

## **Dumas, Michel (Le Rat or Watchskon). (1849-1901)**

Michel was born at St. Boniface on December 1, 1849, the son of Michel Dumas Jr.<sup>1</sup> and Adelaide Lespérance. He is the nephew of Isidore and Daniel Dumas even though there is not much difference in their ages. His father was the second son of Michel Dumas Sr. and his first wife, Josephthe Sancheau Contree. His mother was the daughter of Alexis Bonami Lesperance, a leader of the La Loche York Boat brigades, and Marguerite Gourneau. Michel married Véronique Ouellette (January 2, 1875 at St. Norbert), the daughter of Joseph Ouellette and Marie Anne Lamirande.

Children of Michel Dumas and Veronique Ouellette:

- George, married Marie Rose Tourond in 1917 at St. Boniface.
- Louis, born November 27, 1875 at St. Norbert.
- Arthur Alexandre, born May 1881 at St. Laurent, died 1886 at Leroy, North Dakota.
- Marie Rose, born 1883 at St. Laurent, died 1886 at St. Charles.
- Charles Alexandre, born September 8, 1885, died January 9, 1887 at St. Charles.

Michel was educated at mission schools. Michel was one of Riel's Captains during the 1869-70 Resistance at Red River. The family moved to St. Louis de Langevin in 1880. He was one of the men who travelled to Montana with Gabriel Dumont to get Louis Riel prior to the Resistance of 1885. Dumas was the One Arrow Reserve farm instructor and served for a time as the secretary of Riel's governing council.

In his interview with Father Cloutier, Dumas gives an account of the manpower and weapons available for the defence of Batoche;

Toutes les forces en tout — 475  
dont 43 Cris de la réserve de Barbet,  
et 15 au plus de la réserve de One Arrow.

Environ 400 Metis capables de porter les armes –  
122 bonnes carabines –  
56 fusils à 2 coups (fusils à canards, à petite portée)  
Le reste était des fusils à pierres et vieux

Au commencement, il a compté 12 barils de poudre –  
Environ 1000 cartouches pour les diverses sortes de carabines –  
Balles: plomb à canard et envelopes de thé<sup>2</sup>

Michel fought during the Resistance then fled to Montana with Dumont after the battle of Batoche. He and Dumont were arrested by the U.S. Army when they arrived at Fort Assiniboine. They were released two days later on the instructions of President

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Dumas Sr. was employed as a Bowsman with the HBC between 1853 and 1855.

<sup>2</sup> Cloutier, *op cit* Vol. 2, pp. 109-110. For some reason Dumas has not listed the Sioux participants in this account.

Cleveland. They then travelled to Fort Benton. A livestock dealer raised money for their support however Dumas spent much of the money on alcohol. The Fort Benton *River Press* gives the following report on September 23, 1885 (p.6):

Michel Dumas arrived yesterday from the Judith Basin, where he has been looking up a location for the colony of Half-Breeds from the north. The scarcity of water in locations otherwise favourable makes it undesirable for a colony. Mr. Dumas came in on business for Mr. Tingley, and left today for Utica. He will assist in the Judith cattle drive to Billings then go east.

In August 1885, at Lewistown, Montana, John Burke hired Dumas to appear in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Dumas appeared in the 1889 Exposition Universelle (Paris Worlds Fair) with Buffalo Bill Cody. Michel Dumas, along with Maxime Goulet, Maxime Lepine, and Jules Marion were presented as French-Canadien trappers with teams of Eskimo sled dogs

Dumas left St. Boniface on March 30, 1889, with Maxime Goulet, Ambroise Lepine, and Jules Marion on the way to the Paris World's Fair to take part in the Wild West Show. They took two Red River Carts, two trains of dogs and a buffalo gun. They built a Metis log cabin at the Fair.



In the finale at the Wild West Show their log cabin was set on fire and they were depicted as trappers under attack by Indians who are rescued by Buffalo Bill and his men. The Wild West Show took two Metis dog teams, twenty buffalo and 200 horses with them to Paris.

Michel returned to Canada and lived near relatives at Ebb and Flow on Lake Manitoba. He was the first schoolteacher at Ebb and Flow. Joe Morrisseau<sup>3</sup> informs that his family's oral history notes that when the police came to Ebb and Flow looking for Dumas, his wife who was hanging blankets on a clothes line, simply piled them on Michel to hide him. He then left to hide at Turtle Mountain, telling her he would meet her in 12 months north of St. Laurent, which he did. He was known as a heavy drinker and this contributed to his early death at St. Boniface on December 13, 1901, at age 52.

Following the Resistance battle at Batoche Lieutenant Governor Dewdney sent spies to report on the rebels who had fled to Montana. In a letter of November 9<sup>th</sup> 1885 James Anderson reports from Lewistown, Montana:

Sir,

Since writing to you from Billings on the 25<sup>th</sup> I have made the journey to this place, a distance of 140 miles. On my arrival here on Friday afternoon the 27<sup>th</sup> I immediately set to work to get the information desired by you. Some few weeks ago about thirty half breeds arrived here from the South Saskatchewan, fifteen stayed here, and the others went on to the Sun river, a half breed settlement between Benton and Helena, of which I shall write to you fully after visiting the place.

The following stayed here, and are settled for the winter, Gabriel Dumont, wife, one child, Ed. Dumont, wife, two children —John Dumont, Parenteau, wife, three children. G. Dumont is living with his brother-in-law, David Wilkie, and the others are building small houses for the winter. They arrived here with 20 horses and very little money. I had a long conversation with Dumont and find from him, that they all intend on settling in the Turtle Mountains, and will leave for there, as soon as spring opens out, as they cannot get any land in this district worth having.

I have had several conversations with the leading Half-breeds of this settlement, and find they consider the late rebellion was a mistake. Ed Wells the most intelligent of them remarked that it was out of the question to win against a government that could fight twenty years, if it was necessary to do so. I was at a half-breed dance last night, and had the pleasure of dancing the Red River Jig with some of the young ladies. I met Ed. Dumont at this place, who seems quite contented and satisfied with his lot. There are about two hundred and fifty in the settlement, owning thirty horses and twenty head of cattle; they were much better off three years ago. The Peigans have since run off a great number of their horses. I find that they have very few rifles, but those are of the best. The nearest Indians to this point are about 120 miles in a direct line—there is no intercourse between the Half-breeds and the Indians, who never come down here, and are not in any way connected with them in marriage, language or trade, so that there is no danger of union of any kind between them.

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<sup>3</sup> Joe Morrisseau's mother is a Dumas.

## Michel Dumas

Riel was well known all through this section of country, he had at one time lived at Flat Willow Creek, about 50 miles N.E. of this place, where about ten families are settled. The white settlers seem to pay very little attention to the late rebellion, and all I have come into contact with are quite satisfied with the turn it has taken. Dumas was here with Dumont for some time, and both had arranged to go to Chicago last August, but for some reason that I cannot find out, Dumont changed his mind. Dumas has since been living at Benton, and occasionally here. I am informed that he has entered the service of the Lingley Bros. of Benton, very large cattle owners, and very rich, and that he has been sent in charge of a shipment of cattle to Chicago. One of the Lingleys is married to a half-breed, and in sympathy with the late rebels. I feel quite confident that Dumont has no intention of giving any further trouble, but I do fear that Dumas means trouble. I am informed that he is very determined, and is continually swearing vengeance, and should Lingley Bros. help him by introducing him in Chicago to that class that would most likely aid him; it might be the foundation of serious trouble. On my arrival at Benton Dec. 2<sup>nd</sup> I shall make all the enquiries possible, and will advise you at once. The half breeds that have gone on to Sun River are C. Trocher (Trottier) & sons, L. Sayers, John Ross Jr., and one Rocheleau. I am also informed by the Half-breeds that some that left the South Saskatchewan have gone to Wood Mountain, and a few have gone direct to the Turtle Mountains. The American Govt. have a Ft. N.W. of this place about 10 miles known as Ft. McGinnis, about 400 men are kept in this fort, one half cavalry. I have arranged through an Englishman, a schoolmaster, to keep me posted as to Dumont's movements, also Dumas' should he return to this place.<sup>4</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> Glenbow Institute, Edgar Dewdney fonds, Series 22, Riel Rebellion, James Anderson's Reports – 1885, M320.