

Jean Baptiste Dorion Fur Trade Contract

By Leah Dorion and Lawrence Barkwell

The fur trade contract shown below was signed by Jean Baptiste Dorion in October of 1838. In 1825, he married Thérèse Constant, a Métisse, at The Pas Mission. As this contract shows he went back to the Missouri River area, but later the family settled at Cumberland House.

Jean-Baptiste Dorion (1800-1889) was the son of Pierre Dorion, a Metis and Marie de l'Iowa, a Shoshoni. Jean Baptiste was documented as being born in 1800, on the Missouri River and came into the northwest to continue life as a voyageur. As per family tradition, he contracted out his labour to various companies as a free trader. He was also multilingual and could speak French, Sioux, Iowa and English.

Jean-Baptiste Dorion was one of the first Missouri River Metis to go through the Great Lakes trade system, then through the Red River region, then the Mackenzie trade region and eventually into Cumberland House, which later became his permanent home. Jean-Baptiste Dorion explained his longtime career on the 1887 Half-Breed scrip application, which states that: "I lived when young in Missouri and afterward at Columbia River, then I came in Mackenzie River District also at Athabasca River, then in Cumberland District where I lived at Grand Rapids on the 15th of July 1870 and here at Cumberland House for the last 15 years" (National Archives of Canada, Scrip Applications).

In 1820 and 1821 he was hired a NWC voyageur at the Lac Népigon and Lac des Iles posts, both located north of Lake Superior. He later held a contract with the HBC as a steersman in the Cumberland District and held an account at the Cumberland House post in 1822 (HBCA F.4/26). At that time he worked on York boats with other men such as Alexis McKay, Michel Lavallé, Pierre Carriere, Marken Lavalley, Amable Lucier and Isidore Fleury. In the 1830s he worked for the HBC intermittently as a middleman and steersman. Upon his arrival in what is now Northern Manitoba, Jean-Baptiste (John) Dorion married Thérèse Constant at the Le Pas Mission in 1825. Thérèse Constant was a Metis woman born in 1810, and raised in the community of Le Pas. The Constant family had extensive family relations in the fur trade community of Grand Rapids and was connected to the northern HBC trading system. Jean-Baptiste and Thérèse had seven children together. Upon his legal marriage, the Northern Saskatchewan River system became his permanent home. The Dorion family is recorded in the Grand Rapids post accounts for 1858 that lists Joseph Atkinson, John Ballendine, Edward Cook, Charles Fidler, John and Pierriche Dorion, John Stove, and Philip Turner as holding accounts.¹ The many children of Jean Baptiste Dorion and Thérèse Constant continued to work in Cumberland House and parts of northern Manitoba as freemen, labourers, and interpreters, guides, middlemen and York boat employees. However, the family was establishing regular permanent residency at Grand Rapids, The Pas, and Cumberland House and intermarried with Scottish-English Metis.

¹ See the H.B.C.A, B.49/d/83, Cumberland House Account Book, 1858/1859, mf. 1M462.

PARDEVANT le Tinone rousigne fut present
J. B. Daurin
lequel s'est volontairement engagé et s'engage par ces présentes à Jacob Halsey
Agent de l'AMERICAN FUR COMPANY, à ce présent et acceptant pour à sa première requisition partir de
ce poste en qualité de Interprete pour faire le
voyage, tant en allant qu'en revenant, et pour hiverner pendant 6 mois

libre à son retour le 1^{er} d'Avril 1839

~~au lieu d'être ou autre alléant obtenu dans le pays sauvage~~
ET AVOIR BIEN, et dument soin pendant les routes et étant audit lieu, de toutes les marchan-
dises, pelleteries, vivres, utensils, et de toute autre choses, nécessaires pour les voyages, traite et hiv-
ernement: servir, obéir et exécuter fidèlement tout ce que le dit J. Halsey
agent de l'American Fur Company, ou toutes personnes aux quels le dit J. Halsey
agent de l'American Fur Company est autorisé par ces présentes de
transporter cet engagement, lui commanderont de lecite et honnête faire son profit, éviter, son dom-
mage, l'en avetir, de toute choses touchant son intérêt, qui vient a sa connoissance, travailler, dans
les postes, villes, villages et campagnes, non pays considéré comme pas sauvages, si requis et générale-
ment tout ce que un bon Interprete de Voyage doit, et est obligé de faire; sans
pouvoir faire aucune traite, pour son particulier, ni avec les blancs, ni avec les sauvages; s'absenter,
ni quitter le dit service, sous les peines portées par les loix, et de perdre ses gages:

Cet engagement ainsi fait, pour et moyennant la somme de deux cents
piastres argent des Etats-Unis, qui le dit J. Halsey agent de
l'American Fur Company, ou celui a qui cet engagement est transporté, promet, et s'oblige de bailler
et payer au dit J. B. Daurin
a son départ il recevra une equipement, consistant Indian traps & 1 Pkg Indian Gear

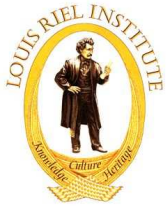
FAIT et passé a St. Pierre le 27^{es} de Octobre
l'an mil huit cent 38 et ont signé a l'exception du dit J. B. Daurin
qu'aynt déclaré ne le savoir faire, de ce enquis, a fait sa

marque ordinaire après lecture faite;
En présence du témoin,
Jacob Halsey

Jean Baptiste Dorion
Agent American Fur Company.

Jean Baptiste Dorion was born in 1800 on the Missouri River

This contract was provided to Louis Riel Institute by Dr. Tanis Thorne, Department of History, University of California, Irvine. Dr. Thorne was a contributor to *Metis Legacy: A Metis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*, L. J. Barkwell, L. M. Dorion and D. R. Préfontaine (Eds.). Winnipeg and Saskatoon: Pemmican Publications, Louis Riel Institute and Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2001.



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