

Michif Foodways

A Remembrance by Elder Sandra Houle

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Our people mainly ate wild game and berries that grew in the local area. They grew gardens; they ate ducks, geese, grouse, partridge, muskrats, beaver, grey squirrels, porcupines, raccoon, deer, rabbits, and so on.

In the summer, ducks were the main meat that was served because they were eaten fresh. There were ducks in the lakes and sloughs; people would go and shoot ducks and cook them up. They were either boiled with salt pork, or you could make soup with them. The soup was usually *rababoo*, an oatmeal soup, but sometimes they used rice or macaroni. The ducks were also roasted and sometimes stuffed. They also fried the duck after it was boiled.

Partridge, geese, grouse, muskrats, beaver, raccoon, porcupines, and squirrels were usually roasted. Deer was roasted or fried in bacon grease. Deer meat was also canned in quart jars and saved for hard times or summertime, when fresh meat was not available. In the winter, there were ice boxes to keep meat. In the winter, rabbits could be snared, and deer could also be hunted.

Summer was kind of a bad time for fresh meat because it spoiled without electricity and a fridge. Also, you really couldn't hunt in the summertime, except for ducks. In the spring, fish were caught when they were spawning, and the fish were smoked. In the summer, people also caught fish to eat. The heads of the northern pike were boiled and used to make rice soup. Also in the spring, *poul do* (mud hen) eggs were gathered and eaten.

Morel mushrooms were gathered in the spring of the year. They were dried for later use if they were plentiful. People made gardens and canned the vegetables, and they picked berries and made sauce with them. The berries were also dried to cook later. Juneberry pie is one of our traditional foods.

Berry sauces were sometimes eaten with cream, and you dipped your bread in the sauce. Some of the sauces, such as Juneberry sauce, were used for pies. The berries were boiled and canned in quart jars, so when it was time for pie, you just opened a jar of berries, put them in a dipper on the stove, and heated them to a boil. You could thicken the berries with either cornstarch or flour, then make the pie.

Meat pies were also made. If there was leftover meat from a meal, which wasn't that often, you could always stretch it and use what was leftover for a pie. Store bread was a treat for our people if you had money. Since we usually didn't have money, everyone had homemade bread, gullet, biscuits, loaf bread, bangs, *gullet di vaen*—which was gullet made from yeast bread—and buns. Canned meats such as hams, potted meat, corned beef, corned beef hash, and canned chicken were sometimes eaten if you could buy them. Since we didn't have electricity, we couldn't store meat, so canned was easier if fresh wasn't available.

Buying fresh meat from town didn't happen often, except in the summertime. Hamburger we probably got once a month. Ham wasn't so bad for the summer if you could afford it because a person could buy a ham and keep it for a couple of days if it was kept cool.

A lot of our foods were boiled. My grandpa used to make boiling beef and potatoes. They would also boil ham and potatoes. Some people also raised chickens and butchered them when they needed to.

Another source of meat was tripe—great for soup. There was a slaughterhouse about 1½ to 2 miles south of Rolla, and our people used to get tripe from there. They also got ox tails and made ox tail soup. If a pig was butchered, they would hang the pig and take all the blood to make blood sausage. *Boulllets*, bangs, and pie—mostly Juneberry pie—and *la puchin* (boiled pudding) were the traditional New Year's foods.

When you went to visit somewhere, you were always fed. It didn't matter where you went to visit, you were given hot coffee or tea and a lunch. Sometimes lunch was just sauce and cream with bread, bread and jelly, or pie.

People sometimes went out to the prairie to look for *le na voo*, which were wild turnips. They are great in soup.

Another thing that was (and still is) a snack with our people is what some called “round-and-round” which is peanut butter and syrup mixed together. Most people used Karo syrup bought in gallon pails.

Armour lard was used to fry bangs. Sometimes, if we couldn't afford to buy it, we used rendered lard made from melted pork fat. The fat that wouldn't melt was used to make *gwar-toons* (cracklings). Almost everyone made jams and jellies from fruit and berries that were picked locally. You could also make syrup from the berries.

Homemade Michif ice cream was made from snow during the winter—a real treat. A person used snow, evaporated milk, sugar, and vanilla to make the ice cream. It was not really ice cream, but was rather a nice mix that kind of had the texture of ice cream. The good thing was that if you put too much liquid in the snow, or if the snow got too runny, you could add more snow to thicken it up.

A remembrance by Sandra Houle, Elder, 2009.

Biographies

Sandra Rose Houle (Turtle Mountain Chippewa/Red River Metis) was born November 13, 1959, in Belcourt, ND, to Sam Ferris and Ida Swain. She was lovingly raised by her mother and Oscar Houle in Belcourt and completed her education there before attending college.

Sandra was united in marriage to Edward Houle on October 9, 1978, in Bottineau, ND. Together, they had three children: Corbet, Eric, and Lane.

Sandra enjoyed listening to “old time” music, beading, sewing, and guitar. She loved time spent with her family members, especially her grandchildren, and time with her friends.

She worked as a teacher throughout the years, teaching the Michif language and culture to many children and adults in schools, college, and privately throughout the Turtle Mountain area. She was working with the Prairie to Woodlands Language Consortium on a book to teach the language when she passed away.

Sandra Rose Houle: November 13, 1959 - July 21, 2020



Kade Ferris is a professional anthropologist and historian, working for various tribal groups throughout the upper Midwest to promote historic preservation and cultural resource management. He is the author of six books about Metis history and culture and maintains the Dibaajimowin blog and Turtle Mountain Chippewa Heritage Center websites.
