

Dakota — Metis Relations in the 1800s: Clash and Conflict to Collaboration

1824

Alexander Wilkie or his son Jean-Baptiste Wilkie and the Chippewa reportedly had a palisaded fort on the Souris River near Towner N.D. called “Buffalo Lodge” which was attacked and burnt down by the Dakota in 1824.

The Dakota Winter Count indicates:

An 1824 Pictograph of log or frame structure

Wah-pes·a conkas·ke kii

Corrected to *Wakpe s·a* conkas·ke kii

Red Leaf Fort was taken by force. Becomes: Red River Metis Fort was taken by force.

This year-name and pictograph refer to a battle between the Ojibways and the Dakotas at a locale near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota. The Dakotas discovered an Ojibway fort in their buffalo hunting territory. According to the winter-counts the Yanktonais soundly defeated their enemies and destroyed the fort. During the 1820s and 1830s, the Lakotas (and Yanktonais) and Ojibways were in a fierce and violent competition for the buffalo ranges of central North Dakota. Sporadic fighting continued up to confinement of these groups on reservations. The Dakota text is apparently in error. Rather than *Wah-pes·a* (Red Leaf), the term should be *Wakpe s·a* (Red River), The Yanktonais and Lakotas referred to this group, who were *Métis* rather than Ojibway proper, as the Red River people.¹

1844 Metis Treaty with the Sioux

At the peak of his career, in 1844, Cuthbert Grant had successfully negotiated a peace settlement with the Sioux, traditional enemies of the Cree and Saulteaux and consequently of the Metis. The peace lasted for seven years, until the battle of Grand Coteau.

In 1844, after a skirmish with the Dakota, the Métis retaliated and killed several members of a Dakota band. After the confrontation, many of the Dakota leaders met to discuss what should be done about the situation. Winter was almost upon them and it was essential that they be prepared for it. The necessary preparations could not be made if they continued to engage in skirmishes with the Métis. The years of fighting had not been

¹ Linea Sundstrom, *The Chandler-Pohrt Winter-Count*, Detroit Institute of Arts, Day Star Research, 1998.

productive. Many men from both sides had been killed and patrols of scouts were constantly needed. The fighting and the need for scouts reduced the number of hunters who were available to supply the needs of their people. Seeing the wisdom of putting an end to the fighting, the Dakota took the initiative and began to negotiate for peace. They drafted a letter which they sent to the Métis by an interpreter named Lang. (From Alexander Ross, *The Red River Settlement: Its Rise, Progress, and Present State*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1972 reprint, pp.324-330.)

Sioux letter to the Metis

White Bear's (Matoska's) Lodge, 14th November, 1844

Friends, - We hang down our heads; our wives mourn, and our children cry.

Friends, - The pipe of peace has not been on our council for the last six days.

Friends, - We are now strangers. The whites are our enemies.

Friends, - The whites have often been in our power; but we always conveyed them on their journey with glad hearts, and something to eat.

Friends, - Our young men have been killed. They were good warriors: their friends cry.

Friends, - Our hearts are no longer glad. Our faces are not painted.

Friends, - You owe the Sissetons four loaded carts, they were our relations; the half-breeds are white men: the whites always pay well.

Friends, - the four Yanktons did not belong to us: but they are dead also.

Friends, - Tell us if we are to be friends or enemies? It is to be peace or war? Till now our hands have always been white, and our hearts good.

Friends, - We are not frightened; we are yet many and strong. Our bows are good; but we love peace: we are fond of our families.

Friends, - Our hearts were not glad when we left you last; our shot pouches were light, our pipes cold; but we love peace. Let your answer make our wives happy, our children smile.

Friends, - Send Lang, with your message, his ears are open; he is wise.

Friends, - We smoke the pipe of peace, and send our hearts to you.

Friends, - Tell Lang, to run, he will eat and rest here. He will be safe, and we will not send him off hungry, or bare-footed.

Signed by the chiefs

Wa Nen De No Ko Ton Money,
La Terre qui Brule (Makaideya, Burnt Earth),
In Yag Money (Inyangmani or Running Walker),
The Thunder that Rings,
Etaï Wake Yon (Etewakinyan, Thunder Face a Sisuwan Chief),
The Black Bull,
Pin E Hon Tane,

The Sun

The letter proposing peace was received by Cuthbert Grant, in his capacity as leader of the Métis. He replied with a letter of his own. He agreed with the need for peace and outlined the concerns which still needed to be addressed by the Dakota:

Grantown, 8th December, 1844.

Friends, - The messenger which you sent to us, found us all sad as yourselves, and from a similar cause: a cause which may give a momentary interruption to the pipe of peace; but should not, we hope, wholly extinguish it.

Friends - you know that for half a century or more, you and we have smoked the pipe of peace together; that during all that time, no individual in your nation could say that the half-breeds of Red River lifted up their hands in anger against him, until the late fatal occurrence compelled them in self-defence to do so; although you well know, that year after year, your young men have killed, and, what we regard worse than death, scalped many belonging to us. Not that we were afraid to retaliate; but because we are Christians, and never indulge in revenge. And this declaration, which may not be denied, brings us more immediately to notice and to answer the several points in your message to us.

Friends, - You say your people have been killed: we believe what you say, and sincerely regret it; but at the same time, you forget to express your regret that our people were killed also: the one fact is as well known to you as the other; and they were killed first. You forget to notice, that whilst La Terre qui Brule and party were in the midst of our friendly camp, smoking the calumet of peace in all confidence and security, your people at that moment were treacherously murdering our friends within sight of that very camp! You forget to mention that our dead were brought into the camp, the bodies yet warm, and laid before your eyes! Till then, never did it enter the head or the heart of a Red River half-breed to seek in revenge the blood of a Sioux.

Friends, - You state that our people have often been in your power: we acknowledge what you say; but you must likewise acknowledge, that your people have often been in our power, and we sent them off with glad heart also. Even on the late fatal occurrence, when our dead were before your eyes, and when a hundred guns pointed with deadly aim threatened La Terre qui Brule and party with instant death, yet more were for you than against you; so you were safe; La Terre qui Brule and party were safe in the camp of the half-breeds. The brave are always generous.

Friends, - You state that when you last left us, "your shot pouches were

light and your pipes cold." There is a time for everything; was it a time to show you special kindness when murdering our relations? You demanded from us four loaded carts for the four Sisitons: we never refuse paying a just debt, never consent to pay an unjust one. Let us see how far we are liable. In the first place, then, you know your people were the first aggressors. You, La Terre qui Brule, saw with your own eyes our dead, and you knew that none of your people were then killed, and we gave up all thoughts of retaliation, still clinging with fond hopes to that peace and friendship which had so long cheered our intercourse together; but the very next day after you left our camp, a party of your people were discovered rushing upon one of our hunters who happened to be a little on one side and alone; the alarm was given, when the first at hand scampered off at full speed to the rescue of their brother, and in the onset your people were killed. Four, you say, were Yanktons. The demand you make we cannot comply with, either for Sisitons or Yanktons, be the consequences what they may; because we consider it unjust. We may give a pipe of tobacco, or a load of ammunition voluntarily; but we will submit to no unjust demand.

Friends, - You put the question, "Shall we be friends or enemies, or shall there be peace or war?" We leave yourselves to answer the question. They who would have friends must show themselves friendly. We have violated no faith, we have broken no peace. We will break none. We will not go to find you to do you harm. We will always respect the laws of humanity. But we will never forget the first law of nature: we will defend ourselves, should you be numerous as the stars, and powerful as the sun. You say you are not frightened: we know you are a brave and generous people; but there are bad people among you.

Friends, - We are fond of you because you have often shown yourselves generous and kind to the whites: we are fond of you from a long and friendly intercourse, and from habits of intimacy. To sum up all in a few words, we are for peace, peace is our motto; but on the contrary, if you are for war, and you raise the tomahawk in anger, we warn you not to approach our camp either by day or night, or you will be answerable for the consequences.

Friends, - You have now our answer; we hope you will take the same view of things, and come to the same conclusion we have done. Langé will lay this before the great chiefs; may your answer be the sacred pipe of peace. Put your decision on white man's paper. And may that peace and friendship, which has so long knit our hearts together heretofore, still continue to do so hereafter.

Signed *Cuthbert Grant*,

To Wa Nen De Ne Ko Ton Money,
In Yag Money,
Etaï Wake Yon,
Pin E Hon Tane,

Upon receiving the letter from Grant, the Dakota leaders assembled to discuss their response to it. A consensus was reached and a final proposal for peace was drafted. The nature of the peace was clearly defined in their letter to the Métis:

To Cuthbert Grant, Chief of all the Half-breeds, and Warden of the Plains

White Bear's Lodge, 12th Feb, 1845

Friends - Langé is here, and your message is now spread before us in council. Ne-tai-ope called for the pipe; but Wa-nen-de-ne-ko-ton-money said no: all the men were then silent; but the women set up a noisy howl out-doors. Nothing was done till they got quiet. The council then broke up. Next day it was the same. The third day the council received your message as one of peace. We now send you our answer. Langé promises to run.

Friends - I, the afflicted father of one of the young men killed by you, wish that he who killed my son should be my son in his stead. He had two feathers in his head.
Ne-Tai Ope.

Friends - Among the young men killed by you, I have a nephew. He who killed him, I wish to be my nephew. He was the smallest of all the unfortunates.

Friends - You killed my son, he was brave, San-be-ge-ai-too tan. He who pointed a gun at him, I wish to be my son. He had a feathered wand in his hand. I send it by Lang, to my adapted son.
Tah Wah Chan Can.

Friends - I wish the brave who killed my brother, should be my brother. He had a gun and many feathers in his head. He was young.
Hai To Ke Yan

Friends - I am old and bowed down with sorrow. You killed my brother-in-law. He was braver than the bear. Had three wounds, and a scar on the face. Whoever killed him, I wish him to be my brother-in-law for ever. He was bareheaded. Hair painted red. Many bells and beads on his leggings. He was tall and strong.
Tah Tan Yon Wah Ma De Yon

Friends - My cousin never returned. He is dead. Whoever deprived me of his friendship, I wish him to be my friend and cousin. He had been

wounded before, and had a crooked hand. His feathers were red. He had garnished shoes.

Wah Ma De Oke Yon

Friends - You killed my father last summer. I wish him who made me fatherless, should be my father. He was a chief, a Sissiton warrior, had a gun and a bow, had been scalped young. His feathers reached the ground. Whoever will wear those proud feathers, I will give him a horse. I will be proud of him.

Friends - You killed my uncle, Thon-gan-en-de-na-ge. I am sad. The man who was so brave, I wish to be my uncle. He was a Yankton. My face is always painted black. He had on cloth and leather leggings, and one feather.

Kan Tan Kee.

Signed by the Chiefs.

Wa Nen De Ne Ko Ton Money,
In Yag Money (Inyangmani, or Running Walker a Wahpeton Chief)
Etai Wake Yon (Ite Wakinyan, Thunder Face a Ssituwan Chief)
Pin E Hon Tane,
La Terre qui Brule (Burnt Earth),
The Thunder That Rings,
The Black Bull,
The Sun

1848 Battle of O'Brien's Coulée

In mid-summer 1848 a large Chippewa-Metis and Dakota battle took place at O'Brien's Coulée² near present day Olga, North Dakota in 1848. The Chippewa-Metis hunting camp was made up of 800 Metis men and 200 Chippewa Indian men. They had their families, horses and over 1,000 Red River carts. The Chippewa were led by Old Red Bear and Little Shell II. The Metis were led by Jean Baptiste Wilkie whose mother was a full-blood Chippewa.

François Corvin Gosselin who along with William Gaddy who would later be a sub-leader of the 49th Rangers attached to the British Boundary Commission were also at this battle.³

² So called because O'Brien lived at this location some 35 years after the event. It is a short distance west of Olga, N.D. Olga is between one branch of the Pembina River to the north and the Tongue River to the south.

³ Libby Papers, A85, Box 36, Notebook #14. August 4, 1910 interview with Little Duck, Dominion City, MB, interpreter Roger St. Pierre. This paper was given to me by Louis Garcia, historian for the Mni Wakan Oyate.

1851: Battle of the Grand Coteau

The Metis battle against the Dakota Sioux which began on the Grand Coteau in the vicinity of “Maison du Chien,” (Dog Den Butte) in the Dakota Territory was a defining moment in Metis history. This butte is located to the southwest of Butte North Dakota, just east of the Strawberry Lakes. This landmark was a gathering place for the Arikara and Dakota Sioux and was of great spiritual significance to them. Jean Baptiste Falcon, Pierre Falcon’s youngest son, was captain of the hunting party from St. Francois Xavier which clashed with the Sioux at the Battle of the Grand Coteau on July 13 and 14, 1851.⁴ The Sioux initially attacked the smaller St. Francois Xavier Brigade, which then joined the next day with the larger Red River/Pembina Brigade led by Jean Baptiste Wilkie. The Sioux subsequently withdrew.

1855:

Matowakan (Holy Bear), the leading chief of the Yanktonai, attacked the Metis, taking 20 horses, however about 80 Yanktonai were killed in the fight.

Sioux, Chippewa/Metis Treaty of 1859

William Davis (born RR 1845) was present at this meeting as a 14 year-old. He tells the following story:⁵ There had been a conference at St. Joseph in 1858 where it was agreed that a meeting should take place the next year at Les Isles aux Mort, near Leeds N.D. (north-west of Devil’s Lake) to set the boundary lines for the hunting grounds of the Sioux, Metis and Chippewa. There was water everywhere in the vicinity of the treaty site. This created islands, leading to the name of the site.

On the first day of the conference the bands rode out and met halfway between the camps. They were on horseback and fully armed, ready for battle, if necessary. They rode in parallel lines until they were about 100 feet apart. They then turned to face each other. After a few moments of silence a Sioux Chief slowly dismounted, accepted a huge peace pipe of catlinite (pipestone) from a warrior, stepped into the lane between the lines and invited the Metis leader to join him.

⁴ It is possible that this was a confrontation between the Cut Head (Pabaksa) Yanktonai (Ihanktonwanna), Dakota because the Metis were on their traditional territory. The Yanktonai, Dakota traditional territory extended from the Red River on the east, to the Missouri River on the west. From the Pembina River on the north to Lake Kampeska - Moccasin River area in the south. In 1872-73, the Sisseton – Wahpeton tribes, of the eastern Dakota sold the Yanktonai land to the United States Government. The Yanktonai, Nakota are the only tribe not to sell their homeland. To this day they are scattered on several reservations, principally Ft. Peck, Montana, Standing Rock, North Dakota, and Ft. Thompson, South Dakota. See Louis Garcia, *Message from Garcia, Brave Bear, the Cuthead Yanktonai*. Tokio, N.D., August 16, 2008.

⁵ Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation. *St. Ann’s Centennial: 100 Years of Faith*. Belcourt, N.D.: 1985, pp. 314-315.

The pipe was first presented to Chief John Baptiste Wilkie, leader of the mixed-bloods and after him the sub chiefs and headmen of the Sioux and the captains of the Metis puffed the pipe. When the serious matters were finished the two groups mingled freely to indulge in sports and trade, the latter consisting chiefly of barter for guns and buffalo robes and horse trading.

The next day the conference began. It was agreed that the unpleasant relations between the Chippewa (the relatives), the Metis and the Sioux were unnecessary and dangerous. The Sioux were accused of raiding the Chippewa country, stealing horses and sometimes scalping Chippewa people. The Metis were most concerned because the Sioux “made fun” with the “meat” (other portions of the body).

The Sioux charged that the Metis encouraged the coming of whites and the killing of too many buffaloes. But the line was fixed. It was to follow the Goose River from the mouth to the timber of the Goose where the river has three branches. From the source of the branches the boundary followed the stream to its mouth and continued to Dog Den Buttes, from there it ran south to the Missouri river opposite the mouth of the Knife River.

Gray Owl, Wanata II⁶, Tete la Brule (Makaideya, or Burnt Earth) and Mato Wakan (Medicine Bear) were the Sioux leaders. Grey Owl was described as a fine appearing man and very eloquent by Mr. Davis. “He had fine limbs, thick and strong and was straight and tall. He spoke well and was not afraid.”

!858/59 The *St. Peter Free Press* of May 4, 1859 reports that the Yanktonai, Pabaska, Northern Sisseton, and Metis met in council at Mni Wakan and agreed that all previous hostilities would be forgiven. They also promised to meet again on the Sheyenne River during the summer to hunt buffalo.

Treaty of 1860

On the annual buffalo hunt of 1860, the White Horse Plains Metis visited the Dakota Sioux village of 1,500 warriors to make peace. The Dakota Sioux had sent a peace party to the Metis camp requesting a conference. Following peace, the Dakota Sioux performed the Buffalo Head Dance. In the evening the young single girls, in white deer skin, profusely ornamented with porcupine quills and beads, danced and sung much to the enjoyment of the young Metis hunters, who made many presents, to the evident

⁶ Wa-na-ta (Dakota: Wánataŋ which translates as *One who charges*, or *Charger*) was a chief of the Yanktonai, a tribe of the Sioux. He was born around 1795. The Yanktonai were located near the St. Peter River, which is today known as the Minnesota River. The Yanktonai were said to have a population between five and six thousand individuals with 1,300 warriors. Wanata was a very influential chief, as evidenced by his ability to lead his tribes' 1,300 warriors into battle. At age 18, Wanata was accustomed to the ways of war and fought under his father Red Thunder (then the chief of the Yanktonai) against the Americans in the War of 1812. Wanata was recruited by British, Colonel Dixon whom convinced him to join him in battle at Sandusky. During this battle, Wanata charged Fort Sandusky and was wounded, but earned himself the nickname “Charger.”

pleasure of the young girls. The final day of the peace conference is devoted to horse racing and exchange of horses.

The Dakota Metis Treaty of 1861

In subsequent years the hunting parties of the Dakota and the Metis continued to fight over the same hunting grounds. The Dakota (the people of the “Ten Nations,” some 400 lodges) would typically gather at what was called “Sioux Coulee” near present day Langdon, North Dakota. The gathering place for the Chippewa and Metis was between Cando and Devil’s Lake. Tired of this stand-off, Chief Wilkie as leader of the Metis and Chippewa hunting parties decided to bring some resolution to the situation in the early 1860s. Gregoire Monette⁷ of Langdon, North Dakota tells the following story in 1917:

In order to put an end to the suspense, fear and worry of watching the enemy, the Half-Breed hunters and Chippewa Indians under Chief Wilkie decided to send a commission to Washington to interview the president and find out how to obtain peace between these tribes. Chief Wilkie and Peter Grant were the men chosen. So well did they impress the authorities at Washington that President Lincoln told them they could have all the ammunition they needed for their protection. He asked them at the same time not to induce trouble but to go to them as brothers taking with them the bravest and best to make parley for peace. This was done and Chief Wilkie, Peter Grant, Gabriel Dumont, Joseph LaFramboise, Antoine Fleury, and seven others were chosen. They went direct to the village of the Dakota’s or Nadouissieux and direct to the lodge of the chief. This they found surrounded by soldiers. They reported to the chief, and he asked for them to be brought in. The rabble had gathered about the lodge and threatened to kill them, but the soldiers would not allow them to do so saying that their chief was a brave man who would dare to come alone to a hostile camp. The crowd was so envious and angry that with their knives they slashed the tent cloth in the lodges. Although they were admitted to his presence the chief was very austere. They told him their mission, and being very tired and thirsty, Gabriel asked for a drink of water. This was refused which was known to be an indication of trouble. Chief Wilkie became alarmed and sadly dropped his fine bearing. Gabriel, his son-in-law asked him “What is wrong with you?” When the old gentleman told him his fears, he became very angry. He began at once to load his gun, saying “I won’t die before I kill my full share,” and again demanded water which was brought immediately and due respect was shown their high commission from that time forth.

When asked to fully explain their mission, as spokesman, Chief Wilkie said, “We are enemies wasting the good gift that has been bestowed upon us through nature. We are preventing each other from trapping and killing the animals. There is plenty of room and much provisions. Let us help each other as brothers, let us have peace together.” When the council was concluded, the pipe of peace was ordered to be brought. This was a very long pipe, ornamented with human hair so long as to reach the floor, bear claws and porcupine quills were also part of its

⁷ Gregoire was married to Philomene Wilkie (b. 1863) the grand-daughter of Chief Wilkie.

decoration. The tobacco was cut by his first lieutenant; this was mixed with several herbs, and kinnikinnick. This mixing of the tobacco was to indicate the fusion of their interest and harmony of the whole people. The pipe was then handed to the Sioux chief, who took three draws and passed it to chief Wilkie. In this way it went around the lodge. Three times the pipe was filled and solemnly smoked and peace thereby established.

Chief Wilkie then distributed to them gifts of tobacco, tea and sugar. They were then given a great feast at which they told how sad they were and afraid when they thought they were going to regret their friendship, and asked how they should get safely home. The chief said with great dignity, "I will give you safe conduct; I will send my soldiers with you to your lodge and nothing will harm you. You have seen here some of my bad children and you may meet them on the way, but if they attempt to harm you, kill them and I will protect you." The above took place on Grand Coteau, forty miles west of Devil's Lake. Before leaving, Chief Wilkie invited the Sioux to send a delegation to visit his people, setting the day and hour for their arrival. When the time came near chief Wilkie bearing in front of him a white flag, went a mile out to meet them. About one hundred came, the chief and his staff were quartered in Chief Wilkie's lodge, the common people were scattered so as to get better acquainted. When the time came for them to go, they, as a sign of their friendship and brotherly feeling traded all their horses taking back none they had brought with them. Much good was accomplished, although there were still bad children (perhaps on both sides). (Cited in *St. Ann's Centennial*, 1985: 231-232.)

Father Belcourt (March 1861) also reports on a meeting and says that the Northern Sisseton planted their corn and returned to the hunt. They again arranged to meet with the Metis. Waanatan (Charger II) spoke of his father's good relationship with the Metis, and how he, like his father, favoured peace. Tatankananajin (Standing Buffalo) also wanted to keep the peace intact, saying, "We can no longer hold back, we must make peace, and it is agreeable to eat from the same dish, to carve the same animal each on his side, to make the same peace pipe." Makaideya (Burning Earth) was also present with Wasukiye (Causes Hail) and Little Fish (Hogan Cikana).

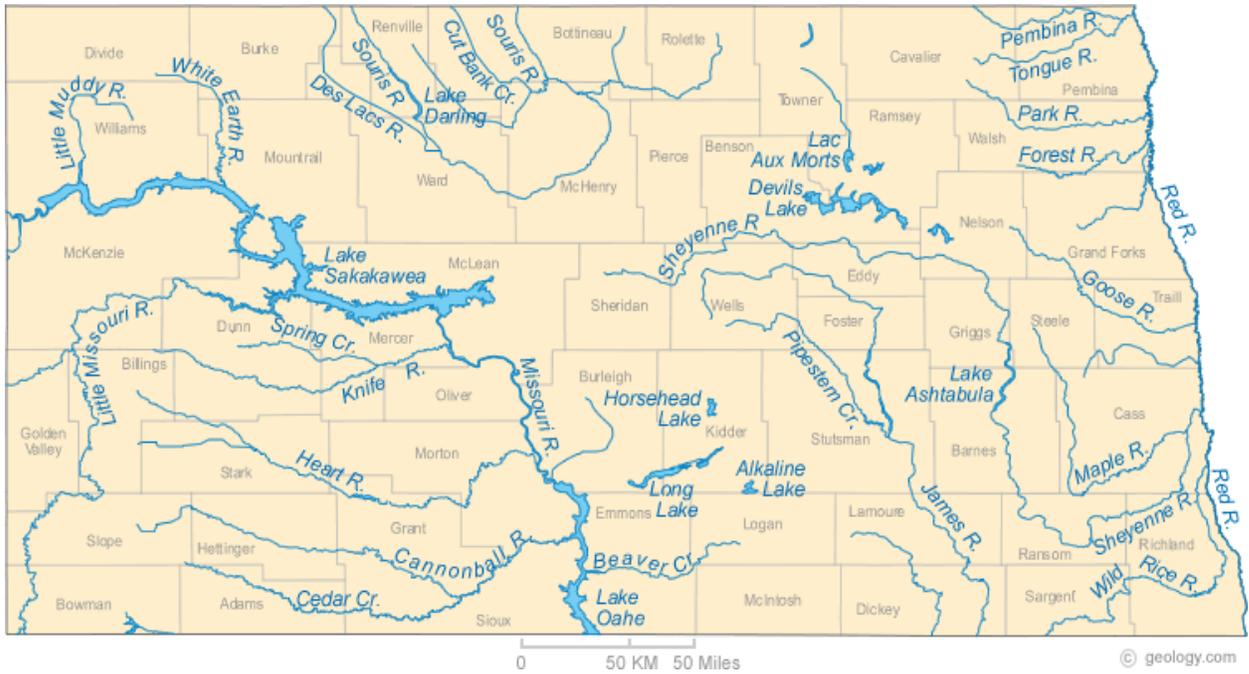
Peace Conference of September 1861

During this hunt Metis leader William Hallett held a peace conference with the Yanktonais under Chief Mah-to-wah-kan (Medicine Bear).

Friendship Treaty of 1862

In the summer of 1862, William McKay, a Metis, and the Chief Trader of Fort Ellice, was on his way to join a hunting party from Fort Ellice. The Fort Ellice group was camped close to a party of Metis and Cree (about 500 tents), also hunting on the prairie. On the way he was met by a band of Sioux and one of them, Tumma, offered to lead McKay to the Fort Ellice camp if he would promise to arrange a Friendship Treaty between the

Sioux and the Metis and Cree camped nearby. The Cree and Sioux had been traditional enemies for centuries, but when the Sioux were forced to migrate from their home in the United States into the Canadian Northwest, the necessity for coexistence between the groups became apparent. McKay, realizing the importance of such an arrangement, set up the meeting and witnessed the Sioux/Cree/Metis Friendship Treaty. Shortly thereafter, Jean Baptiste Wilkie, the Chief of the Pembina/St. Joseph Metis was to negotiate a similar treaty with the Sioux in North Dakota.



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