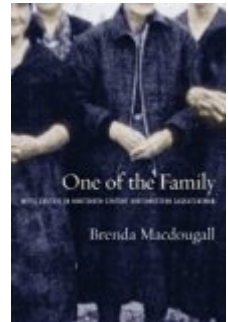


Brenda Macdougall. *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan.* Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010. xxii + 335 pp. \$94.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7748-1729-5.



Reviewed by Venetia Boehmer-Plotz

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Commissioned by Stephanie Bangarth (King's University College, UWO)

For years historians have studied the connection between the fur trade and the Metis community, and until now the story of the Red River settlement has remained central to that discussion. In a meticulously crafted study of the connections between the Metis families of the Sakitawak (Île à la Crosse) region of Saskatchewan, Brenda Macdougall adds richness to a familiar story by extending the focus of her study from the geographic, temporal, and cultural preeminence of Red River in historical discourse. *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* challenges the idea that external forces such as the fur trade, the Roman Catholic Church, and nationalist movements shaped Metis identity; rather, Macdougall proposes that it was fostered through their social relationships according to *wahkootowin*, a Cree term meaning, “a worldview that privileged relatedness to land, people (living, ancestral, and those to come), the spirit world, and creatures inhabiting the space” (p. 3). Put simply, family is defined through broad relatedness with all beings, and it is through these

relationships that the Metis of Sakitawak actively established their connections with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and the church and secured their identity.

In order to understand the structure of the Metis community and the interplay of *wahkootowin* and local circumstances, Macdougall makes use of a range of sources, including scrip applications, parish registries, journals, correspondence, and post and employment data from HBC post records. Through cross-referencing, she constructs a comprehensive genealogy of the English River District and focuses on five generational cohorts between 1800 and 1912. She examines the latter four cohorts in greater detail due to the availability of sources and the emergence of strong identity patterns that reflected “a society different from, but compatible with, that of their ancestors” (p. 248). The chapters unfold thematically, rather than chronologically, exposing the layers of the narrative and emphasizing the interconnectedness of the community. The extensive use of maps and genealogical charts helps

to guide the reader through the story. Chapter 1 offers a useful introduction to the geographic region, a borderland of Cree and Dene territories that allowed for competitive trade predicated on family connections. It is from this position that Macdougall understands the introduction of white traders into the local ecology. She follows the development of the Metis family in chapter 2, studying naming practices to show how surnames, given names, saint names, and Aboriginal names incorporated paternal (European) relations, yet established familial connections and ancestral continuity in the spirit of *wahkootowin*. In chapter 3, Macdougall disputes the legacy of highly descriptive travel narratives, which touted masculine perceptions of Metis life and romanticized a society “perpetually in motion” with men hunting furs, transporting goods, and chasing buffalo (p. 93). Instead, she classifies Metis movements as “well-defined” and framed within “the maternal legacy of homeland” (p. 126). To be sure, men helped to define the Sakitawak community through the use of their surnames, which signified family alliances. In turn, these families were linked to specific economic activities in distinct areas and helped to define the local Metis communities. Chapter 4 examines the connection between acculturation and religion; Macdougall outlines the appeal of Roman Catholicism and its continuity with the existing *wahkootowin* values. As a result, church rituals and celebrations soon came to indicate membership or exclusion from the Metis family. Chapter 5 studies how employment in the HBC was essential to the Metis cultural identity, showing how group labor and intermarriage among trader families provided a support network and cemented a sense of family. Finally, in chapters 6 and 7 Macdougall contends with the uncertainty of contested space and traces the ways in which the Metis community negotiated the tensions between the HBC and the Roman Catholic Church. The ongoing assertion of self-determination and the ability to influence, at least in part, trade relations and politics, points to the

strength of *wahkootowin*. In a nuanced approach to studying the impact of colonialism, *One of the Family* recognizes the prominence of European institutions in Metis history without overlooking community agency in negotiating the competing external forces.

Macdougall pieces together a thought-provoking narrative that brings life to genealogical reconstruction. She provides a thorough discussion of the historiography and the complex conceptual and historical issues related to her study, yet her work remains clear and accessible, complete with a glossary for those unfamiliar with the terminology. Furthermore, she carefully chooses to use the contemporary, Anglicized or Indigenized, spellings of surnames in order to ensure that their descendants find her work useful. Macdougall’s clever approach to naming also marks important distinctions in the landscape. She privileges Indigenous place names in areas important to the Metis community and uses French and English names to mark the presence of external institutions, showing how *wahkootowin* expressed itself in toponymy. The result is an impressive work that traces the emergence of the Metis community “as an expression of Aboriginality” (p. 56). *One of the Family* emerges as a welcome and much-needed contribution to the field and should serve as a valuable framework for future research. Both captivating and rigorous, this book is sure to engage scholars interested in Aboriginal-newcomer relations and Metis identity studies.

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