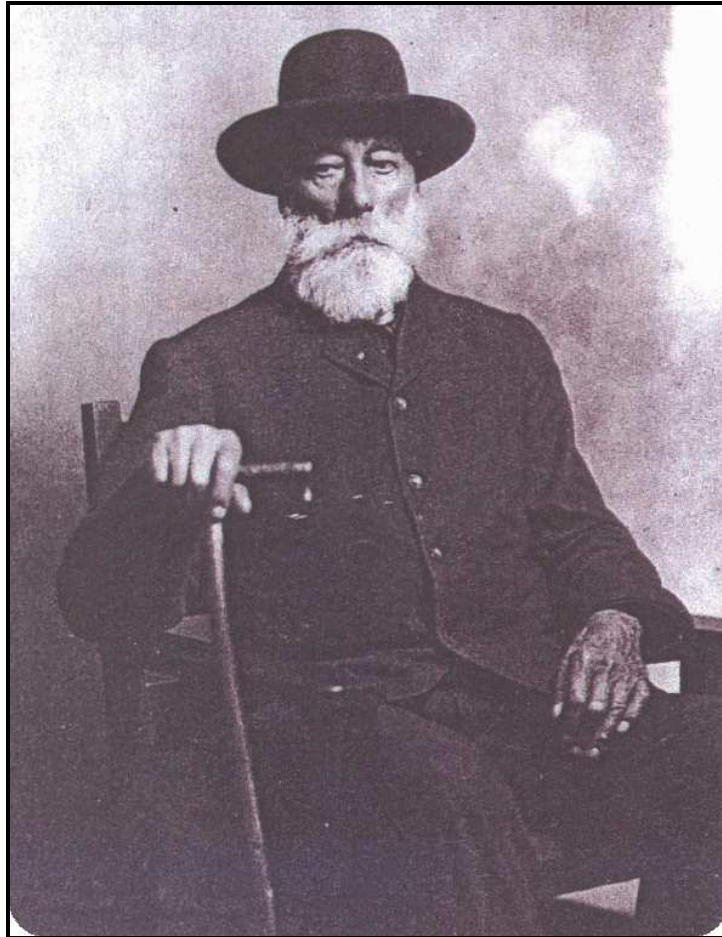


## William Dease (1827-1913)

By Darren R. Préfontaine and Lawrence Barkwell



William Dease: Councillor of Assiniboia

William Dease, who lived at Pointe Coupée (St. Adolphe), was a prominent French Metis opponent of Louis Riel. He was born at Columbia Lake in British Columbia on September 19th 1827, the son of Chief Trader John Warren Dease and Geneviève Beignet. They moved to Red River three years later. He was nominated to be member of the (appointed) Council of Assiniboia on June 11, 1867.

On October 19, 1869 the Council drew up a welcome address to Lieutenant-Governor designate McDougall (Dease was the only Metis Councillor at this meeting). At the next meeting on October 25<sup>th</sup>, John Bruce and Louis Riel of the Metis National Committee appeared to express their opposition to McDougall's arrival. Subsequently, the Council appointed William Dease and Roger Goulet to collect a number of men and proceed to the place where the Metis were planning to intercept McDougall and "procure their peaceable dispersion." Goulet did not follow-through and Dease along with George Racette, a few other Metis and some Indians failed in their assignment. In the confusion of events in February of 1870, Riel attempted to arrest Dease for communicating with

Schultz and the dissidents of Portage la Prairie, however Dease escaped before being picked up. Later, he agreed to swear an oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government. He was a leader of the Winnipeg meeting on July 29<sup>th</sup> that demanded Canadian recognition of Aboriginal Rights. After the events of 1870 he became president of the Agricultural Association of Manitoba and was a candidate in the provincial elections of 1874.

William Dease was married to Marguerite Genthon, a Métisse, the daughter of Marie Louise Jerome and Maximilien Genthon. Maximilien was also appointed as a Councillor of Assiniboia. Dease was appointed as Petty Magistrate and justice of the peace for Provencher in 1859 and a Collector of Customs in 1861. He held property on the west side of the Red river near Pointe Coupée. Dease also operated as a trader and had close connections at St. Joseph's in North Dakota. In trading he was closely connected to the Ojibwe and Sioux communities and spoke both these languages as well as French and English. His sons were also involved in trading. William Dease, born in 1845 was married to Marie Agnes Grant the daughter of the famous "Johnny" Francis Grant who relocated to Manitoba from Montana. Alfred Dease born October 30, 1858 was married to Octavie Gingras. In July of 1875, the brothers were charged with pressing liquor on Ka-qua-koni-ash and others at the Indian encampment on the Rosseau River and subsequently taking two horses in payment but without consent. In court at North Pembina, William was convicted and fined two hundred dollars (\$110 to the Crown and \$100 to the complainant) and ordered to pay Ka-qua-koni-ash \$60.11 in expenses.

Dease later became President of the Provincial Agriculture Association of Manitoba and a candidate in the provincial election of 1874. They moved to North Dakota in 1876 where he worked as a commissioner in Pembina County. He died on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1913 at Leroy, North Dakota.

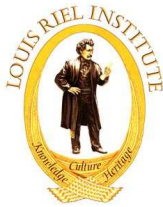
Historian Gerhard Ens has covered Dease's political activities at length in the article "Prologue to the Red River Resistance: Preliminary Politics and the Triumph of Riel." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, Vol. 5, 1994: 111-123. Metis researchers might find some discomfort when reading this essay. Prior to the events of October 1869, which culminated in Louis Riel's leadership of the resistance, Ens indicates that William Dease led the Metis struggle. Ens feels that if William Dease and his followers were able to lead the Resistance, an Aboriginal rights agenda would have been advocated. Dease, a Metis of francophone and anglophone heritage, may have been the ideal leader of the Red River Metis because he spoke all the region's First Nation's languages. In addition, he argued that the whole transfer to Rupert's Land by the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada was not legitimate because Peguis' 1817 treaty with Lord Selkirk was questionable since the Saulteaux chief was a recent arrival to the Red River region. Instead, the Metis could claim to be the direct blood descendants of the Cree – the region's more long-term residents. Ens argued that this would have been a better route for the Metis to take since it would have avoided importing the English-French rivalry from Central Canada to the region (which the Riel-led agitation did). Moreover, Dease sought to construct a coalition that united both the French and English Metis by downplaying religious differences, while Riel's movement encouraged differences.

By contrast, Riel built an alliance with the Roman Catholic Church and allied himself with Père Ritchot. They denounced Dease and his followers as being Canadian Party puppets, and sought to create a French-Canadian province in the North West. In the process, it can be said that Riel lost the support of the English Metis, whom felt his close alliance with the Catholic Church was distasteful. Ens argues that Louis Riel's leadership of the Metis cause at Red River in 1869-70 was, in the end, not in the Metis' people's best interest because he advocated a French/Roman Catholic agenda rather than an Aboriginal one.

Ens demonstrates that the 1869-70 Resistance is not an easy event to analyze. While his argument may at times be a bit contrived, he is correct to indicate that Red River Metis society was fractured along numerous fault lines. (Contributed by Darren R. Préfontaine.)

Reference:

Dorge, Lionel. "The Metis and Canadien Councillors of Assiniboia. Part II" *The Beaver*, 305, Autumn 1974: 39-45.



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