

John Wells II. (b. 1820)

John Wells was the son of John Wells (b. 1779) and Josephte Grant (b. 1785). He was born at St. Francois Xavier and on September 6, 1842, married Mary McKay born July 21, 1820 at Brandon House, the daughter of John Richards McKay and Harriet Ballendine. He was a witness to the investigation of the Assiniboines killed in Cypress Hills.

May 19, 1874: I, John Wells (Metis) of Headingly sworn making oath say:

I have been on the prairies for fourteen years (since 1860) and wintered for the past two years in the Cypress Mountains and three on the Belly river, of these, two were fortified posts, but these were burned by the Assiniboines after some of their people were killed last spring. The other three are trading posts composed of four houses in a square blockaded at each corner. They deal largely in liquor. I saw a large wine purchase and ten kegs brought in at our trip for sale to the Indians. I have heard that there are two strong American forts higher up on the Belly River near the forks towards the Rocky Mountains but I have not been there. One party of seven traders were doing nothing but poisoning wolves and they brought in five hundred at our trip. The Americans kill great numbers of buffalos. I was at Cypress Hills about five miles from the place where the Indians were killed last year, at the time. It was about the month of April last year.

My knowledge of the facts I obtained in part from Louison Gagnon an interpreter and Petit Lounger who were employed by the American traders and they said they were present when the Indians were killed. The chief of the American party was one Farewell, and after the killing was over he rode to my camp to trade, and to hire fifty carts to take his goods to Fort Benton. He told me the Assiniboines had commenced the affair, that they had stolen three of their horses and two days after they brought back one horse for which they asked to be paid in liquor and Farewell said he gave them two gallons.

The Assiniboines had been camped outside the fort and had been trading and drinking before this. After the two gallons were drunk the Indians were back for more, but one of the men refused to give it and the Indian pulled out his gun and the American shot him down. Then the Assiniboine who were drunk ran for their arms.

The Americans and Assiniboines commenced fighting, but the Indians were drunk and could not fight well. I heard the same story from three Assiniboines. I saw the dead bodies two months afterward, and Farewell and his Half Breeds also told me they had killed twenty-six Indians. I saw a woman also, who had received a ball under her arm.

One John Joe was there and took part in the fight. I learned that there were ten Americans in the fort and ten more had just arrived from Fort Benton. There was an interpreter, La Louis Barbe, but he took no part. I heard the other two Metis did, but I

do not know it. Some two months afterward I heard from the Half Breeds that the Americans had abused the body of the dead Assiniboine chief and I went over to see the body and found that a sharpened stick had been driven through the body up to the head, which was then placed in a sitting posture, the stick being in the ground.

The name of the chief was Manitou-potte, after this was over the Americans went off to Fort Benton with their trade and furs. The Assiniboines after they left burned the fort. I heard there was one American killed in the fight. I have told all I know about this affair. There was another fight between the Americans and the Half Breeds before the fight with the Assiniboines. I was told by an American connected with one of the posts who said he was there, a partner of John Joe's. The Blackfeet there were traders at one post on the Belly River and a dispute arose about the price of trade and a Blackfoot shot an American when the American shot four Blackfeet. The Blackfeet then stole seven of their horses. The Americans collected from the other forts in force and carried off the horses and furs of the Blackfoot. The Americans told of it and showed me the horses. I think there were over one hundred fifty men in the post I spoke of.

Signed:
John Wells



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute