James Assiniboine
Narrator

Deborah Locke
Interviewer

Dakota Tipi First Nation
Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Canada
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DL = Deborah Locke
Minnesota Historical Society

JA = James Assiniboine

DL: This is Deborah Locke on January 19, 2012; I'm at Dakota Tipi in Manitoba, Canada with James- and I'm going to try to sound out your name, please pronounce it for me.

JA: Assiniboine (pronounced: ah-sin'-ah-boine).

DL: Could you please spell your first and last names for us?


DL: Thank you. When and where were you born?


DL: Who were your parents?

JA: James Assiniboine and Rosemary Assiniboine.

DL: Who were your grandparents?

JA: My grandparents: Dan Assiniboine and Flora Assiniboine Soldier.

DL: Soldier, was that her last name?

JA: Yes, that was her last name before she married, yes.
DL: So Flora’s family’s name was Soldier. How is that…..

JA: Well, actually it was Yellow Quill. I’m not sure, her mother’s last name must have been Soldier, because her parents were Joe Yellow Quill and Mary Yellow Quill Pashe.

DL: So that covers both sides of the family, then?

JA: Actually, no. My mom’s dad was Jorde Woods and her mom was Barbara Woods Wescoupe.

DL: How do you spell that?

JA: W-E-S-C-O-U-P-E.

DL: How long have you lived here?

JA: 30 years in- actually in Long Plain.

DL: Have you ever lived anywhere else?

JA: I lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

DL: Tell me your earliest memory as a child.

JA: It’s mostly in residential school. I started in residential school when I was 5, until 12, and that was the earliest I can remember.

DL: Leaving home then, when you were a little guy.

JA: Yup.

DL: Do you remember that?

JA: Some of it; not too much. But when I got back to the residential school I remember quite a bit.

DL: Which relative had the most influence on you?

JA: Probably my dad, because he played a lot of sports and then I played a lot of sports after that too.

DL: Did you see much of him while you were in residential school?

JA: Yes, they would come about twice a week, my parents.

DL: Did you have other brothers and sisters who were in the school too?
JA: Yes I did. We had two sisters and three brothers in residential school.

DL: Who taught you the most about being Dakota?

JA: My mom used to talk a little about it because she was more Dakota; she used to speak it and everything. But actually, just recently in the last five years, that’s when I’ve been really looking over my history and finding that I’m more Dakota than anything else. [Relatives from both sides of my family] are from the States.

DL: Was your family Christian, or did they have a background of Dakota spirituality?

JA: Actually they didn’t really have either one. I didn’t go to church, or [follow] traditional ways or nothing.

DL: Did you learn any traditional ways while you were growing up, or later?

JA: Just recently, yes, because my wife, Trudy, is a medicine woman and then I pick all her medicine for her and I mix it and everything.

DL: Did you learn much about Dakota history while you were growing up?

JA: Not really; just in the last about five years I’ve been starting to learn more.

DL: Do you have family members who lived through the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War?

JA: Yes I did.

DL: Who?

JA: My great-grandmother, her name was Little Woman.

DL: What’s the story of your great-grandmother?

JA: I don’t really know; all I know is that they were in the war and the chief sent all the young ladies up to Canada and then once they got here the just started going here and there, because they were scared.

DL: So Little Woman, your great-grandmother, is that right?

JA: No- two greats.

DL: Little Woman was how old when she came up here?

JA: The way we figured it, probably about 10 or 11.
DL: Did she walk up here, or did she get a ride with her group?

JA: They walked; a bunch of them. Actually, the way we found out, there was just two of them that came up here together.

DL: And where did they walk from, in Minnesota?

JA: Sisseton, I think.

DL: South Dakota.

JA: South Dakota; I think it has it right here (sound of papers rustling). Sisseton Sioux.

DL: I see, why do you suppose they went to Canada? Wouldn’t they have been safe at Sisseton? That wasn’t Minnesota.

JA: I’m not sure how it went, but I don’t know why they came from Sisseton. But if we dig more, maybe they ran from Minnesota and then went to Sisseton and then came up.

DL: Have you ever been to Minnesota?

JA: Yes, I have.

DL: Where did you go?

JA: We went to that museum there.

DL: The Historical Society?

JA: Yah.

DL: Did you do some research?

JA: Not really. We had a meeting about two months ago- a month and a half ago.

DL: Oh, I see. I probably saw you there.

JA: That’s why I recognize you.

DL: What is your opinion of the war?

JA: Of the Dakota War?

DL: The U.S.-Dakota War.
JA: What I think is it shouldn't have happened. They seem to have picked on the Sioux for some reason; I'm not sure. But that's what I think— they were just picking on the Sioux because they wouldn't go to where they were supposed to go, like the reserve, or whatever.

DL: If you had a magic wand, what would you wish for the Dakota people today?

JA: That they'd have their land back in the U.S., and there was a lot of them. I wish they were all back, like there.

DL: Would you go back to the U.S. if you had land there?

JA: Yes I would. That's why we're trying to get dual citizenship. So my kids, they're more Dakota than I thought, and I would like them to go over there, and we're trying to take them to that fort over there.

DL: Fort Snelling?

JA: Yup.

DL: This is quite a journey that you are on. What's it been like to learn that you're more Native than you thought? What was that discovery like?

JA: Well, actually it's not more Native. I knew I was Native, but I thought I was more Saulteaux because I'm from Long Plain, and that reserve is mostly Saulteaux.

DL: And what does Saulteaux mean?

JA: It's just a different Native people, like the Sioux, like just the name of the band or tribe.

DL: The band.

JA: Like the tribe. Like the Sioux, the tribe is named Sioux in the States. In Long Plain, their tribe is Saulteaux. Just different languages.

DL: It's interesting, because the word Minnesota, it's that same…

JA: Yah. See, that's why, like some people in Long Plain think, well actually they know there's a lot of people from Long Plain are from Minnesota, and that's where they think they got that name from: Sota. Like with mine, Assiniboine, boy I can't- where those papers were (sound of papers rustling).

DL: There are Assiniboine at Lower and Upper Sioux, I'm pretty sure of it.
JA: Yup, there’s an elder out there, he told me what Assiniboine means in Sioux, but, oh boy, I can’t remember what he told me.

DL: What will you do with the information, once you get it?

JA: Well, I’ll show my kids to show them where they originally came from. Like a lot of times if you don’t really know actually where you really came from until you start looking up stuff, and then: hey, I’m from over here too!

DL: How many children do you have?

JA: We have 5.

DL: You and Trudy?

JA: Yup.

DL: You’re doing important research, so I certainly wish you well with that. Is there anything you would like to add.

JA: Me and Trudy, we do this all the time, like, she has boxes of stuff and we go through it and wherever she wants to go, I’ll drive her and we’ll look up stuff. And like, all this we just found in the last, maybe year or something. She’s pretty good at researching stuff.

DL: And you’re pretty good at getting her around.

JA: Yah, taking her all over.

DL: Thanks for your help.