

Pascal Breland, M.L.A. (1811-1896)

By Lorraine Freeman and Lawrence Barkwell.

Pascal came to be known as “Le Roi de Traiteurs”–“King of the Traders.” He was born in the Saskatchewan River Valley on June 15, 1811 to Pierre du Boishué *dit* Breland and Josephite (Louise) Belley a Half-Breed. The family farmed at Red River, then in 1832, Pascal and his mother and two younger sisters moved from Red River to Grantown (St. François Xavier) to farm. Four years later Pascal married fifteen-year old Maria Grant daughter of Cuthbert Grant and Marie Desmarais. Breland’s sister Marie was the mother of another famous Metis entrepreneur, Johnny Grant.



Maria and Pascal raised a large family of six boys and nine girls. By 1849 Pascal was a very prosperous trader with his 380 acres of land in and around St. François Xavier. At the time he owned 12 Red-River-carts and had 22 horses. Initially, Pascal did not have legal claim to his land but later he received an official land grant from the Crown in 1882.

Breland spent a considerable amount of time on the Western Plains as a free trader in areas of Fort Pitt, Wood Mountain-Cypress, Fort Qu’Appelle and Fort Ellis. As a result of Pascal’s extensive involvement in the trade and his wealth, he gained a social prestige in the area and he was a member of “la bourgeoisie Métisse.”

Pascal’s political views became known when he supported Louis Riel Sr. at the trial of Guillaume Sayer in 1849, involving the Metis right for free trade of their goods. A prosperous farmer, and trader, he owned a considerable number of carts and was nicknamed “le Roi des traiteurs” (the king of traders).

Pascal had many appointments in Red River such as Magistrate for White Horse Plains on October 16, 1851; Petty Judge in 1852; in charge of the census for St. François Xavier in 1856; member of the Board of Works 1856. Then in September 1857, he was sworn in as a new member for the Council of Assiniboia. Breland was re-appointed Petty Magistrate in November 1861. In August 1865, he was President of the Petty Court at White Horse Plains and he was also instrumental with the negotiations for the signing of Treaty Number 4 in 1874. In 1869, he voiced his opposition to intruders, Canadian strangers staking out the land. In 1887, he was the Metis Representative on the Northwest Council.

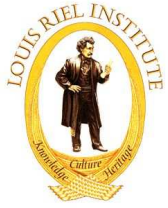
Pascal-Breland did not involve himself during the resistance at Red River in 1869-70. History has many views as to why he was away trading at this time. After Pascal and Solomon Hamelin returned to Red River in the spring of 1870 he was asked by the Metis



for his advice and leadership at a mass meeting being held at the Settlement. Breland was subsequently elected to the new Manitoba Legislative Assembly in 1870 for the riding of St. Francis-Xavier and was appointed to the governing Council of the Northwest Territories. He was known as an able diplomat and a moderate Metis politician.

In 1873, when the Lakota and Yanktonais were being forced out of the U.S.A. Alexander Morris, the Lieutenant Governor of Assiniboia, sent Pascal to see if they presented any risk to Canadians who would be working on the boundary survey. Breland travelled to Wood Mountain arriving on April 19. The Lakota had departed but the Yanktonais were encamped with a group of Metis from Wood Mountain led by Pierre Berger. On April 23, Breland met with their leaders, Struck by the Ree, Two Dogs, Ehannaienke, Napitchota, Matoienke, and Pananikoupi as well a Dakota Chiefs, Wakiendota and White Cap. Two Metis, Joseph Mitchel and Jacques Hamelin, acted as interpreters. The Yanktonais and Dakota received Breland's message of peace with gratitude and joy. When the Dakota learned that there was to be a boundary survey and not a railway survey (which they opposed) they indicated that there was no danger, in spite of what the disgruntled Little Knife had been saying. The Dakota indicated they would meet with Morris later in the year to discuss their requests for reserves.

Pascal Breland died on October 24, 1896 at the age of eighty-five after years of being a diplomat, businessman, pioneer and politician. At his passing many described him as a man of integrity, intelligence and humor who earned the respect of all.



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

Reference

Champagne, Lynne. "Pascal Breland." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. XII (1891-1900). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990: 124-125.