

# The Metis Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition 1804-1806

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In 1804, the Louisiana Purchase led to interest in expansion to the west coast. A few weeks after the purchase, President Thomas Jefferson, an advocate of western expansion, had the Congress appropriate funds for an expedition. In a message to Congress, Jefferson wrote: "The river Missouri, and the Indians inhabiting it are not as well known as rendered desirable by their connection with the Mississippi, and consequently with us. ... An intelligent officer, with ten or twelve chosen men ... might explore the whole line even to the Western Ocean." Jefferson wished to open a trade route to the Pacific as well as evaluate the potential interference of Hudson's Bay Company and Metis hunters and trappers who were already well established in the area. Clark began by recruiting some good hunters and guides, accustomed to the woods and with good physical endurance. Thus, many of the men hired were Metis. The most skilled of these was George Drouillard, an excellent hunter and many linguistic skills.

## **Charbonneau, Toussaint.** (1767-1840)

Toussaint Charbonneau was born on March 22, 1767 near Montreal. He was part Iroquois. Toussaint was a fur trader who had previously worked for the NWC at the Pine Fort on the Assiniboine River. He was discharged from their service near the Mandan villages and had been living for about eight years among the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes along the Missouri River in what is now North Dakota. This is when he met Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in November of 1804. Lewis and Clark recognized that one of Charbonneau's wives, the sixteen-year-old Sacagawea, would be useful as an interpreter for the Shoshone language. Thus, they agreed to hire Toussaint as an interpreter "through his wife." Charbonneau had no particular wilderness skills nor was he a skilled boatman. The only favourable reference to him in the Expedition Journals concerns his cooking skills. He made a fabulous blood sausage (*boudin blanc*), which Lewis declared to be "one of the greatest delicacies of the forest."

At the conclusion of the expedition he received a voucher for \$500.33 in payment for his services. He and all the enlisted men were given land warrants for 320 acres each. Since he and his wife wished to return to the Upper Missouri, he sold his land to Clark for \$100 and took employment with the Missouri Fur Company. He and his wife then travelled to Manual (in what is now South Dakota) and worked at the trading post there. Sacagawea died there on December 20, 1812, after the birth of their daughter Lisette. In 1813 Lisette and Pomp were both officially entrusted to Clark in an Orphan's Court hearing in St. Louis on August 11, 1813. Clark also employed Charbonneau over a number of years as an Indian Affairs interpreter for various visiting dignitaries. In 1833-34 he interpreted for Prince Maximilian of Wied, Germany while he wintered on the Upper Missouri.

## **Cruzatte, Pierre.**

Pierre was a Metis of French and Omaha Indian heritage. He was a descendant of the Cruzatte family who were early settlers of St. Louis. For a number of years he worked as a trader on the Missouri River for the Chouteau fur interests. He was fluent in French, Omaha and Indian sign languages. He enlisted as a private with the Lewis and Clark expedition on May 16, 1804 at St. Charles, Missouri. At the time he was hired he was an experienced voyageur and Indian trader. He was employed as both interpreter and bowman for the keelboat, given his knowledge of the Missouri up to the entry of the Platte River. He was nicknamed "St. Peter" by the other expedition members. He is described a small, wiry, one-eyed man.

Cruzatte was an excellent fiddle player, this along with his language skills, were instrumental in maintaining good relations with the Indians they encountered. Thus was born the descriptor—"Fiddle

diplomacy.” His skills were particularly useful in an 1804 encounter with the Bois Brule Teton Sioux, when the Sioux took the expedition’s pirogues (boats). Cruzatte was able to smooth over the situation and gain the expedition’s peaceful entry into the Upper Missouri region. Clark named Crusats River (now the Wind River) in honour of Pierre Cruzatte.

### **Dorion, Pierre Sr.** (d. 1812)

Pierre Dorion Sr. was largely based in the trading town of St. Louis and lived some twenty years among the Yankton Sioux near the Des Moines and James Rivers.

Pierre Sr., like Joseph Dorion, was involved in strategic marriage alliances as he was married to both a Yankton Sioux and an Iowa woman. Polygamy was an excepted cultural practice by most of the French-Canadians and Indians in the Missouri region. Pierre had four mixed-descent Yankton Sioux children with Holy Rainbow Woman: Pierre Jr., Louis, Margaret, and Baptiste. According to French custom, these children were all given French-Catholic names and the first born son was usually named after his father.

Pierre’s children were in great demand as labourers and interpreters in the Missouri trade system as they had valuable cultural, social and political knowledge. The family had many diverse cultural traits, which were important in the formation of the middle ground. In the late 1790s, Pierre Sr. was appointed the interpreter to the Yankton Sioux and his son Louis Dorion became the government interpreter to the Ioway. According to Tanis Thorne, “even though they were public servants, the Chouteaus, Dorions, and Mongrains did not cease their private trade in furs and hides, but rather used their government jobs as a complementary activity” (Thorne, 1996: 118).

Pierre Sr. interpreted for the famous American Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1804-1806. Author Richard Dillion (1965) explains the political and diplomatic importance of the Métis guides and interpreters in the Lewis and Clark Expedition he claims that, “Dorion had lived with the powerful Sioux or Dakotas for twenty years and was a confidential friend of theirs. Lewis hoped to use him as an entrée to Siouxdom as well as an interpreter.” Dillion also quoted excerpts from Lewis’s journal about the important role of Maurice Blondeau with states that, “Also a very active, intelligent man who was also in the employment of the British merchants, by the name of (Maurice Blondeau), who had much influence with the Sauks and Foxes. This man has more influence with the Sauks and Foxes, or rather possesses their confidence to a greater degree, than any man in the country. These persons, with Old Dorion, I have sent up the Mississippi some weeks since to commence the work.”

Interpreters such as Pierre Dorion Sr. were instrumental in gathering ethnographical and geographical data for the Lewis and Clark expedition. His Métis children, Pierre Jr. and Baptiste, became directly involved with the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804-1806. His son, Pierre Dorion Jr. was involved in the Yankton Sioux councils in August of 1804. There are many available primary sources from the Lewis and Clark journals that indicate how important the Dorion family was in the diplomacy of the expedition, especially Pierre Sr. who was called “Old Dorion.” Below are excerpts from the journals:

August 29. In the afternoon, Sgt. Pryor and Old Dorion, with his son, Pierre Jr., who happened to be trading with the Sioux, arrived and brought with them sixty Indians of the Sioux nation. They appear to be friendly and camped on the opposite shore. Sgt. Pryor and young Dorion carried over to them some hominy, kettles, tobacco, etc. Sgt. Pryor anxiously reported that the women in the Sioux village are mostly old and homely. Drouillard killed a deer, and we caught many large catfish. The pirogue was repaired, and she was reloaded. The men are making a tow-line out of the green elk hides. When Sgt. Pryor first found the Sioux camp they presented him and his party with a fat dog, already cooked, of which they heartily partook and found well flavored. Capt. Clark is engaged in writing a speech, as the Indians are to meet with us tomorrow. The young warriors had killed two elk and six deer enroute, which they use to feed themselves.

August 30. We prepared some presents and medals which we intend to give to the Indians. We sent Old Dorion over in a pirogue for the chiefs and warriors to bring them to our council. At 12 o’clock

we met, and Capt. Lewis delivered a speech in which he explained the change in government, enjoined them to make peace, and invited them to send a chief to our President in Washington to receive his good counsel. We smoked the pipe-of-peace and gave them presents of clothes, tobacco, a flag, medals, cocked-hats and uniforms. The chiefs retired to divide their presents, while Captains Lewis and Clark went to dinner and to consult about other matters. Old Dorion was displeased that he was not invited to have dinner with them, and the captains were sorry that they had overlooked inviting him.

August 31. The Indians remained with us all day. They want Old Dorion and his son to stay with them so that he could accompany their chief to Washington. The chiefs returned with an eloquent account of their dire poverty, etc. They said they would make peace with the Pawnee and Omaha, and said one of them would visit our President next spring. They also wished the captains would give them something for their squaws. The captains told them we were not traders, but had only come to make the road open for the traders who would follow, and who would supply their habits and customs, which we collect for our Government. The captins gave them more tobacco and corn to take to their lodges. We commissioned Old Dorion to make peace with all the chief nations in the neighbourhood. We gave him a flag and some clothes. He received this with pleasure and promised to do all that was necessary. The chiefs sent their young men home, while they stayed to wait for Mr. Dorion. We gave Dorion a bottle of whiskey, and he and his son-with the chiefs-crossed to the other side of the river to camp. (Clarke, 1970: 100).

After the expedition, Pierre Sr. agreed to remain with the Yankton Sioux to maintain good relations and encourage peace with the Omaha peoples. The Lewis and Clark Expedition records refer to him as “Old Dorion.” Records indicated that Pierre Sr. Dorion could speak Yankton Sioux, possibly Algonquin, French and English and was literate in English. Unfortunately, no written material is available from the perspective of Pierre Dorion. Pierre Sr. died in April of 1812 near Brownsville, Nebraska. (Contributed by Leah Dorion.)

### **Drouillard, George.** (1775-1810)

Born in 1775 in the present day Windsor/Detroit district, he had a French Canadian father, Pierre Drouillard, and a Shawnee mother by the name of Asoundechris. George migrated with his mother’s people to Ohio, working in the Cape Girardeau area on the west bank of the Mississippi river.

Pierre Drouillard was from the Sandwich (Ontario) and Detroit (Michigan) area. Pierre Drouillard was a trapper and an interpreter for the Wyandot Indians and had accompanied their delegation to Congress to petition for assistance for a trip they planned to France.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the United States War Department set up a mission led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, called the Corps of Discovery. The expedition to the Pacific made Lewis and Clark leaders in disciplines such as botany, cartography and ethnology. George Drouillard’s skills as a hunter and sign language interpreter made him arguably one of the most important members of the expedition from 1803 until September 1806. George was living on the Spanish side of the Mississippi River as part of the dispossessed community known as the Absentee Shawnee when Lewis and Clark met him at Fort Massac, Illinois on the Ohio River, where he joined the expedition.

It was Drouillard’s knowledge of the Aboriginal people and their sign language that had prompted Captain Daniel Bissell to recommend him to the Corps. He was fluent in several Indian languages, English and French as well as a master of the Indian sign language of the plains. Captain Lewis recruited him in November 1803, and Drouillard was no disappoint to the team – he became an extremely valued member. As a member of the Corps, Drouillard received a \$30 advance and a \$25 monthly salary. He often travelled with Lewis, demonstrating his bravery and skill. He was said to be the most competent hunter on the expedition and led many hunting trips. He also negotiated trade with the Aboriginal people to gather food for the expedition’s survival.

Drouillard was also responsible for moderating many of the encounters the Corps had with different Aboriginal groups, including the Otos, Missouris and Mandans. From these negotiations, the Corps spent the difficult winter of 1804-1805 with the Mandans. He also led the group during an attack by the Dakota/Lakota. His leadership and courage enabled the Corps to hold its ground and survive the attack. In February 1805, over 100 Dakota Indians, who stole two horses and several weapons, attacked the party. Drouillard advised the party to hold their fire, giving the Dakota a small victory and saving much loss of life. Later in 1805, when the party split, George accompanied Lewis up the Missouri south fork to Great Falls. On this trip Lewis commended him in his diary for being able to communicate via sign language with the Shoshones they encountered.

Drouillard's participation in Lewis's 1806 expedition to Montana helped determine the northern boundary of the Louisiana Purchase territory. Lewis trusted Drouillard to deliver to the postmaster the letters of the expedition that were later passed on to President Jefferson.

When the Corps of Discovery reached St. Louis in 1806 it was Drouillard who was entrusted to take the expedition reports to the postmaster at Cahokia to be forwarded to President Jefferson.

Once the Corps disbanded, he lived for a few years at Cape Girardeau, Missouri. He bought the land warrants of John Collins and Joseph Whitehead, which, along with other land, he sold in April of 1807 for \$1,300.00. He made a return trip to the Rocky Mountains and gave William Clark topographical details of the mountain country that Clark later incorporated into his map of the Northwest.

Drouillard returned to Three Forks on the Upper Missouri in 1810, and became part of Manuel Lisa's fur trading ventures on the upper Missouri River and the Yellowstone River where he helped establish the Missouri Fur Company, at Three Forks, in Wyoming. While trapping near the Three Forks in May of 1810, George Drouillard was killed by an attacking war party, believed to be Blackfoot. (Contributed by Morgan Baillargeon, a descendant of George Drouillard.)

**Labiche, François.** (d. 1829)

Labiche was a Metis of French and Omaha descent. He enlisted as a private with the Lewis and Clark expedition on May 16, 1804 at St. Charles, Missouri. He was hired because of his translation skills and experience as a river boatman and Indian trader. He was also an excellent hunter. In August of 1804, Labiche interpreted for a meeting with Chief Petite Villelu, "Little Thief," who had known Labiche when he previously traded with the Otoes. Labiche also interpreted in meetings with the Bois Brule and Teton Sioux. Following the expedition, Labiche accompanied Lewis to Washington D.C. to interpret for President Jefferson and visiting Indian Chiefs. Clark named the River Labiche (now the Hood River) in honour of François Labiche. In October of 1806, Labiche and John Ordway were in charge of transporting the Expedition's scientific evidence to Washington D.C. Labiche was married to Genevieve Flore and they had seven children. He died in St. Louis in 1829.

**Malboeuf, Etienne.** (b. 1775)

Etienne was born at Lac de Sable, Canada. He was the son of François Malboeuf, who had at least seven children with various Indian women. Etienne was living at Kaskaskia when he signed on with Lewis and Clark's Expedition of Discovery in 1804. He accompanied them as far as the Mandan villages where he wintered before returning to St. Louis in 1805.

**Pineau, Peter.** (b. 1776)

Pineau was the son of Joseph Pineau and an unnamed Missouri Indian woman. He was a member of the Lewis and Clark's Expedition of Discovery in 1804, but is not mentioned in the journals after that year. He had probably returned to St. Louis with Pierre Dorion's returning raft crew.

**Roy (Roi, LeRoy), Pierre.**

Pierre was another Half-Breed who was part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, he travelled as far as their first wintering quarters at the Mandan Villages. He apparently then returned to St. Louis and is not

mentioned in the journals after February 28, 1805.

One child, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, was born during the expedition:

**Charbonneau, Jean Baptiste.** (1805-1866)

Charbonneau was born February 11, 1805 at Fort Mandan, the son of a French Canadian interpreter, Toussaint Charbonneau and Sacagawea, a Shoshone Indian. The Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806 employed his mother and father as an interpreter team. He was born while the expedition was wintering at Fort Mandan. He was nicknamed "Pomp" by the expedition staff. Pomp means First Born in the Shoshone language. Due to a fatherly affection toward Pomp, Clark offered to raise him as his son. Consequently, Toussaint and Sacawagea left Jean Baptiste with Clark in April of 1811.

Jean Baptiste completed his schooling in St. Louis then returned to frontier life. In 1823, he met Prince Paul Wilhelm of Germany at the mouth of the Kansas River. The Prince was impressed with the 18 year old's frontier skills and cultured manner and had him join the scientific mission he was on. Jean Baptiste then accompanied Prince Paul back to Germany and remained at the German court for six years. He became fluent in four more languages during this time.

Jean Baptiste returned to America in 1829 and was employed at hunting, guiding, trapping and exploring in the West. During 1846-1847 he was employed as a scout for the Mormon Battalion as they traveled from New Mexico to California. After his discharge he was appointed Alcade (Magistrate) of San Luis Rey Mission. He was troubled by the abuse of the Indians by landowners, resigned his position and joined the California gold rush. He was not successful in this, and headed for the gold fields of Montana. Enroute he died of pneumonia and was buried at Danner, Oregon. In 1973 his gravesite was entered into the National Register of Historic Places.