

Gilbert Godon (b. 1846)
Manitoba's First Outlaw.

Gilbert Godon was the son of Louis Godon (b. 1820) and Elizabeth Isaac, the daughter of Martin Isaac and Magdelaine Roy.¹ Magdelaine was sister-in-law to Little Shell Band Counselor Louis Lenoir. The family of Louis Godon and Elizabeth Isaac was enumerated in the Pembina Census of 1850 under the name Gadon as household # 42. They had seven children:

- Louis "Oshpikahkahn," b. 1836, married Lizette Grandbois then Marie Larocque.
- Joseph, b. 1839, married Caroline Larocque.
- Catherine, b. 1841, married Andre Letendre.
- Gilbert, b. 1846, married Lucienne Collin then Elise Desjarlais.
- Marguerite, b. 1847, married Antoine Collin.
- Rose, b. August 30, 1848.
- David, b. 1849, married Maria Rose Gosselin.

Gilbert first married Lucienne Collin and they had a son, Simon, born May 20, 1880 at Pembina River. He then married Elise Desjarlais, the daughter of Francois Desjarlais and Marguerite Parisien. Their son Joseph Godon was born circa February 1886.

Gilbert Godon and his wife Elize (Desjarlais) and their son Joseph took annuity payments in 1889 as members of the Turtle Mountain Band.

Gilbert Godon, a Metis from the Red Lake district of the Minnesota Territory, has gone down in history as Manitoba's first official outlaw when he killed Benjamin Marchand during a drinking brawl at Ste. Agathe on October 12, 1873.

Godon was in many fights and usually nothing serious happened until the night of October 10th 1873. Godon and a group of drinking buddies arrived at the Fort Dufferin home of A.J. Fawcett who was selling liquor illegally, when Fawcett refused to serve the new arrivals he was pushed and threatened by Benjamin Marchand. Godon, in defense of Fawcett, intervened and chased Marchand outside. Marchand's son (Benjamin Jr.) retaliated by grabbing a shovel and banging Godon on the head. The fight was then joined by Godon's father and brother and the Marchand's retreated to the backyard. They then attacked the Godon's for a second time and were again repelled.

After the victory, Fawcett remembered that he did have some whiskey hidden, and began serving the victors of the fight. An hour later Gilbert went outside for fresh air and ran into young Benjamin in the yard. Fearing another attack, he grabbed Marchand and

¹ Louis was the son of Louis Godon (b. 1808)¹ and was the grandson of Louis Godon Sr., a voyageur with Alexandre Henry at Pembina in 1801. His mother was Louise a Nakota (Assiniboine) Indian. Louis Godon Sr., was a voyageur with Alexander Henry and the North West Company at Pembina and at Rat Portage before the North West Company merged with the Hudson's Bay Company. He had come with Alexander Henry from La Pointe on Lake Superior.

dragged him inside. Her then knocked him down several times and began striking him on the head with the back of an axe head. Before his family and friends could intervene, Godon struck Marchand in the head with what was to later prove to be a fatal blow from the blade.

Fawcett then went to the nearby headquarters of the Boundary Commission (help at Fort Garry was 95 km. north). He returned with fifteen men led by Sergeant James Armstrong of the Royal Engineers. Benjamin died shortly after their arrival so they detained Godon. However, the officer in charge of the Boundary Commission refused to accept responsibility for him and he was released. He then fled across the border into Dakota Territory. Subsequently, a coroner's jury found Gilbert to be responsible for Marchand's death and on November 12, 1873, a grand jury brought a charge of murder against him and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

Six months after arriving in North Dakota Godon was involved in another fight and jailed at Pembina. Manitoba's chief constable, Richard Powell, learned of this and traveled to Pembina to return Godon to Winnipeg. On June 19th, 1874, Godon appeared in court and plead not guilty. The following Monday, his trial was held, the jury deliberated for thirty minutes, found him guilty and he was sentenced to hang on August 26th.

Godon, however, still had the sympathy of one man, bartender Dugald Sinclair, whose life Godon had saved in 1870. Sinclair began a campaign for clemency and in response to these petitions, the government commuted Godon's sentence to 14 years imprisonment. He was then transferred to the provincial prison at Upper Fort Garry. On the morning of September 23, 1876, Godon bolted from the work gang he was on, grabbed a small boat and took off across the Red River. He then collected his wife and his horse and again fled to the Dakota Territory. He lived back and forth between Pembina and his brother's place at Emerson.

In 1877, Bradley, the Justice of the Peace at Emerson sent a posse to pick Godon up at his brother's house. Godon met them with a revolver in each hand, then in the melee caused by his mother and sister-in-law he again escaped.

In February of 1880 he was again arrested for a brawl at Pembina, locked up again only to escape soon after with Frank La Rose. He and LaRose were reported to be in a Half-Breed camp on the Missouri River five months later. LaRose died shortly after their arrival of hunger and exposure. Gilbert Godon survived, never to be seen in Canada again.



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