

# Annie McDermot, (Bannatyne). (C.1830-1908)

By Todd Lamirande<sup>1</sup>  
Compiled and edited by Lawrence Barkwell  
Louis Riel Institute



Annie's father was born in Ireland, joined the Hudson's Bay Company and arrived at York Factory in 1812. Around 1814 he married, à la façon du pays, Sarah McNab, the daughter of Thomas McNab and a Saulteaux woman. The couple had nine daughters and six sons who survived infancy, of which Annie was the fifth daughter.

In 1850, she married Andrew Bannatyne, a Hudson's Bay Company employee who went on to become a very wealthy merchant. She became a leading force in early philanthropy at Red River. Her ladies association did extensive fundraising for causes such as the Winnipeg General Hospital. She is perhaps best known for horsewhipping Toronto writer and poet Charles Mair as a consequence for the disparaging remarks he had made about Half-Breed women and Red River society in letters published in the *Toronto Globe*.

The daughter and wife of two of the most prominent men during the Red River Settlement era, Annie Bannatyne's horsewhipping of Charles Mair, an act still remembered by some people to this day, proved that she was not a mere appendage to the men in her life. Predating the Riel Resistance by almost a year, this act also symbolized the gulf between the old settlers and the brash newcomers from Canada. Mrs. Bannatyne certainly acquired gumption in a hurry.

Born in 1830, she grew up in a pioneer environment lacking many of the amenities found back east, and experienced a climate that varied widely between extremes of hot and cold. Annie McDermot's early upbringing was not all a life of privation because she grew up as the daughter of the wealthiest man in Red River.

Andrew McDermot was born in Ireland, County of Roscommon, in 1791, the son of Myles McDermot, a descendant of Irish royalty. After the death of his first wife, Myles had a family with the "Fair Kitty" O'Connor, a marriage which was never consecrated by the Catholic Church. Andrew was the product of this illegitimate union, which might explain his weak adherence to the Catholic faith and the fact that several of his children, including Annie, were married outside of the Church. He eventually left the Church in 1866. McDermot's illegitimacy would likely have limited his opportunities and it most likely was a major contributor to his decision to leave Ireland.

Andrew McDermott was the Red River embodiment of the Horatio Alger myth. After a dozen years in the service of the HBC, he retired to the Red River Settlement in 1824 and struck out on his own. By that time he could speak several Aboriginal languages, "run like a deer and endure cold like an Eskimo dog, and there was no better judge of men and horses in Red river, or any man who was his equal in address and accommodating qualities, in humor and shrewdness and the power of making money."<sup>2</sup> Starting out with £40 to £50, he had amassed a small fortune of between £8,000 to £10,000 by the 1840s.<sup>3</sup> His success is starkly revealed in the Assiniboia District census: in 1832 he owned 12 carts, 5 buildings, 7 oxen, 4 horses, and had 11 acres under cultivation; by 1849 he had 20 carts, 11 buildings, 40 oxen, 32 horses, a windmill, a shop of merchandise, and 40 acres under cultivation.<sup>4</sup> This was far more property than the average resident of Red River owned at the time.

---

<sup>1</sup> Todd is a long-time journalist with the *Aboriginal People's Television Network* and a former Communications Director with the Manitoba Metis Federation. Todd is the anchor for *APT National News Daytime*. He contributed the chapter "Resistance Activist Elzéar Goulet" to *Metis Legacy: A Metis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (L. J. Barkwell, L. M. Dorion and D. R. Préfontaine [Eds.], Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications and Louis Riel Institute, 2001: 79-92.

<sup>2</sup> W.J. Healy, *Women of Red River* (Winnipeg, 1967), 129-130.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Allen Mitchell, "A Red River Gossip," *The Beaver* (Spring 1961), 8.

<sup>4</sup> P.A.M., Assiniboia District-Census, 1832, 11; 1849, 9-10.

Alexander Ross wrote one of the best descriptions of McDermot and his multifarious interests: “[McDermot] is at once a merchant, a farmer, a horse jockey, and a dealer in cattle. In barter, traffic, and bargain making, he stands unrivalled. He has tried everything and everything he has tried fortune has turned to his advantage ... the poor man’s friend and the rich man’s companion.”<sup>5</sup> Ross was probably indulging in a bit of hagiography. Stories that survived down to the Great Depression suggest that McDermot’s parsimony helped his business success; for example, he would put used tea back in the tea chests to later be sold to unsuspecting customers.<sup>6</sup> Even when he worked for the HBC as a trader, McDermot was not above shortchanging the Indians: “he...deceived them so often that they put no faith in his word.”<sup>7</sup> Regardless of how he accumulated his wealth, it no doubt provided a relatively comfortable life for his family and a relatively privileged upbringing for Annie.



Part, if not all, of her childhood would have been spent at Emerald Lodge,<sup>8</sup> also known as Emerald Grove, the residence and store built a few hundred yards north of Fort Garry by McDermot. W.J. Healy records a description of the house by one of his granddaughters:

It was a very large two-storey house, built of logs, with weatherboard on top. It was plastered inside. A hallway ran down the middle, with two large rooms on each side of it at the front. There were fireplaces of mud, which were afterwards of brick, in each of those rooms. The bedrooms upstairs were heated by Carron box-stoves. There was good walnut furniture in the living room—some heavy chairs and other things...<sup>9</sup>

Annie lived in what was most likely one of the most prestigious buildings in the country, but it was not up to eastern standards. Joseph James Hargrave commented on the state of housing in Red River when he visited in the 1860s: “House building is in a very primitive state... Even the residences of many of the comparatively prosperous, evince a gross ignorance of the essentials of comfort on the part of their designers,” he scoffed.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, images of Emerald Lodge dating from the 1850s give some credibility as to the humble state of the McDermot abode.

None-the-less, their proximity to Fort Garry and the prominence of Annie’s father insured that she was exposed from an early age to the best cosmopolitan milieu that Red River could offer. The Fort was the centre of commerce and social life for most of the settlement. It was a “lively and attractive station, full of business and bustle. Here all the affairs of the colony are chiefly transacted, and here ladies wear their silken gowns, and gentlemen their beaver hats. Its

<sup>5</sup> Ross, 399.

<sup>6</sup> P.A.M., Charles Napier Bell Papers, box 1, #734-36. Douglas Waugh to Bell, November 13, 1933.

<sup>7</sup> H.B.C.A., B 122/e/1, William Brown, *Report of the Manitoba District for 1818 & 1819*.

<sup>8</sup> Emerald Lodge was also known as McDermotown. The collection of buildings owned by McDermot formed the nucleus of the future Winnipeg. Barry E. Hyman, “Andrew McDermot,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. XI, 1881-1890 (Toronto, 1982), 546.

<sup>9</sup> Healy, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph James Hargrave, *Red River* (Altona, 1977 reprint), 468.

gay and imposing appearance makes it the delight of every visitor; the rendezvous of all comers and goers.”<sup>11</sup> Many travellers from across the continent spent the night at Emerald Lodge, the “unofficial” hotel of Red River. Here they would tell stories of danger and adventure that likely made an impression on the young Annie and which probably contributed to her wanderlust. The McDermot family’s hospitality would mark a precedent that the later Mrs. Bannatyne would embrace heartily when she began her own career of entertaining guests.

It is difficult to speculate much about her childhood because their family was not a subject that interested contemporary writers such as Alexander Ross. However, the reminiscences of Andrew McDermot’s granddaughter, Harriet Truthwaite, offer a few insights into Annie’s childhood. She recalled that McDermot showed an affectionate and roguish side to his grandchildren:

He was always fond of teasing, and I remember that when he was quite old and used to sit in his square chair smoking his pipe, with his hands resting on the oak stick he always liked to have, you could never be sure what trick he wouldn’t play on you if you got within reach of him. When we were going somewhere and all dressed up, with the trains we used to wear, we used to have to hold our trains and keep well away from him or he would suddenly put out his stick and try to hold the train of a dress to the floor with it.<sup>12</sup>

McDermot’s store, with its exotic items and aromas, was a “place of wonder” for his grandchildren. He would often “humorously” search the children’s pockets to make sure they hadn’t absconded with any lumps of sugar after sojourning in the store.<sup>13</sup> He undoubtedly would have shown the same affection for his own children when the vigour of youth would have made him even more impish.

Annie McDermot’s upbringing would not have been as rigorous as many of the other mixed-blood children in the settlement. Certainly, it was not as severe as the Metis children who accompanied their parents on the semi-annual buffalo hunts, where they would participate in the dressing of buffalo robes and the making of pemmican. By the time she was eight or nine years old, and up to the time of her marriage, a female servant was counted among the occupants of Emerald Lodge.<sup>14</sup> In a household that often contained up to a dozen people, a servant would not mean that Annie was entirely free from chores. In a frontier setting, she would not escape cooking, cleaning and other drudgery that constituted “women’s work.” Yet this pioneering lifestyle did not mean she was free to avoid going to school.

Again, some speculation is necessary. An existing short biography suggests that her education was higher than that received by many girls in the settlement.<sup>15</sup> One of Riel’s biographers, Maggie Siggins, states that the young McDermot was educated at the Grey Nun’s Convent,<sup>16</sup> possibly under the assumption that Mr. McDermot was a Catholic. The Grey Nuns, however, did not start a school for girls until July 11, 1844, three weeks after they arrived in Red River. By this time, Annie would have been about 14 years old. Although she was probably born into the Catholic faith, it is unlikely that the Grey Nuns educated her, especially since they schooled their pupils in French. She more likely attended the Red River Academy, a boarding school that was founded in 1833 by the Anglican Missionary David Jones and his wife Mary.

The Academy was an attempt to transport the morals and values of Britain into the prairie wilderness, although it was largely for the benefit of the upper classes of the fur trade in Rupert’s Land. Jones wrote to Governor Simpson that a school was needed “for the moral improvement, religious instruction and general education of boys; the sons of gentlemen belonging to the fur trade.”<sup>17</sup> Almost as an afterthought, Simpson suggested that provision be made for the education of girls as well. Jones agreed, and a two story wooden building was erected near St. John’s Church, about three kilometres north of Fort Garry. It is difficult to know with certainty whether Annie attended the boarding school or made daily trips from Emerald Lodge. Whereas boys received schooling heavy in the classics, the young Annie received a more general education that embraced “reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, the use of globes, history and catechical information.”<sup>18</sup> Because the Academy served Red River’s upper crust, Andrew McDermot would unquestionably have sent his daughters there.

Finding a schoolmistress was problematic. Between 1833 and 1840, several women came and left the Academy, most often in order to be married. Mary Lowman, for example, left in the middle of a school year to marry Chief Factor James Bird, leaving the girls to the “harsh discipline” of the boy’s instructor, John Macallum. From 1840 to 1845, the

---

<sup>11</sup> Ross, 143.

<sup>12</sup> Healy, 133.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>14</sup> Assiniboia Census, 1838, 1849, 33,10.

<sup>15</sup> Manitoba Library Association, *Pioneers and Early Citizens of Manitoba* (Winnipeg, 1971), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Maggie Siggins, *Riel: A Life of Revolution* (Toronto, 1994), 87.

<sup>17</sup> William J. Fraser, *St. John’s College, Winnipeg 1866-1966: A History of the first Hundred Years of the College* (Winnipeg, 1966), 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

likely dates for Annie's attendance, a Miss Allan taught the girl's section. She was described as careless and lazy and eventually dismissed in 1845.

Despite these problems the school's education turned out reasonable facsimiles of "proper English ladies." Historian Sylvia Van Kirk has pointed out that the Academy made considerable progress in producing women with the grace and polish expected of young Victorian ladies.<sup>19</sup> Indeed HBC Chief Trader, James Hargrave told McDermot in 1839, that one of his older daughters, who probably attended the Academy, was more like a British lady "than any other I have met in this land."<sup>20</sup> This kind of publicity made the girls desirable marriage partners. Annie McDermot's match came in the form of a young Scotsman who would eventually rival and surpass Andrew McDermot in fortune and prominence. Andrew Graham Ballenden Bannatyne was born in the Orkney Islands a year before the birth of his future wife. He followed his grandfather and great-grandfathers into the service of the Hudson's Bay Company at age fourteen. Initially posted to Sault Ste. Marie, he was transferred to Red River two years later. He soon witnessed how free traders like Andrew McDermot and Norman Kittson enjoyed more material wealth than that of the company employees. The outcome of the Guillaume Sayer trial in 1849, with its cries of "Le commerce est libre! Vive la liberté!," probably added fuel to his ambition, and he eventually left the HBC in 1851. This split with the HBC was not an amicable parting. Bannatyne was not invited to the bon voyage parties held for Dr. John Rae. He later wrote to Henry Fisher about being snubbed: "I was not invited to their great dinner. I am still in [the HBC's] black book. I wish the whole of them were now in McKenzie's River living on nothing but Jack Fish."<sup>21</sup> Yet, his time at Red River must have brought him to the attention of both Andrew McDermot and his daughter Annie.

The question arises as to whether Andrew Bannatyne married Annie McDermot out of love. First, although she would have some choice, this was limited to men of a certain class and subject to parental approval. Second, fur-trading families often intermarried with one another to strengthen business ties. McDermot's oldest daughter Marie married a company clerk, Richard Lane; Ellen married Thomas Bird son of a former Chief Factor; Mary Sally married Governor MacTavish; and Annie married a former company clerk. Bannatyne's letter to Fisher in 1850 and 1851 give no inclination of plans to marry. However, it was common for employees to reveal little about their personal lives. Nearly one year later he begins a letter to Fisher: "Since I had the pleasure of seeing you last I have got married & left the Company's service & settled down a Merchant. I now live with Mr. McDermot & feel quite happy."<sup>22</sup> The tone of the letter suggests a quick courtship, but the proximity of Fort Garry to Emerald Lodge meant that Bannatyne undoubtedly had frequent contact with the McDermot's and over time could have become smitten with Annie.

The marriage of Andrew Bannatyne to Annie McDermot took place on August 19, 1851. This date is somewhat odd because Bannatyne was a Presbyterian, and the settlement's first full-time ordained Presbyterian minister, Reverend John Black,<sup>23</sup> did not arrive until exactly one month later. Why the young couple did not wait until his arrival is unknown. Presbyterians within the Red River Settlement had been without their own clergyman for its first forty years. The Anglican Church had made some accommodations, but by the mid 1840s these had disappeared and Presbyterian worshippers were petitioning back East for their own minister. This religious division came to a head when one of the Anglican clergy proclaimed from the pulpit, "no Presbyterian would ever enter the kingdom of heaven."<sup>24</sup> It is therefore unlikely that the couple married in the Church of England. In the early years of the Selkirk Colony, a Presbyterian Church elder, James Sutherland, had been authorized to perform marriages and baptisms and it is possible the same practice was still in place by the time of the Bannatyne's marriage. Perhaps, Red River historian Alexander Ross, the acknowledged leader of the Presbyterian community, performed the ceremony himself.

The first couple of years of marriage brought triumph and tragedy for the new Mrs. Bannatyne. A little over one year after the wedding a son John was born. Shortly thereafter, a family tradition was begun with the Bannatyne's. Although he would spend the rest of his life in Red River, Bannatyne became what would later be termed a "snowbird." His first opportunity to avoid the harsh Manitoba climate came during the winter of 1853-54 when he took his wife and infant son to Scotland. The trip was no doubt a combination honeymoon and a chance to show Annie the country of his birth. Tragically, the young John Bannatyne died during the journey on November 24, 1853. He was buried in Edinburgh, Scotland. Although it was common to have large families with the expectation that a few children would not survive to adulthood, Annie Bannatyne would end up outliving seven of her ten children. These deaths must have brought great sadness throughout her life. However, she soldiered on and never let them affect her public persona, which developed into that of a friendly and gracious host.

---

<sup>19</sup> Van Kirk, 151.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Van Kirk, 151.

<sup>21</sup> A.A.St.B., Fonds Fisher-d'Eschambault, F-0505-0538, Bannatyne to Fisher, March 12, 1851.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit., Bannatyne to Fisher, February 21, 1852.

<sup>23</sup> Black was married to a daughter of Alexander Ross. When she died he married Laurenda G. Bannatyne, Andrew Bannatyne's sister.

<sup>24</sup> Ross, 346.

Her skills as an entertainer, learned in the McDermot family home, tending to travelling dignitaries, were put to good use as her husband rose in prominence. Under the tutelage of Andrew McDermot, Bannatyne surpassed all of the other sons-in-law when it came to business acumen. He soon had his own store built on a river lot right next to that of his father-in-law. Bannatyne's success as a free trader soon brought him to the attention of the company he so loathed. In 1857, he went north to Norway House to trade but he was arrested and sent back to Red River for violating the HBC's trading monopoly. However, there would be no repeat of the Sayer trial because Governor MacTavish released Bannatyne soon after his arrival. He was now able to continue his trading practices unfettered and he continued his rise in prominence. By 1867, Bannatyne's skill and business sense had brought him to the top of the Red River merchant hierarchy. A traveller who had journeyed through the settlement in 1867 later commented:

Few people ever passed through Red River at that time without experiencing the kindness and hospitality of Mr. Andrew G. Bannatyne, the leading merchant of the 'town.' We were no exception, and were most pleasantly entertained at his comfortable abode, which was furnished in a manner surprising to see after the plain furnishings provided by the Hudson's Bay Company for the quarters of their officers.<sup>25</sup>

Of course as mistress of the house, Annie would have been the one who made the "abode" comfortable and who provided most of the hospitality. By this time, she was renowned throughout Red River for her hospitality and friendliness. "Mrs. Bannatyne had a Christmas [tree?] last Thursday and she came down herself and invited myself and Annie... next Tuesday they are to have another grand gathering. They will go through some ceremonies and have a grand dinner after, all the ladies of the freemasons and a few others (myself included) will be present," wrote Henrietta Black (née Ross) to her brother James during the Christmas season of 1864.<sup>26</sup> Her role as hostess in the dinner to celebrate the establishment of a Freemason's Lodge<sup>27</sup> was just one example of how Annie Bannatyne's position was to be found firmly amongst the *crème de la crème* of the settlement. She did not, however, use her position to merely put on appearances.

In the late 1860s Mrs. Bannatyne involved herself in charitable functions and became a leading force in early efforts of Red River philanthropy, this activity was to become a life-long passion. During the 1866 Christmas season, Annie and several of the other prominent women of the settlement organized a bazaar where they raised and distributed £60 or £70 to the poor. These bazaars became an annual event. James Hargrave commented: "A similar effort, assisted by an amateur concert in 1867 produced about £100, and gave occasion to a series of very large and pleasant gatherings of people from all quarters during the Christmas week."<sup>28</sup> In fact, the 1867 bazaar was held in Mr. Bannatyne's new brick store on what became Winnipeg's Main Street. The Bazaars helped a number of charitable causes, but Annie became particularly involved in establishing Winnipeg's first hospital in the early 1870s. On December 18, 1872, Andrew Bannatyne chaired an influential meeting "composed of men of all classes" to consider establishing a hospital,<sup>29</sup> one can only speculate on the amount of influence his wife may have had, given that at this time they had lost a five year old son and infant daughter. These tragedies may have spurred Annie to begin fund raising and motivated Andrew to donate the land for a hospital. In 1875, Mrs. Bannatyne's Ladies Association was able to hand over \$1,345.80 to help fund the Winnipeg General Hospital.<sup>30</sup> This Ladies Association eventually evolved into the Women's Hospital Aid Society, which helped to raise money and secured the donation of goods for many years to follow.

The above noted activities were typical for wealthy women of that time, but early one day in 1869, Annie stepped outside her gender role and committed a single act of resistance that fired the imagination of a young Louis Riel, an act which is still remembered by many Manitobans to this day.

The incident began with the arrival of Charles Mair into the Red River Settlement. The Canadian Minister of Public Works, William McDougall, sent John Snow and a group of men to survey and build a road from Lake of the Woods to Fort Garry. Mair used his friendship with McDougall to secure a job as paymaster on the project. Just before arriving, Mair and a few colleagues had formed a group called "Canada First," advocating the annexation of the North-West by Canada. Naturally he fell into league with Dr. John Christian Schultz, who also desired this annexation and was making this view known through his newspaper, the *Nor'Wester*. Schultz had also become Riel's chief nemesis during the Resistance.

---

<sup>25</sup> Isaac Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers* (Toronto, 1913), 154.

<sup>26</sup> P.A.M., Ross Papers, #273, Henrietta Black to James Ross, December 24, 1864.

<sup>27</sup> According to Charles Mair, Freemasonry had been established to "heal the fierce antagonisms of the time and place, but failed in its object and fell to pieces." Quoted in William Douglas, *Freemasonry in Manitoba* (Winnipeg, 1925), 47-48. Its failure was probably due to the difference in outlook on the question of annexation as represented by the lodge's two leading members: John Christian Schultz, the chief proponent of Ruperts Land annexation, and Andrew Bannatyne, who ended up siding with Louis Riel.

<sup>28</sup> Hargrave, 421.

<sup>29</sup> *Manitoba Gazette*, December 25, 1872: 2.

<sup>30</sup> P.A.M., Sessional Papers—Manitoba—Legislative Assembly/The Treasurer/In account with the Winnipeg General Hospital from May 14<sup>th</sup> 1875 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1875.

Mair, who had published a well-received book of poetry, and considered himself an acute observer of the human condition, also thought of himself as part of the vanguard of a wave of settlers who would one day make the North West a part of the Ontario frontier. Mair's arrogance and belief that the current inhabitants would need to make way for the more upstanding and industrious settlers soon to come from Ontario did not make him many friends amongst the older settlers.<sup>31</sup> Some of these sentiments are apparent in his correspondence.

Mair's letter, ostensibly written to his brother, was published in the *Toronto Globe*, and brought him the hostility of the settlement and, in particular, raised the ire of Annie Bannatyne. Mair apparently did not realize, or care, that the *Globe* was eventually delivered to Red River. In the third letter of a series reprinted in the paper (November 19, 1868) Mair caused a real sensation. Although a drought and infestation of grasshoppers had ruined the 1868 harvest and caused "Half-Breed" families to be in want, Mair blamed their predicament on their refusal to take up farming.<sup>32</sup> After moving out of the Dutchman's Hotel, into Dr. Schultz's house Mair also commented: "The change was comfortable, I assure you, from the racket of a motley crowd of Half-Breeds, playing billiards and drinking, to the quiet and solid comfort of a home."<sup>33</sup> This remark upset the hotel's owner, George Emmerling, who vowed, "Should the author of these philippics [antagonistic words] ever enter the house he had maligned, he should be expelled."<sup>34</sup>

However, it was Mair's remarks about the ladies of Red River that caused the most commotion. After a party held by Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Begg, he wrote:

Altogether, I received hospitalities to my heart's content, and I left the place thoroughly pleased with most that I had met. There are jealousies and heart-burnings, however. Many wealthy people are married to half-breed women, who having no coat of arms but a "totem" to look back to, make up for the deficiency by biting at the backs of their "white" sisters. The white sisters fall back upon their whiteness, whilst the husbands meet each other with desperate courtesies and hospitalities, with a view to filthy lucre in the background.<sup>35</sup>

Mair's unkind remarks drew the anger of the dinner party's host, who had obviously been offended by the hypocrisy of someone whose boorish behaviour did not make him beyond reproach.<sup>36</sup>

In Begg's, *Dot it Down*, a dinner party takes place where Mair is reincarnated as an ill-mannered sot who insults a Half-Breed woman, and receives a slap in the face from her. Thus, Begg savages what little reputation Mair had in the settlement. This also seems to have been a metaphorical representation of the horsewhipping that Annie Bannatyne administered to Mair.

There are several versions of Mair's comeuppance. James Hargrave recounted that three women had assaulted him: one "Confined herself to words" but "one lady pulled the poet's nose, while another used her fingers rudely about his ears."<sup>37</sup> There is no mention of Mrs. Bannatyne's involvement, although another contemporary account described how she "Slapped his face then struck him several times with a riding whip..."<sup>38</sup> But the best version comes courtesy of St. Boniface priest, Georges Dugas:

Mair, having committed the indelicacy of writing, in Ontario newspapers, some cutting words about the women of Winnipeg, suffers the humiliation of being horsewhipped in the city" post office, by Mrs. Bannatyne, the wife of one of the town" most notable citizens. She had read Mair" writing, and she promised herself to make him pay for it. She ordered the clerk of [her husband]" store, where the post office was located, to come and warn her when Mair arrived to collect his letters and newspapers, as he did every Saturday. Therefore, one Saturday, at four in the afternoon, while the store was full of people, Daniel Mulligan, the clerk, having seen Mair's arrival, ran to tell Mrs. Bannatyne. She quickly throws a shawl on her head and bursts into the post office; holding a large whip in her hand. Without hesitating, she advances on Mair, seizes his nose between her fingers and gives him five or six strokes of the whip on different parts of his body. "Look," she says, "this is how the women of Red River treat those who insult them." The scene lasted only half a minute. But it appeared longer to Mair who left quickly, daring neither to speak nor seek revenge. By evening, the incident was known all across the country.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Begg uncharitably portrayed Mair in his novel, *Dot it Down*, as a "Stout dumpy little fellow, who appeared to think himself of more importance than the whole of those in the room put together." Alexander Begg, *Dot it Down; A Story of Life in the North-West*, (Toronto, 1871), 252.

<sup>32</sup> Letter reprinted in Alexander Begg, *Begg's Red River Journal*, edited by W.L. Morton (Toronto, 1956), 395-399.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>34</sup> Hargrave, 456.

<sup>35</sup> *Begg's Red River Journal*, 396.

<sup>36</sup> Begg dedicated his first and only novel to the Bannatyne's (Andrew was his business partner at the time of this incident). Indeed Mair apparently motivated the book. In the dedication Begg writes, "it has caused me much trouble and indignation to see the kind-hearted people of Red River vilified by scribblers in the public press..."

<sup>37</sup> Hargrave, 456.

<sup>38</sup> P.A.M., Ross Papers, #364, A.W. Ross to his brother, February 15, 1869.

<sup>39</sup> L'Abbé G. Dugas, *Histoire Védique des faites qui ont Préparé le mouvement des Metis a la Rivière-rouge en 1869* (Montréal, 1905), 27-28.

Needless to say, Mair had a stormy meeting with the husbands in the post office that same Saturday night, where he tried to explain that his letter had not been meant for outside readers. As part of the damage control, he would later write a rather backhand apology. "I had received much kindness in Red River and certainly bore no feelings of dislike or ill-will to anyone. But political and monopolistic antagonisms ran high, and... this letter... amongst sensible people, at any other time would have only provoked a smile."<sup>40</sup> Although the whipping caused an immediate sensation around the settlement, it also had some longer lasting effects.

For Charles Mair, the humiliation of being horsewhipped was still being felt a decade later. By that time, he had become a prominent citizen in Prince Albert, where he raised the anger of Lawrence Clarke, the Chief Factor of the local Hudson's Bay Company post. Both men soon became engaged in a war of words that they conducted in the local newspaper. In rebuttal to an article Mair wrote in the *Saskatchewan Herald*, where he criticized the HBC, Clarke virulently attacked Mair's personal credibility. He accomplished this feat by dredging up Mair's past experiences at Red River. Here was a man whose integrity could not be trusted and whose word could not be believed; after all, he had been "personally chastized by a lady in Winnipeg, a native of the country, for the wicked, malicious, lying remarks he had made on the Half-Breed race," wrote Clarke.<sup>41</sup> Mair, nevertheless, would eventually become a relatively wealthy man through land speculation in Prince Albert and later in Kelowna, B.C., but he would lose his wealth in a bust cycle and be again forced to work for a living at an advanced age. Annie Bannatyne's whipping also made an impression on a young man who had recently returned to Red River from the east.

It is interesting to speculate on how much Annie's resistance to Mair, the arrogant Canadian became a symbolic catalyst for Louis Riel. Did it in some way inspire him to stop the annexation of Rupert's Land by Canada? Riel had arrived in 1868 to a Red River rife with rumours of political change, and according to his friend, Louis Schmidt, the local annexationists had plans made, but nothing in place, preferring to wait until the Canadian government acted first.<sup>42</sup> Yet, the horsewhipping of Mair had made an indelible impression on Riel. An act, which he interpreted as one of resistance to the current political agitation. On February 25, 1869, *Le Nouveau Monde* printed a letter from a Half-Breed which was signed "L.R.". Riel undoubtedly wrote this letter, one in which he savagely takes Mair to task for his observances on Red River life and especially its ladies: "You speak of a great many things that you have not had time to see or know; that would be worth as much as the remainder of your letter; as much as the scarcely courteous terms, I will even say barely civilized, which you use in speaking of the ladies of the country..."<sup>43</sup> Just two paragraphs above this remark, Riel responded to Mair's implication that the "future of the country" was its inevitable annexation to Canada. "[Red River] will have some kind of future, but not that which Mr. Mair predicts for it," replied Riel.<sup>44</sup> Some time in 1869, Riel wrote a poem entitled "At Oak Point,"<sup>45</sup> in which he ripped apart Mair's character, and, through a clever play on his name, characterized him as a *chien de Mer* (sea dog). The key stanzas closely associate Canada's thirst for land with the resistance of Annie Bannatyne.

We say on our lands  
La-i-tou-tra-la! Bis.  
We say on our lands  
He wants to be the master  
Over there!!!

Send us back quickly  
La-i-tou-tra-la! Bis.  
Send us back quickly  
That sea dog under water  
Over there!!!

The atmosphere is too dry  
La-i-tou-tra-la! Bis.  
The atmosphere is too dry  
For him to stay there  
Over there!!!

Let's put out to dry  
La-i-tou-tra-la! Bis.  
Let's put out to dry

---

<sup>40</sup> Charles Mair quoted in Gregg Shalliday, editor, *Manitoba 125: A History, volume one* (Winnipeg, 1993), 204.

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence Clarke quoted in Norman Shrive, *Charles Mair: Lierary Nationalist* (Toronto, 1965), 150. One should also be aware that Lawrence Clarke's wife was Metis.

<sup>42</sup> Louis Schmidt, "Les Mémoires de Louis Schmidt," *Patriote de L'Ouest*, January 25, 1912.

<sup>43</sup> Letter reprinted in *Begg's Red River Journal*, 401.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Oak Point, later known as Ste. Anne des Chênes, was where Mair worked as paymaster on the construction of Dawson Road.

The noses of the sea dog  
Over there!!!

It's a lady that will show us  
La-i-tou-tra-la! Bis.  
It's a lady that will show us  
How we should treat them  
Over there!!!<sup>46</sup>

As shown in the memoirs of Jean-Baptiste Laderoute, by the end of April 1869, Riel was associating Annie Bannatyne's stand against Mair with his own stand against the take-over of Red River by the Canadian government. After work one day that April, Laderoute went to Monchamp's saloon for a drink and met Narcisse Marion, Dr. Walter Brown and Charles Mair. Joseph Genthon and Riel arrived shortly thereafter, and after being introduced to each other, the men sat down for a friendly chat. Brown had recently taken over ownership of the *Nor'Wester*, the settlement's only newspaper, from Dr. Schultz, and he solicited the group's opinions regarding his editorship. Marion was diplomatic and said there was nothing better in Red River, but Riel was quick to remind Brown that he was "not always correct in [his] newspaper," pointing out the rude remarks that had appeared about Red River women. Brown rightly denied that he had committed such an offence, but Riel dared Brown to accompany him on a visit to Mrs. Bannatyne and have her prove the veracity of his remarks.<sup>47</sup> The conversation quickly turned to the impending transfer of sovereignty of the Red River Settlement to Canada. Riel declared that the political change was not going to happen as had been foreseen. Dr. Brown and Mair asked, "Who is going to stop it?" Riel answered, "It is I who is going to stop it."<sup>48</sup> Clearly, Annie's act had become a symbol for Riel, because he closely associated her resistance with his own plans. Because she left no record of her own, Annie's reason for attacking Mair will never be known precisely.

It is unlikely that her attack on Mair was for political reasons and it seems more likely that she was defending her status as an elite mixed-blood woman against a very rude and unctuous person who condescendingly felt himself to be a cut above the local inhabitants. As 1869, events moved to open resistance; Andrew Bannatyne became quite actively involved on the Metis side. It is an open question as to how much his wife influenced his sympathies to the Metis cause.

The number of incidents and events where Andrew Bannatyne was involved during the Riel Resistance are too numerous to document here, but his participation was nearly always supportive of Riel and the provisional government. Indeed, early in the resistance, accusers charged Bannatyne with provisioning the French and Metis for their obstruction of William McDougall entry into the country and assisting them in having the mail opened, charges that, at the time, Begg vehemently denied.<sup>49</sup> Although he may not have been directly involved in these acts, Bannatyne made his position on the Resistance known in a letter to Bishop Taché: "My feelings are with Presid. Rielle (sic) & I don't hide it while I know he is working for the good of the Country."<sup>50</sup> This support, however, did not prevent Riel from arresting Bannatyne for attempting to visit Governor McTavish and Dr. Cowan, both of whom were under house arrest. Eventually, their differences were resolved and they were under friendly terms. Having a Metis wife did not necessarily guarantee empathy for Riel. In fact, Annie's father, the crusty old Andrew McDermot apparently tried to convince his daughter, Mary Sally McTavish, to assassinate Riel.<sup>51</sup>

It is typical of the way that history has treated women that most of the activities that Annie may have participated in during the Resistance went unrecorded. Nonetheless, Her sister, Mrs. McTavish, did accompany her on a visit to Father Lestanc in an effort to save the life of Major Boulton.<sup>52</sup> Also in an attempt to discredit Riel, the escaped Dr. Schultz spread the rumour that he had almost caused Mrs. Bannatyne and Mrs. Begg to be apprehended on suspicion of

---

<sup>46</sup> Poem reprinted in *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel, volume 4*, edited by Glen Campbell (Edmonton, 1985), 86.

<sup>47</sup> Written some 43 years after the event, Laderoute's recollections of the Resistance will undoubtedly be lacking in accuracy. As pointed out previously, Mair's letters were printed in the *Toronto Globe* not the *Nor'Wester*. Riel, therefore, should not have accused Brown of having printed them. However, Riel would not have passed up a chance to needle Mair on his breach of etiquette. Oblats de Marie Immaculée, Province du Manitoba, dossier Louis Riel, Jean-Baptiste Laderoute, *Mémoires des Troubles du Manitoba, 1869-70*, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Begg's Red River Journal*, 319.

<sup>50</sup> A.A. St.B., Fonds Taché, A.G.B. Bannatyne to Bishop Taché, August 6, 1870.

<sup>51</sup> Of course, this anecdote may be apocryphal, but apparently Mrs. McTavish and a companion "both looked horrified" when McDermot showed them how to use a gun and suggested that they kill Riel with it, hinting that "no blame would ever attach to them" and the settlement would be better off because all the troubles he had caused would be over once and for all. *Manitoba Free Press*, March 7, 1914: 4.

<sup>52</sup> Boulton had been condemned to death for his role in trying to overthrow Riel's provisional government. This is the incident that resulted in the illegal apprehension of Norbert Prisien and subsequent deaths of Hugh Sutherland and Parisien. Although Donald A. Smith is usually given credit for having Boulton's sentence commuted, Sutherland's mother plead passionately with Riel not to use her son's death as an excuse for further bloodshed and probably had the greater influence. Healy, 226-227.

espionage.<sup>53</sup> Any further involvement in events by Annie ended when she and some of her children accompanied her sister and Governor McTavish (who was suffering from tuberculosis) on the steamer, the *International*, when it left Red River on May 17, 1870.

The reasons she left are unclear; it may have been that her husband was concerned for her safety, especially after the execution of Thomas Scott. He himself left in August. He wrote to Taché that he was apprehensive as to his own safety due to the agitation of the Upper Canadian people, who were excited over Scott's execution.<sup>54</sup> Annie had probably left to assist her older sister care for her invalid husband. Governor McTavish died on July 23, 1870, in Liverpool, two days after disembarking. Andrew joined Annie in Great Britain and they then returned to Canada. She must have been ill during the journey because a letter from Riel received upon their return, expresses hope that her health has improved.<sup>55</sup>

The strait-laced conventions of Victorians often do not allow one to make insights into matters of the heart, but there is some evidence to suggest that the Bannatyne's marriage was one based on love and companionship. Sometime after the Red River Resistance, Mr. Bannatyne wrote to Riel to apologise for not returning a wagon borrowed from Riel's mother. His excuse was Annie's illness "... my good wife was taken so very unwell that I have been at her side all the time & I forgot it. I am thankful to be able to say she is a little improved, but very weak yet. I trust this will in some way excuse my rudeness & neglect."<sup>56</sup> Although Annie's illness may have been just a useful excuse, the two of them were close companions on their voyages, with Andrew often deferring to his wife. While wintering in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1882, Bannatyne was undecided as to whether to go on and visit Chicago and New York, although "the good wife [was] very anxious to go."<sup>57</sup> It was likely that Annie did convince her husband to visit these cities, and she may have convinced Andrew to proceed with a trip to Britain the following autumn, despite the collapse of his wealth as the Manitoba land boom came to a crashing thud. "The only thing my creditor's can't take is my trip to Europe," he joked.<sup>58</sup> The description of this trip in one of his letters makes it sound like a true vacation, or even a second honeymoon. The couple went to the theatre, rode the "underground railway", reviewed the troops on their return from Egypt, made an unsuccessful attempt to get inside the Houses of Parliament, had Annie presented in Court before Queen Victoria<sup>59</sup> and got caught in a London throng.

Tragically, Annie and a few of her children accompanied Andrew on a final trip intended to improve his health. Andrew Bannatyne passed away in the Merchant's Hotel in St. Paul On May 18, 1889, while returning from Texas. His health and fortune had both declined during the 1880s, and his passing was therefore "sad, though not entirely unexpected news."<sup>60</sup> Annie no doubt accompanied the body back to Winnipeg where a lavish funeral, the "largest that [had] been seen for years" was held at Bannatyne's castle.<sup>61</sup> The long procession made its way from Armstrong's point to Kildonan Cemetery, where several Bannatyne children were already buried. Annie lived another nineteen years after his death and kept a relatively low profile.

## **Annie McDermot Bannatyne's Metis scrip application**

### **Next page**

---

<sup>53</sup> *Begg's Red River Journal*, 319.

<sup>54</sup> A.A. St.B., Fonds Taché, A.G.B. Bannatyne to Bishop Taché, August 6, 1870.

<sup>55</sup> Louis Riel to A.G.B. Bannatyne, December 29, 1870. Reprinted in *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel, volume 1*, edited by Raymond Huel, 127.

<sup>56</sup> P.A.M., Louis Riel Papers, #66, A.G.B. Bannatyne to Louis Riel, n.d.

<sup>57</sup> P.A.M., A.G.B. Bannatyne Papers, #3, A.G.B. Bannatyne to Andrew Strang, January 22, 1882.

<sup>58</sup> Bannatyne quoted in J.E. Rea, "Andrew Graham Ballenden Bannatyne," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, volume XI, 1881-1890* (Toronto, 1982), 47.

<sup>59</sup> Although Annie's granddaughter mentioned the meeting with the Queen, she did not give a date, but this is most likely the time because of the prominence of the Bannatyne's.

<sup>60</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, May 20, 1889, 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Free Press*, May 22, 1889, 4.

DOMINION OF CANADA.  
PROVINCE OF MANITOBA.  
County of *Selkirk*

I, *Amie Pannatyne*  
of the Parish of *St. John* in  
the County of *Selkirk* in  
said Province, make oath and say as follows:

1. I am the Half-breed head of a family resident in the Parish of *St. John* in the said Province on the 15th day of July, A. D. 1870, and consisting of myself, and *husband and children* and I claim to be entitled as such head of family to receive a grant of one hundred and sixty acres of land or to receive Scrip for one hundred and sixty dollars pursuant to the Statute in that behalf.
2. I was born on or about the *12<sup>th</sup>* day of *November* A. D. 1852 in the Parish of *St. John* in said Province.
3. My parents were *Andrew McDermid* my father a *Irishman* and *Sarah McNab* my mother a *Scotswoman*.
4. I have not made or caused to be made any claim of land or Scrip other than the above in this or any other Parish in said Province, nor have I claimed or received, as an Indian, any annuity moneys from the Government of said Dominion.

Sworn before me at the Parish of *St. John* in the County of *Selkirk* on the *25<sup>th</sup>* day of *June* A. D. 1875, having been first read and explained in the *English* language to said deponent, who seemed perfectly to understand the same, and *signed* in my presence.

*Amie Pannatyne*

*[Signature]*  
Commissioner.

*Claim 1690 Scrip issued 20<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1876*  
*4/3/80*  
*[Signature]*