

The Montour Family of Red River:

Robert “Bonhomme” Montour. (1787-1857)

Robert was likely the son of fur trader Nicholas Montour¹ (1756-1808) and an Indian woman; and the grandson Andrew Montour (1720–1772) and Sarah Ainsie.² Robert was one of the first leaders of the Metis Nation. On June 15, 1815 he, Cuthbert Grant, Bostonais Pangman and William Shaw signed a decree ordering the HBC to remove all traces of colonization at the Forks. This bison hunting family lived at Red River, white Horse Plain and Pembina. In 1845, he was one of the Metis who sent a letter to HBC Governor Alexander Christie to clarify the rights of the Metis. In 1857, he died at Pembina and was buried there. In 1885 three of his grandsons were active in the Metis Resistance at Batoche.

Robert was born at Red River. He married Josette Spence circa 1818. Robert is shown to be working for Alexander Henry the younger at Pembina in 1808. The family was enumerated at Red River in 1831 to 1840, then at Grantown in 1843. The family is shown on the Pembina Census of 1850 as family #64. Robert married Marie Josephte Spence, b. c. 1799, died 25 Mar 1839, and was buried: 26 Mar 1839, St Francois Xavier, Manitoba, Canada. Robert died on April 1, 1857, Assumption, Pembina, ND.

Thirty–five years earlier, Robert Montour and Cuthbert Grant produced the first treaty ever signed by the Metis.

The first treaty which asserted the rights of the Metis as a free Aboriginal people was negotiated by Cuthbert Grant, Bostonais Pangman, William Shaw and Bonhomme Montour with the settlers at Red River on June 25th, 1815. This was the culmination of the friction between the Metis and the Selkirk Settlers created by the Pemmican Proclamations during the previous year.

In 1850, Major Woods reconnoitered the "North-Western Frontier of the Territory of Minnesota" at the behest of Secretary of War,³ acting as an advance man for the treaty-making expeditions to come. He described his meeting with the Chippewa Métis Indians at Pembina:

I urged them to organize themselves into a band, and appoint their chiefs that they might have some order and government amongst themselves with chiefs ...; that as

¹ Nicholas was employed by Joseph and Benjamin Frobisher on the Churchill River in what is now Manitoba and later worked in Saskatchewan. Montour owned shares in the North West Company. In 1792, he retired from the fur trade and settled at Montreal; he became a member of the Beaver Club there. Both of his sons, Nicholas Jr. and Robert went on to work for the NWCo. A daughter, Elizabeth, married HBC chief Factor James Curtis Bird.

² Andrew had been an interpreter and guide for George Washington.

³ Major Samuel Woods, *Pembina Settlement*, Executive Document No. 51, House of Representatives, 31st Congress, 1st Session.

they were, if the United States had any business to transact with them, there was no person to address from whom *the wishes of the people could be obtained, &c., &c.*

Major Woods also organized the French people he identified as half-breeds:

On the 24th of August these people had returned from their Spring hunt, and about 200 of the hunters came to see me. They had appointed four men as their speakers. *I told them that in virtue of their Indian extraction, those living on our side of the line were regarded as being in possession of the Indians' right upon our soil; that they were on our frontiers treated as component parts of the Indian tribes; that they either came under the Indians' laws or regulations, or formed such for themselves. I urged them to organize themselves into a band under a council or chiefs, invested with ample authority to act in their name, in all matters which might arise to affect their interests ... The next day they returned in about the same numbers, and presented me with nine names as the committee they had selected for the future government of the half-breed population within our borders.*

The Metis presented the following names as their elected chiefs and councilors: J.B. Wilkie, Jean B. Dumont, Baptiste Valle, Edward Harmon, Joseph Laverdure, Joseph Nolin, Antoine Azure, **Robert Montour**, and Baptiste Lafournaise.⁴

Children:

Montour, Pascal Sr. (b. 1822)

Pascal Sr. was the son of Robert Bonhomme Montour and Josette Spence. In 1873, Pascal was issued Scrip # 275 (160 acres) under the Red Lake and Pembina Treaty. He married Madeleine Richard. Their sons, Bernard and Pascal Jr. were also active in the Resistance.

Montoir, [1849 Petition]

Montoir [Montreille], Pascal (1822) [1850 U.S.]

Montour, Pascal [R.L. Scrip #275]

1849 Petition: P. Montoir [Minnesota Territorial Census, Pembina, 1850, family 65/65], born Pembina National Archives, RG 75, Entry 363, "List of Persons to Whom Scrip was Issued under Red Lake & Pembina Treaties...." Halfbreed Scrip No. 275 issued December 20, 1873, under the authority of Secretarial Decision, June 12, 1872, delivered December 20, 1873 National Archives, RG 75, Entry 364, "Treaty of April 12, 1864, Red Lake and Pembina Half-Breeds," Scrip Stubs, Number 275 [checked], dated December 20th, 1873, 160 Acres, delivered December 20th, 1873, issued to Pascal Montour, delivered to Agent Douglass.

Husband of: Montoir, Magdalane (1824), born Red River Br.

Montour, Marie. (b. 1826).

Married Francois Breland, son of Joseph Dubisunier Breland and Marguerite Poitras

⁴ Alexander Ramsey, Letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 21, 1850. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1850*, pp. 43-64

on June 4, 1844 at SFX. She then married Jean Baptiste Rocbrune on Sept. 18, 1854, at Pembina.

Montour, Marguerite. (b. 1827)

Marguerite married Charles Desjarlais the son of Francois Desjarlais and Marguerite Abraham on January 16, 1844 in St. Francois Xavier.

Montour, Sophie. (b. 1829)

Sophie married Alexis Gariepy, the son of Jean Baptiste Gariepy on February 19, 1844 at St. Francois Xavier.

Montour, Abraham Sr. (b. 1832)

Abraham was born at Pembina, the son of Robert Bonhomme Montour and Josephte Spence. In 1854, he married Marie Page at Pembina. In the 1850 Pembina census he is listed as a hunter. He and his wife were members of the Turtle Mountain Band and received annuity payments in 1870.⁵ In 1873, Abraham was issued Scrip # 274 (160 acres) under the Red Lake and Pembina Treaty. He married Marie Page. They spent many years on the plains as buffalo hunters. The family had a homestead entry at Tp. 44, Range 2, W 3. He traded out of a store located on Section 19 from 1875 to 1879. In 1883, the government sold this land out from under him to an Ontario investor. One of the early meetings (March 22, 1884) to plan the Metis Resistance took place at his home. Andre Nault Jr. and Abraham Montour were charged with treason-felony for their part in events at Frog Lake and Frenchman's Butte, however, their hearing was postponed for lack of witnesses and the case was later dropped. Abraham lived at the St. Laurent Settlement River Lot 20, on the west side of the river. His sons, Abraham Jr. and Jean Baptiste were also active in the Resistance at the battle of Batoche and his two nephews were killed during the fighting at Duck Lake. After 1885, he moved to Selby Junction, Montana. Finally, in 1899 he sold his last property in the Batoche area to an American rancher for one dollar. He eventually settled on a ranch near Medicine Hat.

Diane Payment gives the following biography:

Coming from Pembina, North Dakota, via St. Francois-Xavier, Abraham Montour arrived in Saskatchewan around 1871. He settled in Batoche on the west bank in 1877. His brother Pascal lived next to him. He was the son of "Bonhomme" Montour and a descendent of Nicholas Montour, a "peddler" who had arrived on the South Saskatchewan at the end of the 18th century.⁶

Montour, Abraham [1849 Petition]

Montoir, Abraham (1831) [1850 U.S.]

Montour, Abraham [R.L. Scrip #274]

Montour, Abraham [R.L. Scrip]

1849 Petition: Abraham Montour [Minnesota Territorial Census, Pembina, 1850,

⁵ Gail Morin. *Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Pembina Band; Annuity Payments and Census*. Quinton Publications, n.d. p. 65.

⁶ Diane Payment, 1990: 240.

family 66/66] born Pembina, occupation Hunter National Archives, RG 75, Entry 363, "List of Persons to Whom Scrip was Issued under Red Lake & Pembina Treaties...." Halfbreed Scrip No. 274

National Archives, RG 75, Entry 364, "Treaty of April 12, 1864, Red Lake and Pembina Half-Breeds," Scrip Stubs, Number 274 [checked], dated December 20th, 1873, 160 Acres, delivered December 20th, 1873, issued to Abraham Montour, delivered to Agt. Douglass.

Son of: Montoir [Montreille], Bonom (1775) and **

Father of: Montoir, Magdalain (1845), born Red River Br. Montoir, Isabella (1847), born Red River Br.



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