

Guillaume Charette. (1884-1952)

By Gabriel Dufault and Lawrence Barkwell

Guillaume Charette was born in St. Norbert, Manitoba, on October 5, 1884, to Metis parents William Charette¹ and Sarah Perrault. He was raised in a home which served as a Halfway house for travelers for almost a century. He attended school in St. Norbert and St. Boniface College where he attained his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1910. In 1914, Mr. Charette received his degree from the Manitoba School of Law. He then attended the Faculty of Law at the University of Manitoba and received his degree in 1914. He served in Europe with the armed forces, was wounded and subsequently returned to Canada.

Charette was first married to Agnes Daigneault who died shortly after giving birth to a lovely girl who became a Grey Nun-Sr. Simone Charette. He later married Agnes Courchaine, who raised the daughter of the first wife and who gave him four daughters and a son. Guillaume was buried in St. Boniface on August 20, 1952 at age 68.

He was employed as an agent of a colonization company, then switched to the Department of Immigration and spent twenty-five years stationed in Emerson, Manitoba; Kingsgale, B.C.; and various cities in Maine, Vermont and New York. He later worked as an official in the Canada Department of Immigration. In this job he was stationed in various cities across Canada and the United States.

For many years Guillaume was President of L'Union Nationale Métisse St. Joseph du Manitoba. Under his guidance this society did much to correct the way of thinking of the Manitoba population towards Metis people.

He gave many lectures, wrote numerous articles and collected the stories of the Metis people. He loved retelling stories and became known as the "Old Storyteller" of CKSB Radio. He was ardently proud of his Metis heritage and his home became the meeting place of such well-known Metis as Honoré Riel, Alexandre and Samuel Nault, Camille Teillet, Louis and Roger Goulet; there they discussed Metis history and culture. Among the Metis such friend were like relations.

In 1903 the idea of publishing the memoirs of Louis Goulet was suggested. Guillaume started collecting notes for the book *L'Espace de Louis Goulet* (published in English as *Vanishing Spaces*). These stories had been told and retold during long winter evenings. The book was completed posthumously in 1976, from notes provided by Simone, Charette's daughter.

Guillaume Charette was a prolific writer and a most enjoyable storyteller. Among his writings of historical value are the following:

- 1923- *Government of Canada and the North West Territories.*
- 1931- Some points of history

¹ William Charette, born 1851, was the son of Joseph Charette and Marie Gosselin. He married Sarah Perreault, the daughter of Edouard Perrault and Madeleine Millet dit Beauchemin on January 22, 1881 in St. Norbert.

- 1936- Story of the Metis Nation of Western Canada as, co-author with A. H. de Tremaudan: *Histoire de la Nation Métisse dans L'Ouest Canadien*. Montréal: Albert Lévesque, 1936. Reprinted Éditions des Plaines, Saint-Boniface, Manitoba, 1978. This was reprinted in English, translated by E. Maguet as *Hold High Your Heads: A History of the Métis Nation in Western Canada*. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1982.
- 1949- Story of the Originals of the Province of Manitoba
- 1949-1950, the biography of Louis Goulet, *Vanishing spaces*
- 1950- His Family memories.
- 1951- *Waterhen*.
- 1952- Recited (vieux de la veille) (see from the sky)
- 1921-53- Conferences given before the members of La Societe Historique de St. Boniface, published in *Les cloches de St. Boniface*.

Guillaume Charette will best be remembered for the passionate interest and attention that he gave to the Metis cause. During his boyhood, everything around him reflected history. The house where he was raised was built of oak logs and constructed in the early 1800's. Guillaume Charette was a proud Metis, he was steeped in Metis history, and spent most of his free time helping people to appreciate the important role played by the Metis in the development of Canada. (Contributed by Gabriel Dufault.)



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