

Road Allowance Interview, Louis Arcand, Feb. 6, 2014

Conducted by Scott Duffee
December 16, 2013

Scott Duffee (SD): Can you please tell me your name and your community that you grew up in? So, your name first.

Louis Arcand (LA): Okay, I am Louis Alexander Arcand.

SD: Louis Alexander Arcand.

LA: Okay, Debden. I was born in about 8 miles northeast of Debden, in the Wanakena district.

SD: Do you know how to spell that?

LA: Wanakena. W-A-N-A-K-E-N-A.

SD: Thank you. Were born there?

LA: Yes, I was born there on December 30th, 1934. It was a cold, cold day, maybe 45 below. My father had to hitch the horses and go and get Mrs. Pat Vandale. It was about, two o'clock in the afternoon ...

SD: By Mrs. Pat Vandale?

LA: Then he brought her back home. Then dad had to come back. Now sometimes people ask me, "Why did you come out when it was so cold?" "Well," I said, "I don't know any better." Now my father was about 58 when I was born.

SD: Really? What was his name?

LA: Pierre Arcand.

SD: What was your mom's name?

LA: Lottie Viola Gray.

SD: Lottie Viola.

LA: Yes.

SD: How do you spell her maiden name? Her maiden name was Gray?

LA: Gray, G-R-A-Y.

SD: Okay, thank you. How old was she when you were born?

LA: Oh, she supposed to be 22 as far as I know.

SD: Was she Métis as well?

LA: No, dad was Métis, but my mother was a Norwegian.

SD: Interesting. What was the name of the community you grew up in? What did they call that place?

LA: Wanakena district.

SD: That's what they called it, the Wanakena district?

LA: Yes.

SD: And it was 8 miles northeast of Debden?

LA: Yes, there was two ways of getting in there. One way you went there, was to go north and then you turn east. Then you go down the road and there was a log house on the right-hand side. And just go out the gate. They had the gate that you follow down to a creek. And they put a corduroy ... on there so we could get by. And then you come into our place from the south-side, my dad's brother ... had the south quarter. We had the north quarter. And the other north quarter was held by my other uncle Jonas.

SD: So, you guys owned that land?

LA: Yes, we had the farm there. Now, I remember well when they put the crop in. Dad put it in. It wasn't very ... Put it in with the seeds. We grew up. By the time they cut it with the binder, and before they cut it, there was a place you could see your own ... As they cut it, we discovered that it had turnips. Big turnips like that. They wouldn't go in the water pail.

SD: That's big. That's over a foot across.

LA: Yes, in order to get it in the pail, they had to cut it in half. And dad got two and a half wagon buffaloes out of that little pack. Well, we had to defend the garden and stuff. Corn like that, about that big.

SD: Wow.

LA: 12 and 14 loads. And I forget what they call melons. Oh, they'd get about that big and about that long. They're good for making like a soup or—

SD: Watermelon?

LA: No, not a watermelon. I don't know what they—

SD: But it was a fruit anyway?

LA: Yes, well we had to grow something in order to eat. That's back in the Depression. Reminds me of that wheat which sold for 30 cents a bushel. Yes, they travelled 68 miles to the other area.

SD: That's pretty tough for the horses.

LA: Yes, it was.

SD: Was the Wanakena district a road allowance community?

LA: No, there was a school there and a cemetery.

SD: Were there lots of people from around there that were squatting?

LA: Yes, quite a few.

SD: A lot of Métis people?

LA: Yes.

SD: Were there any living on your land that were just squatting there?

LA: Not all of them.

SD: Okay, alright.

Unknown: ...

SD: Who were your grandparents?

LA: They were my dad's father and his mother. They came from Three Rivers, Quebec.

SD: What were their names?

LA: What the heck was it And her, I don't remember her name. I used to know, but I forget it once in a while. But they settled down in Fort Garry. There in Winnipeg, then when they got there And they gave my grandfather a quarter along the river. Every spring the river flooded. My grandfather traded it for three-point hay fork. He said, "I can't use flooded land." So that was around—dad was born at in 1878 at Poplar Point in ...

LA: Yes, then after that is when they moved over to the ...

SD: That was your grandpa?

LA: Yes.

SD: So he came right from Quebec?

LA: Yes, they came from Quebec.

SD: From Three Rivers?

LA: Yes, at that time they were pushing people out.

SD: Do you know why they were pushing people out?

LA: I don't know. Well, there were a lot of French too that were pulled out at that time. Because I remember my half-brother Frank married...This Lacourse guy, he was one of them that they put out. I don't know what turned out, but somebody tried to kill him or something, and he was ready to kill the other guy, so they put him away. There were a lot of French people there that were pushed away. They settled in Debden.

SD: What about Métis people, were there lots of those people out there?

LA: Yes, there were quite a few. Dad had John Baptiste, himself and Jonas and Issac.

SD: With a different woman other than your mom? Was that your brothers or?

LA: Yes.

SD: Was that from a different—?

LA: I don't know the first wife. Dad was in Battleford in 1898. And my half-brother I call him, Frank, was born two years after he come. 1898. And when dad was cutting cord wood for the Mounted Police, in the river barn. They used to cut cord wood and then piled it, but there was so much snow in the spring. The wood was piled up in the trees. I met two women from Battleford that knew my dad and they told me that he was an awful good worker. And they said if it hadn't been for dad cutting the wood for the Mounted Police would have frozen to death. And one day I was in North Battleford, we were having lunch in the restaurant. I met three people from Alberta. They also knew my dad. So that was a great thing for me.

SD: How is it that you're John Arcand's uncle?

LA: Well, let's see, Victor, that's John's father, was dad's nephew. And, John, Victor, that was a son of my uncle Baptiste. And that was quite a family. There was Victor, George, quite a few of them. So, John is my second cousin.

SD: Okay, so did all of your neighbours own their own property?

LA: As far as I know. But they, ... sometimes the grain was poor. People couldn't pay the taxes. I was 4 years old when Dad had to sell the farm because he was coming close to And if you had the farm, the horses, wagon or stuff like that, you couldn't have that. I remember we were on Dick ... place there and his nephew Roger lived there at the next place down and Dad had to cut willow pickets to bring to town to sell. So when he had to hire his nephew to bring the pickets to town and come back, bring Dad back and ..., whatever. But after Dad got the pension, other people got the pension, they didn't have to tell. I don't see that fair.

SD: So where did you guys live after that?

LA: Oh, we moved from place to place. If Dad didn't move 48 times, he didn't move once. On year, two, three years, build a house, barn and dig a well. If it didn't work, move to another place. We were in Duck Lake in 1949. Come all the way with the rack with the stuff, just stayed the winter. Spring comes, gone again. We landed just about the same place we came from.

SD: Back up to Debden?

LA: Yes, oh Dad said we felt so lonely there in Duck Lake. I knew a lot of people. Now they're all gone.

SD: So how many half-brothers and sisters do you have?

LA: I have, let's see, 8. Maxine, there was another one. Another girl, and Frank. Tell you what Frank done, one of his sisters. Our half-sister. He had a toothache. Oh, Frank said, "I'll see to it." I don't know what he did. Dad was butchering. He had a tripod with a thing on top. He brought her there, brought a string, and tied the string onto the rope, and started pulling up. And he lifted her, just her feet off the ground. And then he left her there. "Oh," he said, "the howling she done." His dad and his mother come out to wonder, and there she was hanging up there.

SD: Do you know the name of their mom? Your half-brothers and sisters.

LA: What the heck, one was ... quite a bit. But I can't remember her name right now.

SD: So you're dad had two families, right? He had a family with a woman—

LA: Well Frank, yes two families.

SD: Two families. Do you know the name of the woman who was the mom?

LA: No, that's what I can't remember right now. But like I say, I know the names on that gas truck. I saw quite a bit going between there, Battleford and Edmonton. I'll think of the name but it's hard. If I think of it. I'll write it down.

SD: So, what Métis families lived in Wanakena?

LA: Well, it was mostly French around there.

SD: Mostly French, okay. But your mom was Norwegian.

LA: Yes.

SD: And what were the names of the other communities you lived in?

LA: Oh, one was ... We were in Pasqua. That's west of Debden, that was only one year. That's where I went to school. And in the spring, Dad would move back. They wanted me to stay with lady and ... but I didn't like the place. I didn't go. So, I went to Jackson Lake. That's where I went to school again. During the wintertime, I had a sleigh though. ... and they'd take me to school. ... And I'd turn around and I'd go home. I'd take the harness off and come dinner time hitch him up on the sleigh come, and get me, took me home. And when I was in the other school that was the school before. One day I come home, I stopped at the store. And I had a nickel. I wanted to get myself a scribbler. So, I left my dog there, I come out, he's still there. I went home just across the creek. Until the next morning, I hitched him up, had him wait there, and I run into the house and got my lunch kit. Come out, dog was gone with the sleigh. Call now, "Where am I going to get it?" I started out then I saw the tracks in the snow, alright. Here I got to the store where he stopped the night before. There he was sitting waiting for me. But anything good I had, Dad always sold.

SD: Really?

LA: Always said, "When we get a good offer for something, if you don't take it something will happen." Just like when I was in the hospital in PA for a ruptured appendix. I was supposed to be in there in two weeks. It got so cold there one night. I caught, what do you call that, just like the flu? So, I was in there two more weeks. And dad had a niece in there with a daughter. They knew this old lady. So, when she heard I was out, she come over. She was carrying, you know the carton with the matches, and she had put the matches out. Here was a little female canary in there. She brought it over for me for a gift. So, we had come home on the bus. Dad hired one of the Lemire guys with the model A to come and meet us at the bus when we get home. So, before we got home, about 3/4 of a mile, they run out of gas. So, naturally mother and dad had to change over and carry me because I wasn't allowed to walk. And that canary, when we moved north of Debden where I went to school. Then Dad wanted to come to Duck Lake to the pilgrimage. We didn't have enough money. I'll be darned if he didn't sell my canary to the store keeper. But that canary, dad made a cage for it with little poplars and drilled the holes. A little swing, put the door in, hang it up. Oh, he was swinging away. And the day that Dad come into the door and stamped his feet. I guess we're going to go to town. Oh gee, you should have seen that canary. So, we did go to town, even the cat and the dog came. Dad liked to leave the horses at the livery barn there and go to the grocery store and get a few things. He liked to eat outside. He didn't believe in eating in a restaurant. So here the cat was near the cage watching the canary. And so was the dog. And the other dog come around, but it only got a darn good licken.

SD: So, do you know what year it was that you lived in Pascal?

LA: That was in '46.

SD: '46. How long were you there for?

LA: A year.

SD: What about Jackson Lake?

LA: I was there for two and a half, just about 3 years.

SD: Do you know what years that was? Do you know what years those were?

LA: Let's see, my uncle Joe died in '44. My aunt sold out in '45. That was in '46.

SD: So, you went from Pascal to Jackson Lake?

LA: Yes.

SD: And you stayed in Jackson Lake until what year?

LA: '49. Because I know in '49 we were at that lake. We moved to that lake. Stayed one year there then they met Frank. Just about the same place.

SD: Were Pascal and Jackson Lake Road allowance communities?

LA: Mostly, there were a couple of Englishmen at Jackson Lake. There was one guy, he was married to an Indian lady. One of the Englishmen, I can't remember but I know one. His daughters were Doris Lawrence and Nora. And he had a son. I don't remember his son's name yet.

SD: Well, if you think of his last name, let me know. That is, if you can remember.

LA: Pretty well around there, they're either mixed or—

SD: So, you moved from Jackson Lake to Duck Lake and then back to Jackson Lake?

LA: Yes.

SD: Because there was a school there?

LA: Yes, that was the only school, in Wanakena. They wanted Dad to send me there to school and there was a great bush between there and the trees. Pull the trees and in the wintertime ... had to walk four or five miles in that cold weather. Dad said, "No, you're not going to take him." He said, "If I move, I'll go to the place I want." They never bothered.

SD: So where did you go to school when you lived in Jackson?

LA: Well, the school was there, built right near the road. That was north of Debden about 8 miles.

SD: And all the kids from Jackson Lake went to that school?

LA: Yes.

SD: What was the name of that school?

LA: Well, they called it Jackson Lake.

SD: How long did you stay in Jackson Lake after you moved back from Duck Lake?

LA: Oh, about three years.

SD: About three years. Until what year do you think?

LA: We left in '48. Yes, '46 we went to Pasqua, '47, '48, '49, yes.

SD: '49 to where? Duck Lake?

LA: Yes, to Duck Lake.

SD: Then you moved back to Jackson, right?

LA: Back again.

SD: How long did you stay after you moved back to Jackson?

LA: Oh, we went back. Dad built another house, just south of Winter Lake. That was a little bit northeast of Jackson Lake. So, we were there for years.

SD: At Winter Lake.

LA: Then we had my brother's three children. He would keep them because Pete's wife was kind of ... Couldn't keep the kids so that's where we had them. My dad's laid there. But after we moved to that other lake, then we got word that we had to take this kid to this school, so we took them to ... valley. So, then Dad died in 1960, so mother and I had to stay there a couple of years, and my mother's two brothers come from BC. They settled down. They bought a farm there, just north, a mile and a half. So, in the fall, my uncle had some grain to thrash, so I went and helped. I was there 4 years. I worked for a fella called Raymond Lemire. And he was breaking it with the McCormick tractor. He broke the hub on it. So, there were two weeks I didn't work for him. When he came to pay me, he gave me 15 dollars. But we stayed and helped him 4 years. And he went back to Alberta to work, and his brother was there working, so I kept the farm there for them. Cutting the wood and everything; keeping things in motion. And they told me, "You better have some wood cut." Well, I did cut wood. Just about Christmas time he come home, and said, "You didn't cut any wood, you damn liar." I said, "Listen, hear you're only going to call me that once." "Well, you can do what you like." "Okay." I said, "I'm giving you until the morning to tell me what you want to do or else I'm out of here." But mother had paid for the lumber to build a house. They built it. When we left there, they kept the house. That's where we moved to Debden and I worked for Hector ... I used to work for35 cents.

SD: Were there a lot of Métis families that lived in Jackson Lake?

LA: Yes, there was.

SD: Mostly, Métis families?

LA: Like I said there were only one, two, two families that were English. But the rest were French and Métis. Ever notice the Indian, what they call their father?

SD: No.

LA: Father, father. You know like people and animals?

SD: Oh yah.

LA: And the mother is ... Oh, we used to laugh at that.

SD: Did any of the people in Jackson Lake own their own property? Just those two Englishmen you said?

LA: Yes, they owned their own property.

SD: The people in Jackson Lake did?

LA: Yes, but when the children got older, people got older. They can't work so much. So, one family moves, and another family moves. Pretty soon there's hardly anybody

there. Like now that's all a great big community pasture. And Park Valley, I think there's only two or three families that live there.

SD: So, can you tell me the last names of some of the families that lived in .. ?

LA: One is the ...Aw, shoot. Well, there were the Gaudry boys there from the old Henry Erickson ... place. And Tina Cord. There's another two houses near by brother's place.

SD: Who was there when you lived there, in ...?

LA: Oh, there was the Lemires and all of them, ... Erickson. Oh, there was a bunch of them. Some of them were Swedes. Our father ... And Mable ... Quite a few died there. Once they're gone, they're gone.

SD: So, in Jackson Lake how did most families make a living?

LA: Well, some had cattle. Like the English, the Miners, they had cattle.

SD: Miners was the last name?

LA: I don't remember the boys' name. Oh, Doris married a fellow from Duck Lake. And I don't know, he got into He took ...

SD: That happened in Jackson Lake?

LA: Mhmm.

SD: That's where that happened?

LA: Yes.

SD: What were their names?

LA: Gardipy and Doris Miner. They were married. But I think George Gardipy. He was after the Florence.

SD: That happened in Jackson Lake?

LA: No, that happened west of Debden.

SD: How did families celebrate Christmas and New Year's Eve in Jackson?

LA: Well, some day they ... Like the Métis they don't celebrate Christmas, just New Year's and the seven days after.

SD: How did they celebrate that?

LA: Oh, they had dances. Eat, drink. That's when we were on dad's farm and Jonas was on the next farm. They made it out to have a party. It started with dad. The Métis have, like, if I killed an animal, you apparently have to make the party. Or have the party and my aunt used to make the cake with the nickel. Whoever would get the nickel does the next party. I had the nickel twice.

SD: So, you did, you celebrated with the Métis people?

LA: Oh, yes.

SD: But yet, you're not Métis yourself?

LA: Well, I'm supposed to be Métis, but I don't know. Dad didn't like to be called a Métis. I don't know why.

SD: Well, he was from Quebec your dad, right?

LA: Well, no, he was from Manitoba.

SD: But his parents were from Quebec?

LA: His parents come from Quebec, yes.

SD: So maybe they were just French then?

LA: No, they were Métis.

SD: They were Métis from Quebec?

LA: That's what they said.

SD: That's what your dad and mom said?

LA: Yes.

SD: Sorry, your mom is Norwegian.

LA: Yes, she was Norwegian but—

SD: Did you know your dad's parents?

LA: I think so.

SD: They were alive when you were a kid?

LA: Oh yes.

SD: Did they ever say that they were Métis from Quebec?

LA: Well, that's what dad claimed. So, I didn't talk about grandparents because I wasn't there yet.

SD: What kind of resources did your family harvest? Animals from hunting? Berries?

LA: Oh yes, we had cows, we had pigs, chickens. Well, you had to do that if you wanted to eat, boy.

SD: Any hunting?

LA: It was hard times. That was in the middle of the Depression. I remember I had my job. I was only 4 years old. I had to take a pail of water and go around the potato patch. We were staking out the potato bugs down ... I had to do that 4 times a day.

SD: Did they ever do any hunting, your dad?

LA: Oh, yes. Whatever.

SD: So, what kind of—

LA: Well one day, at that time you could just about shoot any animal you wanted. But then the laws come in you can't do this; you can't do that. You can't do the other thing. Well, what are you going to eat?

SD: When did the laws come in?

LA: That must have been in the '40s or something. We used to eat a lot of rabbit. We used to butcher rabbit. Dad would stretch the hide, dry it out. And when he went to town, sold the rabbit skin. A nickel per skin. Used to get the money, turn around and buy sardines. Two cans for a nickel. Then he'd bring a gallon of ketchup. Hard to beat.

SD: What did you guys use for medicine?

LA: Sometimes, he dug up roots.

SD: What kind?

LA: I forget now what. One kind was good. I know he used to use blue, buffalo bush. If you wanted to throw up, you'd take this stick and put it up, peel it this way. If you wanted it to go the other way, you'd cut it down. You have to boil it. There's another thing up there, it's like a root. It's got like diamonds. That's good for fever or something like that. Oh, they used a lot of them. They went picking Seneca roots. That was good money. Come that time it was all gone.

SD: Was there anyone in your family that made moccasins?

LA: Made what?

SD: Moccasins.

LA: Yes, some even made their own clothes. Mother used to with that canvas there and make me a, a smock. Used to knit ... Knitted the mittens, leather one over it. It was better than buying it. I think the stuff would last longer, too.

SD: What language did you guys speak at home?

LA: Well, I used to speak French. But when I started school, well I had to use English. It was 1965 that I left my home. There I was at my uncles. I went to work down in Biggar. In the fall, one night my boss sent this gunny sack here to get a load of coal. Come home carrying the bag, next morning they had unloaded the coal. He said to me, "You take the truck and get four or five gallons of fuel." So, I took the truck, went down loaded 'em up. Coming home, they had just put the trench for the toilets across the road. But you had a bump like that. So, I come around the corner there, I didn't have far to go. I was going to turn like that, and in time, there was a car coming. I knew I couldn't wait so I floored the gas pedal. Oh gee, I forgot about that trench. Oh, the fuel was flying. He said, "So you're abusing my truck?" I said, "Why didn't you tell me there were no brakes?" He said, "I'm firing you." I said, "Thank you." But I was told after I should have went to the labour board because he fired me, but he never told me there were no brakes on the truck. So, I let it go, and I worked another 6 months not far from Lucky Lake. Then I quit. And went to meet a lady in Calgary and be darned if we got married. We were married. We went to Ontario then. That didn't work very good, so we come back to Manitoba. It was 32 years in Manitoba. I remember 1970 the railway went on strike. They said they couldn't get the boxcars or the flat cars to haul the wood. Know what they were doing?

SD: What?

LA: They were putting all the boxcars and all flat cars behind the trees so they couldn't be seen. The railroad track was low because that's the year the Queen came there. We were cutting pulp then, but after that, they couldn't even get a loaf of bread on credit. I had 8 cords of pulp there in the yard, they stayed there 2 years. They started to rot. ... took the saw and cut up the wood. And the storekeeper come back and said, "Oh you cut some pulp from me?" I said, "Nope." We just about starved there. And I had this little job. Insulate a trailer for this lady who was crippled. I put the plywood and the insulation underneath, and two rolls of paper. I finished that and

she had the TV tower. So, I'm working and it's kind of cloudy, something got into my head ... I better move my truck. I did. But nothing happened. Then I was cutting some firewood for her. We used to pile it. One night there was a storm. We were in their house. Lightning come down the tower through her TV, smashed all the front. She was in the bathroom having a bath and if it wasn't for the cat raising Cain, the place was on fire, burnt the whole thing. So I got a job to clean up around there. There were two spruce trees that I had to cut because they were half black. I got so much for the cleaning. He paid me. Then the insurance man came back, and he said here's 50 dollars, you give it to that man. He said he's done such a good job. After that the lady wouldn't hire me. I had to find some other work.

SD: So, this project is actually about Métis people. Do you know how the Métis people were treated in Jackson Lake?

LA: Well, some of them were treated right, but I feel maybe in some way they could have been treated better. But at all the times too a lot of them liked drinking. And their money ... next thing they fight. Separate, there's no compromise ... I feel when you get married, you're supposed to treat your wife good and her the same. But if the man drinks, comes home, fights with the wife, that's... I don't see any good in that. Just like a person makes a deal, be honest. You don't hide anything. You do okay. But if you don't then you're no good.

SD: Is there anything else you want to share about when you lived in Jackson Lake and?

LA: No, but I was thinking about that Rebellion. I don't know when that started ... first. There's a place there, that at that time, the Indians were supposed to come and help the Métis. And my uncle's son was hauling hay at that time; they had big fires that went across the road. He come through there and never caught his hay on fire. And the Indians had told the Métis they would come and help. But they never showed up. Because there was two young fellas that were killed at the house, at the dog house ... Just outside of Duck Lake. You could see the earth through the crack, through the logs. And these two were told not to go there, but they called there. And the police shot the both of them. So, if the Indians had come with the Métis, to help the Métis I don't know what, what would have turned out.

SD: Who told you that story?

LA: My father.

SD: How did he know the story?

LA: Well, he was there. He was young yet.

SD: In Duck Lake?

LA: Yes, and then the thing they had in The Pas, I was told that the, the Métis were going to lower the cable when the police come with their boat. And they said if there hadn't had been as slow in the boat, the cable would have caught the boat and all the

police would have maybe died because like they said, the police had better weapons.
So there was no compromising there.

SD: No, alright.

LA: That's the only thing I can say about it.

SD: Yes, well thank you.

LA: You're welcome.