

Turtle Mountain Tribal Government¹

Evidence that a Tribal Council or leadership headed by a chief existed since the early 1800s or earlier appears in the journal of the earliest fur trader, Alexander Henry. He wrote in his journal in 1800 “Tobashaw was Chief of the Pembina.” There are conflicting accounts as to whether Little Shell or Tabashaw was first Chief of the Pembina. Petitioners in Docket 113 state that Little Shell was Chief of the Pembina. Later writings disclose that Tabashaw was Little Shell’s favourite son. Tabashaw may have been appointed Chief by his ageing father, Little Shell the first.

In 1802 Alexander Henry, a non-Indian fur trader, appointed eight of his most influential hunters as Chiefs, three of them were Little Shell (Aisainse), Buffalo (Payjack) and Tabashaw. The others are not named. In 1806, Little Shell is Commander in Chief. In 1807, Alexander Henry again refers to Tabashaw as chief. According to Tanner, Tabashaw and his mother, Little Shell’s wife, were killed by the Sioux in a fight at Wild Rice River near Crow Wing River in Minnesota in 1808.

Jean Baptiste Bottineau, attorney for the Little Shell group, said Little Shell was killed about 1804. This no doubt refers to Little Shell I. The Little Shell spoken of as chief in 1806 by Alexander Henry must be Little Shell II.

In 1849 Major Samuel Woods who was on an expedition for a fort reported that the Pembina Indians located at Red River were almost entirely Chippewa, a few Cree and Assiniboines. They were stragglers rather than a band, having no chief or organization, although they tried to select a chief. He declined their request to appoint a chief for them but did suggest three from whom they could select. They agreed with his suggestion and appointed “Sakikwanel” or “Green Feather” as principal Chief, “Majekkwadjiwall” or “End of the Current,” second Chief and “Kakakanawakkagan” or “Long Legs” as third Chief.² Major Woods states that evidence shows Alexander Henry rather than the Indians

¹Reprinted from *St. Ann's Centennial History Book*, Belcourt North Dakota: Turtle Mountain Indian Historical Society, Centennial Book Committee, Stella Davis - Coordinator, 1985: 130-131. Reprinted with permission.

² Major Woods also organized the French people he identified as half-breeds: On the 24th of August these people had returned from their Spring hunt, and about 200 of the hunters came to see me. They had appointed four men as their speakers. *I told them that in virtue of their Indian extraction, those living on our side of the line were regarded as being in possession of the Indians' right upon our soil; that they were on our frontiers treated as component parts of the Indian tribes; that they either came under the Indians' laws or regulations, or formed such for themselves. I urged them to organize themselves into a band under a council or chiefs, invested with ample authority to act in their name, in all matters which might arise to affect their interests ...* The next day they returned in about the same numbers, and presented me with nine names as the committee they had selected for the future government of the half-breed population within our borders.

The Metis presented the following names as their elected chiefs and councilors: J.B. Wilkie, Jean B. Dumont, Baptiste Valle, Edward Harmon, Joseph Laverdure, Joseph Nolin, Antoine Azure, Robert Montour, and Baptiste Lafournaise. (Alexander Ramsey, Letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 21, 1850. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1850*, pp. 43-64.)

selected Little Shell I as “Chief” and there is no substantial evidence that the Pembinas ever selected either of the Little Shells II or II as chief of their group. [Ramsey did attend at Pembina for negotiations with the Chippewa in 1851³, he refused to treat with the Metis however, and in any event this treaty was never ratified.] Governor Ramsey stated in 1863, “The Indians had not even the consistency of tribal organization.”

Nevertheless, in 1863, Ase-anse or Little Shell II and Mis-co-muk-quah or Red Bear signed the 1863 treaty between the United States and the Chippewa Red Lake and Pembina Bands as Chiefs of the Pembina Band. Nebene-quin-qua-hawegaw or Summer Wolverine⁴, Joseph Gornon, Joseph Montreuil⁵, Tab-ish-ke-ke-shig or Equal Sky and Inge-e-quan-abe or Wants Feather signed as warriors of the Pembina. It is very probable that they were councilmen also. In 1874, Little Shell II lived at St. Joe and was to go to Washington with Chief Red Bear, but died at St. Joe in 1874. One account states that Little Shell’s son, Little Shell III lived near Plentywood Montana, where he owned land, before coming to the Turtle Mountain Reservation in 1887. He became hereditary chief upon his father’s death in 1874. Another account which is believed to be more accurate states, “In 1882, Turtle Mountain chieftain Little Shell was living in Manitoba.” He returned to the Turtle Mountain region in July 1882 to warn white settlers not to settle on Turtle Mountain Chippewa lands because a treaty with the US government ceding the land had not yet been signed.⁶ Some community histories have documented that chief Little Shell III customarily travelled back and forth between Turtle Mountain and Fort Ellice in the Qu’Appelle Valley every spring and fall.⁷

The Docket 113 report states that in 1882 Cashpaw [Kaishpau Gourneau] was Chief of the Indians. On July 11, 1882, Little Shell, an Indian Chief from Wood Mountain, Manitoba, arrived and called a meeting, apparently not recognizing Cashpaw as Chief. Little Shell had a 24 member council at the time.

³ Metis James Tanner from Red Lake, the son of John “Falcon” Tanner acted as interpreter.

⁴Also Nebene-quin-gwa-hawegaw and Ne-bin-quowg-o-an-gay. Summer Wolverine (born circa 1827) like Little Shell also lived in the Wood Mountain/Fort Ellice area. William McKay’s Daily Journal for Fort Ellice (PAM, George Pateman Collection) shows Summer Wolverine trading there during 1856 and 1858.

⁵Joseph Montreuil (Montreau or Montreuil) was born in 1808 at Pembina. He married Isabella Mijigisi Bottineau. He then married a woman called Abba and had a third wife, name unknown.

⁶ See Appendix I.

⁷ “Alex Rankin Reminiscences of an Early Homesteader” in Killarney Women’s Institute (compiler) *Stories of Pioneer Days at Killarney*. Killarney: Women’s Institute 1929: 14.

Appendix I

Metis Resistance at Turtle Mountain

After waiting since 1849 for the United States Government to provide land title, compensation for Aboriginal rights or a Reserve, 500 Metis men under the leadership of Chief Little Shell took action against settler squatters at Turtle Mountain in 1882. The article which follows is from the *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, July 29, 1882 (page 7).



Chief Little Shell III



Chief Kaishpaw Gourneau

READING RE. SKINS.

Double Handed Deeds in Turtle Mountain Region—White Settlers Driven Out—The Indians Claim all the Land.

GRAND FORKS, Da., July 29.—I. H. Ansen of the advertising department of the Manitoba road, has returned to the city after an extended tour in the Wolf's lake and Turtle Mountain country and gives an interesting account of his troubles with the Indians there. He arrived in the Turtle mountain country July 17, and found everything in a state of excitement. Around the east part of the mountain several settlers had established themselves, some of them having been there several weeks. An understanding had been entered into between any of them and the resident chief, Ah-ish-pah. They had also been permitted by this chief to cut fuel and material for shanties. These facts coming to the knowledge of Little Shell, full blood British Chippewa, he demanded that the whites should leave the country within two days. He said he did not recognize any boundary lines and that the land belonged to his tribe. Demonstrances were unavailing and Mr. Ansen saw the last party of whites except himself and guide, drive over the line.

The following notice, written on birch bark, was posted up on trees in conspic-

ous places :

PUBLIC NOTICE.

TURTLE MOUNTAINS, D. T.

It is hereby forbidden to any white man to encroach upon this Indian land, by settling upon it, before a treaty being made with the American Government.

CHAS. MONTIGONEY,
CHAS. GEADER,
KAH-ISH-PAH.

Kah-ish-pah says he he did not wish to sign the notice, but was forced to do so by Little Shell. He said the whites were a good class of people and he thought the half breeds who inhabit the country could profitably admit them, as this would open to them a means of trading which would benefit them greatly. Kah-ish-pah says he would like to have a reservation granted him, beginning two miles east of Turtle mountain and running along the boundary line sixty miles west, extending south into Dakota forty miles. This takes the whole of the mountain, with its valuable timber and some of the best prairie land in North Dakota. The balance of the great reservation he wanted the Great Father to take in exchange for annuities for himself and band; said he would be satisfied with living in an agency like that at Devil's lake. He was offended at Little Shell for the summary manner in which he had dealt

with the whites, but was afraid of him. Little Shell would pay no duty on goods taken across the border and Kah-ish-pah thought this was wrong, yet he gave no support to the custom collector who tried to collect duty from Little Shell and the half breeds under him. The resisting of the payment of customs is a serious matter, which the military will probably be called upon to settle. Upon the refusal of Little Shell and the half breeds to pay the duties, Collector McCollum withdrew, stating that all he could do was make his report, and that he could not avert probable unpleasant consequences of their action. There should be at least \$2,000 collected in duties, and less than \$200 had been paid when the informant left. Little Shell has not less than 500 of these British half-breeds at his back, and they are of the ugliest kind. The chief is entirely under their influence, and would never have undertaken this invasion of his own volition. In the case of the collection of customs of course some action must be speedily taken. The resident breeds, with their chief Kah-ish-pah, are peaceably inclined, but it is doubtful if any white settlers will dare to invade the disputed territory unless protection is afforded by the Government.



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