

Georges Racette, “Cheman”. (b.c.1821-1877)

Georges was a Metis born at Red River, he was married to Marie Larocque (b. 1820). He was the son of Georges Sr. (born at Fort Pelly in 1800) and Marie Françoise Guilbeult, both Metis. His nickname “Cheman” (Canoe Man in Saulteaux), came from the fact that he moved around a great deal. He was a plains trader. A large man, well over six feet, Georges was a skilled hunter, fighter and horseman. In 1873 Georges, with several others, established a “Council” in the Qu’Appelle Valley with the intent of forming a government. Due to their lack of formal education they sent for Louis Riel to assist them in this.

Georges was also present at the Treaty Four negotiations. An unknown militia member described a Metis horseman at the Treaty Four negotiations at Fort Qu’Appelle:



On the first day of the assembly, almost immediately after the dress being sounded by Bugler Burns the whole camp came forward in martial array, led by an enormously large man, riding a very fair specimen of the buffalo hunters of that time, standing about sixteen hands high, dark brown, and showing a strain of good blood, his rider attired in blue cloth capote with brass buttons, cotton shirt (unstarched), moleskin trousers and new deerskin moccasins with broad L'Assomption belt or sash of variegated colours in silk around his waist, Indian pad saddle with heavily beaded saddle cloth, complimented with the "tout en semble" of this would-be leader now riding well in advance curvetting and ascribing circles and half-circles, at the canter

or lope, and now and then parading up and down the whole frontage until close up to our Marque tent. Then, at a given signal the soldiers of the party with their hawk's wings, rode forward in sections and passed in review before him at a gallop, towards the fort, and on their return circled around him in a single file displaying some feats of horsemanship while the rest of the camp were dismounted awaiting further orders. Then came Hawk Wing and Red Cloud, Cree Chiefs.

We believe that the man described in the passage above is Georges "Cheman" Racette, born in 1819 at Red River. In 1874, Georges represented the Assiniboine Indians at the Treaty Four negotiations. His display of military strength and strong positions during negotiations led to his being overpowered and locked up during negotiations. He was only released when he promised to leave the area.

Alexander Begg¹ states:

On the third December (1869), a rumour was current in Red River that "Shawman," alias George Racette Jun., a French Half-Breed and desperate character, was on the way to the settlement at the head of eleven hundred Sioux Indians, to take part against the insurgents. The report was the more redily believed, as it was well known that Racette, before he left for the plains, had been in frequent consultation with Dr. Schultz; and it was feared that he had been induced to raise the Sioux warriors, over whom he professed to have great influence. Racette, shortly before his departure for the plains, had been heard repeatedly to threaten that he could and would bring back with him a large enough band of Indians to lay waste to the whole Settlement. These threats, at the time, were not regarded in a serious light, and no steps were taken to have the rascal punished for using them; but when the report was brought in that the Sioux were actually on the way, the words of Racette were remembered, and consequently caused a good deal of anxiety. This man "Shawman" had been known for several years as a reckless and desperate character. At one time a good hunter and trader, he had allowed the influence of liquor to ruin him, until he became worthless and a man not respected amongst his fellows. No merchant would trust him with goods to trade with the Indians, knowing that the proceeds were almost sure to be spent on liquor. Whenever he arrived at the Settlement, it was certain to be a signal for all the worst characters in the neighbourhood to assemble round him, and then came several days- perhaps weeks- of drinking, fighting and rioting, to the terror and annoyance of the peaceable inhabitants of the place. In this way Racette gave a great deal of trouble to the authorities, who were obliged on several occasions to punish him; and for this reason he was a sworn enemy of the Hudson's Bay Company, and therefore adopted by the Schultz party as a friend to their cause. This, strange to say, was the man whom Col. Dennis frequently employed or consulted while carrying on his surveying operations; and this also is pretty well known to be the same individual who is referred to as follows, in the report of 27th October to Mr. McDougall:-

*"I may say further that I sent * * *, a man of influence among the French Half-Breeds, but favourable to our cause, up to the French Settlement on the 'White Horse*

¹ Alexander Begg, *The Creation of Manitoba or A History of the Red River Troubles*. Toronto: A.H. Hovey, 1871: 146-148.

Plains,' on the Assiniboine, yesterday, to use his influence to prevent the people there from coming down to help the insurgents. He returned today, and the result of his mission is given in the annexed paper.

“J.S. Dennis.”

It is well known now that Racette did go out amongst the Plains Sioux and endeavour to excite them; but, fortunately, he found that his boasted influence over them was not equal to that of other and better disposed traders in the neighbourhood. The Sioux were kept quiet through the instrumentality of the majority of the plain hunters who saw with dismay what would be the result of bringing cruel savages upon the scene of action.



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