

“Virginie Fisher, fille de Georges Fisher, mère de Marie de Savoye.”

Virginie Fisher was born near Qu’Appelle in the N.W.T. in 1859, the daughter of George Fisher and Emelie Boyer. Virginie lived with her parents in the parish of St. François Xavier, part of the Red River settlement, in 1870 [1]. She lived next to the family of Joseph Tourond and his wife Josephte Paul [2]. In 1875, just before her 16th birthday, she married the eldest son of Joseph and Josephte, David Tourond [3,4]. They started to raise a family and continued to live in the parish of St. François Xavier until 1882 when, as part of the large Métis diaspora, they, along with their extended family, moved to Tourond’s Coulee, south of Batoche [5, p 35].

Virginie gave birth to 9 children during her marriage to David, however, sadly, only three, Marie, Alexandrine, and Urbain, survived to adulthood. Virginie’s first five children were born in the Red River settlement [6,7,8,9]. Joseph was born in 1876 in the parish of Baie St. Paul but only lived for about 6 weeks. Joseph Marie Pierre was born in 1877 in the parish of Baie St. Paul but died in March of 1882 at age 4. Marie was born in 1878, November 20, in the parish of St. François Xavier and lived to age 80. Jean was born in 1880 in the parish of St. François Xavier, but died in 1882. Henry Alfred was born in 1881 in the parish of St. François Xavier but died in 1894. An insight into Virginie’s life during these years can be found in her statement in her daughter Marie’s scrip application. Virginie dictated the following to the scrip commissioner on June 6, 1900 [10]:

“My husband was freighting in the North West at the time Marie was born and before. My father and our family lived and freighted in the North West. I remained at St. François Xavier to be delivered of my children, and on such an occasion Marie was born.”

Virginie’s next 4 children were born in the parish of St. Antoine de Padoue near Batoche. Jean Louis was born in 1883, September, but died in 1884, July. Marguerite Alexandrine was born on April 30, 1885, during the battles between the Canadian militia and the Métis resistance. Virginie Augustine was born in 1887 but died in February of 1901 at Lebret. Finally, Urbain was born in November of 1890. Tragically, Urbain was killed in action on October 26 1917, having enlisted in the Canadian Infantry. He is memorialized in the Menin Gate (Ypres) Memorial Cemetery in Belgium [7,11,12,13].

Why did so few of Virginie’s children survive to adulthood? This high mortality rate was peculiar to her generation. Her mother Emelie’s 12 children all survived to adulthood except for the triplets. Diane Payment [ref 5, pp 80-81] describes diseases introduced by increased European contact as one culprit, primarily pulmonary tuberculosis and serious influenza epidemics.

By 1883, Virginie and her family had established a homestead on the north side of Tourond’s Coulee (Fish Creek), south of Batoche. They shared this land with her husband David’s brothers and their families, and with David’s parents, Joseph and Josephte Tourond. By the time of the 1885 Resistance in April and May, they were comfortably ensconced at their new home. Virginie had two children, Marie age 6, and Alfred age 4. She was also almost 9 months pregnant. But the first battle between the Métis and the Canadian militia took place at Tourond’s Coulee, within sight of their home, on April 24, 1885. Two accounts of this battle describe the Canadian militia firing cannon at the Tourond homestead [14,15]. One account describes occupants fleeing from the gunfire, the buildings burning and the

buildings later showing signs of “a hurried flight having taken place” [15]. It is not known if Virginie was at the Tourond homestead on April 24. However, it is known that she moved, with her family, to a tent between the village of Batoche and the South Saskatchewan River after leaving Tourond’s Coulee. It was in this tent that Virginie gave birth to her child Marguerite Alexandrine, on April 30 1885. An oral history describes the events of the birth:

Virginie gave birth to a child, Alexandrine, on the night of April 30 or the morning of May 1, 1885 in a tent situated on a slope near Batoche’s Crossing. She was along with her mother-in-law (Josephite Tourond). So frightened were they that they did not dare have some light which could have attracted the enemy’s attention. However, they finally decided that some lighting was necessary. Such were the tragic circumstances surrounding the child’s birth. [16]

On May 9th, the Canadian militia attacked the town of Batoche. Fighting continued until May 12. By this time, the Tourond tent had been evacuated [17]. The Tourond women and children, along with many others, fled along the bank of the South Saskatchewan River. The oral history goes on to describe Virginie’s struggle during this time:

During the battle, or rather, several days later, the women would change places constantly so as to avoid the fire of the enemy. They would hide behind trees or in damp holes. [16]

Virginie’s husband David fled to Turtle Mountain, Dakota Territory, in the United States, in May 1885 to avoid arrest since he was one of Louis Riel’s councillors in the Exovedate [18], and was one of the signatories to Riel’s declaration of war [19]. David returned to Batoche after the amnesty in 1886 and tried to homestead in the Fish Creek area (NE and NW 24-41-2-W3) [20]. However, he was very ill, probably with tuberculosis, and died on September 11, 1890. In the 1891 Census [21], Virginie, only 32 years old, is listed as the head of the family consisting of Marie age 13, Alfred age 10, Alexandrine age 6, Augustine age 4, and Urbain age 1. She was still living in the Fish Creek area, next to her mother-in-law Josephite Tourond, and her brothers-in-law Francis Tourond and Patrice Tourond.

Soon after, Virginie remarried to Napoleon (Leon) Hamelin and they relocated to File Hills in the Qu’Appelle area, close to Virginie’s parents and brothers. Virginie had at least one more child, a daughter Alice born in 1893, with Leon Hamelin.

The 1901 Census [22] lists Virginie and Leon living in File Hills (Dauphinais) with their children Marie, Alexandrine, Urbain, and Alice. Another entry page in the 1901 Census indicates that Alexandrine, Urbain and Alice were attending a small Catholic residential school in April of that year [22a]. In 1902, Marie married and moved with her husband Henri de Savoye to the nearby village of Tyvan.

The 1906 census [23] shows Virginie living with her husband Leon and children Alexandrine, Urbain, and Alice, next to her younger brother William and his family. The 1911 census [24] shows Virginie and Leon living together with a daughter whose name is not legible. Virginie appears in the 1916 census [25], living with Leon, her son Urbain already in the military, and a granddaughter Helen. Virginie is to lose Urbain in 1917, killed in action in WWI, and is to lose Leon in 1918. There is no record of the fate of Virginie’s daughter Alexandrine, nor of the fate of Virginie herself.

- [1] Manitoba Census 1870, Library and Archives Canada, vol. 3, p. 269
<http://data2.collectionscanada.gc.ca/1870/pdf/e010985585.pdf> accessed Sept 9 2013.
- [2] Manitoba Census 1870, Library and Archives Canada, vol. 3, p. 268
<http://data2.collectionscanada.gc.ca/1870/pdf/e010985584.pdf> accessed Sept 9 2013.
- [3] St. François Xavier Register Index, 1834-1900; compiled by Clarence Kipling.
- [4] Morin, Gail, *Métis Families: A Genealogical Compendium*, Quintin Publications 2001, vol. 2, p. 278.
- [5] Payment, Diane P., *The Free People – Li Gens Libres: A History of the Métis Community of Batoche, Saskatchewan*, University of Calgary Press, 2009.
- [6] Canada Census 1881, Library and Archives Canada, Volume 23, Page 28, Item number 977920.
<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1881/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=977920> accessed September 16 2013.
- [7] Canada Census 1891, Library and Archives Canada, Item Number 4771026.
<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1891/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=4771026> accessed September 16 2013.
- [8] Morin, Gail, *Métis Families: A Genealogical Compendium*, Quintin Publications 2001, vol. 5, p. 235.
- [9] North-West Territories Métis scrip applications, Library and Archives Canada, Virginie Hamelin, for her deceased children Joseph and Marie Joseph Pierre.
http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/ourl/res.php?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&url_tim=2013-09-18T06%3A51%3A32Z&url_ctx_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rft_dat=1510487&rft_id=info%3Asid%2Fcollectionscanada.gc.ca%3Aapam&lang=eng accessed September 30 2013.
- [10] North-West Territories Métis scrip applications, Library and Archives Canada, Marie Tourond.
http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/ourl/res.php?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&url_tim=2013-09-17T04%3A12%3A56Z&url_ctx_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rft_dat=1515446&rft_id=info%3Asid%2Fcollectionscanada.gc.ca%3Aapam&lang=eng accessed Sept 16 2013.
- [11] Canada Census 1901, Library and Archives Canada, Item number 1000148.
<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1901/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=1000148> accessed September 30 2013.

- [12] Canadian Virtual War Memorial webpage for Urbain Tourond.
<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/collections/virtualmem/detail/1596658> accessed September 30 2013.
- [13] North-West Territories Métis scrip applications, Library and Archives Canada, Virginie Hamelin, for her deceased children Alfred and Jean Louis.
http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/our/res.php?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&url_tim=2013-09-18T06%3A48%3A44Z&url_ctx_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rft_dat=1510486&rft_id=info%3Aid%2FcollectionsCanada.gc.ca%3Aapam&lang=eng accessed September 30 2013.
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- [15] Boulton, Major Charles A., *I Fought Riel: A Military Memoir*, edited by Heather Robertson, James Lorimer Publishers, Toronto 1985, pp. 117, 128.
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- [17] *Gabriel Dumont: Memoirs*, edited and annotated by Denis Combet, translated by Lise Gaboury-Diallo, Les Éditions du Blé, Saint-Boniface, Manitoba, 2006, p. 94.
- [18] Barkwell, Lawrence J., *Veterans and Families of the 1885 Northwest Resistance*, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Saskatoon, 2011, p. 30.
- [19] "Justice commands to take up arms," Métis Council minutes, St. Antony, March 21, 1885, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
- [20] Homestead map of the RM of Aberdeen, SK, dated Sept 13 1888. Also Saskatchewan Homestead Index, <http://www.saskhomesteads.com/>
- [21] Canada Census 1891, Library and Archives Canada, Virginie Tourond
<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1891/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=4771026> accessed September 30 2013.
- [22] Canada Census 1901, Library and Archives Canada, Virginie Hamelin
<http://data2.collectionsCanada.gc.ca/1901/z/z004/z000180498.pdf> accessed Sept 30 2013.
- [22a] Canada Census 1901, Library and Archives Canada, Urbain Tourond
<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1901/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=1034607> accessed Sept 30 2013.

- [23] Canada Census 1906, Library and Archives Canada, Virginie Hamelin
<http://data2.collectionscanada.gc.ca/e/e049/e001210399.pdf> accessed September 30 2013.
- [24] Canada Census 1911, Library and Archives Canada, Virginie Hamelin
<http://data2.collectionscanada.gc.ca/1911/pdf/e002096657.pdf> accessed September 30 2013.
- [25] Canada Census 1916, Library and Archives Canada, Virginie Hamelin
http://data2.collectionscanada.ca/006003/t-21938/pdf/31228_4363967-00549.pdf accessed
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