

Alexis Piché.

Alexis Piché is credited with bringing the church presence to Lac St. Anne, Alberta. The lake is located about 45 miles northwest of the city of Edmonton. In 1841, Alexis Piché Sr., a Métis who lived in the area, traveled to St. Boniface to ask that priests be sent to live among them. Even though priests were scarce, Bishop Provencher sent Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault, who was a Cree speaker, to check things out.

Alexis Piché Sr. was married to Opeh-tah-she-toy-wishk (a Plains Cree woman). Their sons Alexis "Bobtail" Piché Jr. and Baptiste "Ermineskin" Piché were both Chiefs of Plains Cree Bands. Chief Bobtail's son Coyote (François) was active in the Resistance of 1885 in making raids on the HBC stores at Battleford.

Alexis has been written about in an article by Juliette Champagne entitled "The First Catholics of Alberta."

After the passage of the Pacific-bound missionaries in 1838, a strong desire for the presence of a Catholic priest manifested itself among this population, and in 1841, a freeman, known as Piché, probably on a trading mission at Red River, was delegated to visit Bishop Provencher at St. Boniface and present a formal request that a Catholic priest be sent to the "Rocky Mountains" (le fort de la Montagne). The bishop noted that Piché was a Métis, living "with and as the Indians." This Piché was well known in the Saskatchewan district and along the foothills, as he often worked for the HBC as a guide and as a hunter. Mount Peechee near Lake Minnewanka was named in his honour by the governor of the HBC, George Simpson, who was guided by him through Devil's Gap and on through the pass which bears Simpson's name. Piché was also the father of the famed Cree chiefs Ermineskin and Bobtail.

Fully aware of the HBC's policy, as he had just been refused permission to send a priest to Fort Edmonton, Provencher nevertheless promised Piché that he would have someone ready for the following spring, and Piché said he would return to accompany the missionary. Instead of Piché, Jean-Baptiste Laframboise, a Métis from the Fort Edmonton region, and probably a brother-in-law of Dumont's, guided Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault to the Upper North Saskatchewan.

They left on April 20, 1842, arriving at Fort Edmonton on Sunday, June 19, early enough to celebrate Mass. During this visit, the Fort-des-Prairies register of baptisms, marriages and sepultures was opened, as this is how Fort Edmonton was known to French speakers.

Thibault stayed in the Fort Edmonton region, although he did visit Dumont's settlement at Spirit Lake. He was looking forward to meeting Piché, but when a group of Blackfoot came to the post to trade and meet the missionary early in July, Piché was not with them. By the end of July, he still had not come, and so with Dumont for a guide, they went in search of him and his band.

They travelled due southwest, stopping briefly at Pigeon Lake. As they crossed the Red Deer River, they met a group of Métis who were on their way to the Columbia River, and who knew of Piché's whereabouts. Word was sent out to him and he immediately came to meet the missionary, leading him to his camp of 60 lodges at Dog Pound Creek, west of present-day Calgary. (*Western Catholic Reporter*, September 5, 2005.)

HBC governor George Simpson met Alexis Piche in 1841 and hired him as a guide:

In the spring of the year, Mr. Rowand had secured as a guide to conduct us as far as the Rocky Mountains, a man by the name of Peechee, who though himself a Half-Breed, had been brought up among the savages, and was in fact, a chief of the Mountain Crees." (*Narrative of a journey round the world, during the years 1841 and 1842* (2v., London, 1847, V. 1: 104.)

Alexis Piché Jr. "Bobtail" (b. 1826)

Alexis, whose Cree name was Keskiyiwew, was born in 1826 on the North Saskatchewan River, the son of Alexis Piché Sr. and Opeh-tah-she-toy-wishk (a Plains Cree woman). In 1849, he married Catherine Cardinal (Pierre) *dit* Mustatip at Pidgeon Lake. Her father's name was Pierre Cardinal *dit* Eia-io-wew and her mother was Marie Catherine Cardinal. Alexis Jr. and Catherine had four children; Cecile b. 1852 at Lac Ste. Anne, Francois b. 1847 at Fort Pitt, Angele b. 1864 at Metis Crossing (Victoria) and Alexis b. 1866 also at Metis Crossing. Bobtail's desired a reserve near Pigeon Lake and on September 25, 1877 Chief Bobtail and two of his Councillors signed an adhesion to Treaty Six.

After the 1885 Resistance Bobtail, his wife and his children took Metis Scrip (1886). He had Metis scrip claim # 179 and Catherine's was # 171. Later he applied to return to Treaty status. The Bobtail group then spent several years with the Cree of Montana. After the government campaign to oust the Cree from Montana, this group became the Montana Band in Alberta.

Baptiste Piché "Ermineskin"

Baptiste, whose Cree name was Sehkosowayanew, and was also called, was the son of Alexis Piché Sr. and Opeh-tah-she-toy-wishk (a Plains Cree woman).

François Piche, "Coyote". (b. 1847)

Coyote was born in 1847 at Fort Pitt, the son of Alexis Piche Jr. (Chief Bobtail) and Catherine Cardinal, both Metis. Coyote (François) was active in the Resistance of 1885 in making raids on the HBC stores at Battleford. He was acquitted at trial in Edmonton for lack of evidence. In 1886 his father and mother both left treaty and took Metis scrip for all the children (living and deceased) except Coyote. They later returned to Treaty status.



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