

WHO WE ARE IS WHERE WE COME FROM: A HISTORICAL CURRICULUM  
RESOURCE FOR THE PIC MOBERT FIRST NATION

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study was undertaken in order to create a curriculum resource for use at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education (K-Grade 8 School) on the Pic Mobert First Nation. The Pic Mobert First Nation is located in the province of Ontario, within the Robinson Superior Treaty area. Combining archival data and interviews with community Elders, this study will provide teachers at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education with a tool for the development of historical and culturally relevant teaching and learning material. Data collection focused on the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation and used purposeful sampling, recorded interviews and both primary and secondary document sources. The study used an interpretational approach to data analysis with a focus on identifying constructs, themes, and patterns relating to Pic Mobert's history. The National Indian Brotherhood, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Union of Ontario Indians' Restoration of Jurisdiction in Education Process attest to the need for educational opportunities for Aboriginal students that are inclusive of their language, history, and culture. Furthermore, the literature shows that although there is documented data related to First Nation histories, individual community histories are not making their way into the classroom. The Elders highlighted the importance of teaching Pic Mobert children the Anishinabe language, of restoring wholeness to Anishinabe history and of what it means to be Anishinabe. It is hoped that this study will assist the Pic Mobert First Nation in its efforts to provide students at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education with an educational experience that is reflective of who they are and where they come from.

## **DEDICATION**

*In honour of my late grandmother, Elizabeth Jane Padgena*

*and all ancestors of the Pic Mobert First Nation*

*and*

*for the children*

*of*

*the Pic Mobert First Nation*

*and*

*those yet to come*

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## **GLOSSARY**

### Community Elder:

For the purposes of this study, I use Jonathan H. Ellerby's (2001) definition of community Elder. He states that:

Elders are male or female Aboriginal individuals that have lived a long life, presently maintain a healthy life-style, and possess a wealth of practical knowledge. This knowledge may or may not be related to spiritual things and usually involves expertise based on experience. (pg. 9)

### Anishinabe, Anishinabek, Ojibwe, First Nation, Native, Aboriginal, Indian:

In this study I use the terms Anishinabe, Anishinabek, Ojibwe, First Nation, Native, Aboriginal, and Indian interchangeably when referring to the Indigenous peoples of what is now Canada. A variety of these terms are used in a variety of historical contexts and references, and I use each term consistent with the context of its reference. In reference to the people of the Pic Mobert First Nation, I use specifically the terms Anishinabe and Anishinabek in honour and respect of my community. These latter terms come from our Anishinabe language and mean "original people/s."

### Anishinabekwe

This term means "Anishinabe woman."

### Netamisakomik

This means "where the rivers come out."

## CHAPTER 1: A SMALL WORLD

*What would happen to the Creator's law if the robin couldn't sing its song anymore? We would feel very bad: We would understand that something snapped in nature's law. What would happen if you saw a robin and you heard a different song, if it was singing the song of the sea gull? You would say, "Robin, that's not your language; that's not your song. (Grand Chief Mike Mitchell in Kirkness, 2002)*

### Introduction

I have walked through my life, singing someone else's song and living in someone else's world. I carry an emptiness within, borne of a life shaped by outside influences. My saving grace lived in the heart and soul of my late grandmother, Elizabeth Jane Padgena. If not for her love, guidance, and example, I would not value who I am as an Anishinabekwe today. Although I never knew it at the time, the life my grandmother lived was that of a teacher. One of her most precious gifts was to be of service to others, a role I repeatedly saw her fulfill throughout her lifetime. Following in my grandmother's footsteps, this study came about as a desire to give back to my community.

Giving back to my community means sharing the knowledge I have with students, parents, Elders, and community leadership and working with them to create a more culturally relevant curriculum. I spent twelve years learning in provincial schools, learning material to which I could not relate. Every problem I solved, every word I wrote, every lesson I learned, took me further and further from my truth. The provincial curriculum I learned taught me that I didn't exist and nor did my people. In music class, I learned to sing one little, two little, three little Indians instead of the songs my ancestors sang. I learned to spell English words like bake, cake, make, and take rather than Anishinabe words such as nookomis, amik, mitig, or ziibi. In history I learned of the proud people who tamed the wilderness rather than about the ways of my people on the



land and waterways. When I think about provincial curriculum being taught in schools today, including in my own community, I realize that very little has changed. And so, this study is being written in order to begin to record some of Pic Mobert's history because it is an important part of our identity, who we are and where we come from. This study is my gift to the children of Pic Mobert.

Many of the most important things I've ever learned in life came from my grandmother who was beaten for speaking Anishinabe when she attended St. Joseph's Indian Boarding School in Thunder Bay. It is a dishonor to our ancestors and our residential school survivors to continue to shove provincial curriculum on our children and to call it an education. Instead we must honour them by beginning to create a curriculum that reflects our life journeys. It is well past the time to reclaim our identities as members of the Anishinabek nation. It is well past the time to really begin to bridge the gaps between generations, between grandmothers, mothers and daughters and between grandfathers, fathers, and sons. Our relations in the world will only be truly realized when the Anishinabe words of our people are taken to heart and given new life in the education of our children. An education that reflects who we are, where we come from, and where we are going is an education worth fighting for because we are fighting for our children's dignity and for their right to be themselves.

## Locating Myself in the Study

*“Who you are is related to where you are from in terms of place, family, clan, and nation....when we say who we are, it’s almost like knowing who we are is connected to our healing as Indigenous peoples” (Absolon and Willett, 2005, p. 102).*

The purpose of this paper was to search for data on the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation. It necessarily began with my own story because as Absolon and Willett (2005) state:

...one of the most fundamental principles of Aboriginal research methodology is the necessity for the researcher to locate himself or herself. Identifying at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates is an Aboriginal way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality...research cannot take place without the trust of the community, and one way to gain trust is to locate yourself. (p. 97)

The question of who I am in relation to this historical research is perhaps best answered in terms of where I come from. Following is a poem that I wrote for an on-line course I took at Lakehead University. I share this poem now in order to creatively affirm my own life journey thus far.

### ***Who I Am is Where I Come From***

*I come from the stars where my ancestors now live, ever present*

*I come from the warmth of my grandmother’s embrace, a place of enduring unconditional love*

*I come from cowboy land and down the other end, where the sun’s rays bounce off the lake and sparkle in my eyes, where the breeze speaks to my soul*

*I come from the place where the rivers meet, ancestral pathways leading to forever*

*I come from lily pads, blood suckers stuck to my toe, Carmen’s beach, and the trading post where pop and chips cost only 25 cents*

*I come from warm bannock with blueberry jam, from moose meat, partridge and pickerel*

*I come from smiling, happy people always eager to share, slow to anger  
I come from loss, from grief, from heartache, ripped from the bosom of my family, just a  
child*

*I come from loneliness and longing, living life in a world that wasn't mine*

*I come from denial, I come from shame, they said, "all Indians are drunks" and I  
believed them*

*I come from two worlds, mine and someone else's, trying to fit into both and never truly  
belonging to either*

*I come from change that destroyed all that once was*

*I come from finding myself beneath layers of conformity, layers of untruth*

*I come from ceremony, the heart beat of the drum, still echoing mine*

*I come from reclamation and a fire deep within that never truly died*

*I come from cedar, sage, and sweet grass*

*I come from survival, from perseverance, to face a new day*

*I come from the joy of new life, daughters and sons to call my own, a new generation,  
new hope*

*I come from forgiveness, understanding, inner wisdom and peace*

*I come from the desire to educate, to make things right, to make a difference*

*I come from a return to self*

*I come full circle*

Today, I am a student and a teacher. I am a member of the Pic Mobert First Nation. I attend traditional ceremonies and walk the good red road. Despite all that I have learned, I realize there is much more for me to know because I do not know my community's history.

I spent my elementary and secondary life as an invisible student within the Ontario provincial school system. While attending school I could relate to very little that I was being taught. I never heard a mention of anything related to Anishinaabek people. I remember the very first time I realized who I was back in grade six. During this one winter, the librarian at school offered to read stories to any students who came to school early. Being a bright student, I saw a way inside from out of the cold. We walked to school in those days. I remember wondering what kind of story the librarian had in store for us and whether or not I would like it. We were a small group of students, about four or five along with the librarian who met that cold, winter morning. She sat on a chair in the hallway and we sat in front of her on the floor. She introduced the book, talked about the cover page and started reading. My mouth dropped open the moment she began. She had my rapt attention. The book she read to us, a chapter each morning, was *Julie of the Wolves* by Jean Craighead George. That was the very first time I could relate to a story at school! Even though Julie was Inuit, I could finally relate to the character, the setting, and the events in the story. I was amazed. I did not know they wrote books like that! During that moment I was learning. I could finally relate to a story because I could see something of myself in it and it made all the difference in the world. I wanted to read more books just like it. I learned that stories about Anishinaabek people did exist somewhere in the world. Hearing this story was like the beginning of my search for who I really was. Needless to say, I scoured the school library searching for books just like that one. It is funny how I'm still searching today.

When I enrolled in the Indigenous Learning Program at Lakehead University, I finally had many of my "whys" in life answered. For the very first time, I truly enjoyed

my educational experience because it affirmed my identity and provided me with knowledge that I never had the chance to learn before. During my studies in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University however, I realized that everything I was learning about how to be a good teacher wouldn't necessarily work with Anishinabe students. For the most part, I was being taught how and what to teach students of dominant society from a Euro-Western perspective. Upon graduation I returned to my community to teach. I vowed to myself that I would provide my students with relevant lessons and activities. They would not be invisible students as I had been.

I worked hard to adapt my lesson plans and units so that my students could relate to what they were learning. Our novel studies were based on the works of Ruby Slipperjack, geography lessons were based on local material, and history lessons included learning about the Robinson Superior Treaty. My grade seven students had never before heard of the word "treaty" and this is just one of the many examples of the challenges that I faced as a teacher and part-time principal at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education on the Pic Mobert First Nation. Assuming the duties of part-time principal for the period of only one year was not enough time to implement any sort of school-wide curriculum reform which I believed desperately needed to take place and which I believed required the involvement of parents and Elders. The majority of my time in this position was taken up with having to deal with administrative matters. Given these limitations, the best I could do was to encourage staff to implement culturally relevant activities and lesson plans as I was doing in my classroom. Since the Netamisakomik Centre for Education is a band operated school, it is required by Indian and Northern Affairs funding constraints to adhere to the Ontario provincial curriculum. Meeting the

demands of this rigorous curriculum did not often allow the necessary time required to create more meaningful learning experiences for Pic Mobert's students. I realized that much more needed to be done and many changes had to be made, for far too many students were still struggling. I returned to Lakehead University as a student in the Master of Education program in order to learn how best to address the issues concerning students' learning at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education and all Anishinabek students in general, who attend school on-reserve.

### **Purpose of the Study**

*"Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes. It is not simply about giving an oral account or a genealogical naming of the land and the events which raged over it, but a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying." (Smith, 1999, p. 28)*

The purpose of this study was to systematically search for data on the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation in order to create a community relevant curriculum resource. This curriculum resource was created for use at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education, Pic Mobert's Kindergarten to Grade 8 elementary school and at the community level in general in order to promote personal awareness of Pic Mobert's vitality as a community.

This study was loosely based on previous research I conducted while enrolled in Indigenous Learning 3100, Research Methodology, at Lakehead University in 2004 during my undergraduate studies. I incorporated and built upon some of my previous findings. Finding information specific to individual First Nation communities is often difficult for teachers and not always readily available in the literature. This study aims to address this dilemma.

My research sought to answer the question, “What aspects of the Pic Mobert First Nation’s history are important for elementary school children to learn about and know?” The research aimed to answer the following sub-questions, as well: —What contributions have the people of Pic Mobert made to the area? What do community members have to share about the history of their community? How did community members sustain a livelihood? What is their employment and education history? What were their social and traditional activities? Interviews and data collected from this study determined the nature of the information gathered regarding Pic Mobert’s history.

This study was undertaken in order to give back to my community. My personal and professional life endeavours have always been guided by my desire to be of service to my people. Hampton (1995) identifies five standards of Indian education in his article, *Towards a Redefinition of Indian Education*. Of these five standards, ‘service’ is named as the second standard. In this, Hampton states, “Education is to serve the people. Its purpose is not individual advancement or status” (p. 21). Hampton further states that all of the Indian graduate students he interviewed for his article wanted to go back home in order to help their people (p. 20). This is also true for me. Although I will personally achieve academic advancement and status, it is not what has motivated me. I see giving back to my community as a part of my personal responsibilities in life. It is hoped that this study will improve the quality of life for the children and the people of the Pic Mobert First Nation by offering them a tool to draw upon in order to enhance their sense of identity and in order to provide a more meaningful education to the students at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education.

## **Importance of the Study**

*“...education must begin with us, our people, and our communities. It must celebrate our cultures, our history, the true account of the way it was, and the way it is. From there we can build on how it should be and how it will be.” (Kirkness, 1998, p.11)*

My grandmother left me on a morning filled with light and shadow. I shall always remember the very last time we looked into each other's eyes as the unspoken love that we shared hung heavy between us. A smile tugged at the corners of her mouth, a spark flashed across her eyes, and she spoke to me in Ojibwe. We both knew that I didn't understand Ojibwe and when I think back to that time now, I realize I never really had to because; regardless of what she said her message was implicit. Those Ojibwe words she spoke were the last words I ever heard from my grandmother. It was her parting gift to me, a gift that reminded me of who I was and where I came from. This story reflects the importance of this study.

Like our ancestors before us, our Elders today hold our history in their hearts. What we can learn from them is important because it is a reflection of ourselves. It is our responsibility to respect and honour our Elders by beginning to document the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation in order to preserve it for future generations. This study is important because it is founded upon the stories of some of the Pic Mobert First Nation Elders. It gives testimony to a part of their lives and to a part of the community's history. For too long we have been learning a curriculum that excludes our own voices and the stories we carry. When we do learn of our history, it comes from a Euro-Western perspective and although learning Canadian history in general is important, the exclusion of our Anishinabek history is unacceptable if we are to truly provide a meaningful education for our students. Corbiere (2000) states:



In a school that administers and implements the standardized provincial curriculum, our Indigenous perspectives on history – regional and local – are often omitted. By the time I left elementary school I knew far more about Confederation and the American War of Independence than I knew about the signing of treaties in our territory (Great Lakes region). (p. 115-116)

Is this what we really want for our students? In beginning to document our history, we will be undertaking an initiative that has never been done before, an initiative that honours our children with our own truths. Culturally relevant curriculum is a prominent discussion amongst many educators who work with Aboriginal students. Even the Ministry of Education is attempting to meet the needs of its Aboriginal students across Ontario with the implementation of its *First Nations, Métis, Inuit Policy Framework* (2007) because they recognize the importance of culturally relevant teaching and learning. Creating a curriculum that reflects us will, in turn, help to build the self-esteem and pride of our students so that they know who they are rather than trying to be something they are not.

Although challenging, we have the opportunity to create a very unique learning experience for our students. We can do so much more than emulate what dominant society deems as important for us to learn. In this regard, Kirkness (1998) states that:

For many of our communities that have taken over their own schools and other educational institutions, much time has been lost either emulating the federal or public school systems or merely Band-Aiding, adapting, supplementing when they should have been creating a unique and meaningful education... (p. 5)

We must make a place for ourselves and what is ours in the education of our children simply because the exclusion of our Anishinabek history and other traditional teachings is

wrong. Dominant society would never dream of excluding Canadian history from its school curriculum and nor should we continue to exclude our Anishinabek history.

By beginning to document the history of our community and by beginning to create a culturally relevant curriculum, we will offer our children greater pride as members of the Pic Mobert First Nation. Sharing our traditional knowledge and values and incorporating them into the education of our children gives them the opportunity to grow from a foundation rooted in their ancestry. From there they can continue to grow and learn of the greater world without compromising their identities as Anishinabek citizens.

As far back as 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood has articulated that “Indian children must have the opportunity to learn their language, history, and culture in the classroom. Curricula [must] recognize the contributions which the Indian people have made to Canadian history and life” (p. 28). This study is important because it begins to address this very need by providing details concerning some of the contributions made by the people of the Pic Mobert First Nation to Canadian history and life from an Anishinabek perspective.

Lastly, this study is important to me as an Anishinabe educator because I respect the role of our Elders in keeping our history alive. Many of my community Elders are passing on and they are taking valuable historical and cultural knowledge and insight with them. In this regard, Kirkness (1998) states:

If we sincerely believe that our traditions are important to us, we have no other recourse but to go to the Elders. I firmly believe that we must know the past in order to understand the present so that we can plan, wisely, for the future. It is up to this generation of educational leaders to tap that valuable resource, because

each day, fewer and fewer Elders whose knowledge goes back at least two generations are left to teach us what we need to know. When they are gone, their valuable knowledge goes with them. It's like losing a whole library and its archives. (p. 13)

When my grandmother left that day, I lost my greatest teacher. The remnants of her stories that I now carry are held within my heart. They are the gifts that I share with my children and will share with my future grandchildren. The life my grandmother lived was significant. Her life helped to shape the person I am today and although she is gone her teachings live on. This study is important because some day, a little girl might be told something in Ojibwe by her grandmother and the little girl will understand every word that is spoken. She will reply back in Ojibwe and the conversation will flow rapidly, interspersed with much laughter. The Anishinabek philosophy, language, and culture will hang heavy between them because that is the education the little girl received.

### **Background of the Pic Mobert First Nation**

The Pic Mobert First Nation #195 is located within the Robinson Superior Treaty (See Appendix #1) area in the province of Ontario. It is approximately 400 km east of Thunder Bay and 350 km west of Sault Ste. Marie (See Appendix #2). The community is situated on the shores of White Lake. Year-round access to the community is by gravel road, six kilometers south of Hwy 17. The Canadian Pacific Railway also runs adjacent to the community.

The Pic Mobert First Nation's land base is divided into Pic Mobert North and Pic Mobert South. During the 1970's the Pic Mobert First Nation received an additional parcel of land, approximately two kilometers north of the original reserve settlement. Pic

Mobert North is made up of 14.60 hectares of land and Pic Mobert South consists of 15.60 hectares of land. Elections for Chief and Council are governed by the *Indian Act* Sections 74-79. The council is currently made up of one chief and eight councilors. The total registered population, as of May 2009, is 828 band members. Of this number, 325 live on reserve and 502 live off reserve. The community has a total of 95 houses on reserve (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2009).

With regard to language, it is interesting to note that out of a total population of 240 respondents, 210 respondents on the last Canadian census indicated their mother tongue was English only. Only 30 respondents indicated their mother tongue was another language, presumably Ojibwe. Also, out of a total population of 240 respondents, 235 of these respondents indicated that English was the language most often spoken at home (Statistics Canada, 2009). This information clearly indicates that the community of Pic Mobert is losing their Ojibwe language.

The community has a band office, health clinic, methadone clinic, church, school, recreation centre, and an Aboriginal Police Services detachment on reserve. This detachment is a sub-detachment of the Pic River Aboriginal Police Services. The band owns the St. John Francis Regis Church located in the community. The reserve is also serviced by a privately owned gas bar and two convenience stores.

The elementary school at Pic Mobert has undergone several name changes throughout the years. It was initially called the Mobert Day School, then the St. John Francis Regis School and now, the Netamisakomik Centre for Education. A certain level of disagreement exists amongst community members with regard to the meaning of the Ojibwe term *netamisakomik* but the generally accepted meaning is: ~~w~~where the rivers

come out.” The school is situated at Pic Moberg North and is equipped with a computer lab, gymnasium, library, special education resource room, and up to six classrooms depending upon need. The total student population is low and ranges anywhere from fifty to seventy-five students. Grades are most often split and the band usually hires five full-time teachers. The school is also staffed with an Ojibwe language instructor, a teacher’s aide, a school secretary, and school janitor. During the 2009/2010 academic year, the school did not employ Anishinabe teachers with the exception of the Ojibwe language instructor.

## CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

### Background of Indian Education in Canada

Historically, the affairs of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, including matters pertaining to education have been determined by Canadian government policy. The literature, included here, sets the context for a variety of issues that support how and why this study is also important. Government policies such as those mandated by the *Indian Act* and its resultant funding agreements have kept Aboriginal peoples under the control of the Department of Indian Affairs Canada. The struggle for Aboriginal self-determination has been an ongoing and slow process. The efforts of the National Indian Brotherhood and recommendations made by the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* forced the Canadian government to recognize “Indian Control of Indian Education.” Today, leadership in Aboriginal education has made historical advancement toward efforts of self-determination. The Union of Ontario Indians is currently in the process of establishing “Restoration of Jurisdiction” in the areas of governance and education through negotiations with the federal government. —A part of the Education Agreement with respect to the Exercise of Education Jurisdiction, the design and development of the Anishinabek Nation Education System (AES) is ensured that it is a community-driven process through the creation of the Education Working Group” (Union of Ontario Indians, Restoration of Jurisdiction Dept., Education Working Group ¶ 1). These negotiations promise to provide a means by which the Anishinabek Nation can finally achieve autonomy in matters concerning governance and the education of its people.

## **Indian Act and National Indian Brotherhood**

Currently, Indian education in Canada is a responsibility of the federal government as defined by the *Indian Act*, Sections 114 through 122. With regard to education, Section 114(1) of the *Indian Act* states:

The Governor in Council may authorize the Minister, in accordance with this Act, to enter into agreement on behalf of Her Majesty for the education in accordance with this Act of Indian children, with

- a) the government of a province;
- b) the commissioner of the Yukon Territory;
- c) the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories; (c.1) the Commissioner of Nunavut;
- d) a public or separate school board; and
- e) a religious or charitable organization. (p. 58)

This section of the *Indian Act* exemplifies the control exercised by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development with regard to Indian education on-reserve. It further illustrates the contractual relationship that exists between the federal and provincial governments with respect to Indian education. Consequently, the Minister of Indian Affairs has legal authority to enforce the *Indian Act* and thus enforce the manner in which Indian students are to be educated.

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood presented a policy paper to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development entitled, “Indian Control of Indian Education.” This paper was written in response to the federal government’s 1969 White Paper. In it, “. . . the federal government hoped to transfer federal responsibility for First Nation’s education on reserves to the province” (Battiste, M. and Barman, J. 1995, p.

viii). The policy was opposed by status Indians who argued that they had the right to administer education programs for their children (p. viii). On February 2, 1973, the Minister of Indian Affairs officially recognized “Indian Control of Indian Education” and approved its proposals and committed the Department to implementing them.

“Furthermore, it rescinded the proposal to turn over education to the provinces and acknowledged the right of national Aboriginal leaders to assume jurisdictional control and parental responsibility for Indian education” (p. ix). Consequently, education for status Indians remains within federal jurisdiction today.

The Department of Indian Affairs’ response to the National Indian Brotherhood’s policy paper appeared surprisingly positive at first, in that it supported the National Indian Brotherhood’s proposed initiatives. According to Agbo (2005), two very different interpretations of the National Indian Brotherhood’s policy by First Nations and the Department of Indian Affairs caused the Department to deviate from the policy’s original intent. The Department of Indian Affairs presented its own paper entitled, the Indian Education Paper – Phase 1 in 1982. Agbo (2005) addresses these different perspectives when he points out:

The Paper’s definition of control was equivocal. While the Department of Indian Affairs defined control to mean “a degree of participation” (Barman, et al., 1987), the NIB defined control to mean the First Nations’ people should make all decisions about education at the local level.... Although the Indian Education Paper – Phase 1 identified the same areas of First Nations’ control as the NIB, Barman, et al., (1987) assert that the Department of Indian Affairs’ definition “allowed the department to move slowly, delegating programs of administration rather than policy development and real management and financial control (p. 293).



Consequently, only the administration of schools on-reserve was turned over to First Nations. Administration of these schools is defined by Contribution Agreements signed between the First Nation and the Department of Indian Affairs. The terms of the Contribution Agreements while outlining funding requirements must also adhere to the Department's Elementary/Secondary Education Program Guidelines 2003. "The objective of the Elementary/Secondary Education Program is to provide eligible students living on reserve with elementary and secondary education programs comparable to those that are required in provincial schools by the statutes, regulations or policies of the province in which the reserve is located" (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2003, p. 2) Further, the guideline expects that "...eligible students will receive a comparable education to other Canadians within the same province of residence, with similar educational outcomes to other Canadians and with attendant socio-economic benefits to themselves, their communities and Canada" (p. 2).

It has been well documented that the Ontario provincial curriculum fails to address the needs of Anishinabek students (Kirkness, 1998; Corbiere, 2000; Antone, 2000; Faries, 2004). The Ontario Social Studies Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004) which also includes Grade 7 and 8 History understandably fails to address local community history at the First Nation level. As a provincial curriculum it instead offers learning opportunities within the context of Canadian society in general. For example, under the section Heritage and Citizenship, the curriculum's overall expectations will teach students that First Nations people are a part of Canada's cultural mosaic and keeps First Nations people relegated to the past (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 23, 25, 31). Under the History section of the curriculum document,

students have the opportunity to learn about the treaties of Western Canada but not about Ontario treaties and again, more contemporary issues are overlooked (p. 53, 61).

### **The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples**

As a result of the Oka Crisis and the Meech Lake Accord, a Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was established in 1991 to address numerous issues of Aboriginal concern and the Commission published its findings in 1996. The Commission's final report included recommendations concerning various grievances.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), Section 4, Volume 3, *Gathering Strength* (1996) pertains to educational matters. The Commission (1996) affirms the importance of education to Aboriginal peoples. The report states:

For more than 25 years, Aboriginal people have been articulating their goal for Aboriginal education. They want education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society. But this is only part of their vision. Presenters told us that education must develop children and youth as Aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations. Youth that emerge from school must be grounded in a strong, positive Aboriginal identity. Consistent with Aboriginal traditions, education must develop the whole child, intellectually, emotionally and physically. (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Education, ¶ 3)

Furthermore, the Commission recognized that current education policy fails to realize these goals and they, in fact, erode identity and self-worth through denial of Aboriginal values, perspectives, and cultures in curriculum (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Education, ¶ 4). The conclusions drawn by the Commission are at the heart of this study. By beginning to document our history as a community and by

involving our Elders in our children's education, we can begin to provide our students with an education that is reflective of whom they are as Anishinabek people.

The Commission's Final Report (1996) provides a brief background on the evolution of Aboriginal education. With regard to First Nation reserves, the report states:

With few exceptions, assimilationist education predominated in schools established under government or church authority. Although elementary day schools supported by the federal government continue to be characteristic of schooling on-reserve, in the 1960s the federal government pursued a policy of integrating children from reserve into nearby provincial schools or boarding children with families in urban centres to attend high school. (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, First Nation Reserves, ¶ 1)

Interestingly, during the late 1960s students from Pic Mobert were indeed sent to a nearby provincial school at White River around 1967. Students were bussed approximately sixty kilometers everyday to attend St. Basil's School. High school students from Pic Mobert were also boarded out to attend high schools in either Thunder Bay or Sault Ste. Marie, a practice that continued well into the 1990s.

Sub-Section 1.1 of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Education Background, concludes with information concerning education on First Nation reserves. The report affirms that only the transfer of administration of education occurred between the Department of Indian Affairs and reserve communities. Although the number of schools under Aboriginal administration has grown, their authority over education is limited. The report states:

The federal government has generally insisted that schools conform to provincial regulations with respect to curriculum, school year and so on, thereby restricting schools' ability to include innovative, culture-based curriculum. Funding is very basic, with little money for Aboriginal curriculum development and few resources

to address special needs. (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Education Background, ¶ 1)

The Commission recognized the need for change in the education system and that this change can only come about if Aboriginal people are given the authority to —. organize their own education and to influence how their children are educated” (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, The Need for Fundamental Change, ¶2) through self-governance in education. The report stresses the importance of the role of Elders in Aboriginal education and how they can help make learning relevant for students.

The Commission supports transformative education. The report states: Transformative education uses the students’ personal experiences as the springboard for deeper analysis and understanding. School courses in history, literature, Aboriginal studies, social studies, geography, arts, theatre arts and other subject areas have the potential to transform experiences into an intelligible pattern with local, regional and global aspects. This educational process is participatory and may use experiential learning, research projects, oral histories, theatre, drawing techniques and other forms of creative expression to do analysis. (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Transformative Education, ¶ 5)

In Sub-Section 3.5.5 Recommendations, it should be noted that the Commission recommended the following:

Federal, provincial and territorial governments collaborate with Aboriginal governments, organizations and educators to develop or continue developing innovative curricula that reflect Aboriginal cultures and community realities, for delivery

(a) at all grade levels of elementary and secondary schools;

(b) in schools operating under Aboriginal control; and

(c) in schools under provincial or territorial jurisdiction (¶ 1).

This recommendation made by The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples back in 1996 has not yet been realized in my community of Pic Mobert. There have been very few curriculum innovations or changes at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples allowed First Nations to begin to look at self-government as a viable initiative and to look more concretely at control of their own educational systems. Negotiations for jurisdiction in education are currently underway between some First Nations and the federal government.

### **Current Situation - Restoration of Jurisdiction in Education**

At the time of this research, the Union of Ontario Indians continues ongoing negotiations with the federal government for self-determination in the areas of governance and education. The “Restoration of Jurisdiction Process” is a historical undertaking toward self-government.

The Union of Ontario Indians is a political advocate for 42 member First Nations across Ontario of which the Pic Mobert First Nation is a member. The Union represents First Nations from Golden Lake in the east, Sarnia in the south, Thunder Bay in the West and Lake Nipigon in the north. “The 42 First Nations have an approximate combined population of 42,000 citizens, one third of the province of Ontario’s aboriginal population” (UOI 2009 ¶2).

With regard to the Restoration of Jurisdiction process, Bressette (2009) states that::

The objective of the self government negotiation process, called the “Restoration of Jurisdiction,” is to achieve recognition of the law-making authority of the

Anishinabek First Nations. Without defining the inherent right to self-government, nor defining or affecting treaty and Aboriginal rights, Canada and the Anishinabek Nation have negotiated the Agreement-in-Principle with respect to the Exercise of Jurisdiction over Education. If a Final Agreement can be reached and is ratified by a community vote in each First Nation the Anishinabek will have jurisdiction over the education of community members from junior kindergarten to grade 12. (p.11)

The Anishinabek Nation and the Government of Canada signed an Agreement-in-Principle with respect to the exercise of educational jurisdiction in 2002. Negotiations remain at this Agreement-in-Principle stage today, with a final Education Agreement still not ratified. The Pic Mobert First Nation is a signatory to the Agreement-in-Principle, but they are not currently participating in the process because they have neglected to appoint an individual to the process on a consistent basis. At present, Pic Mobert does not have a representative on the Education Working Group; therefore, they have not provided their input, and the Restoration of Jurisdiction process that has not heard their concerns yet, will continue without their input. In effect, their grassroots concerns are not currently being addressed. This is a cause for concern because without providing their input, this process may not necessarily reflect the needs of Pic Mobert. The Final Education Agreement between the Union of Ontario Indians and the federal government can be ratified with or without Pic Mobert's approval.

What makes the Restoration of Jurisdiction process unique is that it purports to be a grassroots endeavour, involving input from all signatory First Nations. In this regard, Bressette (2009) informs:

The ROJ is committed to transferring control back to First Nation people through the establishment of increased community jurisdiction and control. This project,

involving native people, is different from federal or other national level native incentives in that the project is not being imposed on the people at the community level. The ROJ is a project that is created and administered by native people with the direction of those at the local community level (p. 10).

This indeed represents landmark negotiations between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government. As a signatory First Nation, Pic Mobert could be seeking input and direction from those at the community level and this study constitutes the spirit and intent of the Restoration of Jurisdiction process by giving a voice to community Elders concerning the education of Pic Mobert's students. Furthermore, ~~the~~ Anishinabek Education System will endeavour to...respect local First Nation autonomy in the development and delivery of education programs and services..." (Restoration of Jurisdiction, Programs and Services Working Group, Mission Statement, ¶ 5) and as such, Pic Mobert could be in a position to assume local control of their education.

### **First Nation Histories**

The history of First Nations is important because it is a link to the past. Having knowledge of one's history is important to personal growth. It enables a person to know who they are and where they come from. History gives meaning to one's life and allows for greater awareness and understanding of contemporary issues. One's history affirms identity and instills pride. This study with regard to the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation is being presented from the community's perspective which has never been done before. In conducting my literature review of other First Nation histories, where possible, I chose to look at works by Aboriginal authors but have also included works by non-Aboriginal authors.

When Olive Patricia Dickason (1997), wrote *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, she gave readers a comprehensive portrayal of Aboriginal history with many aspects applicable to individual First Nations such as information concerning the treaties and the fur trade. Dickason's work has also been adapted into a high school textbook entitled, *A Concise History of Canada's First Nations* (2006).

Where Olive Patricia Dickason's work gives readers a broad spectrum of Aboriginal history across Canada, Daniel N. Paul's (2006) work on the other hand, gives readers a specific history of his people, the Mi'kmaq. His book entitled, *First Nations History: We Were Not the Savages*, chronicles the detailed history of the Mi'kmaq people including its government, religion, customs, social values, and the economy. Dickason and Paul's work are good examples of, and useful models for, what I'd like to see on the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation.

Other scholarly works specific to individual First Nations have been written by Dr. Paul Driben. Driben has documented aspects of the history of Aroland and in collaboration with Trudeau, some of the history of the Fort Hope in northern Ontario. With Auger, he also recorded some of the history of the Whitesand First Nation in northern Ontario and the Grand Portage Chippewa Band in northern Minnesota.

These works were selected to form part of my literature review because they provide specific information relating to individual First Nation Band communities. Individual First Nation histories are important because each First Nation's history is unique. Aboriginal students do not enjoy what these histories have to offer because they are seldom taught in schools on or off reserve.



An internet search of First Nation history produced an abundant number of homepages of First Nations across Canada. Typically these sites include information pertaining to treaties, leadership, community events, cultural activities, historical information, etc. Each of the First Nation's homepage sites that I visited offered both historical and contemporary views unique to each particular First Nation.

These histories of First Nations peoples are unique and valuable. What should be emphasized here is the fact that these historical studies, often excluded from educational systems both on and off reserve, are not readily accessible or written in a way that is easily used in schools.

### **The Context of Ojibwe Language Renewal**

There is abundant literature on why Aboriginal languages and education are important. Research by Neganegijig and Breunig, 2007; Rousselot, 2007; Hare, 2004; Moore, 2003; Anderson, 2002 and many others attest to the need to include Aboriginal languages as a part of our children's education. Their research gives consideration to issues ranging from decolonization, curriculum, immersion, wholistic education, pedagogy of the land, to the important role of Elders in such undertakings.

The duration and complexity of the process of language restoration is no small undertaking. Educational models that focus on reclaiming and renewing Aboriginal languages and culture must be a part of education from early childhood through to adulthood. Furthermore, such initiatives require commitment, community-wide support and participation. Aboriginal language initiatives that involve total language and cultural immersion must be built upon an Indigenous philosophy (Kape'ahiokalani Padeken Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper, 2000). In Neganegijig and Breunig's (2007) study,

researching the possibility of incorporating outdoor education programs and Native language programs, they found that further research is needed in this area because few studies have addressed this subject. Lakehead University — .offers a selection of Native Language courses through the co-operative efforts of Languages and Education...[and] offers the Native Language Instructor's Program, a summer program for Native Language teachers as well as a wide variety of Native Language courses during the summer, fall, and winter terms (Lakehead University, 2010). A requirement for enrolling in the Native Language Instructor's Program is that you must be completely fluent in a Native language before you can register for the program.

The preservation, revitalization, and promotion of Aboriginal languages and cultures are important. —People's philosophy and culture are embedded in their language and given expression by it. Language and culture are key to the collective sense of identity and nationhood of the First Nation...peoples" (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005, p. ii). Our Aboriginal languages need to be promoted and protected. The literature on why Aboriginal languages are important can be useful to the Pic Mobert First Nation, given the current state of the community's Ojibwe language usage.

What happened to our language at Pic Mobert is part of the history of all Indigenous peoples in Canada, in Ontario, and amongst the Anishinabek. That history explains how we nearly lost our Indigenous languages, how we are attempting to reverse that trend and bring our languages, our histories, our traditions back again. That history tells of the barriers and challenges we face in our renewal efforts. This study attempts to play a small part in helping our children to become whole in their Anishinabek identity.

## CHAPTER 3: GETTING TO KNOW THE WORLD

*„To me an Indigenous methodology means talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you are answering to “all your relations” when you are doing research.” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177)*

### Research Methodology

The design for my study was based on a qualitative research tradition because it relies on an interpretivist approach to data collection and analysis (Gall, J. P., Gall, M. D., and Borg, W. R. 2005, p. 413). Furthermore, Gall et al., state that, “Contemporary historians tend to dismiss much of the historical literature of bygone eras as mere chronicles of events and lives...they subordinate historical facts to an interpretive framework within which those facts are given meaning and significance” (p. 413). In documenting a small part of the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation, I have considered some of the historical literature and re-presented it in a manner that has meaning and significance for the people of Pic Mobert. Since this research involved the history of my community, it is also a case study. Before I began my active search for sources, I reflected on what I already knew. For instance, I was aware that some of Pic Mobert’s history is located in the Hudson’s Bay Company archives. As well, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has a wealth of information on their internet database. Documentation concerning some of Pic Mobert’s history was also accessed under the Archives of Ontario website, Archivia Net. On this website, Canadian government record groups are readily available or can be ordered through inter-library loan. It was troubling to learn that many record groups are restricted and inaccessible given the time constraints of this thesis. Locating sources of information regarding Pic Mobert’s history was difficult. Nevertheless, my search for data began with these sources of information and my search

terms included Montizambert, Fort Mobert, Pic, Pic Mobert, Mobert as well as other related terms. I considered the types of sources I needed and as these sources pointed me toward other sources which came to include information concerning Lake Superior, I revised my search plan. Although my purpose was to document some of the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation, I desired to do so with an understanding of the events, individuals, and social trends that were influential in establishing its history (Gall, et al., 2005, p. 417).

In reviewing the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation, my data collection focused on perspectives from within the culture. I used multiple methods to collect data about this history, in order to enhance the soundness of my findings. My data collection instruments included: verbal statements, physical objects, recorded interviews, and document analysis. I was solely involved in the data collection process with the exception of two Elder interviews. It should be noted that Howard Twance, former Chief and current Band Counselor of the Pic Mobert First Nation, accompanied me to the interviews with Roy Sabourin and Connie McWatch in order to ensure that they felt more at ease during the interview process. I conducted interviews with community Elders and tape recorded Elders' stories regarding Pic Mobert's oral history. I introduced my study to each of the Elders and explained the importance of knowing our history in order to know who we are. I told the Elders that this curriculum resource could be used by teachers at the school in order to provide students with a more culturally relevant curriculum. I explained what the research involved and what their role was as informants in the study. Interviews were held at the Elder's homes in late September 2009 and

during the first week of October 2009. In interviewing these Elders and obtaining their recollections of past events, I have created new data (Gall et al., 2005, p. 414).

In having contemplated Jo-Ann Archibald's (2008) article, *An Indigenous Storywork Method*, I also desired to conduct my interviews from the perspective of the Elders. I paid close attention to their perceptions and understandings of their social reality by conducting the interviews as "conversation." Archibald (2008) informs that "Research as conversation is characterized as an open-ended interview with opportunity for both sides to engage in talk (p. 377). Elders were allowed to freely tell their story with little interruption and interviewer influence. However, some Elders preferred being asked questions. As they spoke, I listened respectfully and made it known to the Elders who I interviewed that what they had to share was valuable. After the interviews, like Archibald (2008, p. 380), I recorded and transcribed the conversations. I reviewed each written transcript with each individual Elder and got their approval before their story, their words, were recorded in this paper. I sat in quiet contemplation of each Elder's story. Again, like Archibald (2008), I took the time to sit and think and feel and reflect at length on what I had learned (p. 381). From the interviews through to their analysis, I came from their perspective in an effort to remain true to Archibald's four Rs of research: respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity (p. 373). In recognizing the role of the Elders that I interviewed as co-researchers and co-owners in the research results, I ensured a "...respectful and receptive research context..." (Kenny, C., Faries, E., Fiske, J. and Voyageur, C., 2004, p. 36) for all community members. Elders were also given the choice to remain anonymous should they desire. I adhered to the traditional protocol of my community by providing gifts to the Elders.

In interviewing Elders and having them share their stories about the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation, I used purposeful sampling. Gall et al., (2005) state that, —the goal of purposeful sampling is to select individuals for case study who are likely to be ‘information-rich’ with respect to the researchers’ purposes” (p. 310). Rather than trying to interview all Elders in the community, I began by speaking with ‘key informants.’ —These are individuals who have special knowledge or perspectives that make them especially important in obtaining the emic perspective” (p. 310). My strategy for purposeful sampling was the “snowball” strategy. That is, I interviewed those —.recommended by individuals who know other individuals likely to yield relevant, information-rich data” (p. 311). I interviewed four community Elders and I obtained their informed consent by way of letter. All of the Elders interviewed were given the opportunity to review and approve of their interview transcripts. Minor changes were made to some of the transcripts as a result. The interview transcripts and tapes will be stored at Lakehead University for 7 years.

I made extensive use of both primary and secondary sources. To the extent possible, I subjected both types of sources to internal and external critiques. In order to apply the findings of my historical research, I needed assurance that the historical sources that I used as a basis for my interpretations were valid. Otherwise, my views of present practices would be distorted by incorrect perceptions of past events. In determining the authenticity of historical sources, I conducted an external critique. This process of external critique is concerned with ensuring that the claimed origin of the sources corresponds to its actual origin. As well, in determining the accuracy of historical sources I conducted an internal critique. I questioned my findings in order to determine

the reasonableness of statements in a historical source (Gall et al., p. 421). I conducted a cross check between the documented data I gathered with the stories the Elders shared with me. I checked for bias in all material by critically analyzing the accounts of historical events and other information I researched.

An interpretational approach to data analysis was used. I focused on identifying constructs, themes, and patterns relating to Pic Mobert's history. I developed a category system to code the segments into which interview transcripts, documents, and other materials were divided. Interpretational analysis was used initially to identify recurrent themes in the primary and secondary sources. Following the interpretational analyses, I moved toward reflective analysis (Gall et al., p. 315).

I used my collaborative data to weave together my findings into a coherent story of how particular events, individuals, and groups in the past played a part in the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation. I also included Elders' stories in this same regard. During my interviews with Elders, I asked them about what they deemed important for students to know in relation to their history. Since my research is specific to the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation, generalizations cannot be made. My research was guided by my relationships with my own family, with the Elders, with the community at-large and with my ancestors.

This study has a number of limitations and is based upon certain assumptions. To begin with, the first limitation was data availability. I can only provide the best picture possible with what is available and within what is deemed by the Elders as important for students to learn. The interviews that I conducted are not exhaustive and the numbers of interviewees were also limited. Since I utilized the "snowball" strategy in my purposeful

sampling, that is, I only interviewed those individuals likely to yield ~~in~~“information-rich” data; my interviews cannot be considered a random sampling of all the community Elders within the population of the Pic Mobert First Nation.

With regard to assumptions, I assumed that the community’s Elders possess knowledge about the history of the community that I was researching and examining. I assumed that this is research that the community wants and about which the community has an interest. I also assumed that the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation should be an important part of the curriculum at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education. Lastly, I assumed that I am an appropriate person to conduct this research because of my skills and abilities and because of my connection to the community.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University. My interviews did not cause harm to community Elders. While engaged in this research process, I kept in mind Marlene Brant Castellano’s ~~eight~~ principles for conducting ethical research in Aboriginal communities, which embody the guidelines from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the SSHRC and the Tri-Council Policy Statement principles...” (Kenny, C., Faries, E., Fiske, J. and Voyageur, C. 2004, p. 35). These eight principles outline the federal government’s fiduciary responsibility to protect against infringement of Aboriginal intellectual property and to recognize that Aboriginal peoples have an inherent right as principals or partners in research that affects them. Ethical standards should be determined by Aboriginal peoples and all researchers must be educated with regard to these ethics (Kenny et al., Appendix H). I gained entry into my research setting by contacting the Chief and Council of the Pic Mobert First Nation and obtained their permission and support for this study (Appendix 3, 4, 5). I had a letter of



introduction (Appendix 6) and consent form (Appendix 7) ready to hand out and I had gifts for research participants.

This study will be shared with all band members of the Pic Mobert First Nation, Chief and Council, and Netamisakomik Centre for Education staff and students as copies of the final report will be made available at the band office.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE WORLD FROM THE OTHER SIDE**

### **Introduction**

The stories the Elders shared depict the lives of a hardworking people who adapted to changes taking place around them, while maintaining, as best they could, their Ojibwe culture and language. The limitations imposed by my guiding interview questions and by the fact that I cannot speak Ojibwe did not allow the telling of a different history from within the Ojibwe language. Working from the written record contained within archived data from the Hudson's Bay Company and the Department of Indian Affairs, as well as from other secondary sources, still gives a glimpse into Pic Mobert's past because the data matched the stories told by the Elders. In reading and comparing the data, one can see how the community of Pic Mobert contributed to the fur trade economy. The influence of forced schooling and the economic development of the area saw the people adapting to the changes around them by walking in two worlds. Living off the land while collecting a pay cheque demonstrates the endurance of the people. Their intelligence, fortitude, and insight allowed the community to grow and prosper. Today, the remnants of Ojibwe culture and language remain as gifts from the ancestors which can now become the seeds for today's language and cultural renewal.

### **Elders Interviews on the History of Pic Mobert**

#### **Origins of the Elders**

*"I asked her where people were living. In wigwams, she said." (C. McWatch)*

The land encompassing what is now the Pic Mobert First Nation was inhabited by the Anishinabek people since at least, before 1875/76. Connie recalled that her

grandmother, Jane Wynne, first arrived at Pic Mobert's current location by canoe from what is now Moosonee, Ontario, when she was about eleven or twelve years old (C. McWatch). Jane Wynne and her family had spent the summer travelling by canoe and had passed through what is now Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, via the St. Mary's River. Upon her grandmother's arrival, Connie recalled being told that, "There were no houses here, nothing, when she got here, my grandmother. Nothing. I asked her where people were living. In wigwams, she said. There were no tracks and no houses" (p. 4).

Ancestors of the Elders interviewed also originated from what are now known as the Pic River, Beardmore, and Michipicoten areas, to as far away as the Moosonee and Moose Factory areas. According to the Elders, the Pic Mobert First Nation had previously been referred to as Montizambert and Mobert but more importantly as *netamising zagigun* by the ancestors of the community. Connie clarified that the term is made up of two words, *netamising zagigun* which translates to mean "...first big lake from Lake Superior" (C. McWatch). Roy indicated that "[t]he first part means the first lake from Lake Superior" and stated that "...it was our travel route to go north" (R. Sabourin).

### **Livelihood and Resourcefulness of the People**

*"We lived off the land...It was a good life...You were just there with your family. That's all you cared about."* (F. Brown).

Trapping figured prominently in the livelihood of the Elders interviewed and in the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation in general. The families of all the Elders interviewed spent time trapping on a yearly basis.

The Elders recalled travelling to their trap lines by dogsled, toboggan, and snowshoe and depending on the location of their trap line, they also travelled by train and

snowmobile. Trap lines of the Elder's families were located at Copper Lake, Raven Lake, Gravel River, Prairie River, Rain Lake, Tripoli, and Kalila Lake.

Most of the families would leave for their trap lines in the fall and return to their homes at Pic Mobert at Christmas time. Typically the people trapped beaver, wolf, martin, otter, and fox but it was the responsibility of the women of the family to clean and stretch the furs. Florena noted that her mother —. helped clean the furs and got them ready with [her] granny. That was their job” (F. Brown). The furs would be scraped clean of fat and meat and stretched repeatedly. The furs were sold to the Hudson Bay Company.

In addition to trapping, the people of the Pic Mobert First Nation sustained a livelihood in a variety of different ways. All the Elders recall how the people of Pic Mobert planted and maintained vegetable gardens to help supplement their diet. Gardens were dug by hand and produce included potatoes, carrots, turnips, radishes, and cucumbers. These vegetables were often stored in underground root cellars beneath people's homes.

The Elders spoke of their family members securing employment with Abitibi Lumber Company, Austin Lumber Company, and the Department of Lands and Forests. Florena's father, the late Xavier Padgena, worked for Abitibi as a self-taught electrician and carpenter and also built homes on the reserve. When he was no longer employed by Abitibi, he worked as a carpenter and electrician at other reserve communities such as Gull Bay and Pic River. Connie's husband, the late Leonard McWatch worked for the Department of Lands and Forests. He also worked as a carpenter. She informed me that he learned how to cut steps in his dream one night. Connie praised the work of these two

men as skilled carpenters. ~~It~~ only took them about a month, maybe a month and a half to finish the whole house. That's how long it would take them and that's everything" (C. McWatch). Connie herself worked at Abitibi as a "cookie" (cook) serving people and she earned two dollars and ten cents per day. She shared her earnings with her mother. Florena's mother, Betty Padgena, worked for both Abitibi and the Department of Lands and Forests doing laundry for the men. It was hard work since she had to wash heavy woolen blankets by hand. Helen's father, the late Steve Desmoulin, worked at Abitibi as a night watchman and as a foreman for Austin Lumber.

Work at Austin Lumber included cutting logs and hauling them out of the bush to the river. Horses were used to haul the wood. Two of the Elders also stated that they lived at Bremner which was a logging camp located about ten kilometers east of the community of Pic Mobert near a railway siding, as a result of their employment with Austin Lumber. Work at the Department of Lands and Forests included firefighting, tree planting, and cone picking. The people also picked and sold blueberries. "People would pick three or four baskets a day" (C. McWatch). Roy recalled that his father, the late Gilbert Sabourin, worked at the cattle stockyard at White River.

Elders spoke of the people's resourcefulness at great length. Wood would be hauled by dogsled from across the lake for cooking and warmth. The wood then had to be cut and split and this was usually done by the women because the men were away at work. Water also had to be hauled from the lake for drinking, cooking, and bathing.

Feather blankets made from duck down and rabbit blankets were hand-sewn. Everything was home-made including the rugs on the floor. These rugs were braided from scraps of material. Home-made quilts were also sewn. Clothing which was also

hand-sewn was cleaned in the summertime in the lake. The women pounded the clothes on a rock, used a washboard and rung the clothing out by hand before hanging them on clotheslines to dry. Clothespins were made out of wood. —It was lots of work but nobody complained and said that’s too hard” (C. McWatch). In wintertime, the laundry was cleaned in washtubs indoors. Women also made socks, did embroidery and knit items such as mittens. The people made their own snowshoes, dog sleds, sleighs, houses, and sometimes boats and canoes. Household objects and personal jewelry such as rings were shined by using burnt ashes from the fire. The women were adept at setting snares and hunting small game and they passed these skills on to their children.

### **Education and Language**

*“...in school we tried to compete with each other...It really started at school and yet you need an education but if we had our culture and our language it would have been better, just be who we are rather than trying to change who we are” (H. Porter).*

The Elders did not speak favourably on the subject of school. —That was our enjoyment, being away from school” (F. Brown) and all recollected that a school existed on the reserve when they were young children. Typically, one teacher would teach about fifty students from grade one through to grade eight, in a one-room classroom. This learning environment was seen as competitive by Helen because of the influence of catalogues. If a student wore hand-me-downs that student was then teased and put down by other students. Helen noted that this behavior did not extend beyond the classroom walls. This competition amongst students —.started at school...but if we had our culture and our language it would have been better, just be who we are rather than trying to change who we are” (H. Porter). Both Florena and Helen had attended school during the 1950s at Pic Mobert. Schooling was forced upon the people of Pic Mobert by threats of withdrawal of assistance from the Department of Indian Affairs and also by the threat of

having a child taken away from its parents and community (H. Porter). Despite having a school in the community, some children were still sent away to residential school.

Florena recollected that one family —.took [their children] down the river when people came to the reserve to take kids” (F. Brown). Helen believed that attending school caused her to lose everything, stating:

When I started school, everything was gone. Everything was taken away. Then from there I started hating being Indian. I didn’t want to be Indian anymore because it was too hard because I had to learn all these things and to keep on and to keep it I had to speak the white to really know and bring it back to my mom and she’d be speaking Indian and the next thing you know it was broken language and that’s how it went. From there I would start looking at the catalogue and wishing I was white because I’m learning white now. Why don’t I change? Why don’t I be in these pictures? I started hating my colour and who I was. I started hating myself. I didn’t like who I was for the longest time. From that I just let the language go. Just let it go” (H. Porter).

At one time, the people of Pic Mobert spoke fluent Ojibwe. The Elders confirm that —.there was no such thing as English” (C. McWatch) and —. parents and grandparents spoke Ojibwe all the time” (F. Brown). Over time and with the introduction of forced schooling, English began to break apart the Ojibwe language in the community. Helen also shared that while she attended residential school she was not permitted to speak Ojibwe and instead was taught to speak English and French. Having to attend mass every morning, she also learned to speak Latin. Although her mother, Monica Desmoulin, —.kept talking to her [and her siblings] in the [Ojibwe] language, [her older siblings] would answer back in [English]” (H. Porter) and this is how the Ojibwe language became broken. Connie also shared a similar story of how she spoke fluent Ojibwe with her husband. She said, —He’d understand every word I said to him and he’d

answer me back in English and that's where it broke our language" (C. McWatch).

Florena, being the youngest of the Elders interviewed, never spoke the Ojibwe language while growing up as a child. "We all spoke English and we never spoke our language. Even at home, we never spoke it at home" (F. Brown). Although Florena's parents spoke Ojibwe they did not speak the language to her or her sister. Florena heard her grandparents speaking Ojibwe all the time and she attributes this to her understanding of the language today.

### **Traditional Activities**

The Elders shared numerous examples of the traditional Ojibwe activities the people of Pic Mobert once practiced. People fished by net and made their own fish nets out of twine. "[They] used little rocks for anchors and...made floats out of cedar" (C. McWatch). When someone got a moose "...they'd bring it back onto the reserve and everybody would have their pots and everybody got a piece of it" (F. Brown). Everything would be shared. The moose hide was cleaned and tanned by the women of the community and made into moccasins. Everyone wore moccasins at this time (C. McWatch). The hide was placed over a log and the moose bone was used to scrape the hair off the hide. It was then soaked and tanned. Mittens were also made from the hide and both moccasins and mittens were often beaded. The people made their own snowshoes and some made their own canoes. Roy recalled that "Old Whiskeyjack had [a canoe made of] birch bark" (R. Sabourin).

The people of Pic Mobert often made their own traditional medicine. Florena remembered her grandfather, Alex Padgena, making medicine. "He didn't doctor anybody, it was just for family" (F. Brown). Helen recalled that her mother also picked and made her own medicine. "I used to remember my mom making her own tea for the



blood.... She knew [of] some medicines to make” (H. Porter). Connie’s grandmother always made a variety of medicines, especially for the women after they gave birth.

Traditionally, babies were born at home and delivered by certain women of the community. Some of the names of these ancestors who delivered babies include: Elizabeth Nabigon, Suzie Gagnon, Mary Sabourin, Ann Kwissiwa and Marie Pishkin. —We had some mid-wives making medicine, after they’d take the afterbirth and make sure everything was flowing well. They’d give them medicine and they’d make their own” (H. Porter). Connie added that her grandmother —.always took the afterbirth and went and hung it up in the bush after she delivered a baby. She’d put it in a clean cloth and go and hang it in the bush” (C. McWatch). Later on, the baby’s belly button was tied up in a cloth and sewn into a little bag or it was hung on the baby’s cradle for the baby to play with. —[T]hat’s the way my grandmother taught us. She never told us why” (C. McWatch). Helen recalled her mother picking moss for the babies. —She’d dry the moss out for the babies to keep dry...the baby [was] never wet” (H. Porter). Babies never got a rash when the moss was used.

Ancestor Patrick Sabourin was a well-known medicine man from the community of Pic Mobert. —He doctored people with water” (F. Brown) and —He did some powerful medicine” (H. Porter). Helen also added that —...[H]e didn’t give medicine but he went and prayed with whatever and I saw a lot of people heal from that. He was a very powerful man. He’d just tell you to think of him at a certain time and everything happens. It was always good medicine” (H. Porter). Connie’s grandfather from Michipicoten was also a medicine man.

Helen remembered her mother taking food down to the lake as a food offering. This was done before the meal was served. If a moose was killed, a feast would be held right away. —That’s what I’d see her do. She’d stand there for awhile but I didn’t know what she said, what was in her mind, but she was praying and then she’d offer it to the water” (H. Porter). When the animikiik were coming, Helen’s mother burned cedar and told her, —You have to respect them too, the animikiik” (H. Porter). Animikiik are thunder beings.

It was common for the women of the area to visit with one another and to help each other. —The aunties would come and help the mothers [and] you’d get a lot of help from the grannies” (H. Porter). These women often travelled a long distance to be of assistance, coming from places such as Pic River or Michipicoten. The women met under big shaded trees put together like a teepee. —They’d all be sitting there. All the aunties would be sitting there. Talking about different things and cooking. They’d be sharing a lot...they were teaching them different things” (H. Porter). Children were not allowed within the enclosure but they could listen from the outside to what was being spoken.

Connie’s grandmother made birch bark wigwams. She used to —...make a fire right in the middle” (C. McWatch) and she often told Connie —...when you want to do something, go around the fire. I never saw her put tobacco or anything in the fire but that was sacred for her. She said never step over it, always walk around in a circle” (C. McWatch). Connie was also told to respect the Elders, people who were older, no matter what. Florena never saw a powwow until she was an adult but she remembered her

grandmother telling her —.to respect powwows and never to make fun of anyone” (F. Brown).

### **Other Aspects of Life, including Church**

Most of the people of Pic Mobert attended the Roman Catholic Church in the community. Once a month a priest would visit the community and say mass. Two masses were held, a low mass and a high mass and —.each one of them was always full” (F. Brown). Roy remembered that his parents —.used to go to eight o’clock mass in the morning and they [didn’t] come back until four o’clock” (R. Sabourin). He believed a new church was built in the community because the church was always packed. Helen shared that her mother —.started going to church and the next thing you [knew, we were] praying with rosaries in Anishinabek...” (H. Porter). Connie also learned to say her prayers in Indian and Florena remembered her mother and father saying their rosary at night in Indian.

### **Social Activities**

*“When we had all these things, parents were always involved with their kids. Always.”  
(H. Porter).*

The people of Pic Mobert lived an active social life and parents participated in these activities with their children. In the wintertime, people spent time outdoors skating, tobogganing and walking with snowshoes. Hockey games were played against players from Abitibi. In the summertime, they played baseball and hide-and-go-seek. “[The] people were good athletes” (H. Porter) and everyone pitched in to help build rinks and sliding hills. Lights were strung up and some would construct their own bob sleds.

Many people visited and played cards. Square dancing was also popular and people would clear out a room in their house to make a dance floor. The church also

played a role in people's social activities as well because the parish priest would help them set a calendar of events which included dances and movies.

Teenagers would often get together and hold their own dances in an abandoned house. The young men played the accordion, guitar, and drums and they were all self-taught musicians. They'd ride bicycles and have beach parties complete with record players and bon fires (F. Brown).

At this time, alcohol was not permitted on the reserve. The Elders stated that Pic Mobert was a happier, better place without it and once alcohol was allowed, sometime during the 1950s, "everything went wrong" (F. Brown).

### **Prisoner of War Camps**

Elder Connie McWatch served the German prisoners-of-war while she worked as a "cookie" (cook) for Abitibi and according to Roy, there were eight P.O.W. camps in the area, sometime during the 1940s. Each camp held between fifty to seventy-five prisoners. "They used to march as far as the store and back with big red targets on their backs. They got the royal treatment...they'd do [their work] before breakfast and then be free all day. You'd see them on White Lake, sailing" (R. Sabourin). These prisoners-of-war, aged eighteen to twenty years of age, cut wood for Abitibi and were considered nice people.

## **Community Access**

The gravel road into the community of Pic Mobert was originally built and maintained by Abitibi. A gate was constructed where the gravel road met Highway 17 which was also just a gravel road at that time and access into the community was controlled by Abitibi. Although the road did not quite reach the community, people did make use of it. “Only people from the community were allowed in and if you weren’t from the reserve you [were] turned away” (F. Brown). Florena recalled however, being turned away one time and had to travel back to Pic River because she and her aunties were refused entry.

Highway 17 was built sometime during the 1960s. Prior to this, a ferry was used to cross White Lake Narrows that could carry one or two vehicles. In the wintertime, the cars crossed on the ice. Eventually, a bridge was built to cross the White Lake Narrows and people from Pic Mobert secured employment during its construction (F. Brown).

## **What Children Should Learn**

I asked each of the Elders what they thought the children of Pic Mobert should learn with regard to their history. Although two of the Elders believed that children should learn how to survive in the bush and learn about hunting, fishing, and trapping, all the Elders agreed that children should be learning the Ojibwe language.

In this regard, Helen stated:

We can never go back to how I lived. We could never go back to that. However, getting your language will bring back your culture because in your language, once you know your language, it tells you a lot of things in one word alone. It describes who you are and how to believe in yourself’.

Helen also elaborated on the importance of using pictures to teach children and added that,

...if we could bring our pictures back and talk about it, if we could show...cradles and how they were made and by talking about that cradle in our language, that would bring a sigh of relief. It could bring back the feeling of serenity again, of not wanting something that you could never get...if we could get our kids to look at those pictures and bring them back to reality and say this is us, that's our ancestors. Bring their pictures back and show that our ancestors are not Columbus coming here. That's not us. Bring back...we could bring our history back to who we are, bring it to reality...That picture will tell us who we are.

Helen believed that this would be an effective way to teach the Ojibwe language because "...that's how they did it with us. They showed us some pictures" (H. Porter).

## **Documented History Concerning the Pic Mobert First Nation**

### **Origins**

The Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) provides some of the earliest information regarding its Post at Montizambert and the Anishinabek who traded there. The records of the Hudson's Bay Company include: a) Post Reports which contain statements of Indian accounts and fur lists; b) Inspection Reports which report on buildings, stock, furs, accounts, expenses, personal, and general information; c) Correspondence Books which include incoming and outgoing letters for the Post; and d) Post Journals depict the day to day events happening at the post with regard to its interests. Although these records provide data on the history of the Hudson's Bay Company, they also provide glimpses into the life of the Anishinabek people in the area of these posts.

Dean (1992) states that the first Hudson's Bay Company Post in the area was established in 1850...at the mouth of the Shabotik River at the north end of White Lake. This was another route to James Bay via White River, Gum River - called the

Obakagama Route. This Indian Post was moved in 1886 to Montizambert (Mobert)...”

(p. 153). According to Hudson’s Bay Company records:

The Hudson’s Bay Company Post called Montizambert was established circa 1888 and was situated on the C.P.R. line on the banks of White Lake, a widening of White River. In 1892 buildings consisted of combined dwelling and sale shop, provision shed and men’s house. The latter build in 1889 and was used by the Indians when they came to trade. The name was changed from Montizambert to Mobert sometime between 1 June 1945 and 1 November 1946. This post was closed on 15 May 1969. (Provincial Archives of Ontario, Fur Trade Paper, 1897-1906)

Montizambert Post was a fur trade post. ~~It~~ was likely named after an engineer who worked on the construction of the railway” (HBCA, 2010). A Hudson’s Bay Company Montizambert Post Report dated 1895 includes a sketch plan of the post. This sketch plan shows an ~~Indian House~~” made of logs, measuring 14’ x 18’ as well as five acres of cleared land. (HBCA, 1895). In 1901, Hudson’s Bay Company records indicate that the Post at Montizambert was ~~entirely~~ engaged in Fur Trade, there being no settlement here...” (HBCA, 1901). In addition, it is written that —...th~~e~~ndians visit the Post only at Christmas and at open water” (HBCA, 1901). There was considerable fur collected and ~~the~~ furs were of superior quality...” (HBCA, 1901). The list of furs collected for the month ending January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1897 included: ~~beaver~~, ermine, fisher, red fox, blue fox, cross fox, silver fox, lynx, marten, mink, wolf, muskrat, otter, and skunk” (HBCA, 1896-1900). The names of some of the ancestors who traded at the post included: ~~D~~oksis, Kweseewa, Muskego, Metigonabo, Pashkeway, Pishkan, Taubatch, Sabourin, Taylor, Longhead, Morriseau, Desmoulin, Onabegon, Gagnon, English, and

Twance” (HBCA, 1896-1900) to name a few. Many more names of Pic Moberg ancestors were listed but due to the condition of the archived data, the names were illegible.

Perhaps more than any of the other Hudson’s Bay Company records, the Post Journals written by clerks of the Hudson’s Bay Company provide insight into the lives of the Anishinabek who participated in the fur trade. L. R. Johnson maintained such journals for the post at Montizambert during his employment period. On May 1, 1932, Johnson writes —North wind. cool and fair. very quiet Indians at church. Some not in from their hunting grounds yet.” (HBCA, 1932-1933).

Johnson reports on May 8, 1932 that some muskrat were being traded by the women who were doing the trapping close by, as the men were not having much luck elsewhere. He also reports that there were fifteen children at school. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, 1932 Johnson reports that —School inspector Greening of the Dominion Government inspection staff is here today inspecting this school reports good progress being made by the teacher. and improvement is being shown in all branches of the work” (HBCA, 1932-1933). On May 20 and 21, 1932 Johnson writes, —. several Indians and there familys arrived last night...more indians arriving. Ice in big Lake broke up and disappered yesterday, so now they have an ice free route into this Post. More expected tonight...” (HBCA, 1932-1933). On the 23<sup>rd</sup> he informs that —...indians busy cleaning up their grounds, ploughing ect. all others expected in this week...” (HBCA, 1932-1933) and on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> he adds, —.much work in on the reserve is being done. some are tearing down and rebuilding their houses some are moving to the point east of us were there is wood and water handier than here...all Indians excepting two familys are in, they expect the priest monday. so all came in for church” (HBCA, 1932-1933).



During the month of June 1932, Johnson reports that everyone was busy planting potatoes and working around their gardens. A priest had been in the community for three weeks and —.every‘ one of the ind[ians] were here for him and some from outside points. These have left for their homes in White River. Heron Bay. and Coldwell” (HBCA, 1932-1933). During the month, several forest fires on White Lake saw —.all Indians working on fire patrol...” (HBCA, 1932-1933). Johnson reports that the temperature was —.101 in the shade...this is the hottest yet...and is typical of last July when everything on this reserve was destroyed” (HBCA, 1932-1933). June 28<sup>th</sup> saw all the Indians gathered in the community for treaty payments. Indian Agent Burk and his wife arrived on June 29<sup>th</sup> and paid out treaty monies all day. —.the Indians were very much disappointed that there were no games ect. as this is the only day in the year for them. Very little action for them, but to spend their money, and they had a dance at night among themselves” (HBCA, 1932-1933).

On Dominion Day, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1932, the Indians were in White River spending their treaty money and playing baseball. This month saw the Indians leaving for berry fields at places such as Grasset, Peninsula, and White River. —Nicholas Whiskey Jack and Peter Dick left for the big Lake...after meat” (HBCA, 1932-1933) and —.Joe Pishigan, Paddy Sabourin and Paul Kiwiwisia left for the west...going as far as Peninsula to look over the Berrie Grounds. as they intend to move next week if they find sufficient quan[t]ity to warrant...all Indians that can get away are gone berrie picking” (HBCA, 1932-1933).

During August of 1932, the majority of Indians were out picking blueberries. Prices for berries ranged from —...25 to 40 cents 11qt basket” (HBCA, 1932-1933). Mid-month, —Paul Kiwiwisia, Joe Wynne, and Joe Pishigan left for down the river...for meat”

(HBCA, 1932-1933) as there was not much meat on the reserve for some time. The end of the month saw Sam and Gregory Desmoulin leaving for the —.big lake...expect[ing] to get some meat before they return” (HBCA, 1932-1933). On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1932 Johnson reports, —Gilbert Sabourin, Joe Bannish and Familys left for the west today. looking for blueberries but not many places left w[h]ere there is not Indians, Peninsula has a camp of about 200, pays Pit. 50. Coldwell 50. Ripple 50 and seel and Jackfish 100. These Indians are made up of the White River, Heron Bay, Mobert, and Fort William bands. and are practi[c]ally all obijaways” (HBCA, 1932-1933).

September 1932 saw a flurry of activity. Indians were returning from berry picking and —Sam Desmoulin, Gregory Desmoulin, Ellis Desmoulin [were] building new houses. Paul Kiwiwisia [had] completed his new house and [had done] a very good job” (HBCA, 1932-1933) according to Johnson. Ducks and partridge were plentiful and —.Indians [were] coming in with supplies of meat...they [were] also digging potatoes and report[ed] [a] good crop and fair size” (HBCA, 1932-1933). According to Johnson, —.Potatooe yield on this reserve will be best for some years and we should dig three hundred bags at the least which will be a big help for the winter grub” (HBCA, 1932-1933). On September 15<sup>th</sup>, Johnson reports that —.13 children are reported with Whooping Caugh. and more on the way...Doctor called last evening. but says it will have to run its course” (HBCA, 1932-1933). In total, 33 cases of Whooping Cough are reported. Johnson concludes his monthly journal informing that —.Frank Tookeney of Tookeney lake was in with his family last night. Reports he has received a commercial fishing license to fish Trout lake he will dispose of his fish at White River.” (HBCA, 1932-1933)

November 1932 saw the people once again on the move. —Peter desmoulin and family left for Struthers...Joe Pishigan and Frank Gagnon. gone up the big lake for 10 days” (HBCA, 1932-1933) and —Paul Kiwiwissia and Joe Tookenay arrived home...after 22 days in the woods had fair luck. Report lots of Ducks and Geese...Ellis Desmoulin and son left for the big lake...for a few days fishing they report the White Fish spawning in large numbers on the shoals. And a good time to get them, Joe Pishigan got 92—in one lift, which is considered a good haul these days” (HBCA, 1932-1933). Mid-month, Johnson reports that all of the Indians who are going out into the bush have left. On November 17<sup>th</sup> Johnson states —. School attendance is 34 approx. 88 pc [percent] of the regular attendance” (HBCA, 1932-1933). Rabbits and birds were plentiful with one catch amounting to over 100.

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1932 Johnson records —. no one around today, as mostly all the Indians are out what are here are at church their being two services at the R.C. Mission church” (HBCA, 1932-1933) . Again the people are moving between the Post and their trap lines. Ancestors such as Nicholas Whiskeyjack, Joe Tookeney, Abram Tookeney, Steve Whiskeyjack, Micheal Sebbens, Joe Pishigan, Frank Gagnon, Albert Sabourin, Herb McWatch, Ben Sabourin and Paddy Sabourin are all reported as leaving the Post to go trapping and returning with furs for the trade. Johnson adds —. several moose have been gotten the last week, and indians are busy bringing same in and giving it around to the less fortunate. also plenty of rabbits are being snared and there seems to be no want for meat” (HBCA, 1932-1933). Christmas time saw the return of the Indians from the trap lines. —. [T]he School Xmas tree was held this morning with about 80 in attendance. The toys ect. having been brought down by Indian agent Burk. Who visited

us yesterday” (HBCA, 1932-1933) and on Christmas eve, Johnson writes, —. every thing very quiet on this reserve and the Indians has started to go to Midnight mass, and undoubtly they will all be there in another few minutes and the ball will give out the tidings of Midnight. It has just rang. So —Merry Christmas Ye Merry Gentlemen” we wonder what the New year has in store for us all” (HBCA, 1932-1933).

### **Local Employment**

In 1923, the Austin and Nicholson Lumber Co. opened a sawmill about 18 miles west of White River on the Canadian Pacific Railway line. It closed in 1933. It opened again in 1939 under the management of Austin Lumber and operated until 1961. In 1931 Abitibi started cutting trees in the district, closing in 1964 (Dean, 1992, p. 67).

Both men and women of Pic Moberg were hired by these companies. Men were hired for wood cutting, sawing, and millwork, while the women were hired by the companies to cook, clean, and do laundry. On April 29, 1933, Post Manager Johnson reports, —J. Buckley and a teamster arrived in the village...they are enrouted to the mill at mile 18½ to load all slabs, lath, ect. for shipment west about 150 cars, they have hired 10 men from this reserve to complete the work at 15¢ per hour” (HBCA, 1932-1933).

When Abitibi was in operation, its logging operation was located at Regan which was approximately one kilometer east of the original reserve settlement. Logs were driven down the White River to Lake Superior, a distance of approximately 70 kilometers and then on to a mill at Marathon, Ontario on the shores of Lake Superior.

The people of Pic Moberg were also employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway to cut wood, clean wrecks, and lay track. As example, Johnson reports in 1933 that, —.indians still cutting and hauling C.P.R. wood on their contract” (HBCA, 1932-1933) and —.the last of the wreck that occurred on the C.P.R. is being cleaned up today. 100

men have been working for three days mostly hired from Mobert and White River” (p. 32).

Dean (1992) states that,

Almost immediately after the C.P.R. arrived in Snowbank [present day White River], a stockyard was erected on the banks of the river. It remained the largest such facility between Toronto and Winnipeg up until the 1960’s when they were no longer needed. In its hey-day the stockyard would hold up to 100 cars of cattle and horses, often up to 1,450 head of stock at one time. (p. 153)

### **Education and Language**

The written record does not give any clear indication of a school at Montizambert until 1915. At this time, Indian Agent, W.R. Brown writes to Duncan C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. In his letter, dated April 14, 1915 Brown informs Scott that L. Yelland, Manager at the HBC Post at Mobert had written him about opening a school at Mobert. Yelland had informed Brown that there were seventeen Indian children of school age, plus he had three of his own children he wished to send to school (Canada, 1915). Brown recommends that —. .a farm should be connected with the school on every Reserve. It is apparently impossible to teach the old people to farm but should be easy to teach the young.” (Canada, 1915) Upon receipt of this letter, Scott requests further details regarding —. .this application from Mr. Yelland” (Canada, 1915) in a follow-up letter dated April 26, 1915. Brown writes back giving his opinion and states, —I believe that money spent in a farm on each Reserve would be a good investment, provided of course that a practical farmer was in charge...children could then put in certain hours of their school time learning the practical side of farming” (Canada, 1915). Brown adds that, —Mr. Yelland is so anxious to have his own children at school that he would no doubt see that the Indians attended” (Canada, 1915). Also, in reply to

the Department's request for further information, Yelland reports that there were eight families and fifteen children living there and that the children "...can be kept regularly to school all year round" (Canada, 1915).

A school at Montizambert was eventually ready for opening in September 1915. (Canada, 1915). The school was opened in a building also used as the church. It did not fare well with repeated reports of poor attendance. The Agent wrote in September 1916 that "...the Mober Indians are away to the bush and will not be back until Christmas" (Canada, 1915). Due to low attendance, Brown advised the Department in 1917 that "...the school should be closed at the end of June, as there are very few Indians there now" (Canada, 1917).

In 1923, the Indians at Mober petitioned the Department to open a school. In a letter dated September 8, 1923, Brown writes that, "The Indians in the district of Heron Bay and of Mober are very anxious to have educational facilities for their children...there is land owned by the Indians which would be suitable for a school building" (Canada, 1915). The school at Mober wasn't re-opened until 1929. A combined school and residence was built in 1930. It is reported that there are at least 30 children of school age at Mober in 1929, doubling the number of children that lived there in 1915 when the school first opened. The school continued to have low attendance at times because families were often away at their trap lines or travelling to other destinations throughout the remainder of the year for various purposes.

Department of Indian Affairs, Inspector's Reports on Indian Day Schools provides information regarding the operation of day schools. National Archives of

Canada, RG10, Volume 8447 gives information regarding the school at Mobert for the period December 1, 1930 through to March 19, 1957.

As early as 1934, it is recorded that the Indians at Mobert had lost interest in the school. Inspector Greening reports that, —. The Chief called to see me and told me that, in spite of his best endeavours, he was unable to get the children to school. Many of the families, he said, had moved from Mobert rather than send their children to school there.” (Canada, 1934)

Again in 1936, the Indians at Mobert made known to the school authorities that they were unhappy with the school at Mobert. Of 35 school age children, only 11 were in attendance at school for this period. Inspector Greening notes the following comment in his school report, —the Indians strike me as quite dissatisfied and unwilling to cooperate with the teacher by sending their children to school” (Canada, 1936). Greening does not provide the reason for this dissatisfaction. Given the Indians’ lifestyle, low attendance at the Mobert school continued to be an issue. Indian Agent J.G. Burk in a letter dated July 12, 1938, declined assistance to a Mobert individual who had moved away for work, stating, —. Bonanish moved from the Mobert Reserve some few months ago to a sawmill fourteen miles east of the Reserve. He advised me that he would be willing to leave his children on the reserve if the Department would feed and clothe them” (Canada, 1938).

Classes taught during school included English conversation, reading, spelling, writing, and arithmetic. Later, sewing, home economics, carpentry, and manual training were added to the curriculum. In a report on May 15, 1942, Inspector Greening of the Department commends the students at Mobert saying, —I cannot close the report without

remarks upon the interest taken at Mobert in the Red Cross. Thirty-three scarves and an afghan are among the articles that have been sent to the society during the current year” (Canada, 1942) and he adds that tools were needed at the school —...this place seems destined very shortly to become quite a lumbering centre” (Canada, 1942). In a later report, Greening writes that the Indians would not cut wood for the school because they made more money working for the pulp companies (Canada, 1946).

Teachers hired by the Department at Mobert assisted with reports concerning government assistance. In reference to a particular teacher, Greening notes in his September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1945 report that ~~He~~ assists this Agency in certain details, such as Family Allowances...” (Canada, 1945) and later in 1946 states that, ~~Attendance~~ at this school is good, though the average is brought down through poor attendance of one family, whose family allowances have been suspended” (Canada, 1946). The records show that this was a common practice as again in 1947, Greening reports, ~~About~~ three families moved to the bush and their children were thus kept out of school for fairly long period. Family allowances in these cases were suspended, as the parents were admonished to no avail” (Canada, 1947).

Parents again made known their concerns with their children’s schooling. On March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1948, Greening writes, ~~In~~ conversation with some of the parents, they seem to think that undue stress is laid by the teacher on Catechism. Again, on November 26, 1952, Greening adds, ~~She~~ is not an outstanding teacher and the criticism of too much religious instruction has been raised against her” (Canada, 1948, 1952).

At one time, the people of Mobert spoke fluent Ojibwe. School reports from as far back as 1930 indicate that classes were taught in English conversation, reading,



spelling, and writing. School Inspector Greening, wrote in a 1931 School Inspection Report that “The children are acquiring a good working knowledge of English, but are too apt to reply in monosyllables if at all possible” (Canada, 1931). Greening concludes:

For example, as is the case in practically all Day Schools, the written English is very weak. The teacher does her best to improve their work, but finds progress slow. It is not so much that the pupils will not speak English, (because the Hudson Bay Storekeeper tells me that, whereas a scant couple of years ago it was almost impossible to get the children to speak English, they will now almost invariably respond in English if addressed in Indian) as it is a lack of models. (Canada, 1931)

A year later, on May 11, 1932 Greening informs that “monosyllabic answers [have] been almost eliminated” and still another year later he reports, “I cannot close this report without remarking upon the command of English being acquired by the pupils here. Some of them saw me coming along the railway track and came over. They talked about their baseball teams easily and fluently, and seemed quite at home in English.” (Canada, 1933).

### **Traditional Activities**

The Ojibwe people have used and continue to use plants for healing (Densmore, 2005; *Aboriginal Innovations*, 2002). Johnston (1976) states, “Plants have many purposes, all of them good. Some sustain men in their growth and existence; some heal; others give beauty and inner strength (p. 39).

In Densmore’s (2005) *Strength of the Earth: The Classic Guide to Ojibwe Uses of Native Plants* over 200 plants are identified and recorded. Plants used as medicine are charted according to: system or part used, how prepared, and how administered. In Ojibwe country, Densmore encountered a dynamic network of women who specialized in

plants and their healing properties...many of the plants Ojibwe women gathered were exclusive to female health issues and wellness” (p.vii, ix)

For the Ojibwe and many other tribes, plants had many purposes. Moss was gathered and used for different purposes but most importantly as diapers. –Women and men would search for the –right” type of moss and transport it back to the village for use in moss bags. The moss was placed inside the bag to absorb moisture from babies, who as a consequence, seldom experienced diaper rash” (*Aboriginal Innovations*, 2002).

The Ojibwe used birch bark for many useful purposes. They once lived in birch bark wigwams and travelled the waterways by birch bark canoe (Bogue and Palmer, 1979; Quimby 1960). In the winter, snowshoes were used as the means of transportation. Toboggans were also used to help carry items. –The Chippewa, being essentially nomadic, had houses that were easily constructed. They lived in oval wigwams that were dome-shaped, made of saplings covered with strips of birch bark. Chippewa canoes were excellent craft and capable of making long voyages even in the waters of the Upper Great Lakes” (Quimby, 1960, p. 124). Canoe frames were made of cedar and soaked in water, then bent to form the shape of the canoe. Birch bark canoes were waterproofed using spruce or pine resin. In a letter dated September 7, 1897, Hudson’s Bay Company Montizambert Post Manager, W. Aitken writes, –Please if you know of anyone wanting Canoes to buy you might tell them that I have some fine Birch Bark Canoes for Sale, Size from 2 to 2 ¾ fathoms long.” (HBCA, 1897)

Moose hide was used by the Ojibwe and many other tribes as well, mostly to make moccasins. *Smoke Tanning: Traditional Indian method of Preparing Animal Hides*

(1974) by the Saskatchewan Indians Arts and Crafts Advisory Committee is an excellent resource which outlines the steps to produce smoked tanned hide.

### **Other Aspects of Life, including Church**

A church had been erected by the Indians at Mobert at their own expense by 1920. The church had cost them approximately \$5,000.00 (Shanahan, 2001, p. 41). Monthly visits by the priest were noted in the Hudson's Bay Company Post Journals.

Dean (1992) informs that ~~in~~ 1943 Prisoners of War were permitted to work in the bush camps for 50 cents a day. These German prisoners were a major source of manpower in northwestern Ontario's logging industry..." (p. 69), and ~~by~~ 1951, there were over 250 bush camps in Northwestern Ontario" (p. 72). Interestingly, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (2010) website reports that ~~Unlike~~ prisoner of war camps run by Axis powers in Europe and Japan, life for German PoWs transferred to Canada was relatively carefree. Situated in remote rural locations, the camps were havens for many PoWs who took advantage of the luxuries provided to them. (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, PoWs, 2010 ¶2).

### **Community Access**

According to Frances (2006) the stretch of the Trans Canada Highway, passing near Pic Mobert, was completed in 1960. Celebrations for its completion were held at Wawa, Ontario, on September 17, 1960. This section of highway known as ~~the~~ "the Gap" stretched between Agawa Bay and Marathon and was a challenge to build because of large amounts of rock and cliffs, boggy muskeg, and its thick stands of timber. Another challenge highway construction workers encountered was the White Lake Narrows (p. 106-109). ~~The~~ Alice M. ferry carried workers across the White Lake Narrows while the

bridge was being completed” (Dean, 1992, p. 213). At the White Lake Narrows a  
—..stabilizing arch bridge had to be built, itself costing \$1.2 million” (Frances, p. 106).

The concept for a national railroad came about in the early 1880s. —It was not  
until December 1880 that the Bill was finally presented in Parliament” (Dean, 1992, p.  
35). According to Berton (1971), the location of Bandeville is situated at or near present  
day Pic Mobert. In 1885, the railway was under construction. East and west along the  
proposed railway had gaps where there were no tracks other than a tote road used for  
carrying supplies. —There were four gaps, totaling eight-six miles, in the unfinished line  
north of Lake Superior” (p. 357). On March 26, 1885 the North West Rebellion broke  
out which prompted the government to send troops west to confront the situation. Berton  
recounts the soldiers trek from the first gap in the line to where the line once again  
allowed soldiers to board a train and refers to this portion of the track as the —eruel  
journey.” Soldiers were transported by horse and sled in bitter cold with very little rest  
through the portion of incomplete track west of White River to present day Marathon.  
Gaps in the line begin at Biscotasing to Birch Lake which was renamed Desolation  
Camp. From here, soldiers re-boarded the train and with a stop midway at Bandeville,  
they are transported to the next gap at Port Munro, which is a few miles east of Marathon.  
Berton informs that soldiers rested at Bandeville, near present day Pic Mobert, which  
consisted of one building where soldiers ate and rested for awhile. In this regard, Berton  
states, —At the present Bandeville (which consisted of a single shack in the wilderness)  
the men were fed sandwiches and hot tea” (p. 372). Interestingly, —On May 16, 1885,  
the last rail laid [was] on [the] Lake Superior line” (p. 427).

## **Summary**

The Elder's stories mirror one another and align with the written record. The history of the Pic Mobert First Nation as told by the community Elders that I interviewed and as documented in the written record tells the story of a dynamic community ever adapting to changes and development in the area. Despite the onslaught of assimilation and colonization efforts by the Canadian government, the language and beliefs of the people remain and although reduced to a fraction of what they once were, hope lies in its renewal.

The Elder's stories reflect how people at Pic Mobert enjoyed their traditional lifestyle and how the onslaught of the Euro-Western world changed their way of life. Their stories show how they were at the cusp of the transition to Euro-Western ways. As they joined in the Euro-Western ways, they saw many of their traditional ways disappear. Their stories illustrate the pain they felt in that transition. The documented history from the Euro-Westerners measured its gaining success in achieving the government's aim of assimilation. Their respective stories reflect common data, but from polarized perspectives of people walking in two different worlds and two different worldviews, worldviews whose differences we have not yet reconciled.

## CHAPTER 5: WALKING TWO WORLDS

### Personal Reflective Summary

I started doing this research in order to create a curriculum resource for use at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education at Pic Mobert. When I was working at the school as a teacher and part-time principal, I realized that the students needed to learn of things that were more culturally relevant. They needed to learn about things that they could relate to, to things that were their own and not somebody else's. I started this research to address that need. I thought the best place to start to begin providing a more relevant curriculum would be to look at the history of the community. I did not know my own community's history. I did not know anything I wanted to know and I wondered how many others did not know about the community's history as well. This was the impetus for my research.

When I started looking at the literature, I found many authors saying that it is indeed important for our children to learn of whom they are descended from and that in learning who they are, their self-esteem would grow and they would do better in school. It was encouraging to learn that there are researchers out there who recognize this. I conducted my literature review and then developed a set of research questions for the Elders I planned on interviewing from the community. I believed that to have the students learn about their history was a good thing. It is what provincially educated students learn in schools off-reserve. That was one of my biggest assumptions, that Pic Mobert's history could come from the same sources as that of dominant society, those found in corporate and government archives. Armed with this assumption, I went to the community Elders.

The interviews conducted, the stories the Elders shared and the written record all originate in the English language. What might have been recorded had the interviews, stories, and written record been recorded in Ojibwe instead? Certainly, a different truth may have emerged. This is perhaps the biggest limitation to this research.

The Elders gave me what I wanted. They answered my guiding interview questions. In the end, what they gave me was something totally unexpected. In reference to what students at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education should be learning with regard to their history, the Elders said that children should be learning the Ojibwe language. After I conducted the interviews and transcribed them, I spent time reflecting on what the Elders had said and it took a long time for me to realize what they were really saying, that is, our history, the history of Pic Mobert is in the Ojibwe language and our Ojibwe language is of the land. Hearing what the Elders said and interpreting what they said, in the way that I have, means there's a whole other history that remains unexplored. Certainly, the history that I have collected from archived data is a part of our history but it is a history from the perspective of dominant society. It is history from within a Canadian context. In having done this research, what this study is now saying is that there is more research to do. There is another history that exists embedded in Ojibwe and that is the history that needs to be taught at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education at Pic Mobert. That is the real history of the community and it is what the students need to learn. It is a different history than what I uncovered in archived data. This history within the Ojibwe language would reveal a different past because it would perhaps speak about stories from the land, of other world beings, places with Anishinaabe names because those places meant something to the people. It would perhaps speak of the

people's relationship to the people and things around them. It would perhaps speak of who we are as Anishinaabe people because it would also speak of our own philosophy and beliefs.

This revelation makes me feel sad because I cannot speak the Ojibwe language. And because I do not speak the Ojibwe language, I think this history is something I may never know. It is as if a whole other world exists and I am separated from it. Fewer and fewer people in my community can speak the Ojibwe language. Based on what the Elders have said, it is important for me as an individual, as a student, as a teacher, and as a mother to learn my Ojibwe language. It is also important for my community to learn the Ojibwe language.

We need to start now. Our language tells us who we are and where we come from is on the land. Based on what the Elders have said, we can no longer continue teaching our children provincial curriculum to the exclusion of an Ojibwe epistemology. I recognize that an education must allow our students to succeed in the world, but that education cannot remain one-sided as it is now. We have to include our own teachings and bring the two worlds together. By creating a balance between both worlds, our students will be more successful and happier.

The entire community needs to be involved. I think that is what we need most in order to become a healthy community again. My literature review on language renewal programs shows that some research has been done but there is a great deal yet to do. There are many ideas for Pic Mobert to investigate and pursue as they work toward providing a more culturally relevant curriculum for students, one that is meaningfully based within the Ojibwe language.



## **Interpretations of Elder's Stories and the Written Record**

The Elders interviewed shared many historical facts about the community's past, but because of the limitations of my guiding interview questions and because I cannot speak the Ojibwe language, the Elders were not able to participate in this research using the Ojibwe language. As a result, this limits the kind of information that I could have gathered which perhaps may have been more relevant. What the Elders did share spoke of a hardworking group of people who exercised their traditional knowledge and ways of life on the land. Their stories are confirmed in the written record and the Elder's stories validated one another.

In one instance, an Elder's story sheds new light on the timeframe of the community's original settlement and shows a difference between the oral history and the written records. The written record shows that —The Hudson's Bay Company Post called Montizambert was established circa 1888..." (Provincial Archives of Ontario, 1897-1906). According to Elder Connie McWatch, a settlement existed at what is now Pic Mobert at least 13 years earlier. Connie was born in 1930 and went to work at Abitibi when she was about 16 or 17 years of age in 1947. Her grandmother, Jane Wynne passed away at this time at the age of 83. Connie recalled that her grandmother arrived at what is now Pic Mobert when she was about 11 or 12 years old. This means that Connie's grandmother arrived at Pic Mobert as early as 1875/76. Connie's story confirms that Indians of Pic Mobert were living in birch bark wigwams at this location (C. McWatch). Connie's grandmother and her family had travelled to the area to visit Joe Pishkin and this indicates that people from as far away as Moosonee knew that Indians were settled in the area.

Some of the oral histories confirm the written records. The Elders interviewed shared stories of trapping. Most often they would leave for their trap lines in the fall and return at Christmas. In the summer months they would travel to various locations to hunt and pick berries. In comparison to the literature of Hudson's Bay Company Post Journals written in 1932, this shows well-established community norms that had been taking place long before three of the Elders were born and at the time when Connie was only three years old. The stories told by the Elders coincide with those recorded in the Hudson's Bay Company Post Journals for 1932.

The Indians of Pic Mobert were a semi-nomadic people. The Elders interviewed and the written record shows that they moved in relation to the demands of the fur trade, for hunting, fishing, and gathering and also in connection to resource development and employment in the area. When a school was established at Pic Mobert back in 1915, it created a dilemma for the people. It actually prevented the Indians from continuing to participate in the economy and unfairly punished them for attempting to do so. The school at Pic Mobert, administered under federal government policy, forced the decline of the Ojibwe language usage amongst its students. The school policy was designed to teach the children English and eliminate their Ojibwe.

Some of the stories shared by the Elders interviewed are verified by the literature. Hudson's Bay Company archival information depicts Pic Mobert's participation in the fur trade. Government of Canada records confirm what the Elders had to say about education and language, and other historical sources confirm Pic Mobert's role in the development of the area. Documented information regarding Pic Mobert's history is the history of the colonizer. Hudson Bay Company archives and Canadian government

records are written from this perspective and when utilizing this type of historical information, the context in which it is written must be considered in order to gain a truer picture of past events. Despite this colonial bias, much can still be learned from the archival data concerning the history of the people of the Pic Mobert First Nation.

In 1901 it is written in the Hudson's Bay Company records that there was no settlement in the Pic Mobert area. This however, was not the case as, according to Elder Connie McWatch, Indians were in fact living in wigwams at this very location as early as 1876. Furthermore, a Hudson's Bay Company post was located at the mouth of the Shabotic River on White Lake as early as 1850. This shows that the Indians were on the land in this area even though their settlement was not recognized by the Hudson's Bay Company post manager. It is common knowledge that the Hudson's Bay Company established posts near large populations of Indians in order to maximize their profits in the fur trade. It is unlikely that the Hudson's Bay Company would have built a post in an unoccupied area.

Ancestors of the Pic Mobert First Nation fully participated in the fur trade. They brought in furs of superior quality and were successful enough to warrant the Hudson's Bay Company post remaining in operation from approximately 1850 to 1969, a total of 119 years. They were also a hard working group of individuals. They built their own homes, planted successful gardens, and secured employment regularly as development in the area flourished. Being skilled hunters they provided for their families and shared their catch with others in the community. They knew the land and were comfortable travelling in and out of the community as needed, in all seasons.

The ancestors of Pic Mobert had an intimate knowledge of the land which allowed them to harvest what they needed for various purposes. Medicines were collected for healing and birch bark was collected for shelter and canoe making. In addition, being skilled crafts people, they took from the land and the animals what was needed to make cradle boards, snowshoes, toboggans, etc. They were adept at living their traditional lifestyle while adapting to European encroachment upon their traditional territory.

The initial request for a school at Pic Mobert was never initiated by the ancestors of the community. Rather, it was the Hudson's Bay Company post manager who requested a school be built at Montizambert in order for his own children to attend school. When a school was eventually requested by the Indians in 1923, according to Hudson's Bay Company records, not all Indians supported such an initiative and some moved away rather than send their children there. This could be an indication that some of the Pic Mobert Indians had insight into the harmful effects of school on their children, a legacy that has lasted to this very day. According to the Hudson's Bay Company archives, low attendance at school can be attributed to the ancestor's nomadic lifestyle of trapping but perhaps the real reason for the absenteeism at school was in fact a form of resistance on the part of the people toward assimilation. For those ancestors who perhaps supported a school in the community, this shows their foresight into the need to adapt to the changes in the developing area. Once a school was established, the Pic Mobert ancestors did not idly sit back and allow government policy to rule. Rather, they made their concerns known to the Indian Agent and expected change. For example, they spoke out against curriculum when too much Catechism was being taught. This shows that the

Pic Mobert ancestors were aware of and knowledgeable of school administration and were actively involved in the education of their children.

In summary, we can conclude that the ancestors of Pic Mobert supported and provided for their families. As the onslaught of development increased and as oppressive government policy prevailed, to the detriment of their traditional lifestyle, the Pic Mobert ancestors persevered. Walking two worlds, they showed great fortitude in their efforts to remain true to their Anishinabek heritage. As illustrated in their stories, they continuously returned to the land and held on to their Ojibwe language and beliefs in spite of already well-established assimilation efforts of the Canadian government.

Despite some of Pic Mobert's history contained within the written record since at least 1888, the Elders interviewed did not indicate that this was information the children of Pic Mobert should learn with regard to the community's history. This is not to say however, that information regarding the community's history from a dominant perspective should never be taught to children but more importantly, if they are taught this sort of information, its context certainly must be considered as indicated above, for it is not our history. The directive from the Elders is that our students should be learning the Ojibwe language and this can be interpreted to mean that the true history of Pic Mobert can only be found within the Ojibwe language.

In response to the question about what the children of Pic Mobert should learn with regard to their history, the Elders interviewed informed that the children should learn the Ojibwe language, as well as traditional activities such as bush survival including hunting, fishing, and trapping. As early as 1915, when the very first school opened at

Montizambert and possibly earlier still, the people of Pic Mobert have seen their Ojibwe language fluency steadily decline.

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (2003) states, in reference to residential schooling, that “our Elders as children received and survived the front line assault on our culture and language” (p. 97). This can also be said of the Pic Mobert ancestors who lived with ever encroaching resource development on their traditional territory and who eventually became subject to the assimilation policies of the Department of Indian Affairs. The Elders have declared the importance of the Ojibwe language to the community. In essence, the Elders have said, our history as a community resides in our Ojibwe language which is naturally connected to the land. Without a doubt, the Ojibwe language at Pic Mobert needs renewal and its importance is perhaps best articulated by Battiste (1998) who states:

Linguistic competence is a requisite for the renewal and respect of Aboriginal knowledge and humanity. Aboriginal people cannot rely on colonial languages and thought defined in provincial curricula to shape our reality. If we continue to think of our reality in terms and constructs drawn from Eurocentric diffusionism and languages, we continue the pillage of our own selves. The reconstruction of knowledge builds from within the spirit of the lands and in Indigenous languages. Indigenous languages offer not just a communication tool for unlocking knowledge; they offer a process of orientation that removes us from rigid noun-centered reality and offers an unfolding paradigmatic process for restoration and healing. It reflects a reality of transformation and change in its holistic representations and processes that stress interaction, reciprocity, respect, and non-interference. (p. 24)

It has also been found that using our language can bring children and Elders together, raise test scores in reading and writing, and help our children to develop their inferential reasoning and informal generalization skills (Grant and Gillespie, 1993, p. 20).

Given the importance of what the Elders have said regarding the students learning the Ojibwe language, what does this now mean for the students at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education with regard to their education? Furthermore, how can the Pic Mobert First Nation begin to address its need for Ojibwe language revitalization should they decide to pursue such an initiative?

According to Hill and Holland Stairs (2002),

In order for education to be truly relevant, this is where we need to begin – with the knowledge of our ancestors, and where better to find that knowledge than in the land we have shared with them and in the learning that comes from it. For our people to continue to survive with this knowledge, though, we will need to do that in the language of our ancestors.” (p. 282-283)

Given the current state of Pic Mobert’s Ojibwe language use, this presents a problem. To start, adult Ojibwe language immersion courses need to be implemented immediately at the community level (Moore, 2003; Maracle, 2002). With regard to the education of its children, the Pic Mobert First Nation, at the very least, must begin to work toward incorporating an Ojibwe language program within the school that extends beyond the classroom and includes Elders.

Language renewal at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education will require a concerted effort on the part of the entire community of Pic Mobert. Maracle (2002) informs that ~~key~~ key elements of the immersion programs [or any language renewal program] are commitment to the program, to the language continuing beyond the

classroom, time and patience” (p. 399). Perhaps this is where the community of Pic Mobert needs to begin, with a commitment toward language renewal. In this regard, Anderson (2002) also states that, —The first step is deciding that our languages are important and that our children need their Anishinaabe language first, not as an add-on or extra program, but as an essential part of their education” (p. 301). Continuing to adhere to provincial curriculum will mean continuing to devalue our Ojibwe language. Corbiere (2000) believes that —. . . a powerful silent message is sent to Native students when our education staff does not use our languages, our stories, or our perspectives in Native/Indigenous education. The message is this: If something is not used, then it is not important” (p. 116).

The literature shows that numerous Indigenous language program models exist. According to Neganegijig and Breunig (2007), examples include: home schooling, multi-community initiatives, extensive single-community strategies, immersion programs, bilingual programming, individual instruction, larger community domains, the role of Elders, and the land as teacher (p.308). Bilingual and immersion programs have been used successfully with Indigenous children in other parts of Canada and the world as well and we can learn from them. It is not the intent of this thesis to examine and determine the best option for the people of Pic Mobert to pursue with regard to any particular language renewal initiative. This is a decision that must be made at the community level. As Bressette (2009) informs, —Without the structured, organized, or informed input of all peoples, especially at the community level, native people are frequently left with the limiting option of simply replacing old colonial rule with more of the same, via their own people” (p. 7). This must be avoided at all costs and eventually, the people of Pic Mobert



might realize the need to consider a move toward a complete decolonization of its education system (Nadeau and Young, 2006; Anderson, 2002; Hampton, 1999; Battiste, 1998; Kirkness, 1998; Grant and Gillespie, 1993). For now, perhaps a good place to start might be with Ojibwe language renewal.

The Elders also indicated that our connections to the land are important and should be a part of students' learning. Since time immemorial, our people have had a sacred connection to the land and to everything in nature. This connection nourishes our souls and shapes our identities. A language program at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education that extends beyond the classroom and includes elders would provide numerous opportunities for our children to spend time on the land and in nature. In this regard, Hampton (1999) states that, "Indian education recognizes the importance of an Indian sense of place, land, and territory" (p.40). Many innovative approaches are being used that could also allow for our own children's sense of place while at the same time positioning them within nature. The learning possibilities are endless. Following are two such examples from schools in Manitoba.

In response to the Elders of the Nelson House Indian Band, who desired to keep an honourable culture alive, a group of educators formed the Canadian "School in the Bush." Staff of the Roland Lauzon School in Nelson House, Manitoba, Canada, initiated the program in conjunction with the community. In this program, teachers take students out of the regular classroom and transport them to one of many isolated trapper's cabins where they learn many different skills. One lesson centers on the tanning of moose hide. Because the process takes time, the lesson has many parts. During the process, children learn scientific, ecological, monetary, mathematical, and language art skills, all from the perspective of their culture. At the conclusion of the lessons not only have the students gained academic knowledge and captured vital elements of their culture, they also have

learned how to make a lucrative living through the sale of moccasin slippers and mukluks from the tanned hide. (Grant and Gillespie, 1993, p. 36)

Another example from a school in Thompson, Manitoba involved bringing Elders into the classroom.

Staff from Eastwood elementary School in Thompson, a mining town in northern Manitoba, Canada, devised an alternative to teaching science through the medium of papers, pencils, and overheads. We invited resource persons of Native ancestry to visit the school and teach lessons. Often these visitors came to class with fresh fish or freshly caught rabbits and, in front of their student audience, proceeded to dress the fish or rabbits. While our non-Native colleagues squirmed uncomfortably, Native students contributed rigorously with instructions and anecdotal remarks, which they later included in excellent writings and retellings. The experience also enhanced student self esteem which had been noticeably absent before the visits. What began as an experimental program became an integral element of the course owing to student demand. Teachers at the Junior High later adopted this strategy, especially in the area of science, where it had the same overwhelmingly positive results. After the success of the Elders' lessons, students were loath to accept a return to the regular deliver of programs. (Grant and Gillespie, 1993, p. 36-37)

Such initiatives are good models and vital to either maintaining or re-establishing our children's connection to the land and nature. A language model such as this would ensure that our children have ample opportunity to enjoy diverse learning environments and be immersed in Anishinabe at the same time.

Today we are challenged to find a way to return to our traditional teaching methods. Because we live in two worlds our children need to learn, based upon our own philosophy and language, while at the same time being able to cope with and succeed in

dominant society's Euro-Western systems and methods of education. Our oral tradition begs us to return to our language in order to hear our truth. When we translate our language into English, the meaning or more importantly, the essence of our truth, is distorted.

Battiste (1998) reassures us that restoring our languages is not an impossible task. "[The] spirit of languages is resilient, and in many of our communities who have in the last generation or two merged to the colonial languages, the spirit and socialization of Aboriginal languages are still embedded in the succeeding generations" (p. 25) and Maracle (2002) who quotes Bilger (1994) writes that, "... a single committed speaker can save a language; a million indifferent ones can let it die" (p. 402). Language renewal is imperative for the students at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education and throughout the community at large. Cultivating a love of our language requires teaching our language based on our needs and wants and not those prescribed by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

To reiterate, a language renewal model will, first and foremost, need to be controlled by our people. It will need to be structured by our own philosophy and culture and its development needs to involve our methods, our structures, our content, and our resources (Hampton, 1999, p. 10). This will lead to a decolonized education model that requires the involvement of our people which requires further research. What has been articulated here is a mere glimpse into possible educational change for Pic Mobert children.

## **Implications**

This research paper reveals that several histories exist, our history within the English language and our history within the Ojibwe language. Some of these histories are oral and some are written down. Teaching a history of the community in the English language from written documents only, perpetuates the Western paradigm. Instead, it is important to consider what the Pic Mobert Elders, who were interviewed, have said. In order to provide the students at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education with a truly relevant account of the community's past, it must be taught within the Ojibwe language. As mentioned previously, out of a total population of 240 respondents, 210 respondents indicated their mother tongue was English only. Only 30 respondents indicated their mother tongue was another language, presumably Ojibwe. Also, out of a total population of 240 respondents, 235 of these respondents indicated that English was the language most often spoken at home (Statistics Canada, 2009, Website). These statistics indicate that Pic Mobert has almost lost its Ojibwe language and that is why it is imperative for the community to heed what the interviewed Elders have said. Ojibwe language renewal efforts need to be considered in order for students to benefit from a more culturally relevant curriculum. For example, the Netamisakomik Centre for Education needs to provide a rich and meaningful Ojibwe language program so that children can learn Ojibwe. Students need to be able to learn the concepts, knowledge, and philosophy embedded within the Ojibwe language on a regular and consistent basis. By involving community Elders in this process and by providing opportunities for students to learn Ojibwe alongside them, Pic Mobert could possibly start its language renewal efforts.

Prior to colonization, our people had their own unique way of teaching and educating children based upon our own philosophy. Every member of the community

was a teacher and all adults were —. responsible for ensuring that each child learned how to live a good life. Central to the teachings was the belief in the sacred, the Great Spirit” (Kirkness, 1998, p. 10). Our people believed in a holistic approach to education whereby children were taught on a level that encompassed their spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional aspects and these teachings were conveyed through storytelling. Children were taught to be independent and self-reliant by observing and utilizing their environment. From their environment, they learned on an experiential basis (Kirkness, p. 10).

This is the vision I have for students of the Pic Mobert First Nation and it is a vision I have for all Anishinaabek students. Movement toward this vision requires stepping away from dominant educational practice and being cognizant of who we are as Anishinabek people. It is a step that bears in mind what the Elders I interviewed have said with regard to the Ojibwe language but it is ultimately a step toward a decolonized educational model.

Working towards this vision can begin with simple steps. To begin with, allowing Elders to play a significant role in education means incorporating the Ojibwe language into everyday activities. Bringing students and Elders together will cultivate a love of the Ojibwe language and provide for more meaningful learning experiences. Having students and Elders working closely together will ensure that student learning is within context and is relevant. For example, the Netamisakomik Centre for Education at Pic Mobert could establish a Resident Elder Program whereby the knowledge and expertise of community Elders is easily accessed on a daily or weekly basis to augment the learning activities of teachers and students in the classroom and beyond.

My vision for education includes moving the classroom out onto the land. By involving parents and Elders as active participants in teaching and learning opportunities for students, education is culture and tradition as opposed to being connected to it.

My vision for education supports the courageous acts of relying on our own resources and utilizing teaching methods known to promote our children's learning. We have our own unique ways of thinking, learning, teaching, and communicating that are different from white culture (Hampton, 1999, p. 28). We need to validate these processes by changing the manner in which we teach our children. Teaching strategies need to reflect the manner in which our children learn at home, utilizing our own resources to provide a relevant curriculum to our students. It means beginning to document our history as a community and nation by working with community Elders and parents in order to develop a meaningful curriculum that is reflective of its students. Relying on our Elders to help us establish a community-relevant curriculum can only enrich student learning because it would be based upon our Ojibwe philosophy and worldview.

In beginning this research paper, I set out to learn about the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation and what aspects of this history were important for the children of Pic Mobert to learn. The Elders interviewed indicated that the children of Pic Mobert should be learning their Ojibwe language and I interpreted this to mean that our history as a community is contained within our Ojibwe language. What happened to our language is an important part of our history and has created a huge gap in our understanding of who we are as Anishinabe people. Bringing our language back can restore us to wholeness in our identity, to wholeness in understanding our worldviews, our connection to the land, our true history. This research paper can be used as a starting point to

continue the important task of documenting the community's history from written records, and more importantly, from within the Ojibwe language of community Elders.

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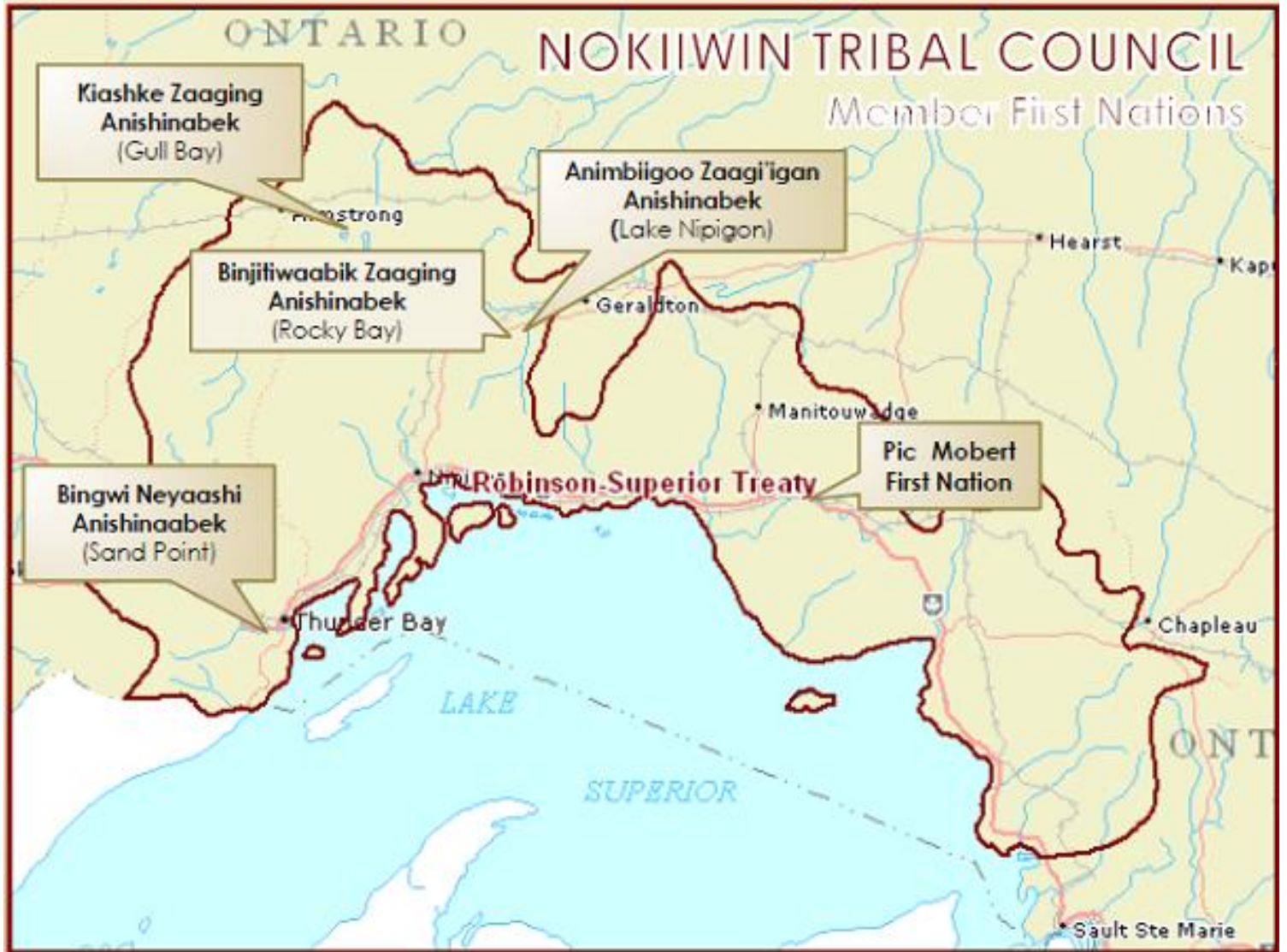
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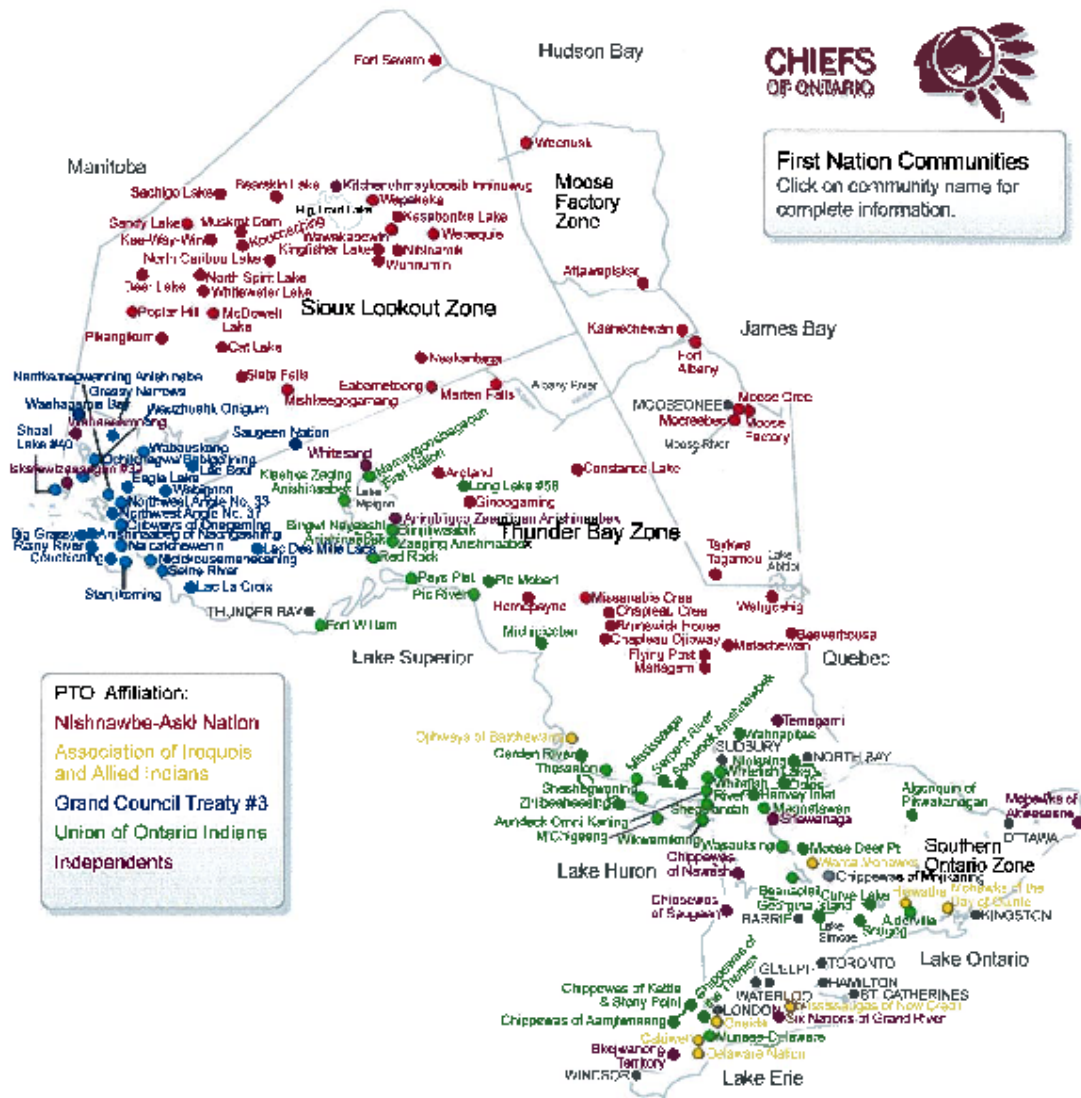
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## APPENDIX 1: Map of Robinson Superior Treaty Area





# APPENDIX 2: Map of First Nations in Ontario



## **APPENDIX 3: Personal Email to Chief and Council, Pic Mobert First Nation**

Chief & Council  
Pic Mobert First Nation  
P. O. Box 717  
Mobert, ON  
P0M 2J0

May 20, 2009

Dear Chief & Council:

As a Master of Education student I am required to be registered full-time at Lakehead University throughout the spring and summer months, as well as into the 2009/10 regular academic year, in order to prepare my Master's thesis. These past few months, I have begun preliminary research on my thesis proposal. I have chosen to document Pic Mobert's history in order to develop a curriculum resource that can be utilized by teachers at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education.

By way of this letter, I am requesting your permission to proceed with this research project in order to give our children the gift of who they are, as defined by where they come from. Research involving community participation will not be conducted until I have received approval from the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University. For now, my research is limited to corporate and governmental records.

I trust this is satisfactory. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at [yrtwance@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:yrtwance@lakeheadu.ca) at anytime. Thank you for your anticipated assistance.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Twance

## **APPENDIX 4: Letter of Support from Chief and Council, Pic Mobert First Nation**

Yolanda Twance  
523 Black Bay Road  
Thunder Bay, ON  
P7A 1P9

June 26, 2009

Chief Jeff Desmoulin  
Pic Mobert First Nation  
P. O. Box 717  
Mobert, ON  
P0M 2J0

Dear Yolanda:

This letter is to inform you that the Chief and Council of the Pic Mobert First Nation have discussed your proposed Master's thesis research and are in full support of your endeavour.

The Chief and Council of the Pic Mobert First Nation recognize the value in your research and look forward to learning of your findings. Please be advised that we are more than willing to assist you in any way that we can.

I trust this is satisfactory. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Chief Jeff Desmoulin  
Pic Mobert First Nation

## **APPENDIX 5: Letter of Introduction for Research Participant**

October 03, 2009

Yolanda Twance  
523 Black Bay Road  
Thunder Bay, ON  
P7A 1P9

Dear Community Elder:

My name is Yolanda Twance and I am a member of the Pic Mobert First Nation. I am a Master of Education student at Lakehead University. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Ethel Gardner, and she can be reached at Lakehead University's Faculty of Education at 807-766-7195. Susan Wright is the Research Ethics and Administration Officer and she may be reached at Lakehead University's Research Office at 807-343-8283 or by email at [susan.wright@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:susan.wright@lakeheadu.ca). Thank you for your interest in my research on developing a curriculum resource for use at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education, concerning the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation entitled: WHO WE ARE IS WHERE WE COME FROM: A HISTORICAL CURRICULUM RESOURCE FOR THE PIC MOBERT FIRST NATION.

I am asking you to participate in my research because as an Elder, you have many years of experience and a wealth of knowledge about Pic Mobert's history. What you have to share is important to this study because it will help me to document our community's history. This study will benefit our community because it is research that has never been done before. By documenting certain aspects of the history of the Pic Mobert First Nation, this curriculum resource will act as one of the many first steps toward relevant teaching and learning at the community level. This research will promote greater pride in the students at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education which in turn will contribute to greater student success. This study may also become a resource for other First Nation communities and schools. It can act as a bridge in bringing communities together and it will add to the literature on Canada's history.

I will ask permission during the study to use an audio-recorder; however, at any time, upon your request, I will turn the recorder off. After the interview, I will write out the recordings. You have the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview. I will meet with you two times over the course of two weeks. Our first meeting will be an interview lasting from 1 to 1.5 hours. The second meeting will be for me to ask for clarification or to ask further questions that I might have. At this time, we will also review what I have written from the first audio-recordings of our interview. We will meet again to verify my findings and you may also read the study before its formal

submission. You will review the written tape-recorded interviews and you will also review and approve the excerpts to be included in the thesis.

The information collected in this study will be distributed in many different ways. Articles may be written for publication in journals and newsletters. Curriculum may also be developed and used at the Netamisakomik Centre for Education. Formal distribution of the research findings will be in the form of a thesis located in the Lakehead University Education Library. You will be given a copy for your personal use. As well, the study will be shared with all band members of the Pic Mobert First Nation, including Chief and Council, and Netamisakomik Centre for Education staff and students at a planned community information session and feast at the community hall. Copies of the final thesis will also be made available, at this time, to all band members in attendance.

All the data from this study will be stored securely for five years at Lakehead University in the Faculty of Education. All interview tapes and written data will be made available to you upon your request at the completion of the study.

If you wish to remain anonymous, your name will not appear on any written documentation concerning this research nor will it appear on the audio-recording. You may change your mind to remain anonymous and you may withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty. If you want your name used in this study, I will add it to the dedication page and your name will be used throughout the published document

If you agree to continue, please sign the enclosed consent form and return it to me. Thank you for your interest in participating in this research.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Twance

## APPENDIX 6: Consent Form

### Consent to Participate in Research

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to participate in the study entitled **WHO WE ARE IS WHERE WE COME FROM: A HISTORICAL CURRICULUM RESOURCE FOR THE PIC MOBERT FIRST NATION** by Yolanda Twance.

I understand the letter of introduction and I further understand that:

- a) This study involves an interview and that it will be tape-recorded.
- b) I will have an opportunity to give feedback on the written part of the interview.
- c) Yolanda Twance may quote parts of the written interview within the body of her thesis text.
- d) I may choose a pseudonym (fictitious name) for myself as well as for other people and places or I may choose to allow my name to be used.
- e) I may contribute photos to be included in the written thesis.
- f) The information that I provide for this study will be securely stored at Lakehead University for a period of five years.
- g) Upon completion of Yolanda Twance's thesis, a copy of the thesis will be given to me and her research findings will also be shared with all members of the Pic Mobert First Nation.
- h) I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time and I have the right to refuse to answer any question that Yolanda Twance might ask.

**I decline to participate in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not consent to participate in this study, and I understand that this decision will not adversely affect me in any way.

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 7: Guiding Interview Questions**

### **GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Where did the people of the Pic Mobert First Nation originate from?

Why did people settle here?

What kept the people of Pic Mobert in this area?

How did people sustain a livelihood?

How did the people use the land?

What natural resources did people access?

What is Pic Mobert's employment history?

What is Pic Mobert's educational history?

What is Pic Mobert's political history?

Who have been the leaders of Pic Mobert?

What were the social activities of the people?

What traditional activities or crafts play a part in Pic Mobert's history?

What was life like before Pic Mobert became a reserve?

What did you experience while growing up at Pic Mobert?

What do you think the children of Pic Mobert should be learning at school with regard to their history?

Did any changes occur with road access?