Métis land settlement at Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan, 1840-1910

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Introduction

There have been numerous studies of ethnic group settlement in western Canada. Researchers have sought to explain why ethnic groups chose particular areas for settlement.¹ Reasons for individual land selections have also been studied, for many groups.² This study seeks to add to this literature with a detailed study of Métis land settlement at Willow Bunch, a community located in south central Saskatchewan (Figure 1). Although the history of this group’s coming to Willow Bunch is outlined, particular attention is given to Métis land selection; this aspect of Métis settlement has yet to be extensively studied.

Overview of Literature

Some analysis has been made of the location of Métis settlements. This includes explanations of the broad pattern of their settlements in western Canada (Giraud 1954, 1986) and of the specific location of a few communities, including Lac Sainte Anne and Saint Albert (Moodie 1965), Pakan or Victoria (Ironside & Tomasky 1971) and Saint Laurent (St-Onge 2004). Anderson (2005) summarizes the historical factors behind the founding of several communities. Payment (1986) is among the few to offer a more detailed discussion of the locational characteristics of a Métis settlement. She briefly commented the family nature of Métis migration from Red River, their resettlement in family-based communities in the Batoche area, and their selection of river lots.

Several descriptions have been made of the history of Willow Bunch. Rondeau (1923) produced the first published history of the community. Chabot (1970) updated Rondeau’s history, to the time of writing. Some family stories have been included in the local history of Willow Bunch rural municipality (Willow Bunch Historical Society 1998). More recently, however, it has been noted that none of these works well described the Métis and their contributions to the community. Armstrong (2000) and Rivard and Littlejohn (2003) have contributed to filling this gap. Yet, while these works comment on early Métis settlement in this area, and provide

Figure 1: Study area.
some reasons for the general location of their community, they remain largely historical and do not include a detailed analysis of Métis land selection within the community.

**Historical Background to Métis Migration to Willow Bunch**

The mid-1800s brought hardship to the Métis of the Red River settlement. By this time, over-hunting had made the once vast herds of buffalo, the mainstay of their economy, scarce. In fact, twenty years had passed since the Métis had made their first forays to the plains for provisions, and since George Simpson, officer of the Hudson’s Bay Company (H.B.C.) at Fort Garry, had forecast the bison’s extinction. Moreover, in the decades that had followed the merger of the Northwest Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company (in 1821), seasonal work freighting or portaging for the company had been more difficult to find. The H.B.C.’s development of farms at Lower Fort Garry and Saint François Xavier, and the saturation of pemmican markets in the 1830s had reduced the company’s needs for surplus pemmican and farm produce. Population increase had crowded the Métis’ river lots and droughts, pests and frost had caused their crops to fail regularly. These conditions provided the push for outmigration. By the 1840s, temporary departures from the colony were common. Many followed the still large buffalo herds to the west and traded with the Bay company or with Americans, who had recently opened posts on the southern Red River and upper Missouri River, and who offered competitive returns (Martel 1979, 77; Giraud 1986, 409; Pannekoek 1988, 85-87; Ens 1989, 48, 58, 78, 83, 90; Potyondi 1995, 25; Harroun Foster 2006, 186).

The buffalo economy required close proximity to the herds; by the 1850s achieving this often demanded wintering west of the Red River settlement. Pembina and later Saint Joseph’s, North Dakota, both about a six day journey from the herds, emerged as wintering places, and became central in the Métis’ economy (Giraud 1954, 12; Ens 1996, 77; Harroun Foster 2006, 187).

The continued decimation of the buffalo herds and the calamities that affected those who farmed at Red River contributed to larger and more distant migrations in the 1860s. The hunt in 1866 was the last that originated from Red River. So few were the buffalo on the eastern plains at this time that Métis who wished to continue hunting, and taking advantage of the increased prices for robes, could no longer start from Red River (Ens 1989, 208-209; Ens 1996, 75-77, 120). Drought and grasshoppers plagued
the Red River settlement through the decade. Crop failures were so severe in 1862 that the Hudson’s Bay Company distributed seed grain so that starvation might be avoided. Two years later, hot, dry weather again burned large areas of crops and grasshoppers ate the remainder. Harvests were even smaller in 1868. That year, the potato harvest, normally 12,000 bushels, was just 5,000 bushels. The harvest of 15,000 bushels of grain in 1867, a year when crops were described as only mediocre, dropped to 1,200 bushels in 1868. Again, it was only charitable distributions of food and seed, this time from the Council of Assiniboia that saved many in the settlement from starvation. Moreover, as of the middle of the decade, typhus and dysentery spread through the poorly ventilated, single room homes that lined the Red River. (Friesen 1984, 116; Pannekoek 1988, 71; Ens 1989, 191; Ens 1993, 254; Ens 1996, 110, 137).

The next year, in 1869, Rupert’s Land, until then held by the Hudson’s Bay Company, was transferred to the new Dominion of Canada. This sale and the land survey, into townships, a pattern that was unfamiliar to the inhabitants of Red River, were completed without permission of the colony’s residents. Frustrations over these actions contributed to the Red River Resistance. As a result of the resistance, the Métis won the “postage stamp” province of Manitoba, and many of the rights that they had demanded, but the settlement fell to the Dominion Government’s Colonel Garnet Wolseley. Moreover, hostile feelings persisted at Red River; this, along with in-migration from Ontario and the decision not to grant amnesty for Riel supporters, contributed to further Métis departure (Métis Scrip Claim [M.S.] 5218, 5249; Friesen 1984, 120-127; Ens 1996, 166).

Métis Wintering Locations in Southwestern Saskatchewan

The Métis’ migrations from Red River, to wintering locations near the buffalo, took a few to Wood Mountain, Eastend and Cypress Hills, in the 1840s and 1850s (M.S. 1004, 1312, 1651, 1675; Nelson 1973, 98). The number of Métis in southwestern Saskatchewan increased slowly during the early 1860s. Records ascertain that between 1861 and 1865 nine were at Wood Mountain and two were at Cypress Hills. However, the situation at Red River contributed to larger migrations during the later part of the decade. In 1868, fifteen families followed the earlier migrants to southwestern Saskatchewan, hoping to “escap[e] the ravages of the grasshoppers.” They built residences at Rivière Blanche (Whitemud or Frenchman River, probably near Seventy Mile Crossing). Many more followed, to Wood Mountain, the next winter (Giraud 1954, 2; Loveridge & Potyondi 1983, 60).
However, George Fisher, an independent trader who had been among those who camped in the area in 1869, apparently attracted the largest contingent, of somewhere between 35 and 75 families (Spence 2000, 14). After wintering near Wood Mountain, George Fisher had returned to Red River and had spoken of a “real hunter’s paradise” with ample buffalo (Musée de Willow Bunch, n.d.; Rivard and Littlejohn 2003, 105). But, buffalo were not the only attraction. Mule and white tail deer, pronghorn antelope, elk, jack rabbits, badgers, porcupines, snow and Canada geese, prairie chickens, ducks, coyotes, fox, beaver and wolves could also be hunted and fished. The rolling hills, willow and poplar shrubs, wild saskatoons, chokecherries and strawberries, and the abundant springs and creeks provided protection and sustenance (Surveyors Field Notebooks; Giraud 1954; Préfontaine, Young, Paquin & Dorion 2003). Still, unlike some wintering sites, the sites near Wood Mountain that the Métis selected, offered little protection from others who used the area. Several First Nations, the Atsina (Gros Ventre), Lakota (Sioux), Nakota (Assiniboine), Plains Cree and Sikisika (Blackfoot), had claimed the hunting grounds of southwestern Saskatchewan. Hostilities increased as the buffalo declined. Indeed, when the Cree, Saulteaux and Lakota saw that the Métis appeared intent on staying, and were competitors for the declining game, they attacked their settlement. As of 1873, the Métis needed a military guard to watch over their camp at night. In later years, southwestern Saskatchewan was known both as a “no mans land”, an area into which few ventured without superior numbers or weapons, and was an area where First Nations and Métis people congregated, as buffalo were no longer to be found elsewhere on the plains (Légaré c.1914, n.p.; “Histoire de W.B.”, n.p.; Loveridge & Potyondi 1983, chapter 2; Hildebrandt & Hubner 1994, 39-40; Préfontaine 2003; Anderson 2005, 360).

The maps of adults’ birthplaces, places of marriage, and childrens’ birthplaces (Figures 2, 3 and 4) depict the patterns of Métis migrations at this time. Many adults were born in Saint François Xavier, Manitoba. The frequency of marriage at Saint Joseph’s, North Dakota, of childrens’ birthplaces at Sainte Agathe, Manitoba, one of the southernmost parishes in the Red River settlement, or at Wood Mountain, shows both the Métis’ pattern of westward movement as the buffalo herds declined, and suggests that those who wintered at Wood Mountain may have been acquainted. Although the links between families were not fully traced, family names further suggested that many who had made their way to Wood Mountain were related. Many, who, as adults, wintered at Wood Mountain in 1870-1871, had likely left Saint François Xavier, with others they knew, when it became impossible to start hunts from Red River, if they had not left
earlier. Likely, they had initially moved to Sainte Agathe or Saint Joseph’s, communities that were nearer to the herds, and allowed them to continue to hunt. However, as time passed, they had moved west, to winter, or to reside, at least temporarily, at Wood Mountain.

Indeed, the Wood Mountain wintering site, like many others, was ephemeral. The requirements of proximity to the herds and the declining number of buffalo at Wood Mountain meant that by 1875, the Métis congregated at Cypress Hills. Although increased scarcity elsewhere led to Cypress Hills being known, at this time, as the buffalos’ last refuge, the herds remained plentiful for only a short time (Légaré 1914, n.p.; Hawkes

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**Figure 2:** Birthplaces of Métis adults at Wood Mountain, 1870-1871.
In February 1879, Father Hugonard reported to Archbishop Taché that most of the buffalo and other large game had left Canadian territory (Fonds Taché [F.T.], Hugonard 17 February [1879?]). Hunts that year took the Métis into the United States, though American officers soon turned them back to Canada. The next year, they again entered the United States. Rather than hunt, however, they encountered Miles, an American General, at Milk River. Under pressure from American ranchers and business people who were concerned that Métis from Canada might sell arms to the Lakota, and viewing their hunt as illegal, he took 300 Métis families prisoner. Although Superintendent Walsh, of the Northwest Mounted Police, secured the release of 130 families who wanted to return to Canada, the group was dispersed as the American army escorted others to settle at Judith Basin and Turtle Mountain. In the

Figure 3: Marriage places of Métis at Wood Mountain, 1870-1871.
end, about a third of the families returned across the border and settled near Jean Louis Légaré’s store at Wood Mountain or in Grant’s, Portas’, Bonneau, and Bellegarde villages, between Wood Mountain Post and Big Muddy River, or in one of at least five communities in the Cypress Hills (F.T., Hugonard to Taché 17 February [1879?]; 25 November 1879; Canada Sessional Papers [C.S.P.] 1880, 11, 14; Hawkes 1924, 1048; Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management n.d.; Harroun Foster 2006, 191).

Yet, the return to Canada was a return to scarcity and the Métis’ hunts remained unsuccessful. Those at Wood Mountain were soon forced to fast to preserve the little remaining food and later to kill a colt to avoid

![Figure 4: Birthplaces of Métis children at Wood Mountain, 1870-1871.](image-url)
starvation. Adding to their difficulties, a large fire swept through the region, burning hay and trees (F.T. Hugonard to Taché 25 November 1879; C.S.P. 1880, 15; Willow Bunch Historical Society 1998, 626).

The Location for Agricultural Settlement

The impossibility of hunting in the United States and the lack of buffalo in Canada necessitated a change of lifestyle. William or Guillaume Klyne became the first to settle in Willow Bunch Valley, in 1879. It has been said that André Gaudry also settled in the valley before 1880 (Homestead Files [H.F.] 690072; Rondeau 1923, 105-106; Hawkes 1924, 1048, Willow Bunch Historical Society 1998, 595). Because of the fire, that spring and summer the Métis at Wood Mountain found little grass to feed their livestock. The winter that followed was hard and cold, with many blizzards. Nonetheless, as usual, Jean Louis Légaré held a New Years’ party. At the party, André Gaudry proposed that the other Métis settle alongside him. He described Willow Bunch Valley’s attractions, its beauty, hay, wood and water, a location where they might raise livestock rather than hunt buffalo (Rondeau 1923, 105-106; Hawkes 1924, 1048, Willow Bunch Historical Society 1998, 595). Poor, alkali soils were the only characteristic that made this site unusual among squatter settlements, but the Métis chose it for livestock raising and favoured its attributes of shelter and water rather than land that was fertile for crop growing (Hamilton & Hamilton ca. 1952, 90; Grismer 1980).

Early Settlement Patterns

Although satisfactory, class 3, land was available in the valley, the Métis chose to settle on land that was poor for growing crops (Figures 5 and 6). When John Bourgeois and F.E. Brunelle surveyed the area in 1886, they found most of the Métis who had settled on class 6 land. Class 6 land has no capacity for crop growing and has limits for grazing. Moreover, the Métis had located on the southern slope of Willow Bunch Valley, often in coulees, on land that was likely partially covered with bush (Figure 7) (Surveyors Township plans; Fieldwork 2004).

Like the general location of the settlement, individual Métis settlers had probably chosen their land for its advantages for raising livestock. Their patent applications confirm this possibility. When he applied to patent his homestead, Louis Dumais wrote of the Métis’ intent to raise livestock, especially since farming was impractical at Willow Bunch at this
time: “This country is useless for any purpose except stock, cultivation except on a very small scale, is out of the question” (H.F. 675609). The lack of a railway, although as of 1883 the Métis and other settlers attempted, though unsuccessfully to obtain one, also affected the Métis’ land use choices and potentially their land selections (Statutes of Canada 1883 The Regina Leader June 5 1884; September 21 1886). With 90 kilometers to travel to the nearest railway, Narcisse Lacerte wrote: “I did not crop more land because we have no market where to sell the product” (H.F. 683758; Rondeau 1923, 187). Other homestead declarations showed the Métis’ emphasis on livestock. Many had numerous animals, and buildings needed for raising livestock. Zacharie Chartrand Senior, for example, had an average of 14 horses, 45 cattle and 600 sheep annually in his first years of settlement at Willow Bunch (H.F. 701431). Others, including Elzéar Bottineau, with an average of 18 horses and 4 cows annually, had smaller herds (H.F. 1929986). William Klyne, on the other hand, with 21 acres in crop, cropped more land than any other Métis settler (H.F. 690072).
Moreover, although they located along the base of Willow Bunch Valley, the Métis did not appear to have attempted to transfer the river lot pattern of settlement from Manitoba. They settled in coulees which were scattered along the valley and the areas that they broke were of assorted shapes. This pattern of land settlement appeared to result from their seeking advantages of such landforms rather than from an attempt to transfer a river lot settlement pattern. Also, they did not settle according to the Dominion Government’s township survey, and some claimed school, Hudson’s Bay or railway land; this too appeared to have been a selection of land that was advantageous for their purposes, of livestock raising (Rivard and Littlejohn 2003, 209).

The 1880s were very difficult years for the Métis at Willow Bunch. Many continued hunting (Manuscript Census [M.C.] 1881). Their success was limited. Although the hunt of 1883 was more fruitful than that of 1881,
by 1884 buffalo no longer came to the Willow Bunch area. Métis who continued to hunt were forced to hunt ducks, wolves and other smaller animals; these were less secure sources of food (F.T. Germain to Taché December 1882; September 28 1883; 3 March 1884; *The Regina Leader* March 8, 1883; Lapointe 1920; Giraud 1986, 415). Some Métis replaced the hunt with picking buffalo bones. These bones were used to refine sugar and as phosphate in fertilizer; they yielded $4-$8 a ton. However, after only a few years, the plains were picked clean of this remnant of the great herds (McGowan 1975, 23; Potyondi 1995, 37). Others took on a variety of jobs, freighting, paving streets and working as scouts during the resistance at Batoche (*The Torch*, n.d., 29; Armstrong 2000, 29; Rivard and Littlejohn 2003, 203). Those who had settled on land attempted to grow vegetables, crops and to raise livestock. However, the weather was poor during many of the early years. Winters were severe. Moreover, in 1884, frosts came early. In 1885, fires and grasshoppers ravaged crops. Droughts and livestock losses were significant in 1886-1887, and, horse theft was common throughout the decade (White 1886 Lands Branch [L.B.] 111072; *The Regina Leader* 12 April 1887; Légaré c. 1914, n.p.; Lapointe 1920, n.p.; Warkentin 1974, 53; Mason and Poirier 2000, 112-113; Rivard and Littlejohn 2003, 206).
This situation likely affected the land settlement pattern as many Métis took their scrip as money scrip or sold their land scrip (Légaré c. 1914). It also contributed to much turnover within the community. Just 6.4% of those recorded in the 1881 census were still in the area in 1891 (M.C. 1881, 1891). While the high degree of turnover left full aspects of land settlement at this time unknown, those who would go on to form the core of the community were among those who remained on the land.

The 1890s also brought periods of hardship. Droughts affected the community in 1892, 1893 and 1894. Livestock losses were significant in 1893. These difficult years that followed those of the 1880s contributed to the closure of the community school (C.S.P. 1890, 98; 1893, 80; 1895, 88; Fonds Langevin [F.L.] Lapointe to Langevin, 5 July 1897). However, unlike in the previous decade, potentially as a result of the end of other alternatives, the population at Willow Bunch stabilized: 80.6% of Métis household heads recorded in 1891 were present in 1901 (M.C. 1891, 1901). Nonetheless, a lack of information prevented analysis of developments in their land settlement pattern.

Even so, from the information that could be located, the settlement in 1901 appeared to follow the previous pattern (Figure 8). Most Métis continued to make their homes along the south side of Willow Bunch Valley. A few others, however, had been quite successful despite the adverse conditions. They had extensive ranches; this was also a reflection of the transition in the community from hunting and other activities to raising livestock. Others Métis appeared to live in the village (M.C. 1901). Still, despite the survey, none of the Métis had entered for land (Township Registers).

The Métis began making entries between 1901 and 1905. These entries followed their earlier settlement pattern. They were often for poor land that was suitable for ranching.

They continued entering in 1906, expanding their settlement, mostly to the north, in Willow Bunch Valley, though a few claimed land south of the valley (Figure 9). However, unlike those who selected land earlier, the Métis who chose land in 1906 frequently took relatively good, class 3 or 4, land: 20.0% of those who made entries between 1901 and 1905 claimed class 3 or 4 land, 73.1% of those who settled in 1906 claimed class 3 or 4 land. A significant number of other settlers also entered in 1906. While this may have affected the direction of Métis settlement, it did not explain the change in the sort of land that they selected. Non-Métis newcomers generally chose good farm land; there was no lack of class 6 land that had the attributes that the Métis had previously sought (Lautier 1973). Also, railways did not affect this settlement pattern as the first railway to Willow Bunch was built in 1926 (The Morning Leader November 22, 1926; Drake
On the other hand, it may be contended that those who entered in 1906 sought land with greater farming possibilities than earlier entrants and were prepared to forego bush and running water, both amenities for livestock raising that had contributed to their earlier choices, in favor of better farmland. Indeed, their activities on the land suggested that they may have selected land to farm. Those who entered for land in 1906 broke and cropped more land than those who had entered earlier (Table 1). Also, those who entered on class 3 or 4 land in 1906 had fewer cattle and horses than others who had entered earlier. On the other hand, although many entered on class 3 or 4 land, some entered on class 5 or 6 land. Those who

Figure 8: Métis homesteaders at Willow Bunch, 1901.
entered on class 5 or 6 land still had large herds. This suggests that land was selected differently in 1906 than it had been in the years before 1906. Several who entered in 1906 chose land that they could farm; before this the Métis had selected land for raising livestock. Others, however, continued selecting land to raise livestock.

Yet although several Métis who entered in 1906 chose better land than other Métis who homesteaded earlier, and many appeared to have chosen land for farming, they did not choose the best land possible. In 1906, much better farmland, that was closer to railways, was still available in western Canada. For those Métis who entered in 1906, remaining in the same community as other Métis settlers appeared to have been a priority;
they opted to remain near their compatriots ahead of choosing land in another district where there were no other Métis people.

Métis people continued entering for land between 1907 and 1910 (Figure 10). They more frequently took relatively good land than in the years before 1906, but the definite tendency to take class 3 or 4 land did not continue. In 1907, 54.5% of the land that the Métis took was class 3 or 4; in 1908, 1909 and 1910, 87.5%, 57.1% and 53.3% of the land entered for was class 3 or 4.14 Several explanations were considered. Certainly, as other settlers came to Willow Bunch and usually claimed the better land, less good land was available. Nonetheless, although other homesteaders eventually surrounded the Métis, some class 3 or 4 land was available in the community for several years. Table 2 shows their activities on the land while earning patent and their average age at entry. There was a clear tendency for those who entered on poor land in 1907 to raise livestock while those who entered on better land grew crops. However, all who entered between 1908 and 1910, even those who took poor farmland, broke and planted larger areas to crop and had fewer livestock than the first Métis settlers. This followed the general trend, towards crop growing, in the area (Rondeau 1923, 209-210). Yet, this also showed that while Métis who entered in 1907 may have chosen poor farmland for raising livestock, later entrants did not choose land to raise livestock.

Since the Métis did not appear to take land to raise livestock other possibilities were considered. Secondary sources revealed that although Métis people began entering for land soon after other settlers came some, despite the arrival of other settlers, held the land that they had lived on and used for several years, but did not enter. Yet, they were at little risk for losing the land as it was often poor for farming and little desired by other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Soil Class*</th>
<th>Average Age at Entry (years)</th>
<th>Average Area Broken at Homestead Patent Application (acres)</th>
<th>Average Area in Crop Annually (acres)</th>
<th>Average Number of Horses/year</th>
<th>Average Number of Cattle/year</th>
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<td>before 1901</td>
<td>3 or 4</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>none patent</td>
<td>none patent</td>
<td>none patent</td>
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<td>30.5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>10.9</td>
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<td>21.6</td>
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Source: Homestead Files

* soil class on the homestead

Table 1: Breaking, crops and livestock holdings of Métis homesteaders, 1879-1906.
homesteaders (Lautier 1973). It was considered that if delayed entry for poor land that had been held for some time explained the entries for poor land then the Métis who entered for poor land, and who would have lived in the area for several years, would have been older than those who took better farmland. Table 2 shows that this was sometimes the case; on average, entrants for class 5 or 6 land were older than those who took class 3 or 4 land. Still, the data showed that some younger Métis took poor land; delayed entry by older settlers who had lived on land but who had not entered for it did not fully explain the pattern.
Thus, there is no clear evidence that poor land was selected, especially after 1907, for raising livestock. The slightly greater number of animals owned by those on poor land may have resulted from their recognition that the land was only good for raising livestock as much as it may have reflected a choice of land to raise livestock. Moreover, delayed entry did not fully explain the pattern. On the contrary, as shown in Figure 10, clusters of Métis settlers developed, around those who had entered by 1905, and around those who had settled in 1906. It is contended that Métis settlers sought land that was near other Métis people and thus clustered. Because of the location of earlier clusters, usually in the valley where some land was relatively good but other land was poor, and because other settlers arrived and took better land, some Métis had to choose poor land to remain near other Métis people.

The amount of good land available elsewhere declined too, though land that was at least class 3, and nearer to a railway, remained available for many years, if homesteaders will willing to disperse and take land where they could. Again, it appeared that many Métis preferred to stay in a community, with other Métis, rather than to take land, that would have had greater economic advantages, elsewhere. These preferences, to locate with other Métis, led them to locate within the community and, it appeared, to locate alongside other Métis, even if this meant taking less than optimal land.

Table 2: Breaking, crops and livestock holdings of Métis homesteaders, 1907-1910.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Soil Class*</th>
<th>Average Age at Entry (years)</th>
<th>Average Area Broken at Homestead Patent Application (acres)</th>
<th>Average Area in Crop Annually at Homestead Patent Application (acres)</th>
<th>Average Number of Horses/year</th>
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<td>18.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
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<td>41.8</td>
<td>25.1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Average soil class of homesteaders’ entries, average land use statistics calculated for homestead land quality
Source: Homestead files
The advantages of taking land at Willow Bunch and clustering, to be near other Métis, were likely enhanced by the possibility of remaining with others who were known, or at least who came from common places. Figures 11 and 12 show the origins of the Métis who were at Willow Bunch in 1901. Because of the high turnover, especially during the 1880s, the community in 1901 differed substantially from that of 1870-1871. However, again, most adults came from a few common origins: many were born in Saint François Xavier. Some were born at Saint Norbert and Winnipeg/Saint Boniface. Many more were descendants of families who had spent time at Wood Mountain/Willow Bunch and were born at Wood Mountain or Willow Bunch. Only a few were born at Pembina, Cypress Hills or at various other locations in the Northwest.
Certainly, there remained factors at Red River that promoted emigration. Farming conditions continued to be poor, land titles were insecure and some may have sold their land at Red River during the boom at Winnipeg during the early 1880s (Mailhot and Sprague 1985, 4; Flanagan 1991). But, this pattern of origins, with many coming from a few places, suggests that many people who settled at Willow Bunch may have known each other before they migrated to the community. Recollections suggest that at least a few came through processes of chain migration, to join relatives, and to ranch (Price 1959, 271; Willow Bunch Historical Society 1998, 419, 512). Those who were born at Willow Bunch were returning to a community where they had been before. Others appeared to gravitate to the community where other Métis had settled (Price 1959, 271). On the other hand, as the

Figure 12: Birthplaces of Métis children at Willow Bunch, 1901.

Number of Children (0-17 years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba (undifferentiated)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Northwest (undifferentiated)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (undifferentiated)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Morin 1998, 1901 manuscript census, Métis scrip claims
Métis people were very mobile at this time, many who were not from the most common birthplaces, may, despite their dispersed origins, have come into contact with each other prior to settling; they too may have come through the process of chain migration. Still, in all cases, by the time the Métis at Willow Bunch took land, they were well acquainted and many had intermarried.

Remaining near family was another advantage of persisting at Willow Bunch. Figures 13 and 14 show links between family members, within the community. Like the Métis population at Batoche, the map reveals that most Métis at Willow Bunch were related (Payment 1986; Rivard and Littlejohn 2003, 20). In fact, very few who were at Willow Bunch in 1910 could not be linked to another Métis settler, as parents and offspring or

\[ \text{Figure 13: Links between Métis parents and children at Willow Bunch, 1910.} \]
through marriage before or after settlement. On the other hand, within the settlement, some families clustered, with most members having taken land near one another, but many had dispersed, with family members having taken land at some distance from each other. This pattern appeared unusual as many studies of ethnic settlement have shown a tendency for families to take land together. However, at Willow Bunch, typically, members of the senior generation had chosen land in the early years of settlement, and had taken poor land, along the edge of the valley and on its walls, for raising livestock. On the other hand, some of their offspring, who entered in 1906 and afterwards chose better land, even if it meant locating at some distance from family. Still, the clusters that developed over the next years were not necessarily family based clusters; members of several families grouped together. It appeared that while family and common origins may

**Figure 14: Links between Métis in-laws at Willow Bunch, 1910.**

Sources: Homestead Files
Saskatchewan Land Titles
Township Registers
1901 manuscript census
Morin, 1998
have added to the incentive to stay at Willow Bunch and that while within the community settling near other Métis was a priority, it was not crucial to settle directly alongside family or beside others from common places.

Finally, although clusters developed, unlike some other groups, such as the Ukrainians who clustered along religious lines (Lehr 1999), there appeared to be no other factors that led to segregation within the community. Most of the Métis who came to Willow Bunch, like their compatriots elsewhere, were Roman Catholic. Rivard and Littlejohn (2003, 20) traced 23 families back to Saint François Xavier in 1827. Nineteen of these families were headed by Roman Catholics and four were headed by Protestants. However, the 1901 census identified all Métis at Willow Bunch as Roman Catholic (Canada 1901). Thus, it was assumed that all Métis were Roman Catholic when they entered for land. At the same time, family names indicated that, while most Métis at Willow Bunch were French Métis, some were English. However, these differences of origins did not lead to segregation within the community. This, perhaps, is not surprising. Although English and French Métis were initially separate and worked for different trading companies, the two communities had begun to integrate in the early years of the fur trade (Clarke 1997). Moreover, English and French Métis at Willow Bunch had intermarried, both before and after they arrived in the community (Métis scrip, Morin, 1998).

The lack of segregation by religion, by French or English background, or by family at Willow Bunch suggested that the Métis had developed a cohesive community. Entering for land near other Métis people was of prime importance. The Métis forewent better land elsewhere to remain with their people at Willow Bunch. Within the community they also took land alongside other Métis even though better land was available, at some distance from other Métis people, but still within the settlement. The social advantages of settling with members of a common ethnic group are well documented. At Willow Bunch, like in other communities, these advantages likely contributed to the pattern of land selection. However, at Willow Bunch, this tendency may have been enhanced by the arrival of large numbers of Francophones and other homesteaders. Shortly after the turn of the century, and especially after 1906, Francophones came to dominate the culture of the community. Activities at Willow Bunch shifted from those reflecting Métis culture to those centered around French Canadian organizations, such as the Saint-Jean Baptiste, the Chevaliers de Colombe, the Dames de Sainte Anne, the Congrégation des Enfants de Marie and the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne. These organizations were foreign to the Métis. Moreover, and likely more importantly, these organizations often excluded them.
At the same time, racism appeared with the Francophones’ and other settlers’ arrival (Préfontaine, Young, Paquin and Dorion 2003). The development of clusters of Métis, and the selection of land to be alongside other Métis, even if it carried significant economic disadvantages was likely an effect of, and a response to the coming of a new culture that marginalized and excluded the Métis. Even the land selections in 1906, which were for better land, and that at times involved settling at some distance from co-nationals, did not fully contradict this pattern. Most of these selections were ahead of the general settlement frontier and were made before the Métis were surrounded by other homesteaders.

Still, the Métis settlement at Willow Bunch displays several characteristics that were typical of prairie ethnic settlements. The settlement was largely of families, of people from common origins, and of people who knew each other. Those who settled at Willow Bunch had initially hunted together, but the decline of the buffalo had forced them to settle or to take up and alternate activity. When they settled, they settled together. Though situations have differed, many groups of settlements have displayed similar tendencies; families, people from common origins and acquaintances often settled together on the prairie frontier. Chain and gravitational migration were common processes that brought these settlements together, and they contributed to bringing the Métis together at Willow Bunch. Moreover, the Métis’ preference to stay in the area, despite its economic disadvantages, is not unlike other groups. Several groups have settled together, and later comers have joined existing settlements, because of the social advantages of settling with family, acquaintances and countryfolk, even if settling alongside those they knew and co-nationals meant settling in a less than optimal area.

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Endnotes

1. Schlichtmann (1977) reviewed numerous factors affecting ethnic group location in Western Canada. These factors are usually addressed in work on ethnic settlement.

2. For example of settlers at Pembina Mountain, Manitoba see Richtik (1985), for Scots see Lewry (1986), for Germans and Scandinavians see Boyd (1989), for Swedes see Ostergren (1998), for Ukrainians see Lehr (1999), for Francophones see Hamilton (2007).

3. Prices for buffalo robes rose from $3.00 in 1846, to $3.50 in 1856, and to between $5.50 and $6.00 in the 1870s (Hildebrandt and Hubner 1994, 36).

4. Secondary sources debate whether or not this move, of a group of Métis occurred, and debate the number of Métis involved (Légaré c. 1914, n.p.; Rondeau 1923, 12, 30; Chabot 1970, 225; Potyondi 1995, 29-30).

5. Pakan, for example, provided protection from the Blackfoot, a First Nation with whom the Métis were not friendly (Ironside & Tomasky 1971, 20). On the other hand, Sainte Anne was situated “… deep in the country of the Crees and Assiniboines, where it could escape the frequent clashes between the Crees
and Assiniboines, on one hand, and their age-old enemies, the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy, on the other” (Moodie 1965, 36).

6. Secondary sources usually mention Saint François Xavier as the origin of the Willow Bunch Métis (Rondeau 1923 12, 30; Rivard and Littlejohn 2003).

7. This finding concurs with others. For example, Payment (1986) found that many who settled at Batoche were related.

8. Specifics regarding the migrants’ background at Red River were not traced.

9. Surveyors’ field notes, township plans and homestead entries show that many Métis settled in the late 1800s, although they did not enter for land until the early 1900s.

10. Later homestead claims suggested that between 1879 and 1886 the Métis consistently settled on class 6 land at Willow Bunch.

11. Likely both maps are incomplete. In the winter of 1880, Father Saint Germain recorded thirty families in the area (Rondeau 1923, 106). In 1886, there were forty or fifty people in the community (Légaré 1886, L.B. 114778). The transiency in the community and the use of the homestead files and surveyor plans influence the incompleteness of the maps.

12. Immigrants’ transfer of aspects of the cultural landscape is a traditional interest of cultural geography. Mannion (1974), for example, examined Irish migrants’ transfer of various aspects of their material culture to Canada.

13. Land was held for the Qu’Appelle Long Lake and Saskatchewan Railway until 1902 (Porter 1902, L.B. 400831).

14. These statistics are the average quality of the land entered for by each Métis homesteader.

15. As they followed the few remaining buffalo.

16. Rivard and Littlejohn (2003, 20) described the community as a group of extended relatives in their history of the Willow Bunch Métis.

17. For example, Lewry (1986) or Richtik (1985).


20. A similar pattern was noticed by Pyée (2005) in her thesis on Notre Dame de Lourdes and Saint Claude, Manitoba.

21. Many studies of prairie settlement have noted the extent of chain migration and its importance in forming ethnic bloc settlements. For an example of Swedes see Ostergren (1979), for Icelanders see Richtik (1986), for those previously resident in the United States see Widdis (1997), for Ukrainians see Lehr (1996), for French see Sylvestre (1997) and Pyée (2005).

22. A similar pattern is evident in other ethnic group settlements. In order to remain near co-nationals and those they knew, settlers often took up poorer land than what might be available elsewhere. For an example of Jews see Fox (1979, 83), for Ukrainians see Lehr (1985 and 1999, 355), for Fins see Pedersen (2004, 39-41).