

Pierre Falcon. (1783-1876)

By Audreen Hourie and Lawrence Barkwell

Pierre Falcon *dit* Divertissant was born on June 4, 1783 at Fort la Coude (Elbow Fort) in the Swan River Valley. His father, Pierre Jean-Baptiste was a fur trader and clerk with the North West Company in the Red River district and his mother was a Cree Indian, the daughter of Pas au Traverse.¹

In 1799, Falcon traveled east with his father and received his education in La Prairie, Lower Canada. He returned to the west at about fifteen years of age and he became a clerk with the North West Company.

At that time, the rivalry between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company was strong. Falcon joined his friend and brother-in-law, Cuthbert Grant, in the battle for Metis free trade rights against the Hudson's Bay Company and the Selkirk Settlers.

Pierre is known to have worked in a variety of areas: the Fort William-Rainy Lake district, the northern regions of Lake of the Woods and Montagne la Bosse into the Qu' Appelle Valley, where he resided at Fort Pelly for some time. The duties he performed ranged from a clerk to traveling fur buyer.

In July of 1816, Falcon was en route from Fort Qu' Appelle, where he and his men had seized HBC provisions, He met up with Cuthbert Grant in the Souris River area. Grant requested that Falcon leave his canoe brigade to help escort the NWC pemmican past the HBC's Fort Douglas. Three kilometers north of the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, Grant led two groups of his men across Frog Plain. Falcon apparently arrived in the middle of the battle and told others that he did witness the death of Governor Semple. During the victory celebrations on the evening of the battle, Pierre Falcon is said to have composed "La Chanson de la Grenouillère" or the "Ballad of Frog Plain", a song that immortalized the Battle of Seven Oaks and added to his own notoriety.

Falcon had a special talent. He could take an event and describe it in song. During the victory celebrations that followed the battle, it is said that Pierre Falcon composed "Chanson de la Grenouillere," or the "Battle of Frog Plain." Certainly this was not the first song he had written, but it was his most famous. Metis sang the ballad in the west and as far east as the St. Lawrence river in their travels as voyageurs. Many a night they would dance and sing to Falcon's lively ballads around a campfire after a hard day's work.

¹ His grandfather, Pierre Falcon I, was a native of France, born in 1735 at St. Quentin, diocese de Beauvais in Picardie, the son of Etienne Falcon and Marianne Jolys. Pierre I arrived in Canada after the Conquest and married a fourth-generation Canadian woman, Marie-Genevieve Tremblay, in 1763. They and their children lived in Baie St. Paul for some time and then moved to Montreal where they settled in the Laprairie district at Blairfindie, known today as I' Acadie. Marie Falcon died there in 1780, but her husband lived to age ninety-two.

In 1812, Falcon married Cuthbert Grant's sister Marie, and in 1825 they settled in the newly established Grantown (St. François Xavier) west of Winnipeg. They had four sons and six daughters whom Falcon supported as a successful rancher.

- Madeleine, b. 1815, married Francois Jeannotte.
- François, b. 1815, married Euphrosine Poitras.
- Isabelle, b. 1819, married Andre Trottier.
- Pierre, b. 1820, married Marie Louise Leveille.
- Marie, b. 1825, married Antoine Ledoux.
- Jean Baptiste, b. 1826, married Marie Nolin.
- Emelie, b. 1829, died 1852.
- Julie, b. 1831.
- Catherine, b. 1833, married Francois Nolin.
- Gregoire, b. 1837, died 1853.

Falcon was quite a spirited character in his younger years, but his grandchildren remember him as very quiet in his old age. He continued to compose and though too old to participate, supported Louis Riel in the Resistance of 1869-70, by writing a song called "The Misfortunes of an Unlucky King," in which he made fun of Governor William McDougall and the Canadian government.

On October 28, 1876, Pierre Falcon died at the age of eighty-three, but his memory lives on in the lake named after him in southeastern Manitoba.

Reference

Chartrand, Paul L.A.H. *Pierriche Falcon, the Michif Rhymester: Our Métis National Anthem: The Michif Version*. Saskatoon : Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2009. This CD and book are a commentary on Falcon's song (most commonly known as "The Battle of Seven Oaks"), the Michif language and Metis nationalism, with Michif translations of Falcon's other songs.

Peel, Bruce. "Pierre Falcon." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. X (1871-1880). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972: 276-277.



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