

TALK GIVEN BY DR. JOHN BROSSÉAU, NOVEMBER 1980

First of all, I'd like to tell you what a pleasure it is to be here with you this evening. I hope that what I have to say to you is informative. I hope I don't tell you too many lies but I see there's a few people here with grey hair who might be able to correct any errors.

I think when one comes to talk about one's ancestors one must be very, very careful, because those in the audience might say "What a braggart that individual is" or "What tall stories he tells". I know full well that there are many other pioneers in the St. Albert region other than my grandfather. However, I have not had the privilege to meet many of them. I never did meet my grandfather either. I am the youngest son of his youngest son so there's quite a gap between the two of us. I was born in 1940, my grandfather, Edmund Brosseau, died in 1917.

Now, what I'll tell you tonight is information that I've gathered from basically two sources; written documents which I saw in history books, items of history and information that I picked up by way of family stories, family history, family folklore. When you get information like that from the family, you always get biased information. They always tell you the good things about the guy. They never tell you all of the bad things so if you know "bad things" about him, well okay.... but they haven't told me about them.

I'd like to speak about Edmund Brosseau in probably 3 or 4 different way. I've broken my talk into sections and the first one I'd like to talk about is the roots: the roots of our family as I know them to exist. The first Brosseau, of the same family family of which I am a member, who came to Canada, came in the year 1668. They came from the city of Nantes, in the province of Brittany. They settled in an area of Quebec known as LaPrairie. LaPrairie is south and east of Montreal and that area is now known as Brossard and is a suburb of Montreal I believe.

The Brosseau family, at least my ancestors, lived in LaPrairie for 8 generations before there was another migration. In other words, 175 years before they migrated. To the best of my knowledge, they were farmers. They tilled the land, they looked after cattle and many of them apparently, were killed in altercations with the Indians in that area. That is why the name Brosseau is not very common even in Quebec. The name Brousseau - spelled with a 'u', is much, much more common but there are not many Brosseaus.

I do not know of any of the members of that family that accomplished anything really outstanding in their life. They could have done these things but I'm not aware of it. I know there is a school in Brossard named Jean Brosseau School. Now who that's named after, I'm not sure.

The next topic I'd like to talk about is the migration. ANTOINE BROSSÉAU, Edmund's father, moved his family from LaPrairie, Quebec, to Platsburg, New York in 1845 and there were four members of the family. They had four children; a son and three daughters. EDMUND HECTOR was the son. He was born in 1843 in LaPrairie. Apparently he lived with his parents until about age 21. I don't know anything about his youth but I suspect, as many people at that time did, they lived with their parents, they helped around the farm or whatever. I really don't know what he did.

The first item of history that I have on Edmund, other than his birth, is in about 1864 when he volunteered and joined the American Army, the Union Forces. As you will recall, this was the time of the Civil War in the United States and it was not uncommon for Canadians to go and fight as mercenaries in the American Army.

That is where the term "Canuck" comes from. You may have heard that. It was generally referring specifically to French-speaking Canadians who went as mercenaries to fight on the side of the Union Forces. I'm not sure whether or not my grandfather was a mercenary because he might have been an American citizen. As a matter of fact, I think he had dual citizenship. I think he had both American and Canadian citizenship.

He was with the 2nd Regiment of the New York Veteran Cavalry. He was a scout and I have a copy of his discharge papers which I can show you. His career in the army was not an illustrious one. He received no medals, he was no hero. He was not wounded, he was not shot, and I don't know that he ever shot anyone himself. I do have one story however, about his episodes in the army and I call this "the Dysentery Story" and if you've ever heard of dysentery, it's the worst case of diarrhea you can imagine. Well apparently, Edmund, one day, went on muster parade. He wasn't feeling well and the doctor diagnosed him as having dysentery and he gave him a box of pills which apparently were going to cure this dysentery. Well, Edmund couldn't read, he couldn't write and so with his probably rather primitive logic thought "Well, if one pill will help me, the whole box will do me a hell of lot of good" so he took the whole box of pills. Well, they never saw Edmund for a few days, they lost him. I guess his superiors probably figured he had deserted the army ...ran away. (I guess with the dysentery, he was doing a lot of running). The story goes that some good Samaritan coming along the trail or path saw a horse standing there grazing, saddle on, no rider, so the guy, being curious, looked around and found this soldier lying there unconscious. He was still alive though. He took him into their home, kept him for a few days. He came back to life more or less and recovered and reported back to his officers saying, "No I hadn't deserted. I got really sick and I was laid up for a few days." Apparently, the doctor said he must have the constitution of a horse to survive all of that medicine he took. Nevertheless, he survived. One can always wonder if that's a true story or not. Maybe he did desert for a few days and then changed his mind but that's the story that is told.

The next episode is what I chose to call "TRAVELS WITH EDMUND". He was a wanderer. He had wanderlust. He couldn't stay still too long.

He was discharged from the army of the United States in 1865, so he was in the army there for about one year. He took a ship from New York City, down the Eastern seaboard of the United States, around Florida down close to Mexico and eventually to the area which we know today as Panama. There he took a train across the isthmus of Panama where the Panama Canal is. He picked up another ship of the east coast of Central America and came back north to California to the California gold fields. He loved the thought of getting rich and he figured he was going to get rich by striking gold like many perhaps of your ancestors.

Well, we've all heard about the California gold rush. A lot of people got there; a lot of people dug for gold; a few got very, very rich but most of them didn't make anything at all. He didn't strike it rich to my information. I never heard of him striking it rich in any event. After awhile, wandering around the goldfields, eating dust and digging dirt, he decided it was time to go and see his dad. His dad had moved in the meantime from Plattsburg, New York. I guess his dad liked the thought of finding gold too because he was in Quesnell, B.C. That was the area of the Caribou goldrush. So Edmund went up there to visit his dad and, I believe, one of his sisters was up there also. She was married to a chap named Green.

Well, Edmund tried his luck in the goldfields of the Caribou and I don't think he found too much gold because he didn't stick around there too long. He stayed there apparently, until about 1872. His father, Antoine Brosseau, is buried in Quesnell.

I don't know when he died but apparently he is buried in the graveyard in Quesnell.

Edmund left Quesnell, or the Caribou goldfields, looking for gold again and he came back in a westerly direction. We don't know where he travelled exactly but we do have five reference points where we can say he was at a certain place. The first place he was talked about was bathing or having a swim in a very, very hot pool so it is assumed that was Miette Hot Springs. As a matter of fact, they say he referred to it as Pocohantas and if you see it along the highway, they make reference to Pocohantas.

He was then moving up into the Peace River country. We know he was around the Slave Lake area for awhile and he finally came out of the bush or his wandering at a place called Goodfish Lake which is north and east of the town of Smokey Lake about 40 miles or so and there he met a surveyor by the name of PETER ERASMUS; quite a historical figure in Alberta and he bartered with Peter Erasmus. Edmund had a little bit of gold so he must have found something someplace. His boots were completely torn and tattered and he wanted to get some moccasins from Peter Erasmus. Erasmus said, "Look, you've travelled like an Indian all over the country so you might as well learn to live like one" and he gave him the moccasins.

Shortly thereafter, probably in a matter of days or so, he landed up at Whitefish Lake which is only a few miles from Goodfish Lake. He met a man by the name of HENRY BIRD STEINHAUER. This chap was our former Lt. Governor's grandfather; Ralph Steinhauer's grandfather. So in other words, his grandfather and my grandfather met at that time which is about 1872-1873. He stayed with Steinhauer, I guess for a few days because in one account that I've read they say he was near exhaustion and he almost bit the dust when he got there. Steinhauer looked after him for a period of time, gave him a horse and told him about St. Albert. He said, "There's people there from Quebec. There's some French people there who speak French like you do and maybe you'd like to go and meet with them and join with them".

So he had a horse and started coming this way. Another thing I hear about it is he didn't want to take the horse from Steinhauer. He said, "You don't know me. How do you know you'll ever get the horse back?" but Steinhauer said "You can have the horse. I know you'll send it back." I think that exemplifies much of the spirit of our pioneers who trusted one another a lot more. When you borrowed something, you got it back and there was a lot more faith in one another and willingness to help one another.

He continued on his journey and started moving back in a westerly direction. In other words, he went all the way around St. Albert. Instead of coming straight here he went away north to Slave Lake up towards the St. Paul region and then moved this way along the Saskatchewan River and he panned for gold and tried to find some gold in that area. (I have his gold scale but I don't think it was weighing the gold he found. When he became a merchant, I think he purchased it.)

As he came in this direction from the east, he stopped at a place called Fort Victoria which is immediately south of Smokey Lake on the Saskatchewan River and it is also known as Pakan. He met a group of Indians who were camped along the river. He gave them the horse that Steinhauer had lent him and said, "Return it to Steinhauer." So Steinhauer got his white horse back. Apparently everyone seems to remember it was a white horse.

He worked his way along the Saskatchewan River, panning for gold here and there, and eventually came towards Edmonton and came to St. Albert, He took out his homestead here immediately west about a mile or 2 miles down the road. He had a $\frac{1}{4}$ section homestead there. That was in 1873 that he took out the homestead.

The next part of the story which I want to tell you is probably generally not told. This is the story of Julie, his wife, She, I think, had a profound influence on his life and often is not mentioned. JULIE L'HIRONDELLE was born in Grouard in the Slave Lake area in 1840. In 1863, she married a chap by the name of WENCELAUS BRUNNEAU and they had one daughter, CATHERINE. I knew Catherine as a young boy, She was my "Tante Catherine". She was in her 90's when I remember her. Wencelaus Brunneau died very suddenly, apparently, in 1865 and in 1875, ten years later, she married Edmund and they had eight children; 5 of whom lived to adulthood; the other died as infants. The oldest was EDMUND, JR. who was born in 1878, and then there was a daughter, MARIE LOUISE who was born in 1880. JOSEPH was born in 1882, JEAN BAPTISTE was born in 1884 and my father, ALPHONSE was born in 1890.

Julie L'Hirondelle was native. I don't know specifically what the blood lines were; I can't say she was a full-blooded Indian, or 75% or 50% or whatever but in our family we always regarded her as being native, I assume a pure blood Indian. My dad and his brothers and sister were always regarded by us as being half-breed or Metis. I regard myself as Metis. In school tho' I learned very quickly - I was French!

I think, as I mentioned earlier, Julie may have been much responsible for Edmund's success. She spoke 3 languages: English, French and Cree. All of her children spoke 3 languages; English, French and Cree. I can remember going hunting with my father as a young boy and he had a friend who he went hunting with. His name was LOUIS BEAUREGARD; he had relatives around here, the Bouregard family. They never spoke any language that anyone could ever follow. They spoke Cree but they didn't know a lot of the Cree words or couldn't remember it or whatever so they'd throw in the French word and sometimes they didn't know the French word so they'd throw in the English word. It was a real muddle but they had no problems in communicating.

Louis Beauregard, I believe, was a cousin or a 2nd cousin of my dad's. He was an interesting character. He had a little farm about a mile north of St. Paul but he used to work for the Chinaman in town. They had a little place they called Hong Kong or Shanghai. It was a gambling den. There was the restaurant and in the back there was a little chicken coop and up on top of that they had the gambling den. Louis used to keep track of the pots. In other words, every pot, the house got 10% and Louis used to look after that. I remember he bought a farm, a small farm, and he borrowed money from my dad to buy it. He paid my dad off and you know how he paid him off? In nickels, dimes and quarters and he used to bring them in the baking powder cans, those old blue baking powder tins full of money. Everyone in town knew it was going on including the local MLA: he use to go and play there too. All illegal but it was never raided.

Getting back to Julie, I think she forged that link between the Brosseaus and the Indians and the Metis so that we could move easily between the 3 cultures; the white culture, the Metis culture and the Indian culture and my father-in-law, Louis Belland, who lived in the St. Paul area said, "You Brosseaus had the best of all worlds." and maybe he was right. This was his observation about 10 or 15 yrs. ago because much of the work that had been done on the farms in the settlement out at Brosseau had been done by native people who had been hired to do the work.

Going back to Julie, according to what I heard, she was a very good mother and looked after her children very, very well. She cared for them greatly and she was apparently an extremely religious person. She went to Mass every morning come rain, shine, cold, sleet, whatever, Not all of her children inherited that same devotion or faith; only one, from my observation, and that was my father, Alphonse. He had an extremely deep faith, loved his family very, very dearly and profoundly, more than anything else he drove into me and I think my brothers and sisters, the dignity of people. How every person, every man, every woman, no matter how old, how young, how good looking,

how ugly, how fat, how skinney they are, deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. I think I've succeeded a bit in life and I think if anything, that lesson may have been a reason why I succeeded perhaps the way I have.

The other characteristic that Julie passed on to her children and we'll see as the generations go, what happens to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren, is longevity, Julie lived til 92. Her daughter, Catherine, lived to 98, and her daughter, Marie Louise lived to 96. The males in the family weren't so fortunate. They died at a young age, 83, 82 and 92 except for Edmund Jr, who was the oldest. He died at a relatively young age, He had some dort of diabetes or something. I'm not sure, but he died at an early age. But the others all lived long lives and today, among my brothers and sisters, we seem to all be very healthy. No one's ever sick. There seems to be almost little or no disease or illness. Why that is the case, I don't know.

Let's look at EDMUND THE MERCHANT. This is probably what he's known as more than anything else and he started his career as a merchant here in St. Albert in 1889 when the Hudson Bay store closed here in that year. He started in part of NARCISSE BEAUDRY's house which was on 16th Street and St. Vital Ave. (16 St. Vital Ave.) and the next year apparently, he built his own store at the north side of the old bridge.

Incidentally, I have a picture from a Montreal newspaper - 1898 - advertising his store. This was found in Perron's Store, They were tearing it down 5 or 10 years ago. Someone found this in there and sent it to me. It came to me about 10 years ago. From the Montreal Star, Thursday August 18th, 1898 and it was sent to FRANK BROSSEAU in St. Albert, Frank Brosseau was Edmund's cousin who came up here. FRANCIS XAVIER BROSSEAU.

Price 1¢ - newspapers cost 1¢. Here's the beaver and it says 'From Edmund Brosseau, dealer in dry goods, groceries, ready made clothing, gent's furnishings, hats, caps, boots, shoes, etc, St. Albert, Alberta.' So he had that in the Montreal Star many, many years ago.

In 1900, he sold the store in St. Albert to HEBERT and PERRON and moved to Edmonton and opened up a store kitty-corner from where the Mac Hotel is and he stayed there not too long - apparently for 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 years and sold out his share to a fellow by the name of Mr. Lessard who later became Senator Lessard who some of you may have heard of.

Now Edmund, and perhaps some of the old-timers here remember stories about him. This is one story that was told to me by J.C. McGregor. He's written many historical books, He told me, "This is a story that you should tell. It's true. It happened in St. Albert and I've got the names".

This story about Edmund Brosseau takes place in in the hamlet of St. Albert in about 1895. The scene is the local school and an address is being given by R.B. Bennett, a strong Progressive Conservative who later became the prime minister of Canada in the early 1930's. Mr. Bennett, according to my source, was a strong, waspish character. He was in St. Albert trying to get some support for Progressive Conservative cause from the local French Canadians. Things haven't changed much. The Progressive Conservatives have been trying to get support from French Canadians for 100 years and haven't made much of an impact, at least in Quebec.

I guess at that time there was a tremendous rivalry in the west between the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives. They were fighting each other tooth and nail and hated each other just like poison. Apparently, very early in the presentation, Bennett was talking about St. Albert: "Oh what a nice church you have" and "How nice

the French people are" and How he loved them. Edmund jumps up, shouted out, "Shut up and cut out your lying!" At that point Bennett got a little upset and said, "Brosseau, I've heard about you. You're a trouble-maker and you sit down and shut up." So Edmund decided the guy got the best of him so he sat down and shut up for a little while. Then I guess, Edmund noticed that Bennett was speaking in very, very simple English, like 'How - are - you'; not using any big words at all. Edmund jumped up again and said, "You know, you can speak a regular English and use big words. We can understand it."

At that point they got into a debate back and forth and insulted each other a few times and finally Edmund sat down. I guess Bennett had got the best of him again. As soon as Edmund sat there there was a hell of a commotion. There was a guy, I think his name was the old man Pepin who was epileptic and everyone in the community knew he was epileptic except for Bennett. Well, he has a seizure right in the front row. Four guys grab ahold of the old man Pepin and haul him out. Edmund was up on his feet again as soon as the commotion settled down and Bennett was starting to talk again after they got the old man Pepin out. As soon as he started Edmund got up on his feet again. "You've already killed one man. I'm sure we're not going to sit here and let you kill another one of us." At this point he said, "I think we've all had enough. Let's go have a drink." and apparently that was the end of the political meeting and I don't know that Mr. Bennett got any more votes. That apparently is a legitimate story. Perhaps some of you have heard it.

A little thing I'd like to throw in here is EDMUND THE BANKER. He was a banker too but he didn't have any building. He had it in his suitcase, I guess. The banks then were no different than they are today. They would lend money to people who didn't need the money but would not lend money to the poor guy who didn't have any security. So Edmund became the intermediary. He would lend money to those people who couldn't get it from the banks. But Edmund was also a shrewd businessman. He wouldn't just lend it out without any collateral and a person who happens to be one of my bosses right now - one of the trustees - one of her relatives, borrowed money from Edmund and Edmund had a chattel mortgage. Now a chattel mortgage is a mortgage on something that you can move around. Well, the chattel mortgage he had was on their cow and they didn't come across with the money when the time was due so I guess they lost their cow. I don't think they particularly appreciated Edmund.

Let's look at another aspect of Edmund's life and this I call EDMUND THE FARMER. In 1902, he bought a section of land to the east of here from the Canadian Pacific Railway. It was located in what was previously known as the Father Lacombe Settlement for the Cree Indians. He called it St. Paul des Cris. About 30 miles out from there they had St. Paul des Metis, the Metis colony which is now St. Paul, Alberta. At that place in the river which has currently the little hamlet of Brosseau on one side and Duvernay on the other, that is where the Indians use to cross the river when they went to the south after the herds of buffalo and then they'd come back north across the river at that point so there was a big campsite there.

It's also an area of the margin between the bush country and the parkland and it's really a beautiful area. In the spring you've got the little aspen groves, the small poplar groves here and there and green lush fields all over and rolling hills. It's very, very beautiful. Anyway, that's where he bought his farm and he went downstream. He had bought a scow, a big flat boat and went down river in 1902 and he had with him at that time, in the boat, two people, Francis Xavier Brosseau, his cousin and BAPTISTE PEPIN. (I suspect that might be the same fellow who was epileptic) They brought apparently, on this scow, a cow, some chickens, and various types of equipment and building materials.

Also, his three sons, EDMUND, JR., JOE, and JEAN BAPTISTE, took the horse herd overland on the north side of the river. I don't know how long it would have taken but

that's how they got the horses out there. Then they started to build a home and barns and grainaries and corrals.

In 1904, 2 years later, they built a huge scow in Edmonton, a real massive thing, and loaded it right to the gunnels with all sorts of things, including his wife, Julie and his daughter, Marie Louise. Joe, my uncle Joe, and my father, Alphonse, and some one by the name of MAJEAU (I don't know the first name) went with them overland with a couple of wagons apparently with seed grain in them.

Now when he was there in this hamlet which became known as Brosseau later on, his business prospered. He had a grain farm that went along very well. He had a cattle ranch and that produced well, He had a horse ranch which was doing well and he set up a store and that is basically how he made his fortune. He was the first, one of the first white men in area. He got those things going and then the migration started. The settlers were coming in to that Bonneyville and St. Paul area, particularly that St. Paul area and they came across the river at that point and so what he did is often loan them the seed grain, sold them horses, sold them cattle and sold them the goods from the store. From a business point of view, he had a monopoly and apparently succeeded very well.

I also remember a story that my uncle Jean-Baptiste told me, Uncle Jean-Baptiste stretched the truth a lot. I'm not going to call him a liar but he liked to really stretch the truth. He told me about once they bought this really expensive stallion. He probably told me \$10,000; maybe it was worth \$1000. Anyway, it was worth a lot of money. They took the stallion, put it in the barn and tied it to some metal rail in there. He said, "Would you believe that there was a thunder storm, lightning hit the barn and killed one horse and it was the stallion." Whether it's true or not I don't know, but it makes a good story.

In 1906, Edmund surveyed that area by the river and it became the hamlet of Brosseau and there was a general store there. There was a hotel known as the Rich-ileau Hotel. There was a dentist there by the name of Doc Hardy, I think. There was a blacksmith shop and a few others types of services. It probably peaked about 1910 and after that it gradually declined.

In 1911, he opened a store in St. Paul with his oldest son, Edmund Jr. and in 1917 Edmund Brosseau Sr. died in St. Paul, Minn. He went there for surgery. He had a prostate problem and he died in surgery. There was always a close connection between he and St. Paul, Minn. because two of his sisters lived there and he went back and forth quite often.

Edmund was, in my opinion, in summing it up, a soldier of fortune. He was a soldier. he was a gold seeker, he was a merchant, he was a farmer, he was a rancher, and he seemed to have done these things all quite well except he was a lousy gold seeker. He never hit it rich but no one really hit it rich I guess. I think he did what many of us fear to do. He took a risk, a big risk and he went out and did things. He was illiterate. He could not read or write or do mathematics in any sort of written form but apparently he could do it very well in his head or otherwise he would have got fleeced in all those business deals he got into. As I understand it, he was a hard, tough, and outspoken individual who was very, very rough and tumble. He swore profusely but yet he was loved very much by his children and very much respected by them. As I look at my own father, he admired his father with almost a god-like reverence. When my father died, I was going thru' his papers and he had papers about his dad including letters from the doctors who had operated on his father when he died on the operating table and he had of the information which he'd kept for about 60 yrs. My mother remembers my grandfather somewhat and she said, "He was really nice to me but if you crossed him you were in trouble and oh yes, he liked to go on a toot once in awhile. He liked that immensely" That's the story on Edmund as I know it.