

## Louis Oreille

*Gerald Nadeau, Transcript*

Algonquin Native Louis Oreille was a solitary bushman

“Louis was an Algonquin Indian who came from Grand Lake Victoria, to Maniwaki, to Chapeau and had his cabin burnt at Chapeau. He had a cow, a canoe, a grindstone, and a rifle. He went down to the river, the Ottawa River near Petawawa, and got the cow swimming, and between swimming and walking the cow he got her up to Maskinonge Lake. He dug a hole in the bank and put his little cabin partly underground and put a little cow stable up and used hay for a roof, a coil of wild hay. And he stayed there for a lot of years. And he made mitts and moccasins, and raised some cattle. He eventually after many years got a little small horse like a pony, almost like a pony, someplace. And he made a little sled for it, and Louis would come into Deep River with his little horse and sled, and he'd always be walking behind. And he'd be looking for straw or hay if you had anything to give him. So he'd feed his little horse and he had a brown overcoat that somebody must've gave him. It was great brown checks and I can still remember that quite well. He'd take his overcoat off when ... he'd be walking, he'd have the overcoat on and it'd be open, and then when he got to where he was going he'd feed his little horse on the sled, he'd use his sled as a manger, and tie him to it, and then he'd put his overcoat over the horse. And the horse was that small that the overcoat would pretty near cover him. And in the morning Louis would set off again if he got any straw or whatever, with his little horse and his sled going home. Louis was a nice person. He had some very good points. But not many people took much time to try to understand him because he came from a different world, you know? His clothes were never good but always clean, and he never ... At a time when lice were a common scourge in those old houses, you know along the river, Louis never had lice and they were always a scared that if anyone stayed over that they would leave lice, you know? But Louis was accepted because he was quite different. Quiet, very easy going, a conversation with Louis might be a dozen words. He'd smoke his pipe and he'd look as though he'd be falling asleep. He didn't miss anything. And he laced his boots—he wore long leather boots in the springtime—and instead of tying them at the top, he started at the top and laced them all the way down to the bottom and tied them there. I don't know if it was because he was a tall man and he felt it was easier to tie them further down, or if it was because he was used o moccasins and you tied them just over your instep. So he might have used either one reason or the other. He belonged in Deep River, yes, he felt he belonged there. Because when he lost his connection to the few people he had gotten used to he looked lonesome and lost. And he died in a cabin in Meilleur's Bay and was dead for two weeks before anyone found him. He was not someone who would communicate with anyone. He had to know you before he would even speak to you, because there were people in Deep River that he never spoke to, and he never got to know them for reasons that I don't know. But he made moccasins and mitts, filled snowshoes and made snowshoes, and a very good bushman. He could spend the night in the bush. Where you'd be working in daytime he'd spend the night right in that same place. And if he found your axe, well, that was Louis's axe, because he found it. It wasn't meant to steal it but anything in the bush that you weren't using, his opinion was that if you left it there than you didn't need it. If we did that we wouldn't need near as much. We'd just go and find something, use it, leave it there, and let someone else come and get it and use it and leave it.”