

## **Wah-pah-ha-ska (White Cap) and the 1885 Northwest Resistance.**

White Cap, a Dakota, was born in 1819 and died in 1889. In the 1850s White Cap had been a Headman of the Five Lodges Band, he was believed to have been a son or perhaps a nephew of Old Thunder Face. His group was an aggressive portion of that band that became designated as the Cankute or Shoot the Woods people. White Cap fled to Canada from Minnesota with Standing Buffalo after the so-called Minnesota Massacre of 1862. While in Canada Standing Buffalo and White Cap engaged a Metis trader by the name of Georges Racette to work for them and represent them in their negotiations with the Canadian government. On March 14, 1870 White Cap wrote a letter to Lt. Governor Adams Archibald of Fort Garry to inform him of his intentions to settle permanently on British territory. He said that he and his nation (presumably including Standing Buffalo's band) lived on English ground and had made peace with the Metis, Chippewa, Cree, and Assiniboine.

After fleeing Minnesota in 1862, a number of Dakota Sioux who went to the North West Territory joined Metis buffalo hunting groups. James H. Howard notes:

There was also a considerable band of Eastern Sioux under White Cap and the son of Standing Buffalo who ranged further west on the Qu'Appelle River in present Saskatchewan. When contacted by the treaty commissioners in 1875, White Cap informed them that his people had been in the region for thirteen years and that they wished to be left as they were, with the privilege of hunting with the Metis. They did not wish to settle on reserves with the other Sioux.<sup>1</sup>

The Metis also had a longstanding relationship with the Lakota Sioux. In an October 1877 meeting between Sitting Bull and General Alfred Terry and Major Walsh at Fort Walsh, Sitting Bull stated:

I was raised with the Red River Half-breeds... and I intend to stop with them, and for that reason I shake hands with the people. In this way I was raised. (to Terry and U.S.A.) - We did not give you our country; you took it from us; see how I live with these people [the Metis].<sup>2</sup>

In 1878, seven or eight lodges of Sioux moved to St. Laurent on the South Saskatchewan River after the failure of the buffalo hunt. Here they worked with the Metis and sometimes were dependant upon them for provisions.<sup>3</sup>

White Cap's band had first settled in the Qu'Appelle valley but wintered during 1869-70 in the vicinity of Wood Mountain near their Metis neighbours, about 100 families led by Jean Baptiste Wilkie. They had always ranged farther west and north than the Standing Buffalo Dakota group. However, into the mid-1870s they were still wintering near the St. Joseph – Red River Metis, now led by Pierre Berger. In June 1872,

---

<sup>1</sup> James H. Howard, *The Canadian Sioux*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984: 31.

<sup>2</sup> CSP, 1878, Volume 4, pg. 48.1

<sup>3</sup> PAC, MG17, A17, O.M.I. "Petite Chronique St. Laurent, pour l'année 1878."

just one year after Standing Buffalo's death, the "Wood Mountain Sioux" notified chief trader William McKay of Fort Ellice that they wanted to visit the Red River officials about a reserve. The trip was arranged, and so White Eagle and Little Standing Buffalo went up to the fort where they had a reunion with Henok, Appearing Cloud's Wahpetons and other Santees. In the spring of 1873 Pascal Breland, a Metis member of the Northwest Council of Assiniboia visited them. Although White Eagle and Little Standing Buffalo were apparently away at the time, White Cap, Red Thunder (III), Running Bear, and He Who Speaks with Laughter (the headman of the old Lean Bear band) were present. As usual they exhibited their King George III medals and were quick to salute the English flag. They asked for traders to bring them "the means of life," and for pity from the Queen on all Sioux refugees from the United States. Breland promised that a commissioner would meet them soon at Fort Ellice.

However, another year went by before the Sissetons had any further progress in their negotiations with the English. Finally, in February 1874 Lt. Governor Morris (of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories), Indian Commissioner David Laird, and William J. Christie (longtime trader of the Hudson's Bay Company) arranged to meet with the chiefs at Qu'Appelle Lakes. This region was the home of various Cree bands under Piapot, and the Saulteaux. The issue of a reserve for Little Standing Buffalo north of Pasqua Lake in the Qu'Appelle valley was settled at that time



Lieutenant Valentine Rowe's painting of Chief White Cap at Wood Mountain, September 16, 1874.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>On June 11, 1874, before the Boundary Commission reached Wood End, just west of Short Creek, Valentine Francis Rowe, a thirty-two-year-old British Royal Engineer had a serious accident when his horse stumbled and threw him causing a skull fracture. He was left behind to recover and was visited by a number of Indians. First, the Elk and his family visited, and then departed when a large band of Yanktonias approached. This group, the bands of Struck by the Ree and Two Dogs, had just left Cypress Hills where they had joined with the Metis to fight off Blackfoot who had been stealing Metis horses. The surveyors working further west where the Milk

Indian commissioner Laird had hoped that both bands would settle at Qu'Appelle. But White Cap argued in favor of a reserve on the South Saskatchewan River. He was already spending much of his time at Duck Lake, and wintering at Prince Albert with a band of Wahpetons. Eventually the chief had his way, and a reserve was recommended for him at Moose Woods near Dundurn. White Cap was leading a group of Cankute Sissetons who were joined at Moose Woods by a group of Yanktons from Prince Albert in 1880. His band was made up of buffalo hunters who traded at both Fort Ellice and Wood Mountain. White Cap's band members were related to the Trottiers and Laframboises of the nearby Metis community of Prairie Ronde.

Chief White Cap first selected a reserve near the elbow of the South Saskatchewan River at Aiktow, but because of the sandy soil in 1878, he moved north near the Metis settlement of Prairie Ronde, located in the Moose Woods, south of Saskatoon. This made his group neighbours to Charles Trottier's Metis Band. The two groups had hunted buffalo together on the plains for many years and Trottier was considered to be a Chief within the Dakota Sioux community. The two groups had also intermarried over the years and Trottier often referred to them as his cousins. Whitecap was given a reserve at Moose Woods in 1879 but it was not surveyed until 1881.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the 1885 resistance, Dumont sent François Vermette and Napoleon Carrière to Prairie Ronde to bring the Metis and White Cap's Dakota group north to Batoche. They proceeded to Prairie Ronde on snowshoes and presented tobacco to White Cap and Charles Trottier.



Wah-pah-ha-ska

---

River crosses the boundary had met the Metis going south from this battle, noted in the pictures and descriptions above. The Sioux camped near Rowe and he got to know them quite well and he painted their pictures as well as that of White Cap, later in September of 1874. Commissioner Cameron was quite pleased with the relationship that had been established and gave Two Dogs a paper noting that he was the "Executive Chief of the Ihuktawanah of which Padinapap (Pananiapapi, or Struck by the Ree) is head," and commended their friendly behaviour and good conduct. This was a passport to cross British lines that Two Dogs carried for years to come.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Bill Barry, *People Places: Saskatchewan and its Names*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1997. Douglas W. Light, *Footprints in the Dust*. North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Publications Inc., 1987: 230.

Norbert Welsh tells the following story of his encounter with Gabriel Dumont's emissaries:

I heard a big noise around my house... there were about forty men on horseback surrounding my house. I opened the door and two men, Carrière and François Vermette, tried to enter, but I closed and locked the door. ... the Half-Breeds spoke through the door. They told me that I would hand things out when [my friend] White Cap came along... White Cap had some of his band with him, but most of the crowd was Half-Breeds.<sup>6</sup>

The next morning White Cap returned with the Metis and Welsh asked him if they had orders to get his supplies. Vermette and Carrière replied that Gabriel Dumont and Maxime Lépine had given them definite orders to seize his stores. Welsh says that White Cap and Charles Trottier then forced him to travel north with them toward Saskatoon. There were about forty men in White Cap's brigade and about twenty in Trottier's group. Welsh got away from the group at Saskatoon. When White Cap and Trottier<sup>7</sup> got to their camp two miles past Saskatoon they sent Welsh's brother-in-law Frank Boyer to return and get him, but Welsh declined.<sup>8</sup>

White Cap and his warriors traveled with Charles Trottier from their reserve at Moose Woods, near Round Prairie south of Saskatoon to join the fighting at Duck Lake, Tourond's Coulée and Batoche. At trial, witnesses said that an armed Metis group from Prairie Ronde coerced White Cap into this. Norbert Welsh does not agree with this version of events:

I called to my guards and we returned to camp [from Saskatoon]. I told them what Trounce had said-that orders had come from the Government to stop White Cap and his Indians, who were claiming that the Half-Breeds were forcing them to join Riel.

White Cap declared that the rumor was not true, and that he and his band would go through, that nobody would stop him.

[At Saskatoon] everything went off as we had arranged. Trounce [the Mayor of Saskatoon] and Trottier took one side of the road, and White Cap and I the other. Each man was challenged as he went through, and asked if he were going to join Riel of his own will. ... When the last rig had gone through... I wheeled my horse around, and said, "I'm the only man that's forced to go through, and I won't go through. Good-bye," I called to the warriors.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Norbert Welsh (As told to Mary Weeks), *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers [reprint], 1994: 157-161.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Trottier was Norbert Welsh's uncle so he really had nothing to fear from him. Welsh's mother-in-law, Madeleine Trottier was the sister of Charles Trottier. Welsh was married to Cecile Boyer, Frank Boyer's sister.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Norbert Welsh (As told to Mary Weeks), *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers [reprint], 1994: 160.

By all accounts at trial, White Cap's group did not arrive at Batoche until April 10, 1885. Philippe Garnot testified that White Cap's group was camped 10 miles outside Batoche on April 9<sup>th</sup> and came in the next day with Riel's messenger who had gone to get them. He says the band consisted of about eighty men however he must be counting Trottier's group from Prairie Ronde along with the Sioux. John Astley testified that he saw White Cap and his band arrive at Batoche on April 10 all on horseback and all armed. He saw the whole group leave for Tourond's Coulee about two days before the fighting started there. White Cap was made a member of the Exovedate. Some historians say that his attendance was simply symbolic since he only spoke Dakota and likely had little understanding of the proceedings. This interpretation is just not believable because White Cap and his group had hunted with the Metis buffalo hunters for over twenty-three years at that point. Moreover, Charles Trottier was fluent in Dakota and Gabriel Dumont did speak some Dakota (as did many of the other Metis fighters). Witnesses said that during the defense of Batoche they were seen conversing with each other. Alexis Labombarde was the man usually used by the Metis for Dakota interpretation. Father Cloutier's journal records some of White Cap's participation on the second day of battle at Batoche;

A soldier advances on his stomach and slips. A Native kills him, and the other Natives yell while striking themselves on the mouth with the hand and jumping - The Native loads his carbine and he leans on a poplar and it falls on the head of the old Parenteau and injures his head - The soldiers have climbed back up the slope; others follow: White Cap, Baptiste, Montour, Falcon, and some others, about ten in all, and when they arrived close to the cemetery the soldiers send a volley of fire it strikes one of the Metis except that in descending from there Pierre Parenteau goes to the trench where he had been assigned to guard the rear near Batoche.<sup>10</sup>

Middleton's scouts south of Tourond's Coulee captured Blackbird, White Cap's adopted son. Chief White Cap was captured after the battle for Batoche, he was later freed and all charges against him were dropped. Chief White Cap died in August of 1889.

After the battle of Tourond's Coulee a number of Wapahaska's people slipped away at night and slowly made their way south to Tatankanaje's reserve (Standing Buffalo). They had left all their food, teepees and footwear behind and were destitute. A number of the warriors were wounded from the battle. Agent Lash agreed to feed the band but did not want to appear to be supporting resistance participants. One newspaper reported:

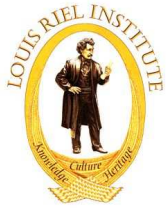
Lieutenant Brown says the Sioux Indians on Standing Buffalo's reserve are still feeling pretty crusty, and express themselves in anything but a courteous manner towards the soldiers, and say they will get square with the whites yet for the loss they have sustained in the present troubles. Seven wounded Indians who were in the Batoche fight arrived on the reserve last Sunday.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Cloutier, *op cit*, Vol. 2: 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Portage la Prairie Weekly Tribune Record*, June 5, 1885.

Sir John A. Macdonald became involved and indicated that the Dakota were not to be left to starve. As a compromise extra food was given to Tatankanaje to distribute to White Cap's group. Lash also sent the wounded warriors to Fort Qu'Appelle to be treated by the military physician.<sup>12</sup>



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

---

<sup>12</sup> Peter Douglas Elias, *The Dakota of the Canadian Northwest*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988: 172.