

Biography

Cecile LaRocque Blanke

Cecile was born in 1934 at home in the Lac Pelletier Valley. She was the 3rd child of Maurice & Lena (Whiteford) LaRocque.

Cecile's Great Grandparents on her mother's side James Francis Whiteford & Marguerite Fagnant Whiteford were from St. Francis Xavier, Manitoba and migrated to the Lac Pelletier Valley. Her great grandfather J.B. Trottier on her father's side also moved to the Lac Pelletier Valley from St. Francis Xavier in 1880.

Lac Pelletier Valley is 30 miles south of Swift Current, Sask. The valley had many Métis families. Cecile grew up in a traditional Métis way; speaking Michif, living off the land by hunting, fishing and gathering.

In the early years there were no schools available for the Métis children, so they were sent to the Lebret Residential School for many years. Cecile's father Maurice was among those that attended. The scars of the Residential School experience were visible in every family in the valley.

Cecile started school at the age of 5 in a French school at Lac Pelletier Village. She was there for 5 years and was still in grade 2. Cecile was 10 years old when she moved to Swift Current living with her grandparents and attended school until grade 7. She excelled in all grades. At the age of 14, Cecile went to work for the area farmer's wives. Cecile at 16 years of age married the love of her life Walter Blanke. They raised 6 children on the ranch in the Lac Pelletier Valley.

Walter and Cecile left ranch life for a new life in Drumheller, Alta. Cecile and Walter did some upgrading on their education, both taking their GED and getting their Grade 12. Walter worked at the Drumheller Penitentiary for 20 years, then retiring and moving back to Swift Current, Sask.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cecile was the President of the Swift Current Métis Local #35 from 1972 to 1978. During that time a Housing Authority under the direction of Cecile purchased and built homes for Métis families in Swift Current and surrounding Area.
- Cecile was instrumental along with her husband Walter in getting the first Legal Aid Office started in Swift Current and was on the Board of Directors from 1974 until 1979.
- Cecile worked closely with Métis Leader Jim Sinclair in the early 70s.
- Upon moving back to Swift Current, Cecile worked with a well known Métis Author Louise (Trottier) Moine from Val Marie, Sask. Louise wrote 2 books that told of her growing up in the Lac Pelletier valley and her experiences in Lebret Residential School. Louise lived to be 101. Louise's efforts in preserving the history of the almost forgotten Métis people of Lac Pelletier inspired Cecile to continue doing what Louise had started.
- Cecile and her Métis group dedicated a Cairn with a plaque at Lac Pelletier on Lemere's point to tell about the first Métis residence on the lake. The Lemere's lived and fished the lake for many years. The Lemere's came to the Lake in 1865 and were there for 100 years.
- Cecile taught many hundreds of school children over a span of 10 years about Métis Culture.
- In 2011, Cecile was honoured to receive the "Citizen of the Year for Southwest Saskatchewan" for her work in educating the public. For 10 consecutive years she led the International Women's Day with the Michif Prayer. Cecile organized many Aboriginal functions at various locations in the South West.
- Cecile's Crowning Jewel, with her husband Walter at her side, was the erection and dedication of "The Métis Veterans War

Memorial” at Lac Pelletier in August 2013. This monument honours 16 Métis Veterans from the Area. This monument is the first of its kind in Canada.

- Cecile has attended the celebrations at Batoche for many years and is involved provincially promoting Métis culture as a Métis Elder.

Cecile continues to encourage the Métis people to be proud of their Métis heritage and would like to see the next generation feel as proud of being Métis as she does.

Cecile recently lost the love of her life, Walter. They were together for 62 years and he was always by her side encouraging her in everything, especially her Métis traditions and Culture.