This is a brief overview of fiddling activities in the area surrounding Dauphin, Manitoba, based on a field work study which is still in its beginning stages. It will be supplemented by Bill Henry’s article on tune transmission among the players he has known for some time in this area. It is a rich region culturally, and I originally chose it for field work a) because of the number of Métis players, a relatively untapped source of an unusual style of fiddling, and b) because of the mixture of cultures, giving me a chance to see how Ukrainian, French, Native, Scottish, Irish, English and to a lesser extent Swedish, Icelandic, Polish and German traditions might interact in a fairly rural setting.

**The Métis:**

The Métis were the first indigenous group in the area to make fiddling a large part of their culture. French fur traders arrived in the mid-1700’s and took Indian wives. Their offspring tended to follow the fur-trade, and adopted a life-style similar to that of the Indians, but with a large cultural legacy from their French fathers including their language, religion and music. Many Métis in the area also have Scottish or English names, and there is a certain amount of verbal folklore about having learned the fiddle from the Scots at Red River, but there is no real basis for this idea in the music itself. Older Métis style has far more in common with Quebecois playing than Scottish, from its aggressive off-the-string bowing to its irregular phrasing, right down to its foot patterns of, delivered while seated. One foot alternates heel-toe for the first two taps while the other toe (less commonly heel) supplies the last tap just before the next strong beat. As in Quebec, some players use their right, some their left foot for the strong beats, and there is a considerable amount of variation in how far the feet are lifted off the floor. I have not yet seen a French or Métis player in the area who did not use his feet in this way. Although some Scottish players use similar patterns, it is not a norm of the style as it is among the French.

Further evidence of the largely French origins of Métis fiddling comes from construction of the tunes themselves.
Roy Gibbons has established the relationship between the Red River Jig, a central part of Métis fiddling tradition, and the Grande Jig Simple of Quebec. (See Canadian Folk Music Journal, Volume 8, also National Museum of Man Mercury series No. 35 which contains transcriptions of 20 versions of the Red River Jig and the Grand Jig Simple, as well as several other Métis tunes). While it is too early in the research for me to be able to establish other historical links between specific tunes here and in Quebec, the irregular phrasing of the tunes is definitely reminiscent of Quebeccois practice. Thus, even though many of the tunes can be ultimately traced back to Scottish origins, they have been altered almost beyond recognition. It is my belief, yet to be proven, that the Scottish repertoire was adopted in Quebec and from there travelled to Western Manitoba.

Native Indian players, according to verbal accounts, picked up the fiddle from the Métis. Indeed, at present, Métis and Native cultures are so intertwined, there is little point in separating them as far as fiddling goes. Métis and Non-Status Indians tend to live around the fringes of the Reserves, and the whole community is somewhat removed from the white-dominated towns such as Dauphin. Although a lot of Native and Métis young people move into the city, the older people, including most of the fiddle players, tend to stay closer to their traditional homes on or near the Reserve.

Métis players are very conscious of an ‘old style’ and a ‘new style’. The old style is the largely French-based approach I have mentioned, in which individualism is paramount. It is very hard to find two older players who play the same version of any tune, even if the players are from the same family. While this is often viewed by Non-natives as “getting it wrong”, a revealing comment by Bruce Flett, a cultural worker for the West Region Tribal Council is that “each of them just wants to communicate in his own way”. (The use of the word ‘his’ here is completely appropriate, as by all accounts so far, Metis and Native women do not play the fiddle). However, the younger players want to ‘make it’ in the larger world, and so are learning the smoother ‘Down-East’ style that contest judges prefer, as well as the Nashville style demanded in the bars. Thus, while most Metis players know at least some Ward Allen, Don Messer and especially Andy de Jarlais tunes, the younger players are starting to make them sound just like the records they came from, while the older ones were proud of playing ‘a version of’ any given tune.

Although Ward Allan is a special favourite, both old and young players are generally partial to other Manitobans, even when buying records. The importance of Andy de Jarlais cannot be overestimated in this regard. While most Manitoba players seem to feel that he never gained the recognition he deserved outside of Manitoba, for the Métis players this respect turns into hero worship. He is the Métis fiddler who could do it all. While he usually played seated and used his feet at a dance in traditional style, he could also outplay everyone at their own game, far surpassing Don Messer as far as they are concerned. He knew hundreds of tunes, made approximately 30 records, and played the traditional Métis and French tunes as well as the popular ‘Eastern’ tunes of the day, all in the approved commercial style. It was surprising to me that the older players so readily acknowledge the superiority of the de Jarlais style since they do not seem to emulate it. They learn his tunes by the score, but as mentioned, freely change them to suit themselves. Their bowing is also shorter and more ‘off the string’. Those who have made records or who play at a lot of contests, though, do tend to adopt a ‘smoother’ sound for those occasions while at home reverting back to their more energetic approach. However, they have been influenced to the extent of wanting guitar accompaniment, even though dances in earlier times were conducted entirely to the playing and feet of the fiddler.

Some of the younger players are becoming interested again in the older style, probably as an offshoot of the renewed native consciousness of the past 10 years or so. We can only hope that this will eventually make this repertoire more accessible to all of us. That knowledge will definitely shake up the general anglophone notion of what makes a fiddle tune.

**Ukrainian Fiddling:**

Ukrainians are the largest ethnic group in the area. Especially with the activities surrounding “Canada’s National Ukrainian Festival” held at the beginning of August each year, Dauphin has become somewhat of a centre for the preservation of Ukrainian culture. However, apart from the Festival, the only places to hear live Ukrainian music are weddings, anniversaries, and similar celebrations. There is enough of this activity to keep several bands working fairly steadily on weekends, although none of the musicians makes a full-time living from playing. In spite of this though, the amount of recording activity in the past was phenomenal for the size of the population, and again gives evidence of the musical loyalty of the audiences to local players. The most-recorded player, Boris Nowosad has six records made between 1966 and 1972 while several other bands have two or three recordings each. The ‘boom’ period of the late ’60’s and early ’70’s has somewhat passed, however, and many of these recordings are almost impossible to obtain today.

Wedding bands tend to play a mixture of Ukrainian, Old-Time, Country and Western music and sometimes
Swing, depending on the particular musicians involved. Some bands, such as Boris Novosad's and "The Original Polka Kings" revolve around the fiddle while others use accordion as their central instrument with the fiddle playing more of a backup role. Repertoire is largely polkas and waltzes, alternating with the occasional song and the more specific dances such as the mazurka, kolomyka or by request, the holub ore chabans. Then there are the requisite Schottisches, Heel-Toe, Butterfly and Bird Dances as well. Depending on the band, songs may be either Ukrainian or Standard Country fare.

The two parts of the wedding celebration which have the most traditional content are the 'Door' and the 'Presentation'. The Door is the entry of the guests into the hall, for which the band usually sets up on the floor right by the entrance and plays a long series of lively 2/4 tunes just called Wedding Marches. While many of these are traditional Ukrainian tunes, others such as "Road to Boston" or favourite Andy de Jarlis polkas often work their way into the sets as well. The Presentation generally happens later in the evening, at which time the wedding party all line up behind a long table and clap while the guests file down the line greeting each person and donating money at the end. The pace of the music is the same as for the Door tunes but according to Boris Novosad the Repertoire is different in mood, being slightly more reflective. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly considering the amount of money involved, the Presentation custom has caught on at all weddings in the area and is now standard practice. In former times other 'Old Country' customs were practised, such as the playing of tunes for the bride at her house, but these are seldom if ever performed today.

**Conclusion:**

Both Metis and Ukrainian players learn the repertoire of Old-Time and Country players, but the reverse is less common. There are some non-Native players who worked in the bush as trappers or loggers with the Metis and who were very influenced by their style. These players are often stauncher defenders of Metis playing than the Metis themselves. However they are rare, and have their counterparts in the Metis players who put down the 'jigging' style of the northern towns. Some working non-Ukrainian fiddlers have learned Ukrainian tunes to satisfy the demands of the jobs they were asked to play, but do not seem to play them for pleasure. Actually the younger players, no matter what their ethnic background do not tend to know the older tunes and lean much more towards bluegrass and Nashville styles, mostly because they are usually playing in bars where there is a demand for that repertoire. There are no old-style dances, and for Old-Time and Metis-style fiddlers, Sports Days, Contests and house parties are really the only public performances. There are contests throughout the summer months, ranging from small local fairs to the "Manitoba Championships" in Winnipeg, the International Peace Gardens contest, and the "Central Canada Fiddling Festival" in Austin, all of which attract many players from this area as spectators as well as participants. However, it is the local events which show the changing patterns of music most clearly. The Open Class (for all players between the ages of 16 and 65 often has less than 5 entries while the over-65 may have upwards of a dozen. The Metis players often enter but seldom win unless the contests are held in their own communities. However, over all, the amount of fiddling activity for such a lightly populated area is astounding and the few signs of interest from some younger players may be enough to maintain the spark for some time to come.