

François Jeannotte dit Gesson. (d. 1905)

Francois was born in the late 1700s on the Mouse (Souris) River, eight miles west of what is now Bottineau, N.D., at a place the Chippewa called Edge of the Woods. His mother, Assiwenotok, was a Chippewa member of the Turtle Mountain Band. His father was a French Canadian, Jutras Jeannotte, originally from Montreal. He had spent many years west of the Red River both north and south of the border. Many years before his marriage to Assiwenotok (Louise Decouteau), Jutras was coming down the Qu'Appelle River with a load of furs, accompanied by his first wife and son when a party of Grosventres attacked them. His son was killed and his wife was scalped and left for dead. He himself fell into the water badly wounded, and as he struggled to save himself from drowning a Gros Ventre attacked him by clubbing him with a flintlock musket. Jutras was able to pull himself out of the water by clinging to the gun, and then wrenching it from the Gros Ventre killed him with it.

At the age of seven Francois lived on Beaver Creek, a tributary of the Assiniboine. It was here that his twin sister was waylaid by a band of Gros Ventres and left lying, still alive but scalped and having fourteen wounds. At this time the Gros Ventres had a village at the junction of the South Antlers and the Mouse rivers. The two sons of the war chief were White Cow Buffalo Robe and Four Bears.

In 1818 François, after his father had returned to Montreal, accompanied his mother to the Pembina River, and during the next two winters they stayed at the Big Salt and Little Salt rivers, as the Hudson's Bay Co. had a post nearby with "Arrelles" as post trader and Burke as clerk. At this time there were also two trading posts at the mouth of the Pembina River. One was established by the North West Company in the charge of McDonald with Grant as clerk, and the other operated by the Hudson's Bay Co. at about the same spot where Kittson's fort was afterwards built. He remembers distinctly, the Selkirk Settlers with a mixture of Swiss, German, Italian and Orkney Island men.

In 1820 he and his mother returned to the Mouse River and wintered at the big bend of that river. During the winter of 1820-21 it was reported that a Chippewa war party that went to the foothills of the Rockies, found a few miles south of present day Minot, N.D. an "American" trading post established by traders from the Little Missouri and in charge of "Gravelle" with the Half-Breed Keplin (Kiplin) as interpreter.

In 1822, he met a traveling civil engineer from Europe at the junction of the South Antlers and the Mouse (Souris) in company with two Half-Breeds, Jack Spence and Jack Anderson. At this time the Gros Ventres had abandoned the place for a good many years, but there was plenty of evidence of their occupation still to be seen. The Gros Ventres had quarreled about the ownership of some horses that had fallen into the hands of their ancient enemies. Subsequently, the Chippewas (Ojibwe), Nakota (Assiniboines) and the Crees, had gradually driven them southward until they reached the shelter of the Missouri River.

François was twenty-seven years old at the time of the great meteor shower of 1833, and remembered it very well. He resided on the Turtle Mountain Reservation for a number of years and died in 1905.

His son, François Jr. also known as Peep-pe-shaish Married Madeleine Falcon *dit* Divertissant, the daughter of Pierre Falcon, Bard of the Prairies, and Marie Grant, daughter of Cuthbert Grant.

Reference

State Historical Society of North Dakota, "Biography of Old Settlers." *State Historical Society of North Dakota Annual Report*, Vol. 1, 1906: 339-340.



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