

Métis Interpreters and Witnesses Who Signed Treaty Four (1874)

Charles Pratt
Pascal Breland
Edward McKay
Pierre Poitras
Jean Baptiste Davis
Pierre Desnomme
Joseph McKay
Donald McDonald
Pierre Lapierre

After six days of conference at the Qu'Appelle Lakes Treaty No. Four was signed on September 15, 1874. Under this treaty approximately 75,000 square miles of territory was surrendered. This territory was also traditional Métis land.

It is noteworthy that on September 7, 1876, 30 Métis at Fort Walsh submitted a petition, on behalf of the Métis of the four districts of Assiniboia to join Treaty 4.

To.

Inspectr. J.M. Walsh
N.W.M.Police
Agent for Supt. Gen'l. Indian Affairs
Cypress Hills
N.W. Ty.

Sir:

We the undersigned Half Breeds offer you to day our homage and submit to you the following petition which we present in our names and the names of all our brothers scattered over the Prairie in the 4 districts and we beseech you to give us a favorable hearing.

We ask you first (1)st

That the Government allow us to relinquish our land claims which we understand the Government has granted in the province of Manitoba and in relinquishing such claims that we be admitted into No. 4 Treaty and to reserve the same distribution of annuity money as the Indian and to be treated in Common the same as the Indian is, with the exception that we be privileged to select our own chief.

Secondly (2nd)

We further respectfully state that never have asked nor yet received the title to said claims.

Thirdly (3)

We further add that we are Half Breeds of the Cree and Saulteaux Tribes, and that we have lived from childhood upon the prairie and adopted the customs of the Indians.

Sincerely trusting this will meet with your favorable consideration we most respectfully subscribe ourselves Her Majesty's most loyal subjects.

September 7, 1876

Charles Pratt (b. 1816)

Charles Pratt (1816-1888), an Anglican Catechist, was also known as Askenootow (Worker of the Earth). Pratt was born in 1816 among the Young Dogs band of Cree/Assiniboinés, part of the Nehiyaw Pwat confederacy, at the fish weir between Mission and Echo Lakes in the Qu'Appelle Valley. Educated at Red River, Pratt was employed as an interpreter for Treaty 4.

His mother was Cree and Nakota and his father was a Métis buffalo hunter, Zacharia Floremond. In 1841, he married Catherine Sinclair (Métis, b. 1826) of Norway House, the daughter of Peter Sinclair and Mary Fidler. They had twelve children. Widowed in 1869, he married Elizabeth (b. 1853), the daughter of Kashepuyas in 1874. Charles Pratt took treaty with his lifelong friend Kaneonuskatew (George Gordon) in 1874,

He is remembered as an Anglican lay reader, catechist and schoolteacher (1851–84), interpreter for Treaty 4 at Fort Qu'Appelle (1874), and the first First Nations person from the Canadian plains to receive a western education. In 1823-24 he was educated at the Anglican Church Missionary Society's (CMS) Red River Indian Mission School (est. 1820). The condition under which he was sent was that he be returned to assist his people once he had learned how to read and write. Pratt rejoined his buffalo hunting people in 1832, and between 1835 and 1848 he worked for the Hudson's Bay Company as a middleman and steersman with the HBC 1835-1845 and as a hunter in 1848-49 at Lake Manitoba. In 1850 he returned to the CMS as an interpreter and schoolteacher.

Over the course of his career, Pratt established five inland missions at Fort Pelly, Qu'Appelle Lakes, Round Lake, and Little and Big Touchwood Hills.

Pascal Breland, M.L.A. (1811-1896)

Pascal came to be known as "Le Roi de Traiteurs"—"King of the Traders." He was born in the Saskatchewan River Valley on June 15, 1811 to Pierre du Boishué *dit* Breland and Josephite (Louise) Belley, a Half-Breed. The family farmed at Red River, then in 1832, Pascal and his mother and two younger sisters moved from Red River to Grantown (St. François Xavier) to farm. Four years later Pascal married fifteen-year old Maria Grant daughter of Cuthbert Grant and Marie Desmarais. Breland's sister Marie was the mother of another famous Métis entrepreneur, Johnny Grant.



Maria and Pascal raised a large family of six boys and nine girls. By 1849 Pascal was a very prosperous trader with his 380 acres of land in and around St. François Xavier. At the time he owned 12 Red-River-carts and had 22 horses. Initially, Pascal did not have legal claim to his land but later he received an official land grant from the Crown in 1882.

Breland spent a considerable amount of time on the Western Plains as a free trader in areas of Fort Pitt, Wood Mountain-Cypress Hills, Fort Qu'Appelle and Fort Ellice. As a result of Pascal's extensive involvement in the trade and his wealth, he gained a social prestige in the area and he was a member of "la bourgeoisie Métisse."

Pascal's political views became known when he supported Louis Riel Sr. at the trial of Guillaume Sayer in 1849, involving the Métis right for free trade of their goods. A prosperous farmer, and trader, he owned a considerable number of carts and was nicknamed "le Roi des traiteurs" (the king of traders).

Pascal had many appointments in Red River such as Magistrate for White Horse Plains on October 16, 1851; Petty Judge in 1852; in charge of the census for St. François Xavier in 1856; member of the Board of Works 1856. Then in September 1857, he was sworn in as a new member for the Council of Assiniboia. Breland was re-appointed Petty Magistrate in November 1861. In August 1865, he was President of the Petty Court at White Horse Plains and he was also instrumental with the negotiations for the signing of Treaty Number 4 in 1874. In 1869, he voiced his opposition to intruders, Canadian strangers staking out the land. In 1887, he was the Métis Representative on the Northwest Council.

Pascal-Breland did not involve himself during the resistance at Red River in 1869-70. History has many views as to why he was away trading at this time. After Pascal and Solomon Hamelin returned to Red River in the spring of 1870 he was asked by the Métis for his advice and leadership at a mass meeting being held at the Settlement. Breland was subsequently elected to the new Manitoba Legislative Assembly in 1870 for the riding of

St. François Xavier and was appointed to the governing Council of the Northwest Territories. He was known as an able diplomat and a moderate Métis politician.

In 1873, when the Lakota and Yanktonais were being forced out of the U.S.A. Alexander Morris, the Lieutenant Governor of Assiniboia, sent Pascal to see if they presented any risk to Canadians who would be working on the boundary survey. Breland travelled to Wood Mountain arriving on April 19. The Lakota had departed but the Yanktonais were encamped with a group of Métis from Wood Mountain led by Pierre Berger. On April 23, Breland met with their leaders, Struck by the Ree, Two Dogs, Ehannaienke, Napitchota, Matoienke, and Pananikoupi as well a Dakota Chiefs, Wakiendota and White Cap. Two Métis, Joseph Mitchel and Jacques Hamelin, acted as interpreters. The Yanktonais and Dakota received Breland's message of peace with gratitude and joy. When the Dakota learned that there was to be a boundary survey and not a railway survey (which they opposed) they indicated that there was no danger, in spite of what the disgruntled Little Knife had been saying. The Dakota indicated they would meet with Morris later in the year to discuss their requests for reserves.

Pascal Breland died on October 24, 1896 at the age of eighty-five after years of being a diplomat, businessman, pioneer and politician. At his passing many described him as a man of integrity, intelligence and humor who earned the respect of all.

Pierre “Peter” Lapierre. (d. 1883)

Peter Lapierre was one of the interpreters and witnesses at Treaty Four in 1874. For many years he had been an interpreter for Chief Kakiishiway (Loud Voice) the leader of the Plains Cree at the Treaty negotiations.

Peter Lapierre was a HBC employee who worked his way from apprentice labourer in 1846 to Trader and Interpreter in 1864-1869 at the Touchwood Hills Post, Swan River district. He was the son of Louis Lapierre a voyageur and HBC Postmaster. Isaac Cowie describes Louis as a French-Canadien postmaster after whom Lapierre House on the Porcupine Branch of the Yukon River was named. Lapierre acted as Cowie's interpreter with Loud Voice. Peter married Adelaide Boyer (b. 1826), the daughter of Baptiste Boyer and Lizette Mainville, in 1849 at Fort Francis. Peter died on November 4, 1883.

Cowie describes him as a “brave, well set up, medium-sized man who loved the glorious sport of charging after buffalo.”¹

Children:

- Thomas, born 1851 at Shoal River.
- Betsy, born 1857 at Touchwood Hills, married Toussaint Galarneau
- Euphrosine, born 1859 at Touchwood Hills.
- Marguerite, born 1861 at Shoal River, married Andrew Stephanson.
- Catherine, born 1864 on Shoal River.
- Adeleine, born 1876 at Swift Current.
- Flora, born 1867 at Touchwood Hills.
- Theophile, born 1871 at Macdonald Hills.
- Daniel, born 1873 at Fort Qu'Appelle, died 1875.
- Joseph

¹ Isaac Cowie *The Company of Adventurers : A Narrative of Seven Years in the Service of the Hudson's Bay Company during 1867-1874.* Toronto: William Briggs, 1913: 299.

- Madeleine, born 1880 at Fort Qu'Appelle
- Pierre, born 1882 at Fort Qu'Appelle.

The Lapierres were one of the Métis families arrested at Fort Belknap for hunting in Montana. November 24, 1878:

November 24: Cypress Mountains, Patrice Breland writes: The news here, although not very good, because the Buffalos (bison) are very scarce in the neighbourhood, they are plentiful on the other side of the line along the Milk River, but there is great inconvenience to go and hunt in that direction because the Americans defend it, they have made prisoners. Antoine Brilliant the elder, Peter Lapierre, Alexander Brilliant, Pierre Labruler, Ambroise Chartrant, Charles Demontigny and Joseph Azure, they have all been made prisoners with their families. They were arrested at Fort Belknap, they have been released after 7 or 8 days after, without being fined provided they don't return and tell folks that other prisoners will be put in gaol for two years and their horses and carts taken. I have learned that the Teton (Sioux) go hunting on the other side of the line numbering 300 men. The Teton are not numerous here. They are about 50 lodges and the Sante about 30 lodges, and the remainder of the Teton with Sitting Bull are at the Mud house on White River (Utah), I have learned that they are about 1,000 lodges. I think I will go very soon to trade with these people...

Pierre Poitras Jr. (b. 1836)

Pierre Poitras was born on November 11, 1836 at St. François Xavier, the son of Pierre Poitras and Marie Bruyer. He was the grandson of Andre Poitras, the founder of St. François Xavier. Pierre married Isabelle Bremner, the daughter of William Bremner and Marguerite Allard on February 14, 1860 at St. François Xavier. They had eleven children. Pierre was found wintering at Wood Mountain NWT in 1873. In 1874, he sold his land at St. François Xavier and later applied for Scrip in 1877. In the 1870s they had children born at St. Laurent on the South Saskatchewan and at Lebret in the Qu'Appelle valley.

Pierre signed a September 2, 1880 Petition from Peter LaPierre and other Halfbreeds of Qu'Appelle Settlement concerning Métis land claims that subsequently goes unanswered by the government.² This petition was addressed to the Marquis of Lorne, "This humble petition of Peter LaPierre, Simon Blondin, John Fisher, Alexander Fisher, John Simpson, Xavier Denomme, and others.

The name Pierre Poitras is among eleven signatories on the Qu'Appelle petition of 1873 asking that the Lieutenant Governor, "give us lands in compensation of our rights to the lands of the country as Métis." A Pierre Poitras also signed as witness to Treaty Four, Fort Qu'Appelle in 1874.

² They ask you, 1st, That the Government allow to the Half-breeds the right of keeping the lands which they have taken or which they may take along the River Qu'Appelle. The right of fishing in all the lakes of the above mentioned river. The right of hunting freely in the prairies west and south-west of the lakes Qu'Appelle without being arbitrarily hindered by the Indians but only in virtue of the regulations that the Indians, in concert with the Half-breeds and the Government, shall establish hereafter for the good of all. The right of trading at the Lakes and environs of the Lakes Qu'Appelle.

Jean Baptiste « Boin-ence » Davis II (b. 1822)³

Jean Baptiste “Boin-ence” Davis was born in 1822 at St. Boniface, the son of Jean Baptiste Davis (b. 1777) and Josephte (Saulteaux/Chippewa). Josephte was Josephte Mijakammikijikok (Mezhekamakuikok) who was first married to fur trader Alexandre Wilkie. Thus Jean Baptiste Davis and Jean Baptiste Wilkie were half-brothers. Jean Baptiste Davis married Julie Desnomme, the daughter of Pierre Desnomme sometime before 1838. This family appears in the 1850 Pembina census as family # 115.⁴ He was a counselor and Headman to Chief Little Shell.⁵ He signed the Augustin Brabant Métis petition from Lake Qu’Appelle, on 11th September 1874. Baptiste Davis signed as a witness to Treaty Four at Qu’Appelle in 1874. He also signed the 1878 Cypress Hills petition for a Métis Reserve.

His brother, William “Kug-kay-dway-wash-kung” Davis (b. 1823) is also listed on the 1850 Pembina census as a hunter as family #116. William is shown as age 26, his wife Marie Vallee as age 20 and their son William as age six. William was born at Red River, the son of Jean Baptiste Davis and Betsy Josette, La Saulteuse. They moved to Pembina in the late 1840s. He married Marie Enno Heneault, then Marie Vallée at Pembina in 1862. William was also a counsellor for chiefs Little Shell II and III. William was a signatory to Riel’s August 20, 1880 petition to Major General N.A. Miles requesting support for the Montana Half-Breeds. He and his brother Jean Baptiste Jr. were both members of the Turtle Mountain Band. He signed the 1878 Cypress Hills petition for a Métis Reserve. Their son Louis Davis (b. 1869) became one of the members of the Turtle Mountain Police in the early 1900s.

Donald McDonald, (b. 1832)

Donald McDonald was born in November 1832, at St. Andrews, the son of Donald “Big” McDonald and Jane Beaudry. He married Harriet Spence sometime before 1852. Donald was a Deputy-Commander of the 49th Rangers of the Boundary Commission (1872-73). His younger brother Adam was also a member of the Rangers.

Scrip affidavit for McDonald Jr., Donald; born: November 1832; father: Donald McDonald Sr. (Scot); mother: Jane Beaudry McDonald (Métis); claim no: 238; scrip no: 1785 to 1792; date of issue: May 1, 1876; amount: \$160.

³ References: National Archives, Record Group 75, Special Case 110, Jean Baptiste “Boin-ence” Davis 73 years old [in 1892], who was also a member of the late Chief’s council.

!RG_75, SC_110, 32382-1907, National Archives: Council Meeting 4 Oct 1892, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, his 'x' mark, councilman.

⁴ Lists Baptiste Davis, hunter, age 28, Julie age 25, Helen age 12, Julie age 10, Catherine age 8, Josette age 6, and Baptiste age 4.

⁵ Counselors for Little Shell III in the 1890s [These men also served as counselors for Little Shell II: Ayse-sense]. Sas Swaine Poitras (67); Kug-kay-dway-wash-kung, William Davis (70), Paydway-walsh-kum, Louis Lenoir; Boin-ence Davis (73); Kar-yence Delorme (50), a son of Auguhk-quay; Sharlo Bottineau (68); Ossaotit, François Desmarais (55); Tchee-kee-tarn Parisien (68); Batees-shish Valley (58), son of Norbace Valley; Ahkee-win-nini, Alex Jannott (58); Tcheer-kuhk, Joseph Desmarais (56); Bayriss, Corbet Grant (55); Karn-nar-dah, Antoine Heneault (59); and Jean Batees Gorin (Champagne, 57).

Edward McKay, (b. 1847)

McKay had also been a member of the Boundary Commission Scouts (1872-73). Edward Richard McKay was born on Nov. 14, 1847, the son of John McKay and Mary England. He married Caroline Voller the daughter of James Voller and Nancy Birston on Dec. 26, 1867 at St. Andrew's. He died April 8, 1927. They had eleven children. He is the brother-in-law of Robert Taylor another member of the 49th Rangers. He was an HBC employee from 1866 to 1870; his service record is shown below.

NAME: McKAY, Edward	PARISH: Native	ENTERED SERVICE: 1866	DATES:	
<hr/>				
Appointments & Service				
Outfit Year*:	Position:	Post:	District:	HBCA Reference:
<i>*An Outfit year ran from 1 June to 31 May</i>				
1866-1868	Clerk	Pembina [1867]	Red River	B.239/u/2 p. 399; B.239/g/108;
1868-1869	Freeman		Red River	B.239/k/3 p. 358
1869-1870	Does not appear			B.239/g/109
				B.239/g/110

According to the Northern Department Servants Engagement Register, Edward McKay made a contractual arrangement with the Company at Fort Garry on August 28, 1866 (a 3 year contract). No contract survives in the HBCA. (source: B.239/u/2 p. 399; A.32/40)



Joseph McKay. (b. 1842)

Joseph was the brother-in-law of Pierre Poitras Jr. noted above. Joseph was born on August 7, 1842 at Fort Ellice, the son of John Richards McKay and Harriet Ballenden. He married Margeurite Poitras, the daughter of Pierre Poitras and Marie Bruyere in 1864 at St. François Xavier. The couple had seven children. They lived at Prince Albert but moved when he became farming instructor at Strike-Him-On-The-Back Reserve near Battleford. After the Resistance of 1885, the family returned to Prince Albert. He later worked as a scout and interpreter for the N.W.M.P. in the Maple Creek area. He died there sometime after 1905.

Pierre Desnomme Jr. (b. 1846)

Not very much is known about Pierre Desnomme Jr. Pierre was the son of Pierre Desnomme Sr. who was a Southesk Expedition guide in 1859. Although John McKay was designated the Head guide for the 1859 Southesk Expedition⁶ and oversaw all aspects of the trip, their real guide, a Métis, Pierre Desnomme who Southesk calls Pierre

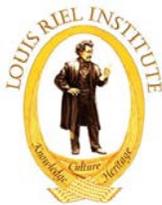
⁶ At the age of 32, James Carnegie, the 9th Earl of Southesk, travelled to Canada from his native Scotland in 1859, after being advised that it would improve his health that had deteriorated following the death of his wife. He wrote that the reason for his journey was to, "travel in some part of the world where good sport could be met with among the larger animals, and where, at the same time, I might recruit my health by an active open-air life in a healthy climate." The Earl travelled though the United States to St. Paul, Minnesota and crossed the prairies, hunting buffalo along the way.

Numme (Denoummee), joined them at the HBC post at Fort Ellice on the Assiniboine River, near present-day St. Lazare, Manitoba. Southesk described him as “a quaint-looking oldish man, with a dark, bony, French-Indian face, and long black hair.” His eyes were so weak that he wore “huge goggles made of wire and glass, which have a strange effect, throwing a dash of the pedantic into his rough and hunter-like appearance.”⁷ He says that Pierre: “Wears leather trousers which have become like varnished mahogany from stains and hard usage, a blue cotton shirt, and a dark blue woollen, mushroom-topped, lowland Scotch bonnet such as I remember common in Forfarshire, in my boyhood but it has red and white chequers round the headpiece and Pierre has added a glazed leather peak. ...He seems a good-natured fellow and is said to bear a high character (pp. 53-54).

Southesk relates that Pierre “put an extravagant value on his services and I was obliged to promise him the immense pay of £25 for one month, and so on in proportion for any further period—the term of service to be only six weeks, failing a new and separate agreement (p. 52).” Southesk paid Pierre off at Fort Carlton, besides his wages he gave him a gun, ammunition, sugar and tea.

Pierre Desnomme married Magdeleine Deschamps dite Amyotte before 1836. They had seven children. Pierre died on April 12, 1875 at Lebret. Their children were:

- Paul, born 1836, married Marie Therese Desmarais.
- François Xavier, born 1838, married Marguerite Gouin.
- Betsy, born 1840, married Marcel Desjarlais.
- Pierre, born 1846, died before 1885.
- Catherine, born 1847, married Charles Racette.
- Josephite, born 1851, married Louis Pelletier dit Racette.
- Michel, born 1857 and died before 1885.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute

⁷ Southesk, James Carneigie. *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains: A diary and narrative of travel, sport, and adventure during a journey through the Hudson's Bay Company's territories, in 1859 and 1860.* Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874: