



Heroines of the 1885 Resistance: Christine (Pilon) Dumas, (1862-1954). Spouse, Raymond Barthélemy Pilon (1861-1943).

Christine Dumas and her husband Barthélemy Pilon arrived at the Metis settlement of Batoche in the spring of 1882. They had recently married in the Cathedral in St. Boniface, Manitoba. Her widowed mother, Henriette Landry (1822-1909), accompanied her. Many of her brothers and sisters had preceded them to the new “homeland.” The young couple settled near their family and began building a comfortable home on their river lot on the South Saskatchewan River. Barthélemy pursued mixed farming and supplemented the family income with freighting and carpentry work. There were many hardships but Christine was resourceful and was often asked to write personal and business letters for relatives and neighbours.

Mme. Pilon was proud of her family's dual Canadian and Metis heritage, a value which she instilled in her eight children: five boys and three girls, born between 1883 and 1904. These convictions and her strength in times of adversity were revealed in a poignant account of her trials during the “Guerre Nationale” at Batoche in 1885 (referred to as the North-West Rebellion in Euro-Canadian literature). She defended the actions of the Metis leader, Louis Riel, a distant cousin on the Landry side, “Ce n'est pas Louis Riel mais le gouvernement lache qui est venu en guerre chez les pauvres gens de la Saskatchewan.”¹



Christine and most of the women and children had sought refuge in dugouts and tents down by the trenches; the advancing Government troops had burned their new home. She was cold, there was little food and after the debacle on May 12, she was forced to flee in the woods (Minatins Hill area) with her young “bibi” (Louis, 18 months). She was with Mme Riel (who had been coughing blood for three days) and her two children. After days of hiding in the bush, they walked the 18 miles back to Batoche.... There, they found a stray calf, which they butchered and ate. “Riel returned three times to say adieu to his family before he gave himself up. It was so sad.”

Christine and Barthélemy had lost everything. “All the houses were burnt down when we came back home. No house, no bed, no covers. Il nous restait que le courage de Canadien et de Metis pour vivre.” But they persisted. A new home was built, crops were

¹ From a letter Christine wrote to Monseigneur Prud'homme in Prince Albert in 1885. A copy of this letter was given to Lawrence Barkwell by her grandson, Omer Ranger of Duck Lake (November, 2009).

sown and a second homestead was acquired. Christine and her “cher mari” celebrated their golden anniversary in 1932. Independent to the end, she died in a little house next door to her daughter Adelaide at the age of 92. (With contributions by Diane Payment.)



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