

Pierre Bottineau. (1816-1895)

Pierre Bottineau was born in a hunting camp at Bear Point, near the mouth of the Turtle River near what was to become Grand Forks, North Dakota. He was the son of an Ojibway mother, Margaret Ah-dik-Songab (Clear Sky), and a French-Canadian hunter father, Charles Joseph Bottineau. In 1787, Charles Joseph Bottineau came into the Northwest Territory Chippewa country with other French fur traders. Between 1803-1808, he was a voyageur and hunter with Alexander Henry in the Pembina area.

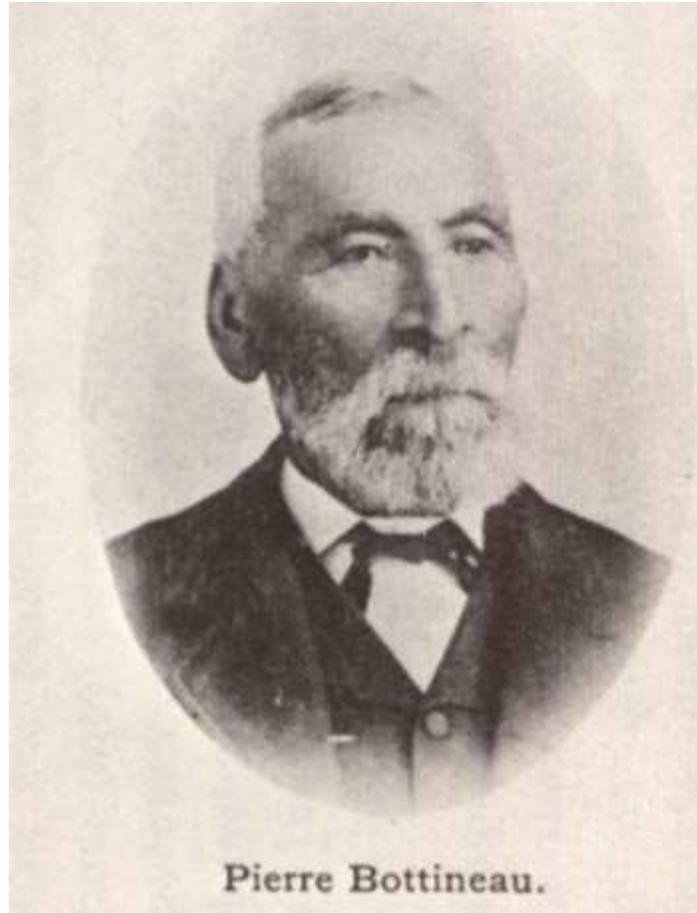
On October 3, 1803, Alexander Henry (Vol. I, p.226) described 'the bustle and noise which attended the transportation of five pieces of goods to the place where the houses were built in 1801-02.' He specifically recalled 'Charles Bottineau, with two horses and a cart loaded with kettles and other trash hanging on to it. Madame Bottineau with a squally infant on her back, scolding and tossing it about.'

On February 22, 1806, Henry (Vol.I, p.274) reported that Charles Joseph Bottineau and Ambrose Allard had left camp to secure four horses stolen by the Cree Indians. 'Allard and Bottineau returned with their stolen horses, after a narrow escape from being killed by the Crees.'

Pierre grew up on the Red River around Pembina and the English colonies. He was described as a man over six feet tall weighing about two hundred pounds and of swarthy complexion. He was a well-known guide for emigrants, traders and land speculators. Pierre was known as the "Daniel Boone" of North Dakota and a county is named for him in that state. During his life, Pierre learned to speak French, Dakota, Assiniboine, Ojibway, Plains Cree, Mandan, Winnebago and English.

Pierre married for the first time on December 1, 1836, at St. Boniface to Genevieve Larance (b. 1818), they had nine children. The nine children of this marriage were Pierre, John, Pierre (the first Pierre had died), Marie, Daniel, Rosalie, Margaret, Leon and Elsie, twins who died in infancy. Genevieve died at St. Anthony Falls on April 9, 1851. His second marriage, on January 6, 1852 was to Martha C. Gervais (b. 1837). They had 14 children, two of whom died as infants. Their names were Charles, Martha, George, Henry, William, Sidney, Emilie, George, Norman, Laura, Jenny, Genevieve, Agnes, and Noah. Pierre and 17 of his children received Half Breed Scrip under the 1864 amendments to the Old Crossing Treaty, a treaty for which he had acted as a translator and a witness.¹

¹ 1863 Treaty with the Chippewa-Red Lake and Pembina Bands, Oct 2, 1863, 13 Stats., 667, Ratified March 1, 1864, Proclaimed May 5, 1864, Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties. Vol. II, Pierre Bottineau signed his mark as a witness to the treaty made and concluded at the Old Crossing of Red Lake River, MN, on Oct 2, 1863, between the US, by their commissioners, Alexander Ramsey and Ashley C. Morrill, agent for the Chippewa Indians, and the Red Lake and Pembina bands of Chippewas; by their chiefs, head-men, and warriors. Pierre received Scrip # 119.



Pierre apprenticed with Antoine Le Count (Le Gros) and made his first long trip as a messenger for the North West Company in 1830, travelling from the Red River colony to Prairie du Chien in what is now Wisconsin. After that, he made several trips from the Hudson Bay Company's posts in Manitoba to the stations of the American fur company in various parts of Minnesota. He was at the Selkirk settlement in 1836, when a man named Dickson proclaimed himself general of the Indian Liberating Army and undertook to unite all the frontiersmen and all of the Indians of North America into a monarchy, of which he was to be the prince with the title of Montezuma II, with headquarters in Mexico. Although this scheme ultimately came to nothing, the originator had a number of followers in the beginning. In the winter of 1837, Martin McLeod, who was one of Dickson's followers (and for whom MacLeod County was afterward named) set out for the United States, and probably Mexico, accompanied by a Polander and an Irishman, Pierre Bottineau being the guide. They encountered such extremely cold weather that the Polander and the Irishman perished in a storm. McLeod and Bottineau pushed on through the snow for twenty-six days without encountering a human being. Their provisions were exhausted, and after going five days without food, they killed and ate their dog. They at last found shelter at a trading settlement on Lake Traverse.



Over the next few years, he regularly guided families who were leaving the Selkirk Settlement to the growing French Swiss Colony near Fort Snelling at the forks of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. Among those families were two of his sisters. In 1837, Pierre was the guide for the party of Martin McLeod from Fort Garry to Fort Snelling with a message for the commander of Fort Snelling from “General” James Dickson a grandiose man with visions of creating an Amerindian kingdom in California of which he was to be leader.

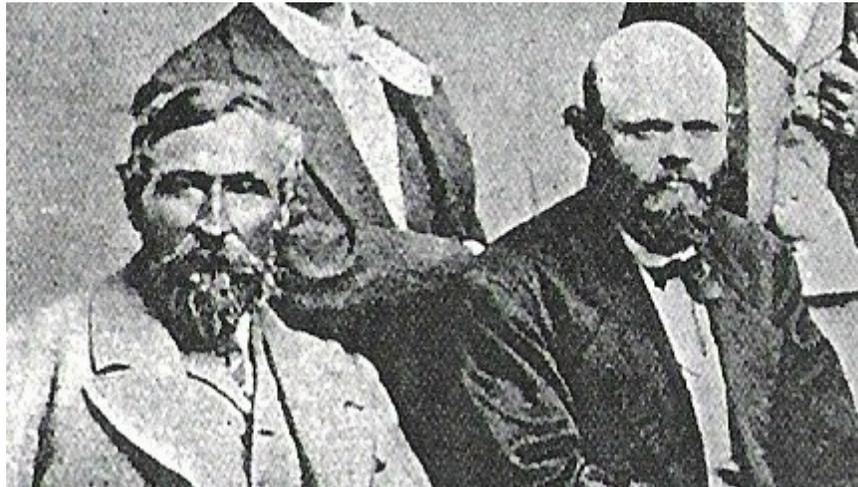
Upon his return to Fort Garry, Bottineau, with his wife Genevieve LaRance (or Jennie Larence, a Métisse) returned to settle at the French-Metis village near Fort Snelling where he began farming. In 1840, military regulations forced the evacuation of this settlement and Bottineau bought land at what is now St. Paul. In 1845 he bought a claim on the east bank of the Mississippi above St. Anthony Falls. Thus along with Franklin Steele, he came to own all of the waterfront properties of St. Anthony, now a part of the city of Minneapolis. In 1851 he also owned a hotel on Elk River which was used as a freighting way station.

Subsequent to business setbacks at the hands of other speculators Bottineau moved to the present day site of Osseo, Minnesota in 1855. Off and on he farmed there at what

was known as Bottineau's Prairie. He also held the office of Supervisor of Roads of Ramsey County through election in 1850.

On top of these farming activities, Pierre's main employment was in carrying out government supply contracts on the Upper Mississippi. Being fluent in French, Chippewa (Ojibwa), Cree and Assiniboine languages, he was also in demand as an interpreter. He often worked as a scout for Henry Hastings Sibley when the latter was an agent for the American Fur Company. In September of 1851 Pierre received a contract to provide supplies and guiding services for Alexander Ramsey, Governor of the Minnesota Territory. This was at the time Ramsey had a Presidential commission to negotiate a treaty with the Pembina, Red Lake and Turtle Mountain Chippewa. This initial effort however was never ratified.

In 1853, Isaac Stevens, the new Governor of the Washington Territory chose Bottineau, to be the principal guide for the Pacific Railroad Expedition across North Dakota to Fort Union on the Missouri River. Stevens described Bottineau as "the great guide and voyageur of Minnesota... famous as a buffalo hunter... [who] surpasses all of his class in truthfulness and great intelligence" (Isaac Stevens, *Narrative and final Report of the Explorations for a Route for a Pacific Railroad*, Washington, 1855: 41). It is notable that during this trip they met up with Governor Jean Baptiste Wilkie from Pembina with a buffalo hunting party comprising of 824 Red River carts.



Pierre Bottineau (left) and William R. Marshall (right) in 1863, during a preliminary survey for the Northern Pacific Railroad

In 1856 Bottineau was part of a group of land speculators who surveyed land at what is now Breckenridge, Minnesota. He received 200 lots as his share but the railway was not built close to this location and the lots were worthless. Bottineau was guide and interpreter on the two further treaty expeditions of 1860 and 1863 to treat with the Chippewa. Ramsey's treaty of 1863 was successful in that Congress ratified it. In 1862, Pierre, along with his fifteen-year-old son Daniel, led the James Liberty Fisk emigrant group to Fort Union. In the mid 1860s he led General Sibley's troops in search of the Sioux after the Indian Wars broke out.



Pierre Bottineau Statue

Bottineau's last important expedition was the 1869 Northern Pacific Railroad survey party to Fort Union. In 1876 he found his location at Osseo becoming too populated and relocated his family to Red Lake Falls, a town he established. There he built a large brick house on the bend of the river. In 1879 the grateful citizens of Minnesota petitioned Congress to give a pension to Bottineau. Bottineau died at Red Lake Falls, east of Grand Forks on July 27, 1895, leaving twenty-three children, nine by his first wife and fourteen by his second wife, Martha Gervais. His son Jean Baptiste practiced law in Minneapolis and later represented the Turtle Mountain Chippewa and Metis in their claims against the government. He was also a powerful advocate for educational measures for this group.



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