

The Nile Voyageurs 1884-1885: Manitoba Metis and Indians of the Nile Expedition

In the early 1880s, Britain was being reluctantly drawn more and more into the internal affairs of Egypt through their need to protect access to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea route to India. The stability of the Egyptian government was being threatened in the southern part of the country, namely in the Sudan. There, Mohammed Ahmed claimed to be a long anticipated messianic figure, the *Mahdi*, and declared himself a representative from God. He preached Sudan's independence and began attacking the Egyptian troops stationed in the Sudan.

Britain eventually sent General Charles "Chinese" Gordon to oversee, as governor-general, the withdrawal of the Egyptian garrisons and the establishment of a responsible government in the Sudan. However, before Gordon's plans could be carried out, followers of the Mahdi besieged the capital Khartoum. British pride required and demanded that everything possible be done to save Gordon, a British war hero. General Garnet Wolseley of the Canadian Red River Expeditionary Force, sent into Manitoba after Riel's Resistance of 1869-70, was put in command of the English expedition charged with saving his old friend Gordon.

Wolseley's use of Native and French-Canadian *voyageurs* to bring his forces from Thunder Bay to the Red River in 1870 had inspired great admiration for their abilities to navigate difficult waters. Since an overland route to Khartoum through vast stretches of desert would prove too difficult to supply and maintain, Wolseley recommended moving an army up the Nile. This plan was predicated on the skills of Canadian voyageurs.

The Nile Expedition marked the first time that Canadian soldiers had been sent overseas.

In Manitoba, 45-year-old Lieutenant-Colonel William Kennedy was responsible for enlistment. A member of the 90th Winnipeg Battalion of Rifles, he was a Red River veteran and a prominent lawyer and politician. Kennedy was tasked with raising a force of 50 men from Winnipeg (later increased to 92). He ran the following newspaper advertisement:

Wanted Immediately
50 MEN
to accompany
GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION
in Egypt to take charge of small boats
on the rapids of the Nile
Must be good boatmen. Men who were
in Red River expedition preferred.
Wages from \$30 to \$40 per month and
expenses. Applications will be received
by the undersigned until the

6th Prox. Expedition leaves Quebec for
Liverpool on the 13th Inst.

W. N. KENNEDY.

The following Aboriginal men from Manitoba served on the Expeditionary force:

Atkinson, John Henry. (1854) John was born at St. James in 1854, the Metis son of John Atkinson and Margaret Flett.

Bouchette, George A. George was likely the Metis son of John Bouchette and Eliza Desmarais.

Cochrane, Adam: (1849-1933): Adam was from the St. Peter's Reserve, band member #113. He served on the Nile Expedition under Chief William Prince.

Cochrane, Alex: (1845-1927): Alex was from the St. Peter's Reserve, band member # 116. He served on the Nile Expedition under Chief William Prince.

Daniels, James. A James Daniels of St. Clements, MB filed for Half Breed Scrip.

Hardisty, Richard: (1862-1885) Richard Hardisty was a Metis, born June 6th, 1862, the son of William Lucas Hardisty and Mary Ann Allen, grandson of Richard Hardisty (c. 1790) and Margaret Sutherland. He served on the Nile Expedition and upon his return was sent with Middleton's troops to Batoche. He died on May 12, 1885 at Batoche (Private in the 90th Battalion). Middleton reported:

Our total loss since Saturday last is dead, James Fraser and Richard Hardisty of the 90th, Lt. A. W. Kippen, of a surveyors Corps, Lt. W. Fitch, and Private Moore of Grenadier's Corps. E.T. Brown, of Boulton's Horse. Gunner William Phillips, of A Battery, and Captain John French of Seventh.

Henderson, Richard: Richard was from St. Peter's Reserve. He served on the Nile Expedition under Chief William Prince. The contingent sailed from Montreal on Sept. 14, 1884, bound for Alexandria in Egypt. The Canadian contingent arrived at Alexandria, Egypt, on Oct. 7, 1884. Prior to its arrival, the contingent recorded its first loss, a Manitoba Ojibwa named Richard Henderson (also known as Richard Burgess) who was buried at sea after succumbing to an illness on September 26, 1884.

Hodgson, Henry Rosser: (b. 1861) A Metis, born November 17, 1861 at St. Andrews, the son of John Hodgson and Catherine Davis, married Charlotte Stevenson (1880) then Margaret McDonald (1885).

Hope, William J.: William Joseph Hope received a share in a Supplementary Half Breed Grant (Scrip 4221). There was also a William Hope who was a member of St. Peter's Reserve, band member #175.

Kirton, Charles: (b. 1863) Charles was born at Poplar Point in 1863, the son of Betsy Boucher and Peter Kirton (both Metis).

McCallum, N. There were Metis McCallum families at Red River and Green Lake, Saskatchewan.

McDonald, Alexander: (b. 1853) Alexander was the son of John McDonald and Nancy Ferguson, a Half-Breed Scots family living at St. Andrews.

McDonald, Donald: (b. 1860): Donald was the son of John McDonald and Nancy Ferguson, a Half-Breed Scots family living at St. Andrews.

McDonald, John: (b. 1856) John was the son of John McDonald and Nancy Ferguson, a Half-Breed Scots family living at St. Andrews.

McDonald, William: (b. 1855): William was the son of Alex McDonald and Ann Tait, a Half-Breed Scots family living at St. Andrews.

McKay, Edward. Edward was born at St. Andrews on Nov. 14, 1847, the Metis son of John and Mary McKay.

Moore, John R.: (b. 1860) A Metis, John Moore lived at the St. Peter's settlement.

Pratt, John: John Pratt was a member of the St. Peters Reserve. He served on the Nile Expedition under Chief William Prince.

Pratt, Thomas: (1868-1891) Thomas Pratt was a member of the St. Peters Reserve. He served on the Nile Expedition under Chief William Prince.

Prince, William: William was a Chief from the St. Peter's Reserve, he is believed to have been a son or grandson of Chief Peguis. He was hired as a foreman for the Nile Expedition.

Settee, George: We found a George Settee band member # 514 of St. Peters Reserve and another George Settee who had Half-Breed Scrip claim 4367 and 2283 (File HB 5109). These may be two different people or someone who left Treaty Status and took Metis Scrip.

Smith, Joseph. (b. 1860) Joseph was born on May 13, 1860 at St. Andrews, the Metis son of William Smith and Charlotte Mowat.

Snyder, William Henry. William and his wife Jane Mary Snyder lived at St. Peters. She took Metis scrip. Their Metis son James Valentine Smith was killed fighting in World War I on May 24, 1917. He is buried at Vimy, France.

Reference:

Stacey, C.P. *Records of the Nile Voyageurs, 1884-1885: The Canadian Voyageur Contingent in the Gordon Relief Expedition.* Toronto: Champlain Society, 1959.



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