

Antoine-Blanc Gingras, (1821-1877)
Metis Trader and Resistance Activist.

Antoine Gingras sometimes called Frederick, was born in 1821 at Red River, the son of a North West Company voyageur Antoine Cuthbert Gingras and Marguerite Madeleine Trottier a Metis woman. In 1842, he began his career as a Plains hunter and trapper. Antoine married Scholastique Trottier, (born c. 1822 at Pembina) in 1837. They were enumerated in the 1850 Pembina census along with their children Marie, Francois, Angelic, Gustus, Antoine and a one year old child William Dhall. Antoine and his family of six boys and four girls took annuities as Pembina/Turtle Mountain Band members in 1869.¹ Their son, Francois took Metis Scrip (#335) under the Red Lake and Pembina Bands of Chippewa Treaty of April 12, 1864.

As an independent fur trader he concentrated on the buffalo trade in hides, pemmican and tallow. He established the Gingras Trading Post and, with Father Belcourt and several Métis families, co-founded the town of St. Joseph near Pembina. The area soon became one of the major Métis centers on the North American continent.



Antoine Gingras²

He was briefly employed with the HBC, then joined what was called the Red River and Pembina Outfit in 1851. This company was a coalition of free traders organized by Norman Kittson. Antoine was a leading merchant of St. Joseph in the Dakota Territory. He established his trading fort there (northeast of present day Walhalla) in 1843 and it functioned up until 1873. St. Joseph was home to large numbers of Metis families and at its peak in 1858 St. Joseph had a population of over 1,500. For over two decades St. Joseph was the centre of Metis culture in Minnesota and North Dakota. Antoine and

¹ Gail Morin. *Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Pembina Band Annuity Payments and Census*. Quinton Publications, n.d. p.38.

² Source: *The Bismarck Tribune*, Dec. 13, 1955.

Scholastique Trottier had 15 children. He served as a member of the Minnesota Territorial Legislature from 1851-1858.

During the Metis Resistance of 1869-70, Gingras was a supporter of Louis Riel. Lieutenant Governor designate William McDougall travelled to St. Joseph from Pembina on December 11, 1869 and while there was informed that Antoine Gingras on the evening of December 10th had “agreed to raise a party of 150 “Half-Breeds” and with a portion of them, to drive Governor McDougall away from his house at Pembina.” McDougall also commented “These Half-Breeds” at St. Joe are principally connected with those at Red River Settlement, and many of them are inclined to fall in with Mr. Gingras’s plan.”³

At the time of his death in 1877, at age 56, Gingras was a wealthy man with a chain of stores in Winnipeg, Pembina and St. Joseph. He also had a trading post on the Souris River. His home and trading post are preserved northeast of Wahalla, North Dakota at the Gingras Trading Post Historic Site.

Antoine died on September 26, 1877 at St. Joseph, North Dakota.



³ *Correspondence relative to the Recent Disturbances in the Red River Settlement*. Despatches from the Governor (4 A, Memorandum). Canada 1870.



Two views of the restored trading post. Photos by Lawrence Barkwell, May 2009.



Interior of the Gingras house (exterior shown below), repainted in the original colours. Photo by Lawrence Barkwell.



Photo courtesy of the State historical Society of Minnesota, Louis Riel was hidden on the 2nd floor of this house after the 1869-70 Resistance



State Historical Society of North Dakota

This is a 1968 photograph of the Gingras home before it was restored, photo from the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

Shown below is an 1862 letter written to William McMurray of the Hudson's Bay Company by Antoine Gingras.

Saint Joseph Pembina March 3d/62.

Mr. W. McMurray

My Dear Sir

I take the greatest pleasure of writing you these few lines to let you know that I didn't forget le Petit Belettes [weasels] that you Promise me a few years ago. I would be very glad if you could get me a Couple Hundred or more. I intend to go this next fall towards Missouri to buy Horses, that is to say if nothing happens to me. I have no News very particular to inform you. The Trade is very dull here. Most of the people here are doing nothing at all but eat and drink, while they have it, there are so Laze that they can't even Trap anything, their business is to Call to Traders and ask for Credit & that is the way most of them lives here - my man arrived here last week from Souve [?] River & Brings very good News, he says that the free mens are making plenty Robes, & still they have plenty of Buffaloes yet. No more at present.

Please to answer. I remain Your sincerely,
Friend
Antoine Gingras



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