ragtime Annie**
- **Cotton-Eyed Joe**
- **Home Sweet Home**
- **Over the Waves**



Right — Homemade Ojibwa "Indian fiddle" from northern Minnesota. Notice the "Quaker State" oil can bridge and the natural crook in the bow.

Photo: Courtesy Gale Perry Andresen

Anglo-Canadian

- **Big John MacNeill** *(originally Scottish)*
- **Growling Old Man, Grumbling Old Woman**
- **Logger's Breakdown**
- **Lumberjack Breakdown**

It must be emphasized that only preliminary comparative work has been done on these tunes and their relation to other repertoires. Further, it is impossible to determine whether many tunes on the "Métis" list are of French-Canadian or Métis/Native origin, as both cultures were intertwined throughout the fur trade era. Also, in the hands of Native and Métis players, the Scottish, American and Anglo-Canadian tunes named above are often played in radically different forms than in the traditions from which they come, some so different as to be almost unrecognizable.

Native influence is evident largely in the form of the old tunes, which are often very asymmetric. In contrast to most Scots-Irish and Anglo-Canadian/American tunes, the phrases vary in length and are combined in irregular patterns. A phrase may be anywhere from two to seven beats long. Tunes or sections of tunes frequently consist of odd numbers of phrases, especially three or five. Sections vary in length within a tune. Some tunes really only have one section, or one section with variations rather than the two-section form of Celtic tradition. Tunes frequently have extended introductions and endings.

All of these features correspond directly to those found in traditional Native songs, especially songs of the Ojibwa and of the Plains tribes. These songs typically consist of a varying number of phrases of unequal lengths. They have extended introductions and endings centering around one note, and one main section which is repeated without its introduction. They are accompanied by one of three drum rhythms as follows:.

a.

b.

c.

Coincidentally, these rhythms correspond to the rhythms of Celtic fiddle music, either reels (a and b) or jigs (c). This may have made it easier for Native people to adopt fiddle music. Interestingly, the clogging pattern most commonly used by French and Native fiddlers corresponds directly to drum rhythm #2. In the film, several people talk about the relationship between fiddle rhythms and traditional powwow drumming, describing them as being similar. Butch Waupoose of Keshena, Wisconsin, tells a story of his father playing fiddle for a famous Memoninee powwow dancer who usually danced to drumming. Debbie Pine and her Aunt Kathy talk about doing the "Squaw Dance" to fiddle music. (The "Squaw Dance" is an old Native round dance done to drum music).

Grandy Fagan, Grandview, Manitoba, 1982.

Photo: Bill Henry

Dancers from Coté. Saskatchewan at the Friendship Centre, Dauphin, Manitoba, 1986.

Photo: Bill Henry

French song tradition, like Native singing, frequently exhibits irregular phrasing, again making it impossible to say how much of this particular trait can be attributed to French influence and how much to Native traditions. However, in my experience, the asymmetric phrasing and tune structures described above are much more pronounced in the fiddling of Native communities than in even the oldest fiddle styles of French-Canadian communities. These traits are especially strong in areas where Native languages, especially Ojibwa, are still spoken. The degree of irregularity in the forms may be some indication of the relative age of a tune in the repertoire of Native communities.

Like many "old-time" fiddlers from any tradition in North America, most Native players learn by ear. They have little access to formal musical education of any sort. Fiddlers watched and imitated older players in the community and few, in my acquaintance, ever had much help. They frequently hold the bow further up than "trained" players and rest the heel of the fiddle on their hand, a practice demonstrated by most of the fiddlers in the film. The fiddle may be placed anywhere from under the chin down to mid-chest. All of these practices are common to many rural fiddle traditions.

However, Native fiddlers also practice some distinctive techniques. They tend to use short bow strokes, strong accents and few slurs. As mentioned in the film, for spiritual reasons, some put rattlesnake rattles or porcupine quills inside the instrument. Further, most of the old-style fiddlers accompany their playing with "clogging" patterns in which both feet alternate on the floor to create rhythms, as follows:

a. Reels -

Some reverse feet, using left foot on strong beats.

b. Jigs -

In Canada, clogging while playing is common in all areas of French and Native heritage. Like the repertoire, it is impossible to determine whether it is of French or Native origin and must again be considered a legacy of the mixed culture of the fur trade.

The old style is also known for "double-stringing" or what has been described to me as "playing on all the strings at once". This means that open strings are frequently bowed along with the melody, creating chords and drone effects. In earlier times, especially before guitars were used as accompaniment, many fiddlers practiced a kind of accompaniment style with two fiddles. In the film, Fred Allery and Sylvester Vivier of Turtle

Mountain demonstrate a version of this which they refer to as "bucking" or "le Boss." In western Manitoba, a second fiddler would sometimes play the melody an octave down, or an improvised accompaniment to the melody.

Fiddlers frequently altered the tuning of the fiddle for certain tunes, in order to give it more resonance. Some of the most common tunings are (from lowest to highest pitch):

a. **A D A E** - Used for *Red River Jig* and many other D tunes.

b. **A E A E** - Used for A tunes. This tuning and the next are especially associated with "Devil's tunes."

c. **A E A C#** - Used for *Devil's Reel* (a version of "Le Reel du Pendu" of Quebec and "Lost Indian" in the U. S.) and *Devil's Waltz* (a version of "Rye Whisky").

Some players, including Teddy Boy Houle, play an older tune in **D D A D** tuning (with the bottom G string tuned down to a low D). Occasionally, **A D A D** also turns up.

Mike Page of North Dakota describes another "old-time" practice — "preparing" a tune by playing several phrases in the key about to be used. These melodic bits were not usually in any particular rhythm and might or might not be related to the actual tune the fiddler was about to play. Several Manitoba players also described this practice to me, referring to it as a kind of warm-up for the tune following. Mike says, "The old timers, I used to get a kick out of them, if they wanted to play something on an F chord, they'd go . . . on for about two or three minutes before they'd take off."

Players in the old style also varied their playing from one time through the tune to the next. In practice, this meant not only varying the notes but adding and dropping bits of melody as well, thus changing the lengths of phrases on repeats of the tune. They also tended to have individual versions of tunes. No doubt, this was partly a result of learning by ear. However, there also seems to be a strong feeling among older players that one should always play in one's own way and not sound exactly like anyone else. Coleman Trudeau says, "the advice I got from my father was: Never try to play like the other person . . . never try to copy another person's playing. Try to develop your own style." (See also the earlier quote from "Teddy Boy" Houle).

Never try to play like the other person . . . never try to copy another person's playing. Try to develop your own style.

Coleman Trudeau

In conclusion, the old style is a legacy of the fur trade that blends influences from Scottish, French, Native and later, American cultures. It is, therefore, a truly Métis, or "mixed" musical tradition. This tradition has been preserved in Native and Métis communities throughout Canada and the northern United States because of the relative isolation of these communities, especially since reserves and reservations were established in the late 1800s.

Within the last fifty years, however, these communities have been exposed to many "new" forms of music, especially country and western, and "downeast" Canadian fiddling. Many Native and Métis players were very attracted to these musics, which were, after all, related to their own. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the musics heard on recordings and radio acquired a higher status in many people's minds than their own older traditions which were not being re-

corded and broadcast. In fiddling, this has meant an increasing tendency towards more regular phrasing and smoother bowing. Double-stringing and "bucking" are disappearing with the greater use of guitar accompaniment. The more complex ornamentation of the older tunes is also fading. Many of the old tunes themselves are disappearing from the repertoire, replaced by recorded American and Don Messer style Canadian tunes.

In the last century, Native and Métis people have faced a situation in which they were encouraged to reject their own culture and join "main stream" white society (even though discriminated against in that society). They have increasingly adopted non-Native cultural expressions. Films such as ***Medicine Fiddle*** help them to take renewed pride in their own unique creative traditions as well. ***Medicine Fiddle*** is of great benefit to the fiddlers, their communities, and to the rest of us in helping us to understand how truly special these traditions are

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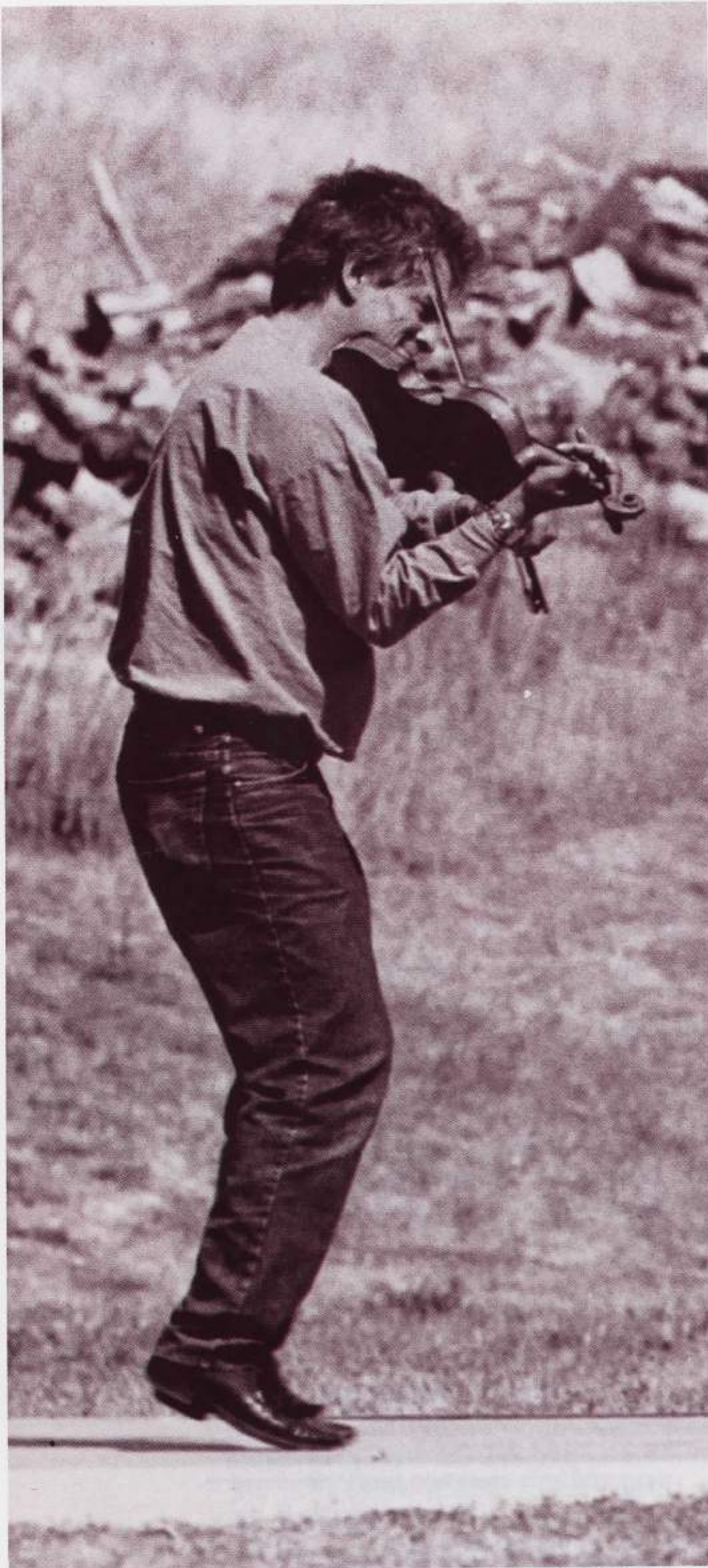


"Teddy Boy" Houle on location for *Medicine Fiddle*

Photo: Mark Nelson

Tale Of the Medicine Fiddle: How a Tune Was Played and the Metchif Came to Be

by
Nicholas Curtain
Peterson Vrooman

with
Frank Poitra
Fred Allery
Mike Page
Dorothy Azure Page

Nicholas

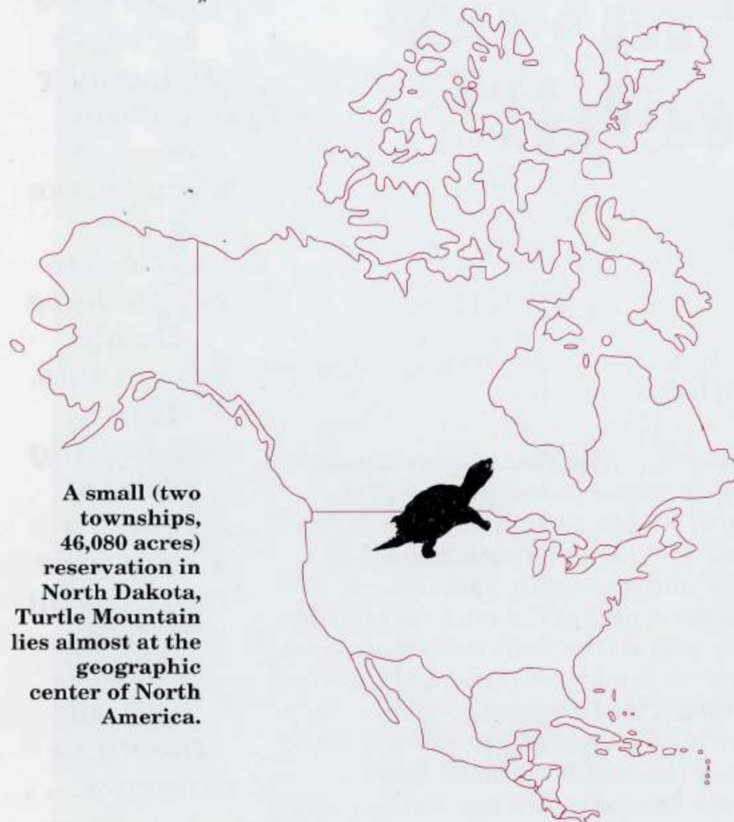
Bo' jou'. Tawnsi keya, neechee? Good day. How are you, my friends? I've come to ask a favor of you all, that we talk a little more about the fiddle in Metchif life. For this film that's been made on it by our buddy Michael, over in that Saulteaux country. Michael wanted me to tell a little something more, words for a booklet to go along with the film, on how the fiddle fits into your lives and what it means to the Metchif, how it's come to be, its story. There are some things I'd like to say about it, from what I've learned from you all and the sense I've made from that, but mostly, I think folks would do best hearing from you the telling of what the fiddle means, its medicine. So I'll say my piece, then sit and listen. . . .

I have this idea that maybe it would help if people looked at map of the North American continent, and in their mind's eye drew intersecting lines north to south, east to west, seeking the center of the land mass, then they would find the Turtle Mountains, right on the North Dakota/Manitoba border. This happenstance that the Turtle Mountains sit at the exact middle of the continent holds many levels of symbolic significance, some of which people might find interesting to know.

The hills that rise out of the vast prairie of the Northern Plains, that are the traditional home of your people, the Pembina Band of Chippewa, the Red River Métis, or, as you call yourselves, Metchif, have come to be called the Turtle Mountains because the outline of these hills, if you were an eagle flying over looking down, is shaped like a giant turtle. The people have always known this. It is a fascinating piece of synchronicity, like there really is some kind of unified theory to existence, that this isolated geo-culture area where you live is at the very

The outline of these hills [Turtle Mountains], if you were an eagle flying over looking down, is shaped like a giant turtle. The people have always known this. It is a fascinating piece of synchronicity, like there really is some kind of unified theory to existence. . .

heart of this continent which indigenous peoples have, since archaic times, called Turtle Island. What we have here is sacred geography in its most potent form. You know this. Maybe others would be pleased to learn.



A small (two townships, 46,080 acres) reservation in North Dakota, Turtle Mountain lies almost at the geographic center of North America.

I have learned from you many things. High among them, that the Turtle Mountain people hold an immensely important place in American culture. There is so much for all of us to learn. There is such a debt of gratitude we all owe your people for the role you played in North American history and the forging of this land. Many of the traditional aspects of your Turtle Mountain life are direct survivals from the Fur Trade days, when the whole economy of North America was dependent on the mediating role of your people between the Red and White worlds. The culture of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, you Metchifs, in spite of the travesties shared by all American Indians, is one of the few examples in American history where Red and White worlds came together, in peace and out of love, to form a complementary mix of both Indian and European traditions, that was a successful adaptation to the volatile world forces then at play. And it culminated in this new truly American language and folklife of yours.

As I put the pieces together I see the Tribes of the Plains as holding the last frontier for Western Manifest Destiny to overcome. The Chippewa and Cree, who are your ancestors, were the westernmost of Native Woodland Culture that followed the Fur Trade from the eastern forests out onto the western Plains, to its height, and demise. Your Indian ancestors had the experience of generations of trade with Europeans and Euroamericans, lived Golden Eras, suffered war and near extinction. But by the time the Fur Trade reached the Plains, in the mid-to-late 1700's, something different started happening which, as I understand it, gave rise to this totally new American people, of which you Turtle Mountain folks belong.

The American Indians and the British Isle and the French Fur Trade men had, from the beginning, coupled and had children. Customarily, they were raised either as Whites or as Indians, one or the other. In the late 1700's things were changing. Mixed offspring were no longer so easily accepted into either side of their parents' lineage. With European women immigrating more to America, as the Fur Trade settled the frontier, competition over men and the role marriage played in the economics of the Fur Trade, brought bigotry and racism into the picture. The Indians tribes began losing the direct access to the Traders they once enjoyed. So, it was the mixed-bloods, or Métis, outcasts of both yet related to

both, who became the middlemen in the economic chain linking the Euroamericans to the Native Americans. A new caste, or social/economic strata, began to evolve. The children of mixed marriages now married amongst themselves. And their children, the same. So, the mixed language, customs, material culture and traditions that were happening at the time when this early intermarrying took place were reinforced and passed on, becoming a whole new culture unto itself. A true amalgam of Indian and European ways.

Out on the Plains, here, this mixed blood group of people and culture, Metchif, as you called yourselves, which, as I understand the term, is an 18th century survival of the vernacular pronunciation of the French word *Métis*, became the largest group of people on the American Frontier. Larger than any other single tribe or the French or the British Islers. Pretty much your forebearers, as middlemen, gained control of the economy of the Fur Trade on the Plains by the mid-19th century. This was something the White world could not let stand. By the time of the decline of the Buffalo, which was the end of the Fur Trade, your people knew your fate, and your place in history. I'll get to that.

But this brings me to one of the things I really want to say that I think few people realize. As we experience a benchmark in world history, the Quincentenary of Columbus coming to America, in 1992, and consider all that begat, you Metchif hold special importance. Because your people symbolize, in a very real way, the union of those forces of Humanity that came together 500 years ago. The life you live is a true blending of Old and New World culture. Your music, as found in your fiddling, represents the identity of a new people born of the marriage which makes Americans different from Europeans, or Africans, or Asians — our collective "Indian-ness" which is the ghost, or the spirit, that pervades, and prevails throughout, this land. It is also pertinent to note, at the time of this great commemoration (and this is what the White world could not let survive, coming out of the Fur Trade), that it was the Métis/Metchif who founded the last nation wrought out of the North American continent. It was not the United States, or Canada, or Mexico, or even Texas. It was a nation called Assiniboia formed by the Métis people on the Northern Plains under the leadership of the school teacher/prophet, Louis Riel. As the Fur Trade was ending the mixed bloods knew their critical position in the economy was over and sought to protect themselves politically and culturally, to have a say over their own destiny. They formed a government, wrote a constitution and created a nation. Their theology and world view was even a New World mix of Native and Catholic religion. Although the nation was defeated by the United States and Canada in 1870 and, after a resurgence, in 1885, its legacy of a truly Native American country lives on as the province of Manitoba, which means in the Metchif language, "Place of God." You people have an amazing history. You have lived lives that are legend to guys like Michael and me.

***Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1860) featured a Métis party — wearing moccasins and dancing to fiddle music.**

These are just some things that I wanted to bring out. So that you know that we know. And so that maybe people, as they listened to your fiddle, they'll understand a little more about

where it all comes from, you and the fiddle. So maybe you folks would tell some about it, how, as you say, a tune was played and the Metchif came to be. . . .

"Well, my Dad, he was pretty old. He remembers the Buffalo Days, you know. He was pretty young at the time. He said they'd leave and they'd be the band of them. They'd leave in the carts, the Red River Carts, and they'd always have a violin there."

Mike Page

Graphic from *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (ca. 1859-60)

Frank

O, the old Metchif, you know they always said - it's just what I heard, you see - most of it comes from way across to the Nort'east, the Islanders, you know. That's in the old time. That's where a lot of our fiddling comes from, the Islanders. Canadians play a lot of them old Island fiddle tunes, but a little bit add to them, ya know, from our Metchif stuff, you see. The first, there was no Whites here. There was a lot of fiddlers here before my time. In my Dad's time, and back, I'll say.

Fred

The Scotch really, where the violin started, where the Hudson Bay started, in Winnipeg, in Canada. That was one of the first companies that was in this country, you know. And, by God, there was no such thing as a boundary in them days. And the Indians traveled in through here, to Winnipeg, this way, up to the Missouri River, over into Montana clear up to the Rockies. Ya, we're related over at Rocky Boy's and Ft. Peck Reservation in Montana, too. Same tunes, same people. Wherever they could get game, trapping, whatever you could make.

And I believe a bunch of Frenchmen, they got in with the squaws, and the Scotch, that's where the Metchif came from, crossed from way back. And then I believe the Scotch are the ones who brought the violin, the bagpipes. And you know the first fiddlers, according to what I hear, when they first got a violin, well, they learned these tunes from the bagpipes. And, by God, there is a lot of tunes that they sound like they would be for the bagpipes, too. Then they kind of reframe them. Then pretty soon they got enough talent they start picking up their own, like, you know. Pick it up from the air or whatever.

You see, over there in Canada, these people traveling back and forth, you know, why they carry this stuff down. Probably there be somebody living down here, someone be going by, well, you have a new tune. See, stop and play for this guy, he picks it up and it just carried on, you know, hand to hand.

Mike

The way you could tell the difference, the Sioux would say, if they couldn't tell that was a Metchif, was if he played one of these things. They couldn't tell what kind of an Indian he was, they knew he was some type of an Indian. But when he played one of these, they knew he was a Metchif, see.

Well, my Dad, he was pretty old. He remembers the Buffalo Days, you know. He was pretty young at the time. He said they'd leave and they'd be the band of them. They'd leave in the carts, the Red River Carts, and they'd always have a violin there,

maybe three or four violins there, you know. I mean everybody played them. They always had music. One of their favorite tunes was the "Red River Jig." And a lot of these old other guys, some of them didn't know how to play a violin, maybe, but they were good jiggers, you know. And they used to play the "Red River Jig." That came from the late 1700s. I think it was, or the middle of the 1700s. Some of the older guys, they'd tell me about it. You try to do the same step as this guy that danced before you and try to do it better. And if you did it better than he did, well this other guy, right behind you, he'd try to do it better than you did. And then you'd add a new step, and do it again.

Like the "Red River Jig," where I figure that come from is some Frenchman, or Irish, or Scottish was playing this violin. And they probably seen - was in camp with, say, some Chippewas from Minnesota over here, or the Cree Indians from Canada - and seen them, watching them do this dance, this Indian dance. Well, all these Metchifs, say the Metchifs were there and they seen this, then they figure well, we play violin, we can do a little bit of that dance there, too, so what we'll do is make a jig out of it. So, they call it the "Red River Jig." Because that's where we all come from, the Red River, here. That's my impression of it. Ya, they do mix. There's a lot of Indian in me, I'll say, when I'm playing. It's like I feel some Indian in me and other nationalities. It's hard to explain.

Frank

O, way back before my time, O, my Dad used to tell me about what they had, you know. There's a lake here, they call it Rabbit City Lake. And the Old Timers, they used to travel a lot, a long time ago, hunting Buffalo. And they'd come up to the Mountains here and winter here in the bush. And that's where they used to come and build their little shacks all around the lake. They called it Rabbit City. That's how the lake got its name. And them people around here, see, every winter they'd play, they'd dance, you know. And they'd have bush dances, what we'd call bush dances. And my Dad used to play fiddle when he was young, at these bush dances. He played quit a little. He played some old tunes.

Sometimes I'd play the fiddle in the evening. I'd tell him, let's see you play some tunes. That's when I was first starting to play. And he'd take out that fiddle and, boy, he'd play some old time tunes, you know. And I loved the music.

Fred Allery of Turtle Mountain

Photo: Mark Nelson

Fred

My first fiddle I got from my grandfather. I had to put little matches in the pegs to hold. I didn't have no money to buy keys for it. Put little pegs in there, spit on them so they'll hold.

I played so much in the house that my Ma, I give her a headache, squeaking that violin, see. We had an old school rig. Finally one day she went and cleaned it up. She put white cloth on the windows. Aw, she cleaned it up

good and put a good chair in there, you know. One day I was playing, she said, "Oh, my boy, why don't you go down there? You give me a headache. Go play over there, I cleaned it up for you."

Mike

How I got interested was when they used to have these dances in this area. Everybody'd gather say—well, my Dad

Mike Page of Turtle Mountain

Photo: Mark Nelson

was a violin player and they'd all gather here. Say some old guys from Belcourt and Dunseith, up north over here by St. John, and west of there.

All the fiddle players, the good ones from that time, were from this area, see. If you were from Ste. Michele, well, they'd figure you were a fiddle player.

Frank

Le boss with the fiddle, that's the way they played. They'd tune the fiddles the same, one would beat out the time on the strings like the drum and the other played the tune. That's how the young ones learned.

Mike

Like all my uncles played. They were playing this *le boss*, they called it, *le boss.* That's where you're bucking with that other violin. Two fiddles were played. That's where I learned music, was from the old, old-timers. And they'd keep time with their feet, like with "Soldier's Joy." A lot of them old guys wouldn't stand up. You couldn't have them stand up and play. They always had to sit down. And they always had their feet going.

Frank

Well, the old time fiddlers, they always did keep time with the fiddle with your feet. O, yes, they all sat down. None of 'em stood up. That's why I took that habit, sittin' down. I can't keep good time standing.

They had some of them old tunes they used to play. Like "Whiskey Before Breakfast," that was a "Reel of Eight," *Reel la Huit*. The first time I heard a name for that was Andy de Jarlis. I doubt old folks had that name. At that time, early on, I never did hear them call a name on a tune. And like "Drops of Brandy," you know, that's that *Danz du Crochet*, there, the "Hook Dance." Do you understand any Metchif? That was an old tune they played. Of course they've changed some of these tunes, the younger fiddlers.

Mike

Some of them old guys, they'd make up certain tunes for certain occasions, I'll say. Well, Dad use to tell me a certain fight they'd have with some other Indians, or a battle they got into and they'd have a fight with some other tribe. And they'd get back to camp and they'd make up a tune about this battle they had.

Like he used to play a tune there, when Louis Riel was fighting in Canada with the Metchifs, *Le Bataille de Batoshe*. They had a certain name for it. They'd get in a battle or when they'd, somebody'd get the biggest buffalo, or whatever it was, from these hunts, they'd make up a tune about it. When they'd get back to camp, he'd say, they'd all gather around and start playing. One guy compose a tune about this. It was just on a violin. I know on the violin they made some of them tunes up, ya see.

Dorothy

That's why when you talk to an elderly person they call them "the good old days." They had a lot of entertainment, like with the fiddle. And, I'll say, poverty didn't mean too much to them, because they were adjusted to it and they entertained themselves with their music. And everyone was close you know. People were close with one another.

Fred

At one time, like my folks used to say that, they had a lot of step dancing. Like the "Hook Dance." There was a "Duck Dance," and a "Rabbit Dance." And then there's this *Reel la Quatre,* "Reel of Four," and jig, and square dance. That's mostly what they danced. Then they got to dancing waltz, fox-trots, jitterbug. That came later on. You know, the Indians were religious. They thought that was a dirty dance, dancing a waltz. You were touching too close together. At one time, ya. It's probably been fifty years since they been dancing waltz, but before that, you know, it was kind of a disgrace out in the open, dancing a waltz. It was their belief. It was mostly step dancing. And then pretty soon, the two-step come out. It was a great sport for them. Then a long time ago, when they made a dance, everyone of them old-timers, too, they were able to dance, was able to step dance a little bit.

Frank

The Metchif, they're great people for dancing, you know. It was before my time, they always danced, but they never danced what we call a round dance, like a waltz, a fox-trot, any of that, you know. That come in when, well, how that come in, really, when the Whites moved in, you know. Before that, before my time, and when I was a little kid, when my Dad would play, there was none of that. All "Reel of Eights" and "Hook Dance" and square dancing. That's all they ever played and danced. Them old Metchifs never danced a waltz or nothing, you know. My Mom, my Dad, the *Reel la Huit* they danced, O. And the jig! That's part of ours, the "Red River Jig!"

Mike

The "Red River Jig," you know everybody's got a different way to playing it, but it's similar to what I'm playing. Like Fred plays it a little different and Jim LaRocque plays it different. It's the same thing but everybody plays it different. Canadians play it. But your Canadians, they're Metchifs up there, too, see. They're about the same thing.

Dorothy

It was kind of like doing a competition for jigging. And that was the tune that was played for the people that were doing the jigging. Well, it's a fast tune, I

"That's why when you talk to an elderly person they call them "the good old days." They had a lot of entertainment, like with the fiddle. And, I'll say, poverty didn't mean too much to them, because they were adjusted to it and they entertained themselves with their music."

Dorothy Page of Turtle Mountain

guess, and it's originally for jigging. It's a certain tune that's played just for this type of dance. The "Red River Jig" was played. Well, I don't know if it was really matching your steps, or what, but I guess people just had fun, you know, jigging and being really active in dancing.

Frank Poitra of Turtle Mountain

Photo: Mark Nelson

Fred

They used to have a hall up here. They call it the Round Hall, old Chippewa style, in Dunseith. And a lot of people were dancing up there. The "Hook Dance," it was hard on the fiddlers. But there was me, Robert Poitra, and Frank Eno, we used to get together, see. One guy take two couples, then I take over, then the other guy take over. Sometimes they'd dance nine, ten couples. And they can keep coming in all the time, so on, for hours. By God, one time I played for eight couples. And I was used to playing! Oh, I tell you my arm was gonna break. I bet you I played an hour, same tune, over and over.

Frank

O, I worked hard. And then, on Saturday night we had some helluva good times. That's the way it was, you see. Everybody was poor. There was no rich in the bunch. But I was the fiddler. I and Jimmy LaRocque, his half brother. It was I and him that was fiddlers in dances. I could play pretty good at that time. So we got all our free drinks. They generally used to treat the fiddler, see. Ya, it payed to be the fiddler. I remember that time, hardly anybody had booze. Nobody had money. And by God we'd be feelin' good playing the fiddle. Keep the fiddlers goin', you're damn right. That was bush parties, you know. And God darn it to hell, well, they should be well satisfied to give me a drink, you know. Playin' so damn much, I just sit there and play. Well, I enjoy playin', you know, but I, we, have to work. God damn it, we worked like hell playin'.

Fred

We had an old neighbor over here. They were both cousins, Houles. This guy, they called him Batoshe, after the battle with Louis Riel. Louis Houle, his dad. But his feet were like this, bowlegged. Well, the other guy was like this, too, but he wasn't so bowlegged. There was a dance here at Old Man Lenoir's. Then that Old Man Lenoir got them two guys to dance that jig. Only there's four that dance that. That's that "Leather Britches", *Reel la Quatre*, they call it. "Reel of Four." Boy, them two bas-

tards, they could really go, boy. Sweat was just pouring down. They were trying to beat one another. Our neighbor up here, she died this last fall. She's one of them that danced, and John Parisien's wife. They were the dancers with these guys. But them women, they were good, too. I mean the top. They didn't wear out the fiddler, but damn it, they sure gave him hell. Them guys were used to playing. They could play an hour at a time, ya know.

Frank

I hardly ever refuse, when they want me to play, you know. My dad, he wasn't crazy like I am. God damn, I go to a party anytime. The Metchif, they're crazy for dancing, you know. Ya, the devil shakes a half-breed, and he does it with a fiddle. There's no Metchif without no fiddle. The dancin' and the fiddle and the Metchif, there all the same.

Mike

George Longie, he's doing a real good job, you know. Now that guy, he's a regular true Metchif, that guy. He's wild and he's jolly and he's nice to get along with.

Dorothy

He likes square dance calling, he likes partying, and can go to four or five o'clock in the morning, and just have a great time.

Mike

Now your old fellas, that's the way they were, the way George is, you know. His personality, character. That's the way the old Metchifs were like. They were jolly.

Dorothy

Well it comes from our people, you know, like our grandfathers. Peoples that were before us, I'll say, were so musically inclined that everyone around here is so musically inclined.

Fred

It don't make any difference to me, partner, you know, you could put strings on a 2 x 4 and I'll make music. It don't' make any difference to me, to hell with the God damn quality, I'll make music.

Frank

The change now, that's the time on the fiddling. These young ones in Belcourt, they play now the fastest. They want the one that plays the fastest, who can play the fastest. It's just speed. You see, they just take a fiddle and . . . Well, you have to run to dance. You can't keep up. You ain't got no time to dance. You see, I go by the time of the dancer. And now, of course, I'm blind, I can't see. But I know, I can hear their feet. That's the big change of the fiddlers now days. The Canadians, up here, are old time, more. South, the South is bad for speed. Holy smokes, boy, they set the bow on fire. Well, some of these young fellas take to that style, see. Speed isn't everything, I should say not. O, boy, look at the dancing.

Mike

See the Metchifs, the old timers, they used to play with a double string. I don't know if you know what a double string is, but it's more of a Cajun. It's got the same beat as the Canadians, but played with the two strings. I don't know if it's a harmony or what, but we play the same beat and the same tunes as the Canadians, but we play double string. As far as I know, my music went back throughout the years. That's the way it sounds to me.

And the old timers, they used to stick rattlesnake tails in their fiddle. Make them rattle. I don't know why they did that. Last year I played a violin in Bel-

"And now, of course, I'm blind, I can't see. But I know, I can hear their feet."

Frank Poitra of Turtle Mountain, one of the featured fiddlers of *Medicine Fiddle*, died in 1991

court, here, and was wonderin why it was rattling. I looked inside there and there's a rattlesnake tail. See that's one part of the culture. A lot of them old fiddlers at that time, like my dad, I remember he used to spit on the keys, like this! So they'd catch. All the time your keys would slip. That was one of the bad habits they had. Ha!

Frank

Metchif fiddler from drawing in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*

(see page 25)

O, we should never, never, never let our music go, the Metchif music. That's what I say, me. That's one of the best musics, Metchif music. The Whites have pretty tunes, too, you know. But the Metchifs, that's their main way. Ya, the music is still there. They never forgot the tunes, the old timers, the old tunes. It was a hand down to the young ones, you know. There's a lot of them kids pickin' it up, though. Like the Parisien Boys. Our young ones have to know that, where the fiddle tunes come from is where we come from, the Metchif.

Dorothy

It has a lot to do with society. I think the Metchifs really should recognize themselves as people, you know, being Metchif, instead of trying to compete with another nationality. Because we're us, we're here, we're us, we're Metchifs. That's the way we should keep some of our old Metchif ways. Don't let the language die out, the good old times people had like dancing the jig, and stuff like that. Why not carry on our own traditions that we had a long time ago? Kind of makes me sad a little bit when I think of what my mother and dad started is going to die down, or what I'm trying to do. Our kids are gonna let it fade away.

Mike

But you know there's a lot of other things, too. Like me now, that's me right here, the violin. There's other areas in this culture that I don't understand or can't do. Like there's some guys that make these hay racks, or wagons, or different things by hand without using a nail in them. Or like trapping, or different trades, I'll say. Or some of them old guys were good at making log houses, or barns, or chicken coops, or whatever. That guy had a name in the community. You had certain trappers, the guys that could trap real good. You couldn't beat them guys trapping. Guys that were hunters. They could hunt anything. Any you had jiggers, coming back to jiggers again. You had all your jiggers, you know.

Dorothy

If someone would start doing something, instead of an outsider coming to us, we should have enough to really go at it and do things like this. Bring back some of the things that we've had that are gonna die down. And maybe our grandchildren will never know what we've done, you know what I mean . . . ?

Nicholas

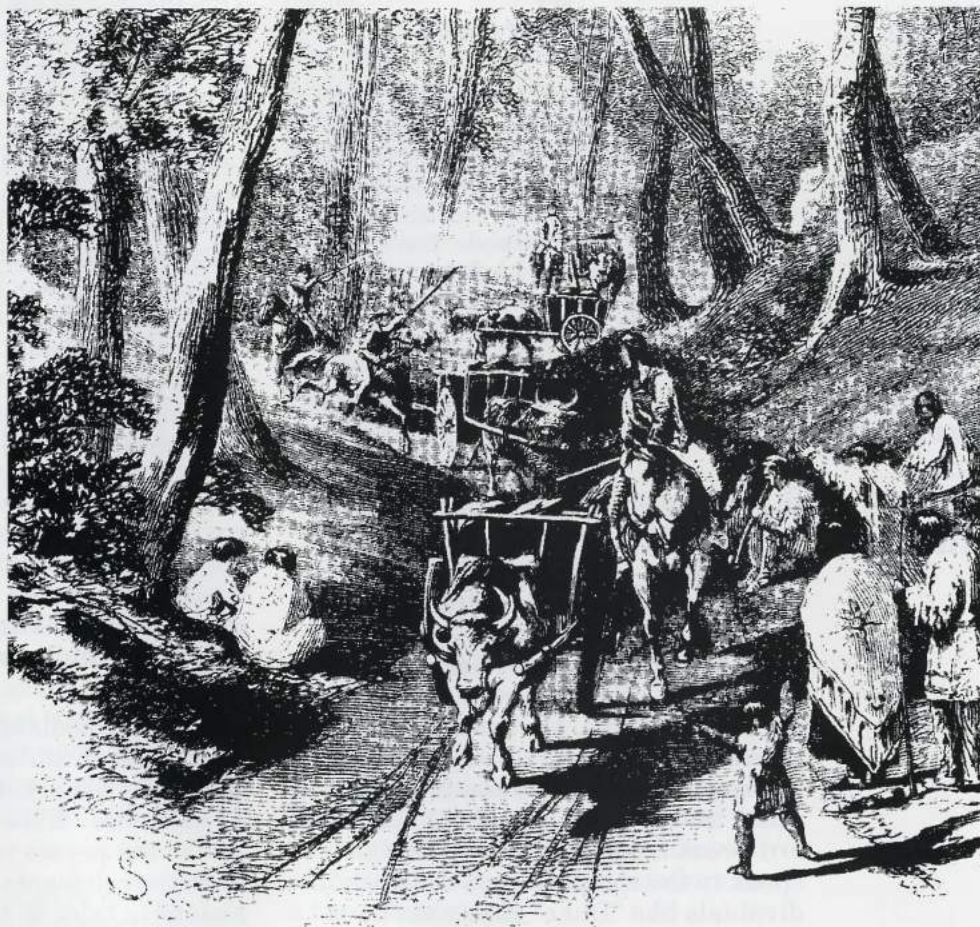
Yes, Dorothy, I do know what you mean. And so does Michael. That's why jokers like me and Michael are doing this work we do. We do what we can, and what we believe in. Ya, we were born outsiders, but you know, we really do feel a part of all of you. We have a real love for your way, and have learned so much from you. We feel there are lessons for others, too, in learning about the Metchif way. And that's why we do this stuff.

And why we think the music is so important, well, the music, the tunes, you can feel it, it's the emotion of the incredible vigor, and vision, and love, and passion of Turtle Mountain life. And it's music that blends the ancient ways with the contemporary, the Red with the White, the Old World with the New World, and now with the One World. And there's a reason why this music is still alive. And that's because from that mixture, from back at the beginning, life was good, and bountiful, and full of satisfaction. There was balance. The tunes, the songs, the dance, and the stories, all of it, were the main expression of that existence then, and remain so today. That tells us there must have been amazing strength and love in so many of those first and subsequent marriages, to keep something like this going, these tunes and these traditions. Your music is up close music, made for homes, and families, and neighbors, person to person. And what the fiddle and being Metchif has to teach us, perhaps, what the medicine is, is that we are all really one people, at the same dance, stepping to a common tune . . .

Sources

Turtle Mountain Music. A two-record set and booklet documenting the music of the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota, produced by Nicholas Vrooman.
Folkways
FES 4140.

"Your music is up close music, made for homes, and families, and neighbors, person to person. And what the fiddle and being Metchif has to teach us, perhaps, what the medicine is, is that we are all really one people, at the same dance, stepping to a common tune."



Scene from Chippewa/Métis culture
***Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1859 or 1860)**

Sawdust and Devils —
Indian Fiddling in the Western Great Lakes Region

Indian fiddling was linked initially to the fur trade, it flourished in the lumbercamps, and it became a vital part of reservation and community festivities.

by
James P. Leary

Back in the '30s there were 300 Indians from all over at that Marquette logging camp near Eckerman [Michigan], and about 150 of them were fiddlers. Some played American style, some played Canadian style. But they all had their own way of playing. You could hear fiddle music every night, and somebody might be jigging — step dancing — over in a corner.

Oliver "Duke" Sebastian, 1987

Words of pride and pleasure from an Ojibwa, a former lumberjack, a square dance caller, a man with some Scottish ancestry and a French surname, a dweller on the American-Canadian border. Words that are widely echoed by Ojibwas, other Algonquian speaking peoples (Cree, Menominee, Ottawa, Potowatomi), and mixed bloods on reservations and in communities that extend throughout the western Great Lakes region. Words that speak to the complex ways in which individuals like "Duke" Sebastian have drawn historically upon ethnic, occupational, artistic, and national sources in order to create and sustain an eclectic yet coherent cultural identity.

This identity is rooted in the late seventeenth century when French explorers and fur traders established an alliance with Ojibwa and other woodland peoples in the western Great Lakes region. Many of these *voyageurs* learned the native language and took Indian wives. By the early nineteenth century loggers and homesteaders — particularly French from Quebec, but also Irish and Scots — followed the voyageur pattern of settlement, partial assimilation to native culture, and intermarriage. Fiddling and dancing to fiddle music were often important expressive activities for the "half-breed" generation. In the western Great Lakes region, Indian fiddling was linked initially to the fur trade, it flourished in the lumbercamps, and it became a vital part of reservation and community festivities.

Although Woodland Indian fiddling is a venerable tradition, the scholarly literature is remarkably spare regarding its existence. Euro-Indian traditions — like the peyote religion with its Christian elements or the made-over European tales in the repertoires of native tellers — have merited some attention. Yet anthropologists have concerned themselves chiefly with traditional Woodland Indian culture:

its pre-contact nature, and its post-contact evolution, diminution, and revitalization. Helen H. Tanner's *The Ojibwas: A Critical Bibliography* (1976), for example, does not include a single entry regarding the hybrid culture that Indian fiddling exemplifies.

Nor can one learn much about fiddling and step dancing Indians from the work of ethnomusicologists. Frances Densmore's two volume *Chippewa Music*, based on fieldwork from 1907-1909 for the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology, documents the sacred songs and dances of Ojibwas on reservations in Minnesota and Wisconsin, while Thomas Vennum, Jr.'s *The Ojibwa Dance Drum* chiefly concerns that culture's acquisition of the drum dance religion from the Sioux.

Published historical treatments of logging are likewise almost silent regarding the role of Indians, mixed blood or otherwise, in the lumbercamps. New England Yankees, natives of the Canadian maritimes, French, Irish, Scots, Scandinavians, and Finns are celebrated instead. Nor can much be learned from the many books concerning lumbercamp music and song since they have focused almost exclusively on Anglo-Celtic narrative folksongs.

Despite the absence of focused scholarship, a good deal can be ferreted out from scattered publications, archival sources, and field research. Desurreau's *History of Langlade County*, for instance, mentions that from 1855-1885 "mixed blood Menomini" in Wisconsin established taverns and "stop over" places along important trails. They

> were typical of the western mining town, where the frontier elements held sway. Hotels and travelers' rests would spring into existence in a day . . . [with] saloons and dance houses . . . the river driver, the woodsman, the teamster, the Indian, all gathered there.
>
> **(cited in Keesing, 1939:177)**

Although Indian fiddlers doubtless rosined their bows in such surroundings, hard evidence of their existence does not come until the twentieth century.

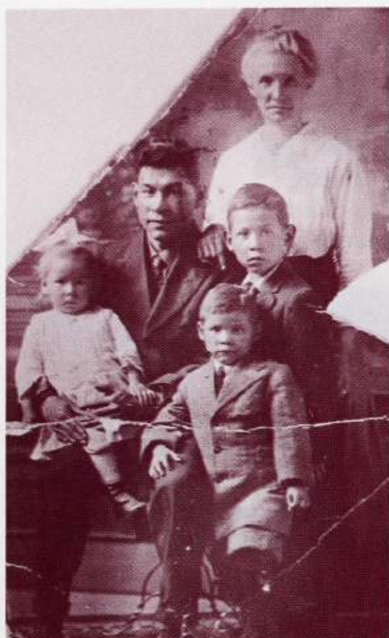
Detail from photograph on page 5 — fiddlers in a logging camp in Delta County, Michigan

In the mid-1930s the Roosevelt administration's National Reemployment Service established a pair of lumbercamps — Camp Tahquamenon and Camp Marquette — near Eckerman, Michigan, that paralleled CCC camps but employed Indians exclusively. Oliver "Duke" Sebastian, quoted above, worked at Camp Marquette where fiddle music thrived. A clipping from the Forest Service files includes a picture of jacks gathered around twin fiddlers and a trio on guitar, four string banjo, and harmonica; while a paragraph, directed at a white readership, expresses astonishment.

> The Indians enjoy cowboy songs more than their own music when they gather around mandolins and fiddles in their barracks. Voyageur tunes,centuries old, are also popular. Napolean St. Louis and several other camp members are expert clog dancers, while a few of the older men dance the war dance.

That Indians in the region had been fiddling for perhaps a century, and that many could mix "war dances" (a white generic term for native dances) with clog dancing, eluded scholars for a few more years.

In 1938 folklorist Alan Lomax — armed with portable recording equipment from the Archive of Folksong at



Joe Cloud and Anna Anderson Cloud with their children (L-R): Harriet, George, and Clarence, ca. 1916 Photo: Courtesy Virginia Cloud Carrington

the Library of Congress — visited the Bad River Ojibwa Reservation at Odanah, Wisconsin. There he recorded fiddler Joe Cloud, dubbing him a "Wisconsin lumberjack" in field notes and emphasizing for posterity that "the blood of Chippewa Indians is flowing in his veins." **(Lomax, 1938)** Born in 1885 in Hollow Lake, Wisconsin, Cloud was one of seventeen children. His father, Menogwaniosh Anakwad or George Cloud (1849-1911) was also a fiddler. Besides Anglo-Celtic classics like "Ragtime Annie" and "Devil's Dream," Joe Cloud's repertoire included that French-derived trademark of Metis fiddlers,"Red River Jig," and several "squaw dances"— melodies for Ojibwa women's social dances that were usually played on the drum. Joe's son, Clarence (1908-1969), accompanied him on banjo for part of the Lomax session. Clarence's wife, the former Theresa Soulier, played piano as well, joining her husband and father-in-law for weddings and community dances at halls and taverns around Odanah until a few years before Joe's death in 1965. **(Carrington, 1990)**

Alan Lomax also recorded the Rindlisbacher Lumberjack Group of Rice Lake, Wisconsin, in 1938. Its leader, Otto Rindlisbacher, worked in the woods and sawmills of northwestern Wisconsin. In the early 1920s he enlightened Franz Rickaby, author of the pioneering *Ballads and Songs of the Shanty-Boy* (1927), about the nature of lumbercamp fiddling. Just as Rindlisbacher spoke of "French," "Irish," or "Norwegian" tunes, he also recognized "Indian" tunes. (Andresen 1987) Rindlisbacher's daughter recalled that "Otto always got along good with Indians, especially the Chippewa." (Albrecht 1987) He played with French-Indian fiddlers like Regis Belille of Lac Court Oreilles many times, learning such "Indian" tunes as "Couderay Jig," "Couderay Reel," "Hounds in the Woods," "Indian War Whoop," and "Red Cliff Jig."

Ernest "Pea Soup" Guibord, an Ojibwa who placed third in a Rindlisbacher-organized fiddlers contest in 1927, recalled Belille (ca. 1865-1935) as a man who made a little money picking berries, working in the woods, and playing music.

> Did you ever hear a really good fiddler play? Well, Regis had them all beat. Hands down . . . he and another guy from Bayfield, and a third guy from up that way [probably the Ojibwa reservation at Red Cliff], the three of them would get together. Boy, that was something to hear! It was like a barbershop quartet, hearing them three fiddles together. Regis, he didn't read music, he didn't know one note from another. But he taught himself to play in any key . . . I don't know how many keys there are, but Regis played them all, from A to Z.
>
> **(Guibord, 1979)**

By the 1970s folklorists with an interest in Upper Midwestern old time fiddling began to document the contribution of Indian fiddlers more systematically. Phil Martin's survey of Wisconsin fiddlers brought him in touch with Guibord in 1979. He learned that "Pea Soup" was born in 1903 at Reserve, Wisconsin, on the Lac Court Oreilles reservation. His father, Joseph, was half French, half Ojibwa, and his mother was a 3/4 blood Ojibwa. His paternal grandfather, Joseph Toussaint Guibord (ca. 1840-1912) was born in Montreal. Old Toussaint traded with the Ojibwas up and down the Mississippi, traveling in a bateaux, and married an Ojibwa woman. He was a fiddler, so were his sons Joseph and Ernest, and so became Ernest "Pea Soup." As a young man, Pea Soup worked and played fid-

dle in lumbercamps. He also recalled dances at four different "boweries" on the reservation. Commonly held in keeping with seasonal and national events, like New Year's Eve and the 4th of July, these affairs combined jigging and square dancing to fiddles with such pan-Indian couple dances as the Rabbit Dance and the 49 Dance performed to drumbeats: "they had 'war dances' and square dances. When they got tired of one kind of dancing, they switched."

The story of Everette "Butch" Waupoose, whom Michael Loukinen and I interviewed a decade later, exhibits a similar pattern of French-Indian ancestry, work in the woods, and syncretism between native and European traditions. Born on northeastern Wisconsin's Menominee Reservation in 1938, Butch recalls that his great-grandfather, Wanawat,

> only had one name. And he had eight brothers. They came from that Michigan country up there, and they brought a lot of that [fiddle music] down with them. So it finally come down to us, this generation, the fourth generation.
>
> **(Waupoose, 1989)**

Wanawat worked in nineteenth century lumbercamps with French- Canadians, as did his son, Dave, who married a Frechette. Dave Waupoose would leave the reservation in the winter to work as a chopper in the woods. In the spring he came home with a store of fiddle tunes. By the time Dave's son, Alex (1903-1972) began working in the woods, the Menominees had their own sawmill and logging operations. Modifying his fiddle with "Indian medicine" (deer bones and porcupine quills), Alex fiddled in Menominee camps, and for reservation square dances that sometimes included calls in the Menominee language. He also played for German neighbors at doings that included 4th of July, threshing parties, and the county fair.

Bob Andresen encountered the same sort of intermingling while documenting fiddlers in the early 1970s around Danbury, Wisconsin, just across the St. Croix River from Minnesota. An unusual "neutral ground" where Sioux and Ojibwa intermarried rather than feuded, Burnett County was also a place where European and native peoples practiced harmony. Among them was Benjamin Connor, a fiddling homesteader of Irish-French ancestry, who had originally come to the region 1852 to set up a fur trading post for John Jacob Astor at Fond du Lac, Minnesota. He married an Ojibwa woman, Odaygawmequay or Shore Woman. **(Winton, 1977)** The oldest and the youngest of their nine children, William and Darius, were fine fiddlers. Darius (1873-1947) worked in the woods as a timber cruiser prior to serving as Burnett County's surveyor for thirty years. **(Connor, 1990)** Often teaming up with Anglo fiddler Jesse Gattin and a pair of "half breed" brothers, Gus and Alex Cadotte, Darius Connor played for numerous square dances that involved the entire community.

Ernest "Pea Soup" Guibord in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 1927 (detail from photograph on page 6)

One of Connor's favorite tunes, and a favorite of many local fiddlers, was known as "Devil Shake the Half Breed." This northwestern Wisconsin version strongly resembled "Rickett's Hornpipe," but the name, attached to other tunes, has been encountered as far away as Brimley, Michigan, where Paul Gifford recorded a version from Indian fiddler Bill Cameron. **(Cameron, 1977)** Mrs. Jesse Gattin, whose husband played with Darius Connor, informed researcher Bob Andresen that one local man, Elmer Harnith, **(see next page)** —

> . . . used to call it "Devil Shaking Hands with the Half Breed," and he

seemed to think it originated from some old half breed that was friends with the devil. And, of course, he did all kinds of wickedness. But that — I don't know — that's just what Elmer had in his head.

Butch Waupoose, whose grandfather Dave had his fiddle smashed by a priest about 1886 — "an act that curtailed his playing for dances — at least until he could get another fiddle."

Photo: Michael Loukinen

She went on to offer an explanation for Harnith's evident distaste:

> Many old fiddle tunes were named after the devil. Well, you know why? Because mostly they came from logging camps. . . . And there's another thing too . . . [People] thought that the violin was the devil's instrument. You shouldn't touch the violin. And there were churches, that I knew of, in this part of the country, that wouldn't have a violin solo.
>
> **(Gattin 1973)**

Of course, notions of the fiddle as a "devil's instrument" pre- date the lumbercamps. They were well entrenched in European folklore at the time of contact with native peoples. The Anglo-Celtic, French, and Scandinavian traditions which took root in the western Great Lakes region all boast numerous tunes and corresponding stories involving the "Devil's Dream," "The Devil's Sexton," and "Devil on a Wine Keg."

While fiddlers, and especially lumbercamp fiddlers, certainly contributed to notions of the fiddle as a "devil's box," they were surely outdistanced by missionaries. Clerics in Indian country, whether Protestant or Catholic, warred against both old native ways and the evolving Euro-Indian traditions of the fur trade and lumbercamp. Part of their concern quite justifiably was with rampant drunkenness, but they were just as adamant against dancing — whether to drum or fiddle. A report from 1886 by Franciscans among the Menominee held that:

> Immorality (formerly) had full sway among them. Special incentives thereto are, above all, two vices, . . . dances and drunkenness. . . . A great change for the better has been brought about. Dances on the reservation become more seldom every year, and if there be any there are not so many partake as formerly.
>
> **(cited in Keesing 1939:187-188)**

Butch Waupoose's grandfather Dave had his fiddle smashed by a priest about this time, an act that curtailed his playing for dances — at least until he could get another fiddle.

Missionaries and government agents sought to teach their wards the beauties of Christian hymns, brass bands, and art songs to classical accompaniment. Hymn books were printed up in an Ojibwa script with musical staffs laying out four part harmony. Marching brass bands in feather headdresses were organized on the Menominee Reservation and among the Ojibwa at Baraga, Michigan. Women from Odanah on Wisconsin's Bad River Reservation were taught to perform romantic songs in light operatic Ojibwa to piano accompaniment for regional pageants. These well-meaning and well-financed efforts for god and country did not, however, shake Indians from their fiddles. Indeed the fiddle's connotations of demonic outlawry may well have promoted its longevity.

Anne Lederman's essay suggests that native tune structures and dance steps found points of intersection with European bow- and footwork. The old

folk European notions of summoning a powerful spirit through music, and of learning a personal tune from the encounter, likewise harmonized with Indian beliefs. For them, music was a major means through which to communicate with the supernatural. Few ceremonies in the western Great Lakes region lacked some personal song acquired from a guardian spirit. That some guardian spirits — the owl, the bear — might be dangerous as well as beneficial found, perhaps, a parallel in European folk beliefs concerning the Christian devil — thief of souls and giver of music.

". . . music was a major means through which to communicate with the supernatural."

Anthropologist Victor Barnouw's comments (1977) regarding the "widespread diffusion" of European magic tales, and of French tales especially, among Indian peoples in the western Great Lakes region might well be broadened to encompass the transference of fiddle music from old world to new:

> The voyageurs, fur traders, and lumberjacks evidently spent much time telling [and playing] their stock of tales [and tunes] to Indian listeners, who were careful to get the details right when they retold [and played] them. Despite prejudice, warfare, and exploitation, there persisted a sort of freemasonry of folklore in which, temporarily at least, the storyteller [and fiddler] and his audience were united.

Thanks to Bob Andresen, Paul Gifford, Richard March, Phil Martin, Roger Pilon, and Tom Vennum for their remarkable generosity in sharing information, ideas, leads, unpublished materials, and tape recordings. It is hard to imagine better friends and colleagues.

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The Lost Woodsman's Jig

Steps Toward a Documentary Film Project

by
Michael Loukinen

On the verge of defeat, I reconstruct my journey and trudge on only to find my own tracks made earlier. Then, somehow I find the right trail.

I wander with film projects like someone lost in the woods. After following a sometimes visible trail, a troubling uncertainty overwhelms me, confusion leads to panic, and I charge forward until I'm exhausted. On the verge of defeat, I reconstruct my journey and trudge on only to find my own tracks made earlier. Then, somehow I find the right trail. Every film I've made has tottered on the edge of a complete failure, before I've "found" it. I wonder whether these uncertain steps follow some inner artistic logic, or whether they reflect the workings of my psyche; but, on this film too, I danced the "Lost Woodsman's Jig."

What ended up as *Medicine Fiddle*, was conceived four years earlier as *Talk 'N' Tunes*, a film featuring dialect joke-telling and multi-ethnic traditional music played in the taverns, dance halls, and homes in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Folklorist Jim Leary and I were going to show that surviving as a traditional musician in an ethnically complex setting such as Stimac's Bar in Copper City, Michigan requires playing Croatian Waltzes, tons of Polkas, Finnish schottisches, country western weepers, two steps, and "Good Night Irene," while telling "Cousin Jack" and "Finlander" jokes between numbers. Such musicians encourage an ideology of cultural pluralism. I intended to feature Coleman Trudeau, an elderly Ottawa/Ojibwa/French fiddler in *Talk 'N' Tunes* along with traditional entertainers from other ethnic groups.

Talk 'N' Tunes died in a National Endowment for the Arts panel, yet I remained fascinated with one of the characters we had intended to film: Coleman Trudeau. I had met him while making *Good Man in the Woods*, a feature-length documentary about workers facing the hazards of the forests and Lake Superior. Coleman had been a lumberjack for most of his life, and we filmed him sawing timber and jamming in the pines, but in the final cut of *Good Man* he appeared for only a few seconds.

What intrigued me about Coleman was the way the fiddle played through the seasons of his life, like a river runs through distinct topographic scenes in the vast Ontario wilderness. Stories from Coleman's life are interspersed with fiddling, and talk of music leads to another chapter in his life history.

Here was a foot soldier in the multiethnic lumberjack armies that swept across Ontario and the United States. Accompanied by his thirsty pals, he stormed the nearest sawmill town and guzzled down his earnings, and survived! He saw the lumbercamp era come and go and he played music throughout it all. And now struggles with severe alcohol addiction left him with a refreshing lack of pretense. He gets a little preachy, like most A.A. graduates, but there isn't any bullshit left in him. He used up a lifetime's supply of self deception, and all that's left is his fiddle and the smiles in his audience.

When the *Talk 'N' Tunes* was laid to rest, I conjured up a new film built around Coleman Trudeau's life history. I intended to develop such themes as: French/Indian musical heritage, Ojibway language mythic story telling, the performance of music and dance in an all-Indian lumbercamp; and Coleman's recovery from playing for "free" drinks to playing for people. This second film saw dialect and ethnic joking change to Ojibway mythic story telling; and multiethnic music shrink to Euro-Native fiddling, all centered around one native fiddler. This second film concept was motivated by my long-standing desire to make a film focusing on just one person to simplify the structural problems of editing.

Our folklore consultant, Jim Leary urged that we broaden the scope by including Frank Boyer Jr., Rene Cote and Dick Gravelle, fiddlers from the Sault Ste. Maries in Ontario and Upper Michigan. This far northern border region between the United States and Canada, where water routes intersect Lakes Superior, Huron, and Michigan, became an historic center of the fur trade beginning in the late 1600s and it gradually developed into a sawmill, paper mill and steel mill center — a cultural crossroads wherein European and native cultures blended. Ojibwas camped along the St. Mary's Rapids during the winter and lived off the spawning whitefish. Nearby, on Manitoulin Island were the Ottawa traders. A Euro-Native fiddling and dancing tradition flourished

Coleman Trudeau Ottawa/Ojibwa/ French fiddler

Photo: Michael Loukinen

in this area where French Canadians from Quebec, and Irish, Scottish, and Scots-Irish had introduced the fiddle. Captain Henry Thorne, a crackerjack, half-breed fiddler composed, "Whitefish on the Rapids," a regional favorite. It seemed that fiddlers from this region should be included.

We contacted ethnomusicologist Anne Lederman, who had studied Native fiddlers in Manitoba, and folklorist Nicholas Vrooman, who had done the same on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. Both had produced albums featuring Native fiddle tunes and they arranged for me to interview Native fiddlers whom they knew.

Menominee elders from Wisconsin read a news article describing our film and invited me to visit their reservation in Keshena. They were concerned about the fragmentation of their tribe, and wanted to revive their fiddle/square dance tradition to restore tribal unity. On the South Branch of the Wolf River, Jim Leary and I witnessed a Menominee lan-

Top, Fiddler Frank Boyer, Jr. with his father Frank, Sr.

Photo: Christine Saari

Bottom, Rene Cote

Photo: Michael Loukinen

guage blessing chant sung for the newlyweds to guitar accompaniment. Later, a young Menominee man slipped into sacred dance steps honoring the animal protector of his clan, while jigging to a fiddle tune. Through such fieldwork experiences, the project flowed into a film featuring fiddlers from Manitoba, Ontario, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Upper Michigan. Tribal cultures included: Canadian Metis, Plains Ojibwa, Turtle Mountain Michif, woodland Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Menominee.

The working title at this point was *Devil, Shake a Half-Breed*.

Coleman Trudeau's Life History

This new film seemed to fit much of Coleman Trudeau's life, especially his stint as a lumberjack fiddler in Ontario and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. It was in the lumbercamps that many of the Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Menominee fiddlers developed their talents and repertoires. Let us look at Coleman's life.

When I was eight years old I thought that Santa Claus was going to bring me a guitar like my brother had gotten two years earlier. My Dad was sitting by the Christmas tree, in our little house in Spanish River, Ontario, and he had a fiddle and he said, 'Look what Santa Claus brought you!' And, he could see the disappointment on my face. But he tuned it up.

My mother used to work all night after midnight Mass, preparing the Christmas meal. I sat on the wood box by the kitchen stove playing that fiddle, trying to make my parents feel good by practicing "Little Brown Jug." Once I got the first two, three notes I kept at it. By 7:00 a.m. I was playing it all the way through. From then on, you couldn't part me from that fiddle!

Three weeks later I played at my first square dance. I knew three tunes and this was "Depression Time." A dollar was a lot of money, and people were paying me to play at house parties. Soon I learned six tunes. I was earning one or two dollars, which was a big income for our home. And, my fiddle cost only $7.95!

When I was fifteen I was playing for a party, and somebody said, "Give Coleman a drink." And, I remember saying, "No. No thanks." I wanted a drink, but my Dad was there. Dad said, "One won't hurt you. One drink won't hurt him." That's the drink that hurt me for thirty-three years.

I started drinking when I was fifteen, and I liked it. It made me feel like I was the best musician in the world. I was tall. I was big. I could talk the way I wanted to. It made me feel important. Whenever I was invited to play, the first thing I looked for was booze.

In 1946 when I got out of the Navy, I came home and pitched a three month drunk. That was the first time I had DTs. I saw dogs and cats and people coming at me when I was walking down a lonely road. From under the covers I saw little green men with spears coming to get me. I stopped drinking for six months.

In the 1940s, I worked in Michigan near Grand Marais, and up in Ontario north of Sudbury, working in the woods — cutting logs and playing music. There was a hundred men maybe a hundred-fifty men in the camp, all in one building. There were log bunkhouses, tar paper, kerosene lamps,

double bunks, and a great big huge stove in the center of the floor. A chore boy kept the night fire going. Almost every night I played music. There were no women allowed up there in those camps, eighty miles from the nearest town. But we did have our jam sessions right in the camp after supper.

There were always a lot of fiddlers and guitar players and, especially on Sunday, we put on a show and everybody would come out with their talent — whatever they could do best. There was step dancing, ax-throwing, and sawing contests, card games. Since we were short on women, some men were "elected" to wear sheets around their waists and dance the women's part so we could have a square dance. It was all clean fun, don't get me wrong here.

There were many nationalities and they had their favorite tunes, but it really didn't matter what tunes were played because they all loved the type of music we were jamming on. For the lumberjacks in those days that was the only music that they knew! They liked the waltzes and the polkas, and then there was some old lumberjack songs. I can't recall the names of them; but, the old-timers used to sing some of them. The words in them were so — revealing; it was like you were right there witnessing whatever the story suggested. The songs were about stories of lumberjacks, but I can't remember any of those songs just right now. My dad used to sing one too. Those were real good songs. I believe I could play some of those tunes if I sat right down and tried to recall them once again.

"Turkey in the Straw," that was one of their favorites, "Over the Waves," "Margie" was another one. They liked slow pieces too. But, we had a huge gang of step dancers in the camp on Sundays. Then, of course, that's when you would have . . . you'd be playing "Whitefish on the Rapids," "High-Level Horn Pipe," "Carlton Horn Pipe," or "Ragtime Annie," or all of those they'd step dance to. "Lumberjacks' Breakdown" was another one. Those were the tunes we played when everything was wide-open on Sundays.

Brillion, Barron County, Wisconsin, 1902: The August Mason Lumber Company camp cook shanty

Photo: State Historical of Wisconsin

After a few months we'd hit the nearest town. I always had the fiddle with me. It would buy my booze in all the bars. When the bars closed, I'd want more booze. I spent all my money in bootlegger joints. After three or four days I'd be too sick to play. And, there were many times when I'd hock my fiddle, never to see it no more. And, I'd go without one for awhile. I'd save enough money in some logging camp, and I'd buy another one off some other drunk. We helped each other out that way. You could trade a bottle for a good fiddle and that was the story of my life for many years.

In 1974 I quit drinking. Suddenly, my fiddling was a little different. I was playing at parties, at *dry* parties, and *enjoying* it! And, for the first time I started systematically practicing. Before when I played there had to be a bottle nearby. Now I could enjoy playing, playing for people!

There's one tune in particular that I want to talk about. "Whitefish on the Rapids," I think it's named after the St. Mary's Rapids in Sault Ste. Marie. That's a real old-timer from up in Canada, that separates the men from the

boys when it comes to fiddle playing. It's played in B flat usually, but a lot of people play it in "A," I think. It seems like every place I play, there's always somebody who will yell, "Give us Whitefish on the Rapids." Course, I don't play it the way the old-timers played it. I just have my own version. I put my own touches in it.

Sugar Island was sacred ground to the Ojibwa in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Ontario. It was believed that on this island, if proper cleansing rites and healing rituals were performed by a Medicine Man, a distressed soul could find peace.

I first heard it when I was about seven years old. I had an uncle named Bill Bell who played fiddle, and when he came to the Wikwemikon Reservation where I was born, on Manitoulin Island, he played what he called, "Whitefish on the Rapids." And, I believe that was the first time I had heard it. He died many, many years ago. He was from the Garden River Reservation in Canada. I only heard him once, but he was a crackerjack fiddler.

"I can really meditate out there in the woods."

Coleman Trudeau

Photo: Michael Loukinen

I remember when I was a little kid playing for a party, somebody will always come up and say, "Hey, you should be playing in Nashville." I've always had the dream that maybe someday I'd like to be recognized; but, then booze took all those dreams away many years ago. I'm almost sixty now. But, I still enjoy playing music for senior citizens' clubs, churches, and A.A. dances.

Coleman Trudeau as Presented in the Film

Coleman first appears in our film in an all-Indian logging camp near the Big Two-Hearted River, about three miles from the "high bridge." The Ojibwa, Ottawa and mixed-blood lumberjacks live in four or five trailers that snake through the woods like a Gypsy caravan, without license plates, going from one cutting to another. Their job lasts from three weeks to three months in one location. Some had their families with them in the camp. Coleman worked with this crew until October 13, 1981 when he had his first stroke. Now he visits the crew and counsels some of the younger jacks who are having problems with alcohol. "It gives me time to think and maybe work up a tune. Since I became sober, it's a place for me to communicate with my Creator, the Great Spirit. I can really meditate out there in the woods." In this serene context Coleman conjured up "Tahquamenon River Breakdown."

We had planned to film an elderly Indian lumberjack telling mythic tales in the Ojibwa language, but he had joined many of the other jacks in what turned out to be a two week drinking binge. I was distressed at the time, but in retrospect, it wouldn't have fit into the film.

Coleman is shown playing with "The Sugar Island Boys" in the Hilltop Tavern on Sugar Island which is in the St. Mary's River, the border between the United States and Canada. The "Boys" include Lawrence "Honey" McCoy (piano), Jack Holt (bass fiddle), Joe Menard (guitar), and Jack Chambers (mandolin). Sugar Island was sacred ground to the Ojibwa in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Ontario. It was believed that on this island, if proper cleansing rites and healing rituals were performed by a Medicine Man, a distressed soul could find peace. Here, Coleman played "Whitefish on the Rapids," and "Manitoulin Island Waltz."

"One Sober Night on Manitoulin Island" carries us mournfully from the

woods in Paradise, Upper Michigan to the Wikwemikong Nursing Home, on Manitoulin Island where Coleman plays for the residents on Sunday afternoons without charging a fee. A few residents wheel themselves across the floor in between numbers to stuff wrinkled bills into his palm. He jokes as he pockets their modest contributions, "This is one habit I've never shaken." Some of the residents are his relatives. Speaking a mixture of Ojibwa and Ottawa, and playing the old time tunes of their youth encourages jigging and square dancing. A social worker at the nursing home calls it "music and dance therapy." She is trying to revive square dancing because it lifts spirits in an otherwise bleak setting. Prophetically, Coleman said, "I'll probably be in there before long."

While we were editing in lower Manhattan I learned on a spring morning that Coleman suffered a major stroke leaving the entire right side of his body paralyzed. He will never play the fiddle again. Fortunately, the Ontario Arts Council honored Coleman with the Folk Art Heritage Award early in 1990, just before he had his stroke. He was nominated by the Native people of Ontario.

Cultural Themes

Throughout the research and the making of *Medicine Fiddle*, I was fascinated by the patterns of assimilation illustrated by this music/dance tradition. Music and dance introduced by Europeans three hundred years ago percolated in the isolation of remote reservations and has entered the hearts and minds of many adult Native peoples. Now it is to some extent, *their* music in accordance with the Indian Way. At house parties and weddings it evokes the presence of ancestors. "This is our music, it's always in the back of our mind that we're at home, and it recalls the people that have left us — our ancestors — that's got a lot to do with it," says Butch Waupoose, a Menominee fiddler from Keshena, Wisconsin. "When I'm out on the back porch playing in the evening, I can see them . . . feel them, my father, grandfathers, uncles, and all the old fiddlers in the [Turtle] Mountains who died long ago," says Mike Page, a Michif fiddler from Belcourt, North Dakota. Old Frank Poitra, who has been blind for "only forty years" sees the old people dancing when he conjures up a tune. Music was always played at home, with family and friends dancing to it, and years later their invisible presence is evoked as a communal memory. Their fiddle not only entertains, but sustains a spiritual continuity with the past.

Joe Menard, one of the "Sugar Island Boys"

Photo: Michael Loukinen

The intense psychic dimension of this hybrid music and dance tradition seems to be linked to Native culture. Jerome Davis, an elderly, blind fiddler meditated in the woods along the Wolf River in northern Wisconsin until he heard music. He stayed amidst the aspen and hardwood stands for many days trying to "find" these tunes on his fiddle. Lawrence "Teddy Boy Houle" a Métis fiddler from the Ebb and Flow Reserve has cruised the highways of Manitoba when a tune entered his mind. He couldn't stand it, so he pulled off onto the road and started

playing it. He was compelled to find this tune. The force of this mind/music is so strong that one must surrender to its calling. Dick Gravelle, a French-Ojibway fiddler from Sugar Island, Michigan, had driven snow plow on the lonely "Seney Stretch," an incredibly remote section of M-28 in northeastern Upper Michigan, during the midnight shift. He said, "a fiddle tune would stay in my mind all night long, it bugged me. I couldn't shake it out of my mind. I had to learn it."

Right-top, Sarah Waupoose

Photos: Michael Loukinen

Right-bottom, Leila "Chips" Waupoose-Rabideaux

A sense of being haunted by the fiddle began early for Gravelle. He recalled that as a school boy in the classroom, "a fiddle tune would come into my mind, and it would bother me. It was interfering with my concentration. I couldn't study at all. I'd run home and try to find it on my fiddle. . . . It still bothers me. Sometime I go to bed and I can hear someone playing a fiddle tune from the mirror on the wall. I can't sleep until I get out my fiddle

Dick Gravelle on the fiddle on Sugar Island in 1939

Photo: Richard Gravelle Family

and try to find it." Dick is still haunted by the vision/sound of Simon Mass, an old man from the Garden River Reservation. He was hypnotized as he watched through the window as the old Indian played at a house party on Sugar Island. "It really bothered me, the things that he did with that fiddle. The sounds that he made. That was almost sixty years ago and he still bothers me. I can still hear 'Sy' playing his tune." I always play it. Some people call it "Dick's Tune," but it's "Sy's Tune".

Native mythology and medicines provide an underworld of spiritual meanings interpreting this music. Sarah Waupoose, the elderly matriarch, believes that her deceased husband, Alex Waupoose's fiddle tunes will disappear. "He's coming to get them. They (the fiddle tunes) are going to the Great Spirit." "Chips" Waupoose had a vision dream in which her deceased father and brothers were playing in cabin high on a hill. She pounded on the window but they couldn't hear her and she woke up crying. "An old Indian lady who believes that old Indian belief told me that if they had let me in I would have died. But, the Old Spirit wanted me to remain on earth and carry on the music of my father and brothers." While playing piano alone, her children ask what she's doing, "I'm playing with Grandpa", she says. They don't understand.

Alex Waupoose's fiddle has porcupine quills in the box, and the strings are supported by a deer bone nut. It's a ritual object handled with great respect by his son "Chopper" (Lowell). "There's Indian Medicine in there," says Butch Waupoose, another son who always sports a red baseball cap bearing his family's name in beadwork sewn by his mother, Sarah. Alex Waupoose's spirit visits us through this medicine fiddle; and, herein is one rea-

playing it. He was compelled to find this tune. The force of this mind/music is so strong that one must surrender to its calling. Dick Gravelle, a French-Ojibway fiddler from Sugar Island, Michigan, had driven snow plow on the lonely "Seney Stretch," an incredibly remote section of M-28 in northeastern Upper Michigan, during the midnight shift. He said, "a fiddle tune would stay in my mind all night long, it bugged me. I couldn't shake it out of my mind. I had to learn it."

Right-top, Sarah Waupoose

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Photos: Michael Loukinen

Right-bottom, Leila "Chips" Waupoose-Rabideaux

Dick Gravelle on the fiddle on Sugar Island in 1939

Photo: Richard Gravelle Family

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son for our title, although it was not an easy decision.

Title Politics

Our title search went from *Talk 'N' Tunes*, to *Devil, Shake a Half-Breed*, to *Medicine Fiddle*. Everyone working on the project thought *Devil, Shake a Half-Breed* (hereafter *DSAHB*) to be the best possible title for the film. The music in the film is the result of Euro-Indian intermarriage, cross-cultural exchange, all driven by the tensions of cultural conflict and assimilation. Many fiddle tunes and a theme sequence in the film are built around devil stories. It was an energetic, attention-attracting title that captured some significant elements of the film.

Jim Leary had learned from his fieldwork, and from contacting fellow researchers Bob Andresen and Paul Gifford, that several tunes called "Devil, Shake A Half Breed" were widely known and played by Ojibwas from Upper Michigan through northern Wisconsin and Minnesota to North Dakota. Folklorists who have worked in the Upper Midwest, like Richard Dorson, have titled their works with such gems as *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers*.

But, I had a feeling that the ancient pejorative meaning of "half-breed" might linger, and I was concerned about the repercussions. Mike Keplin, a young Michif fiddler to whom Fred Allery will pass on his legacy of tunes, said "Half-Breed is a bad word." Unlike, his age peers, Mike was raised by his grandmother, and speaks the old Michif language. He seems like a member of an older generation. He was visibly upset, and could not understand why we would use a bad word for the title.

Gordette Cote, a half-breed "Finndian" whose grandfather was a lumberjack fiddler loved *DSAHB* and felt that "anything that's creative, that's really

new, inevitably causes conflict." She thought that this title would irritate some people, but that these pissed-off potatoes might roll off of their couches and come to see what they thought they didn't like. To her mind, controversy was somehow evidence of artistic truth.

Above, Richard "Dick" Gravelle as he appeared in *Medicine Fiddle*

Photos: Michael Loukinen

Below, Mike Keplin of Turtle Mountain

Lucille Pine, an elderly Ojibwa dancer featured in the outdoor dance on the Garden River Reservation, broke out into a belly laugh when she heard it over the phone. She remembered "Devil, Shake a Half-Breed" as one of her favorite old-time dance tunes. When I mentioned it to Deborah Pine, her granddaughter, also in the film, she was speechless. She wondered, "What is this crazy guy trying to do?" But, Deborah, an artist, didn't offer any criticism, believing that as an artist I must reach deep inside and rely solely on the inner truth, in spite of others' opinions.

Jim Carter, a French-Indian, News Director at Northern Michigan University, who closely fol-

lowed the progress of the film, and both intellectually and personally understands the film, consistently opposed *DSAHB*. He politely listened to my arguments but never budged. Carol Babcock-Elder, a Potawatami archive researcher at the Marquette County Historical Society asked, "Do you want to start a race riot?" Kathy Nertoli, the editor of *Win-Awenen-Nisitotung*, a newspaper published by the Sault Saint Marie, Michigan Tribe of Ojibwa, was adamantly opposed to this shocking slur. Bruce Anderson, a senior administrator in line next to me at the bank, looked as though he had seen death itself. Ashen-faced, on a Friday afternoon he looked over his shoulder and whispered, "You don't need the trouble. You just don't need it. There are other things that you should be doing rather than dealing with the fallout." His warning was in the aftermath of letter to the editor in the student newspaper charging that the special needs of Native American students were being ignored because other minority groups were getting more attention.

A young Ojibwa, earnestly learning the spiritual traditions of his elders, believed that an evil spirit would descend upon me if* Devil Shakes A Half-Breed *identified the film.

A young Ojibwa, earnestly learning the spiritual traditions of his elders, believed that an evil spirit would descend upon me if *DSAHB* identified the film.

Butch and Lowell Waupoose, Menominees from Keshena, Wisconsin were stunned, and visibly hurt when I tested the words on them. Francis Keshena, a Menominee elder who had invited me to film on their reservation thought about it, and said that it was a good title.

> Did you ever hear of a book called, *Nobody Loves a Drunken Indian?* It was written by an Indian from the Southwest, a Navaho, I think, who was recovering from alcoholism. That title made people angry but the book did a lot of good for Indian people. Some people probably won't like your title, but don't worry about it.

Fred Waisanen, a social psychologist, who was my mentor back in graduate school, said the words "Devil" and "Half-Breed" both evoked negative affect. "Why do you want to define your film in terms of negative imagery?" he asked. I explained the devil stories, tune names, the public attention to be gained by a play on the shocking imagery, but he shook his head. "It's still negative," he concluded.

Meanwhile, Jesse Helms was blasting the National Endowment for the Arts for supporting pornographic activity with taxpayers' dollars. I thought about Jesse's stand and artistic freedom and I began to doubt whether I had the moral courage required of an artist. Should I follow my inner voice irrespective of the public reaction? Should I, as a Professor of Sociology, at a state-supported university, consider the public image of my employer, and play it safe?

I began to feel as though I were losing my artistic soul. Somehow, even anticipating the negative reactions of others slipped a censor into my mind; indeed, an evil spirit that I sensed could squelch a fragile spiritual reservoir that all too seldom kicks out anything new. Like an adolescent, I began to think that truth lived only in an assault upon convention. Torn between the ideal of artistic freedom and a sense of responsibility to the Native people and others who supported this film project, I slipped into a depression.

Films are shown to mass audiences, and their reactions must be considered. But, in doing so one risks the inner death. I was honestly thinking of giving up filmmaking.

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lowed the progress of the film, and both intellectually and personally understands the film, consistently opposed *DSAHB*. He politely listened to my arguments but never budged. Carol Babcock-Elder, a Potawatami archive researcher at the Marquette County Historical Society asked, "Do you want to start a race riot?" Kathy Nertoli, the editor of *Win-Awenen-Nisitotung*, a newspaper published by the Sault Saint Marie, Michigan Tribe of Ojibwa, was adamantly opposed to this shocking slur. Bruce Anderson, a senior administrator in line next to me at the bank, looked as though he had seen death itself. Ashen-faced, on a Friday afternoon he looked over his shoulder and whispered, "You don't need the trouble. You just don't need it. There are other things that you should be doing rather than dealing with the fallout." His warning was in the aftermath of letter to the editor in the student newspaper charging that the special needs of Native American students were being ignored because other minority groups were getting more attention.

A young Ojibwa, earnestly learning the spiritual traditions of his elders, believed that an evil spirit would descend upon me if* Devil Shakes A Half-Breed *identified the film.

A young Ojibwa, earnestly learning the spiritual traditions of his elders, believed that an evil spirit would descend upon me if *DSAHB* identified the film.

Butch and Lowell Waupoose, Menominees from Keshena, Wisconsin were stunned, and visibly hurt when I tested the words on them. Francis Keshena, a Menominee elder who had invited me to film on their reservation thought about it, and said that it was a good title.

> Did you ever hear of a book called, *Nobody Loves a Drunken Indian?* It was written by an Indian from the Southwest, a Navaho, I think, who was recovering from alcoholism. That title made people angry but the book did a lot of good for Indian people. Some people probably won't like your title, but don't worry about it.

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Fred Allery, an elderly Ojibwa fiddler, living in Belcourt, North Dakota. Fred said he knows the tune, but that in the Turtle Mountains they call it "Growling Old Man, Grumbling Old Woman." Lawrence Houle recognized Cameron's *DSAHB* immediately, and called it a "Reel of Eight." We filmed Fred Allery and Elmer Davis playing what they thought was Cameron's *DSAHB*, but Anne Lederman, our folklore consultant insisted that they weren't the same tune. She agreed that some of the phrases were identical, but there the similarity ended.

Who was correct? I sided with Anne Lederman, concluding that "Growling Old Man . . . " and "Reel of Eight" were not *DSAHB*. Hence, *DSAHB*, as a tune, was not to be in the film. Did this omission now heighten the risks of using *DSAHB* as the title? If challenged, I couldn't say it was the name of a tune in our film. I was, after all, a white boy making film about Native people, and I recalled how, as a Finnish American, I felt about "outsiders" telling negative Finlander jokes.

Several months passed and I was still searching for a title. Nicholas Vrooman advocated *DSAHB* because it was clearly "the perfect title" and hinted that our integrity was at stake. Was it not the case that anyone thinking negatively of either a half-breed, or even of the "H-word" whether they were Native or non-Native, had a racist mindset? By playing it "sensitive," was I actually submitting to a racist set of cultural distinctions? Was "sensitivity" a racist gesture?

"Bowing to Tradition," "Medicine Bow," "Native Fiddlers," "Whitefish on the Rapids," "Whitefish on the Rapids: Native and Mixed Blood Fiddlers in the U.S. and Canada," "Fur Trade Fiddle," "Fur Trade Fiddlers," "Red Men Fiddle," "Indian Fiddlers," "Devil, Shake a Half-Breed: Native and Mixed Blood Fiddlers," and " Mixed Blood Fiddle" were a few of our options. Richard March, a folklorist, thought we should use *DSAHB* with an extension to elaborate: "Devil Shake a Half Breed: Native and Métis Fiddlers."

One night I tuned in to the evening news from Green Bay and watched a white sportsman wearing a hunter's orange baseball cap, and a camouflage jacket harassing Ojibwas who were spearing walleyes on an inland lake in northern Wisconsin. He was yelling, "Half-Breed. Hey, Half-Breed. Half-Breed. Want another beer, Half-Breed?" There it was in front of my nose: the best film title that I could find contained a potential hate word that someone else would use in a racial slur. *DSAHB* died suddenly.

Finally, I came up with *Medicine Fiddle*. Although it was somehow difficult to pronounce and gives your tongue a funny feeling, like our film, it has a spiritual dimension. Fiddle music makes elders in a bleak nursing home feel good. The music soothes the inner life.

Kathy Nertoli thinks our film title "was meant to be." I found it the night before we filmed our titles and credits. Everyone on the film crew thought I had sold out. "Why not call it Pharmacy Fiddle?" my editor cynically retorted.

In retrospect, it is obvious to me that *Medicine Fiddle* is the perfect title. When I mentioned the title to Linda Skinner, the Director of Indian Education for the state of Oklahoma, she smiled, stared out the window and repeated it in a chant. She turned to me and her eyes said *Medicine Fiddle* was good.

Hearing the fiddle playing in the film makes one tap his feet and feel happy. The music gives viewers a good feeling that penetrates the soul, . . . "good medicine" [which] . . . contributes to the well being of the inner spirit.

Mikel B. Classen, "Good Man Behind the Camera," *Above the Bridge* (Summer, 1991)

The Medicine Fiddlers

Fred Allery

Born: 1922, Belcourt, North Dakota

Old Dan DeCoteau, a French-Canadian neighbor in his late seventies taught Fred to play the old time tunes in exact accordance with the way his own grandfather had taught him. Such strict conformity to the old way, combined with the advanced age of these fiddling teachers over three generations puts Fred in a unique position: he is the guardian of the "correct" old-time fiddling tradition in the Turtle Mountains.

Frank Boyer Jr. and Frank Boyer Sr.

Born: 1946 and 1921 on the Rankin Reserve, Ontario

Frank Jr. is a good old time fiddler, but has found it necessary to play modern country western tunes on the guitar in order to please the younger crowds. He is finding it increasingly difficult to remember some of the old tunes. Frank Sr. was regarded as one of the best guitarists in Ontario. Unlike others who strum out a beat, he plays every single note of the melody, as though he was a fiddler.

Rene Cote

Born: 1928 Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

Although a Canadian, much of Rene's playing is on the American side of the border, especially on Sugar Island where he can always be found jamming with his life-long friend and guitar player, Joe Menard, another mixed blood who identifies with his French ancestry.

Richard "Dick" Gravelle

Born: 1918 Sugar Island, Michigan

As a young boy Dick heard an old Indian fiddler playing at a house party, and the tune stayed in his head for fifty-six years. He drove the snow plow through the "Seney Stretch" during the midnight shift and fiddle tunes would interfere with his concentration. *Medicine Fiddle* is dedicated to his memory (Dick died in 1990).

Lawrence Houle

Born: October, 1938, Ebb and Flow Reserve, Manitoba

In spite of his exposure to recorded music, he prefers the "old-time" way of playing that he learned in his home community. Lawrence is well-known throughout the prairies, playing for dances in many communities, and has appeared at the Winnipeg Folk Festival, and Carnegie Hall. He works with traditional dance groups in the communities of Hollow Water and the Cody Reserve, and has released his own album of tunes learned from his father, on Winnipeg's Sunshine label.

Mike Keplin

Born: 1950 Belcourt, North Dakota

Mike was raised by his grandmother and as a result has absorbed the culture of an earlier generation. He is the only one of his peers in the Turtle Mountains to speak "Michif," the language of his people (a blend of Cree, French, Plains Ojibwa). He has been selected by a senior fiddler, Fred Allery, to be the bearer of Michif music traditions in the Turtle Mountains of North Dakota.

Joe Menard

Born: 1930, Sugar Island, Michigan

Guitarist who has "chorded" for some of the great fiddlers in the Eastern Upper Peninsula and Ontario, including Rene Cote and Coleman Trudeau. He is the "General" of the "Sugar Island Boys."

Mike Page

Born: 1937, Belcourt, North Dakota

Mike was born when his buffalo-hunting father was seventy nine years old. His grandfather, grandfather's brother, father, all of his uncles and most of his neighbors and friends played the fiddle. His father composed fiddle tunes to commemorate a successful hunt. Dorothy Page, his wife, sometimes accompanies him on the guitar.

Frank Poitra

**Born: 1905,
Dunseith, North Dakota**

"Old Frank" was the oldest fiddler in our film. His father played the old time tunes at bush dances on the winter camping grounds, and his uncles were outstanding fiddlers who made a strong impression on him. Two separate accidents robbed him of his vision, and Frank played the fiddle to "keep from going crazy." As he played, he saw dancers in his mind. He'd play quietly to himself while his family was sleeping, and as a result, he developed an unusually quiet style that he believes prevented him from becoming known as a great fiddler. Frank died in 1991.

Film crew, L-R: Michael Loukinen (producer and director), Matthew Quast (sound recordist). Miroslav Janke (cinematographer), and Roger Schmitz (assistant camera), Teddy Boy Houle (far right) teaches youngsters "The Red River Jig."

Photo: Mark Nelson

Steve Souliere

**Born: 1910,
Garden River Reserve, Ontario**

Steve played in the era of the big multiethnic lumbercamps in northern Ontario where many of the fiddlers from his reservation learned their tunes.

Coleman Trudeau

Born: 1926, Wikwemikong Reserve, Ontario

When he was eight, he was given a violin as a Christmas present from his father. He had hoped for a guitar and was disappointed, but played the instrument to please his parents. Lately, he's been playing in nursing homes, at A.A. dances, festivals, and house parties. Since 1975, he has worked as an A.A. counselor with Indian pulp wood cutters. In 1989 Coleman received the outstanding folk artist award from the Ontario Arts Council.

The Waupoose Family

Everette, Josephine (mother), Lowell Waupoose, and Leila Waupoose Rabideaux were raised on the Menominee Reservation on the Wolf River in northeastern Wisconsin. The children learned to play the guitar, banjo, and the fiddle from their father, Alex Waupoose. Alex's father, Dave Waupoose, and his father were likewise fiddlers.

Leila "Chips" Waupoose-Rabideaux

**Born: 1937 Menonminee
Reservation, Wisconsin**

Leila started jigging to her father's tunes when she was four. Now she plays the piano and in the back of her mind hears her (deceased) father's fiddle. Her children don't understand what she is doing, and show little interest in continuing the Waupoose family's music. Leila is one of the strongest narrators in ***Medicine Fiddle***.

Everette and Lowell Waupoose

**Born: 1938 and 1945, Menominee
Reservation, Wisconsin**

The brothers play only those tunes that they had learned from their father, Alex Waupoose. Neither of their children show any interest in continuing with their music.

Josephine Waupoose

**Born: 1908, Menominee Reservation,
Wisconsin**

Mrs. Waupoose's favorite tunes were "Buffalo Gal," "Irish Washerwoman," and "Mother's Tune," (a family composition). She had twenty children, of whom she reckons, perhaps fourteen are still alive. She is the strongest voice in ***Medicine Fiddle*** that expresses the underworld of myth that sustains and interprets Native fiddle music.

The Contributors

Lillian Marks Heldreth

Lillian Marks Heldreth is an Associate Professor of English at Northern Michigan University. Her grandfather, Tyler B. Dean, was a lumbercamp blacksmith-fiddler for the Ely Thomas Lumber Co. in Skiles, West Virginia during 1895-1920.

James P. Leary

Leary is a staff folklorist at the Wisconsin Folk Museum of Mount Horeb and a faculty associate of the Folklore Program at the University of Wisconsin. He has published numerous articles and produced documentary recordings concerning the traditional music of the western Great Lakes region.

Anne Lederman

Lederman is a musician and ethnomusicologist, originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba, now living in Toronto. She has worked mainly in the area of traditional fiddle music in Canada, and has presented her research in articles and documentary recordings.

Michael Loukinen

Loukinen is a professor of Sociology at Northern Michigan University and a director/producer of ethnographic films. In addition to ***Medicine Fiddle***, his films include *Finnish American Lives*, *Tradition Bearers*, and *Good Man in the Woods*.

Nicholas Curchin Peterson Vrooman

Vrooman is the state folklorist and director of folklife programs for Montana. While occupying a similar position in North Dakota, he conducted extensive research among the Ojibwa and Metchif fiddlers of the Turtle Mountain reservation.

Medicine Fiddle

Edited by James P. Leary, designed and produced by Everett C. Albers of the North Dakota Humanities Council, this publication of a collection of essays accompanies a film of the same name produced and directed by Michael Loukinen. The cover art is by Ojibwa artist Peter Maqua, photographs on back cover and inside front and back by Mark Nelson.

The film *Medicine Fiddle* (1991) is an 81 minute color documentary exploring fiddling and dancing traditions of Native and Métis families in the northern United States and Canada. The fiddle was introduced to native peoples by French fur traders in the late 1600s and by Irish, Scottish, and Scots-Irish trappers, lumberjacks, and homesteaders in the late 1700s. Over the past two centuries this music has become deeply embedded in the cultural memory of mixed blood descendants. Some of the music has acquired a Native sound, while an underworld of Native mythology sustains and interprets it. The film weaves tunes, dance, and oral history to join our minds and hearts and to make us aware of our connection to a much older and broader slice of humanity.

16 mm. color print, $900 to institutions (rental — $125). VHS stereo cassette, $200 to institutions (rental — $50); home video (not for classroom or public screenings), $40, plus $4 shipping and handling.

Write to: UP North Films, 331 T.F.A., Northern Michigan University, Marquette, Michigan 49855, 906/227-2041. To order by telephone using Mastercard or Visa: 906/227-2341.

The film Medicine Fiddle and this publication funded in part by The North Dakota Humanities Council, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Lawrence "Teddy Boy" Houle (left)
with Michael Loukinen (right)
and the film crew (standing, from left to right) --
Matthew Quast (sound recordist),
Roger Schmitz (assistant camera)
and Misolaw Janek (cinematographer)

Afterword

He communicated extraordinary enthusiasm, and a genuine love of people from the moment I first spoke with him. Like the Finnish-Americans I know from North Dakota, Michael Loukinen was not a man to commit to any project with anything but a dogged, yet most inspired passion to do well.

Well he did, indeed. *Medicine Fiddle* is one of those once-in-a-decade gems among the thousands funded by state affiliates of the National Endowment for the Humanities each year.

I took my family to a "sneak preview" of the film in Bismarck. "Is this going to be one of those boring documentaries with historians talking through their beards in a way we can understand every tenth word?" asked my wife. "I don't think so, I answered." (I always say that.) After the screening -- 81 minutes later -- as the house lights came up, I looked at my family in amazement. Children and spouse were smiling!

"This one is really something!" said my wife, the world's toughest critic of humanities programs. She's *really* right. As Mikel Classen wrote in an article ("Good Man Behind the Camera"), "the music gives viewers a good feeling that penetrates the soul." I don't know much about soul penetration -- perhaps it has something to do with such exquisite moments as Coleman Trudeau fiddling and seniors in walkers step-dancing in a retirement home gave me the shivers and brought tears of happiness.

Medicine Fiddle offers all that Loukinen promised to qualify for a humanities grant -- exploration of the origin of the traditional music, etc. But he did much more by simply allowing the fiddlers and their followers to tell their story and play their music, to dance and muse. Two of the featured fiddlers died within two years of the filming, another suffered a stroke. Michael made his film just in time. Now, their story will be there for their grandchildren and ours for generations to come.

Well done, Michael. What's your next project, and when are you coming back to North Dakota? You've spoiled this Humanities Council and made things tough at home. My children want to know when I'm going to take them to something good again -- like *Medicine Fiddle*.

Everett C. Albers, Executive Director
The North Dakota Humanities Council

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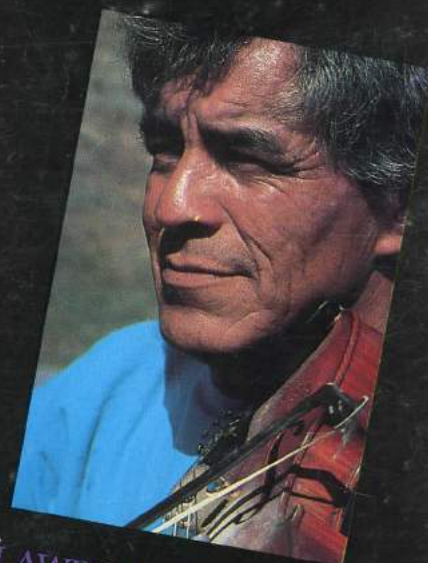
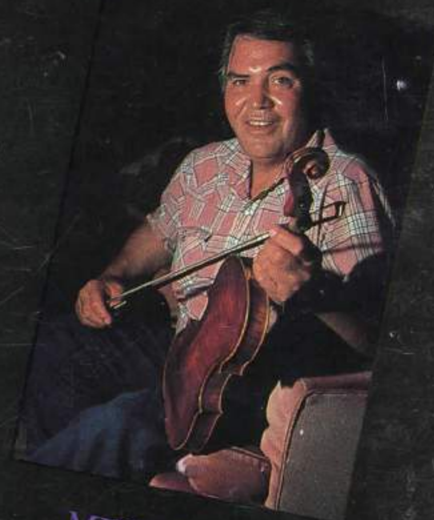


LAWRENCE HOULE

FRANK POITRA



MIKE PAGE

film and discussion guide

made possible in part by The North Dakota Humanities Council

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* FIDDLERS *