

Biographies of Métis Community Leaders - By Michael Relland and Leah Dorion

Monseigneur Jean Alfred Boucher [1901-1974] - By Michael Relland

Jean Alfred Boucher was born in St. Louis Saskatchewan on July 24, 1901. He was one of eight children born to Jean Baptiste Boucher and Maria (née) Bremner who moved to the St. Louis area from St. François-Xavier Parish of the Red River Settlement in 1880.

Alfred was from a political active Métis family. His grandfather, Jean-Baptiste Boucher served as one of the twelve councillors of the Exovidate, Riel's provisional government during the 1885 Resistance. Charles Eugene Boucher, William's uncle, served as a member of the Territorial Legislative Assembly for Batoche, from 1891 to 1898. In addition to being a political family, the Bouchers' were also devout Roman Catholics, with several family members taking holy orders.

Alfred grew up in St. Louis where he received his education to grade ten. He then attended Jesuit College in Edmonton, where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree and excelled in Philosophy, Mathematics and Science. During his studies,

Alfred was awarded the gold medal for academic excellence from A.G. Brett, the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. Alfred graduated from the Jesuit College in 1923. In 1927, he was ordained a priest in his hometown of St. Louis. This ordination made Alfred the first Saskatchewan-born seminarian to be ordained into the priesthood. After his ordination, Alfred served as assistant priest in St. Louis and the priest in charge of Hoey. In 1936, he went to Wakaw as pastor and director of the Shrine of St. Theresa where he stayed for four years.

In 1940, Alfred went to Prince Albert as the rector of Sacred Heart Cathedral, where he remained for the rest of years of service. On April 6, 1949, Alfred was made Domestic Prelate of Pope Pius XII and on April 6, 1962, he was appointed Vicar General of the Diocese, an office that he held until the time of his death on February 16, 1974.

In recognition of his many years of service, the Prince Albert Roman Catholic School Division named the Monseigneur J.A. Boucher Junior High School in his honour.

Note: For additional information into the life of J.A. Boucher please inquire at the Roman Catholic Chancery Office of the Diocese of Prince Albert.

The Honourable Senator William Albert (Boss) Boucher [1889-1976] - By Michael Relland

William (Boss) Boucher was born in St. Louis in what is now Saskatchewan on November 12, 1889. He was one of eight children born to Jean-Baptiste Boucher and Maria (née) Bremner who moved to the St. Louis area from St. François-Xavier Parish of the Red River Settlement in 1880.

William, who received his elementary education at the Sisters of Providence convent, was from a political family. His grandfather, Jean Baptiste Boucher served as one of the twelve councillors of the Exovidate, Riel's provisional government during the 1885 Resistance. Charles Eugene Boucher, William's uncle, served as a member of the Territorial Legislative Assembly for Batoche, from 1891 to 1898. It is reported that William dreamt of becoming a politician like his uncle and of being elected to the Legislative Assembly. As a youth, he had heard many political discussions, which spurred his interest about possible future political career.

Although his given name was William, in his youth he was more commonly called Albert. Later when he became an adult, "Albert" became known most commonly as "Boss"

Boucher, a moniker that stuck with him for the remainder of his life.

In his early adulthood, "Boss" helped on the farm in St. Louis and worked in a variety of railway jobs and for a lumber company, to working at the Duck Lake Hotel where he met his future wife, Hedwige Marion. They were wed in 1917 and had four children, two daughters and two sons. Unfortunately, one of their sons died in infancy.

Boss's political career began at the age of twenty-six when he successfully ran for reeve of the rural municipality of St. Louis. He held this position for eight consecutive years and for a total of sixteen years in all. His municipal service also included a six-year term as the Director of the Saskatchewan Association of Municipalities.

During the 1920s and '30s, Boss established himself as a successful Métis entrepreneur. He owned a general store in Hoey, a small hamlet 6.4 kilometres south St. Louis, and farmed a section of land east of Hoey.

Boss actively supported the Liberal Party and after the depression of the 1930s he became actively involved in

federal politics. In October 1948, his dream of becoming a Member of Parliament became a reality as he was elected into the House of Commons to represent the Rosthern Constituency in a bye-election. He won the seat again in the 1949 general election. During his time as a Member of Parliament, he served as Liberal Whip until he vacated his seat in 1953. After his time in Parliament, Boss returned to Saskatchewan and settled in Prince Albert.

In January 1957, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent appointed him to the Senate. Boss considered this the greatest honour that had ever been bestowed upon him. He became known as the "Métis Senator" and was quoted as saying, "my appointment to the Senate gives me the opportunity of serving my fellow Canadians in a larger field. For the past forty years I have had the pleasure and privilege of serving at different levels of government."

In total, Boss served in the Senate for nineteen years until his passing in June 1976, at the age of eighty-six. At the time of his passing, Senator Boucher was eulogized in the Senate and was described as a man who, "will be greatly missed by his colleagues who will remember him as a friendly and sincere man who made a lasting impression on

this house and, indeed, in all parts of Parliament. Senator Boucher was a gentleman of the old school, very tactful, exuding a social charm recognized by all."

Note: For additional information into the life of William Albert (Boss) Boucher please inquire at the Roman Catholic Chancery Office of the Diocese of Prince Albert.

Gabriel Dumont [1837-1906] - Leah Dorion

Gabriel Dumont was a man of the prairies, a leader of the great Métis bison hunts, a farmer, and a man who felt a deep responsibility for his fellow humans. During the battles, which the Métis fought in making their last stand as a nation, he also proved himself to be a brilliant military strategist.

Dumont was born in 1837 near St. Boniface, in what is now Manitoba into a Métis family of French-Canadian and Sarcee (Tsuu T'ina) heritage. In 1840, they moved to Saskatchewan and settled near Batoche. As a young boy, Gabriel became an accomplished hunter, fisherman, canoeist and rider. He frequently went along on the hunts and became an excellent guide. He had a facility for languages and could speak five Indian languages as well as French.

By 1872, Gabriel Dumont, now a married man, had joined his fellow Métis in settling down to a less nomadic life in the

Batoche-St. Laurent area in what is now central Saskatchewan. He farmed, ran a ferry service, and operated a small store. He was already a leader in the community and in 1873, when the one thousand residents formed a formal community Gabriel Dumont was elected president by acclamation.

In the years following 1873, Dumont was active in the Métis struggles to obtain title to their land and in attempting to set controls on the hunting of the rapidly disappearing bison herds. Dumont was acutely aware of the damage to the Métis as the once vast herds dwindled and Euro-Canadian settlers advanced west. He recognized early the need to unite all the peoples of the area: Europeans, Euro-Canadians, Country-Born, Métis and First Nations in petitioning Ottawa for addressing their neglected rights.

He played a major role in forming strategy and in eventually asking Louis Riel to return to Canada to help them. During the political confrontations with the Canadian government in 1885, Dumont led his people into battle. It is now felt that Dumont's preferred strategy of using guerrilla warfare tactics would have been superior

under the circumstances to the military defensive tactics Riel, as a leader, eventually chose to use.

When the final battle was over, Dumont escaped capture by going to the United States, where he tried unsuccessfully to devise a plan to rescue Riel. In 1886, his reputation as "the Prince of the Plains" gave him the opportunity of joining "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show." He spent only a short time with the show, eventually making his way back to Saskatchewan via Montréal.

In 1893, he built a log cabin at Bellevue, in what is now Saskatchewan near Batoche, and reverted to the lifestyle he had learned as a boy, fishing and hunting in the woods north of Battleford. He was active until his death in 1906.

Pierre Falcon [1793-1876] - By Leah Dorion

Pierre Falcon was born at the North West Company (NWC)'s Elbow Fort in the Swan River Department. His father, Pierre, was a French-Canadian employee of the NWC and his mother was a First Nations from the Missouri Country. He went to Lower Canada (now Québec) at an early age and later returned to Red River at the age of 15 to become a NWC clerk. In 1812, he married Mary, the daughter of Cuthbert

Grant Sr. He was a brother-in-law to Cuthbert Grant and they shared family ties and business connections.

In June 1816, Pierre Falcon and Cuthbert Grant were challenged the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) for control of the region's fur and bison-provisioning trade. On June 19, 1816, Pierre witnessed the Battle of Seven Oaks between the Métis pemmican provisioners and Governor Semple of the HBC. Pierre composed a song about the Métis victory at Seven Oaks called, "Chanson de la Grenouillière." This song was soon sung across the prairies among buffalo hunters and fur trade boatmen for many years.

Pierre Falcon was known as "Pierre the rhymer" and was famous for his poems and song writing. He sang songs in the oral tradition and voyagers and others who listened, carried his songs thousands of miles along fur trade canoe routes. Many of Pierre Falcon's songs survived long after his death and in many versions.

After the Battle of Seven Oaks Pierre continued to work for the NWC but after 1821 when the two trade companies merged he lost his position. In 1824, he joined his relative, Cuthbert Grant, and other Métis families and settled at

White Horse Plain. This community land was granted by the HBC under Governor George Simpson to prevent a possible Métis resistance over land rights. Here, Pierre began to shift to an agricultural lifestyle complemented by buffalo hunting.

During his lifetime, Pierre Falcon was well-respected for his musical talents and for composing. He was a strong supporter of Métis rights. Through his many songs, he provided the Métis with an interpretation of their history and the nature of their resistances against coercive authority.

Elzéar Goulet - By Leah Dorion

Elzéar Goulet was born at Saint Boniface Parish in the Red River Settlement. He married, in 1859, Helene Jerome from Pembina. They later had six children. From 1860 to 1869, Elzéar Goulet carried mail from Pembina to Upper Fort Garry. In 1869 he joined the Métis Provisional Government at Red River under the leadership of Louis Riel. He became second in command of the Métis irregular armed force commanded by Ambroise Lépine.

Elzéar Goulet was a member of the court martial that accused Thomas Scott of treason against the Métis Provisional government. For his actions in the execution of Scott, many Canadian Party supporters called for his arrest. On 13 September 1870, Elzéar Goulet died while trying to escape members of the Red River Expedition led by General Wolseley. Goulet fled on foot to the Red River and tried to swim to safety on the Saint-Boniface side. His military pursuers threw rocks, one of which struck him on the head and he drowned. When the body was recovered the following day the mark was noticed on his head. No arrests were made in the death of Elzéar Goulet. During this military occupation many Métis such as André Nault was badly beaten by assailants. Violence against the Métis was based on revenge for the death of Thomas Scott. An investigation was held into Goulet's death and subpoenas were issued and 20 witnesses were heard. One of Dr. John Schultz's followers in the Canadian Party and one of Wolseley's soldiers were identified as having pursued Goulet. In the end no one was charged or arrested in Elzéar Goulet's death.

Alexander Kennedy Isbister [1822-1883] - By Leah Dorion

Alexander Kennedy Isbister was born in 1822 at Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River. He is especially honoured as the person who established the University of Manitoba. His father was an Orkney Man and his mother was the daughter of Chief Factor Alexander Kennedy and his Cree wife Aggathas. Naturally, Isbister was employed with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in his early years. Isbister received his early education at St. John's School in the Red River Settlement and then went to work as an HBC clerk.

After saving enough money to finance the trip, he traveled to Britain to study at universities in Edinburgh and London. He became a teacher and a lawyer. Although he never returned to Canada, A.K. Isbister was still able to help the Métis cause in Western Canada. At public hearings, held in England, he represented the Métis in their petitions for land titles and the right to trade freely. When he died in 1883, he was a wealthy man.

In 1877, the University of Manitoba had be formed. It had no buildings, no library, no money and no students. All it could do was give examinations and award degrees to those who passed them. Isbister left his fortune of \$83,000.00 (equivalent to one million dollars today), to the fledgling

university. The interest derived from investing the money was to be used to give scholarships to promising students, without distinction of race, creed or sex. He also left his personal library of over 4,000 books to the university. Today, although the money in the Isbister Fund no longer exists, Isbister's memory is still honoured in the province of Manitoba.

James Isbister - By Leah Dorion

1833

James was born on November 29 at Port Nelson. His father was John Isbister, and his mother was Fanny Sinclair. John was from the Orkney Isles. Fanny was born in 1816, in Manitoba, specifically the Red River Settlement.

1853-1859

James worked as a labourer, fur trader, Postmaster, and interpreter at Fort A La Corne for the Hudson Bay Company (HBC). He spoke fluent English, Cree, Chipewyan, as well as Gaelic, and Michif.

1859-1862

James then worked as a postmaster at Fort Carlton, HBC. He married Margaret Bear on January 1, 1859, daughter of

William Bear, a HBC servant. Then he moved from Fort Carlton in 1860 to Prince Albert. James was the first settler that lived on River Street, and bought land known as River Lot 62, approximately 14th Street West, and 17th Avenue West. It was here that he settled with his family. He started to work this land to grow wheat, and raised cattle and horses. He took all his grain to Winnipeg on Red River carts to have it grist-milled. James and Margaret had 16 children, but only 10 reached adulthood.

1862-1867

It was during these years that James continued to work as a postmaster for various HBC posts. In the summertime, he endeavoured to teach children at Norway House, Grand Rapids, Cross Lake, White Fish Lake, and Stoney Lake Indian Reserve. He took an active part in St. Catherine's Church, acting as a lay reader. James still managed to maintain his farm and family during these years even though he worked in various parts.

1867-1871

James then worked as a clerk at Stoney Lake Indian Reserve for four years. He also retired from the HBC and he moved back home to Prince Albert.

1884

James Isbister was a well-respected leader among the local Aboriginal people. He was always in favour of "legal" constitutional debate respecting the rights of Aboriginal people. He accompanied Gabriel Dumont and other Métis from what is now Saskatchewan in 1884, to persuade Louis Riel to come back from the Montana Territory. They wanted Riel to lead the Métis and others in their claims before the Dominion Government. When the resistance broke out in 1885, Isbister stayed neutral.

1895

Margaret died at Mont Nebo, approximately 80 kilometres northwest of Prince Albert. She is buried at the Sandy Lake Reserve, east of Canwood, Saskatchewan.

1915

James died on October 16, at the age of 84. He was buried at St. Mary's Cemetery in Prince Albert. There is a cairn at his gravesite dedicated in his honour. Archdeacon W.F. Payton put this in place on July 22, 1984, with the assistance of Bishop Short. They dedicated this cairn in recognition of Isbister's leadership and contribution to

the Church. It acknowledged Isbister as the founding father of the City of Prince Albert. The inscription on the cairn reads, "First Settler in Prince Albert, began farming in June, 1862. Farmed at approximately 17th Avenue, and 14th Street West. Died October 16th, 1915 at age 84".

Jerry Potts [1840-1896] - By Leah Dorion

Potts was born about 1840 to a Scottish employee of the American Fur Trade Company and Wamo-pisi, a Blood Indian of the Blackfoot Confederacy in the northern United States. While still a baby, Jerry's father was murdered and his mother returned to her people, leaving her baby behind with a trader. Badly neglected by the trader, Potts was forced to fend for himself and as a result grew up quiet and independent. Malnutrition and neglect were factors in his personal appearance. He had bowed legs and a stunted stature.

After his foster father's death, a kind trader, who taught the five year-old to read and write, adopted Jerry. He was taken along on trading excursions in order to learn the business. In his teens, Potts sought out his mother and

lived in a traditional manner. He was readily accepted and eventually became a war leader. Smallpox and the illicit whiskey trade were devastating his people. He left Canada after his mother and brother were killed by a group of drunken men.

Potts rose to prominence when he joined the North West Mounted Police some years later as a scout. He became known as a man who loved danger, excitement and whiskey. His manner of dress also set him apart from others. During his twenty-two years as a scout, Potts played a major role in breaking up the illicit whiskey trade. He was an integral part of the negotiations for Treaty No. 7. As a scout and guide, he was literally indispensable during the early years of the North West Mounted Police. During his career, Potts is credited with saving many lives through peaceful negotiations and also through his expertise and knowledge of the country. He died in the Northwest Mounted Police Hospital at Fort MacLeod of tuberculosis on July 17, 1896.

Louis Riel Sr. [1817-1864] - By Leah Dorion

Jean Louis Riel, the father of the famous Métis leader, Louis "David" Riel, was born in what is now Saskatchewan,

at Ile a la Crosse in 1817. His family was of French-Canadian and Dene ancestry. Jean Louis' mother was Julie Lagimodiere, the first French-Canadian woman to live in Western Canada. Ever since he was a small child, he spent the rest of his life in Lower Canada (present-day Québec) and in the Red River area of what is now Manitoba.

Jean Louis Riel became a leader of the Métis people. He organized the Métis' resistance to break the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC)'s fur trade monopoly in the Red River Settlement during the 1840s. He was an able politician, well educated and a capable speaker. In 1847, the Métis, under his leadership, were successful in breaking the HBC's monopoly and a period of free trade and prosperity for the settlement followed.

On May 17, 1849, Louis Riel Sr. organized an armed gathering of Métis outside the courthouse at the Guillaume Sayer trial. Although the defendants were found guilty of illegal trade, the large gathering organized by Riel intimidated the court's magistrate to such an extent that no fines were imposed for the infraction. The Métis interpreted this as a sign of victory and free trade was declared. It would be only natural for the Métis, later,

to look to the son of such a man when the need for a strong leader arose again.

Riel Sr. is also remembered as the "Miller of the Seine" because of the wool and flourmill he established on the Seine, a tributary of the Red River. Unfortunately, his enterprise there was never completely successful due to the poor economic conditions of the time.

Prior to his death in 1864 he was involved in a variety of occupations, notably the reconstruction of St. Boniface Cathedral.