

Norbert Welsh dit Lallemand. (1845-1932)

Norbert Welsh was born of Métis parents at Red River on the Assiniboine River on August 15, 1845; his mother was a Charlotte Sauvé the daughter of Jean Baptiste Sauvé and Marguerite (Saulteaux). His father was François Xavier Welsh. Norbert married Cecile Boyer and they moved to Cypress Hills in 1874, Lebret in 1877, and Round Prairie sometime before 1884.¹ His wife was the daughter of Métis trader Louis Boyer and Madeleine Trottier. His wife's grandfather was the famous buffalo hunter Andre Trottier. Norbert and Cecile were married on May 27, 1867 at St. François Xavier. They had ten children; only five survived past childhood.

Norbert Welsh started out hauling freight between Red River and St. Paul for Andrew Bannatyne, a dry goods merchant and fur trader. Subsequently, Welsh began trading to the west on his own account but still obtained all his trade goods from Bannatyne. As a trader and buffalo hunter, Welsh travelled throughout the West and was able to give narratives full of interesting details about frontier customs and the social life of the time. Welsh participated in his first buffalo hunt in 1862. After the demise of the great buffalo herds, he turned to farming, ranching and freighting.

Norbert Welsh was a signatory to an 1878 Métis petition requesting a re-opening of the buffalo hunt between November 14th and February 15th each year and the granting of Métis "reserve" land: a strip of land 150 miles long along the American border beginning where the Pembina River crosses the border and west to the area south of Cypress Hills. This strip was to be fifty miles from south to north. All the buffalo hunting families of the day signed this, the Trottiers, Dumont's, Delormes, Gaddy, Welsh, Brelands, Whitfords and Ouelettes.

In 1878 Welsh moved from St. Charles² to Fort Qu'Appelle and built a log house on the flats at Lebret. For the next few years he continued to trade and hunt buffalo, wintering at the Cypress Hills, returning to Lebret each summer.

When interviewed by Mary Weekes he was living in the house he had built at Lebret in 1878. In her biography of Welsh, he provides insights into some of the people he knew and lived with, including Louis Riel, Gabriel Dumont, Poundmaker, and Sitting Bull. After the Resistance of 1885, Welsh was a successful rancher and merchant who lived at Lebret until 1931. Mary Weekes met Welsh in 1931 when he was eighty-seven. He agreed to have her record his stories; they then spent several months on this task.

¹ Charles Trottier, Norbert Welsh's uncle, was the leader of this settlement in later years and noted that he began living there in 1855 when traveling with his parents to hunt buffalo on the plains. Charles was a trader in the North West Territories, having hunted with Norbert Welsh for many years. He was the son of André Trottier and Marguerite Pacquette. His first marriage was to Marie-Anne Parenteau, his second to Ursula Laframboise. In 1878, Charles and other Métis buffalo hunters at Cypress Hills wrote a petition asking for a special Métis reserve of land.

² In the 1870 Census, Norbert and Cecile (Boyer) and his brother Francois and Mary (Hogue) are shown on Lots #14-16 in St. Charles.

During the 1885 Northwest Resistance, Gabriel Dumont, an old hunting companion, tried to get Welsh involved. He sent François Vermette and Napoleon Carrière to Prairie Ronde to bring the Métis and White Cap's Dakota group north to Batoche. They proceeded to Prairie Ronde on snowshoes and presented tobacco to White Cap and Charles Trottier.

Norbert Welsh tells the following story:

I heard a big noise around my house... there were about forty men on horseback surrounding my house. I opened the door and two men, Carrière and François Vermette, tried to enter, but I closed and locked the door. ... the Half-Breeds spoke through the door. They told me that I would hand things out when [my friend] White Cap came along... White Cap had some of his band with him, but most of the crowd was Half-Breeds.³

The next morning White Cap returned and Welsh asked if they had orders to get his supplies. Vermette and Carrière replied that Gabriel Dumont and Maxime Lépine had given them definite orders to seize his stores. White Cap and Charles Trottier then forced him to travel north with them toward Saskatoon. There were about forty men in White Cap's brigade and about twenty in Trottier's group. Welsh got away from the group at Saskatoon. When White Cap and Trottier⁴ got to their camp two miles past Saskatoon they sent Welsh's brother-in-law Frank Boyer to return and get him, but Welsh declined.⁵

Later he was arrested by the Militia who suspected him of being one of Riel's supporters. Subsequently he took a ranch near the File hills Indian Agency and started a store. His wife, Cecilia Boyer, died in 1902 and one year later he married Marguerite McDougall, the widow of Jean McDougall. She was the daughter of Joseph Hogue and Pelagie Turcotte of St. Charles. Norbert's brother Francois Welsh was married to Mary Anne Hogue, the aunt to Norbert's wife. In 1904 Norbert sold his ranch and moved back to Lebet where he also ran a store, butcher shop and livery service between Lebet and Qu'Appelle. Welsh died in 1932 and was buried at Lebet. His wife, Marguerite, moved to Winnipeg where she married Louise Desmarais in 1942.

The surviving children of Norbert and Cecilia were:

- Albert Welsh who married Annie Racette.
- Frank Welsh who married Veronique Beaulieu.
- Emily Welsh who married Baptiste Blondeau.
- William "Jack" Welsh (b. 1889) who married Claire McDougall

The surviving children of Norbert and Marguerite were:

- Claire McDougall (b. 1897) who married Jack Welsh (above).
- Cecile Welsh who married Charles Robinson.

³ Norbert Welsh (As told to Mary Weeks), *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers [reprint], 1994: 157-161.

⁴ Charles Trottier was Norbert Welsh's uncle so he really had nothing to fear from him. Welsh's mother-in-law, Madeleine Trottier was the sister of Charles Trottier. Welsh was married to Cecile Boyer, Frank Boyer's sister.

⁵ *Op. cit.*

- Edmond Welsh who married Katherine Bowman.
- Joseph Welsh who married Edith Wagner.
- Jeanne Marie Welsh (b. 1912) who married Joseph Lepine.

Métis scrip;

Scrip affidavit for Welsh, Norbert; born: August 15, 1844; father: François Xavier Welsh; mother: Charlotte Welsh; claim no: 2885; scrip no: 12375; date of issue: December 10, 1878; amount: \$160.

Scrip affidavit for Welsh, Cécile; born: March 1843; husband: Norbert Welsh; father: Louison Boner (Métis); mother: Madeleine Trottier (Métis); claim no: 2886; scrip no: 12376; date of issue: December 10, 1878; amount: \$160

Welsh, Francois Xavier; address: File Hills; born: 28 January, 1876 at Cypress Hills; father: Norbert Welsh (Métis); mother: Cecile Boyer (Métis); scrip cert.: form C, no. 200; claim no. 426.

Welsh, Emilie (wife of St. Pierre Blondeau); address: File Hills; born: 4 March, 1874 at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; father: Norbert Welsh (Métis); mother: Cecile Boyer (Métis); scrip cert.: form C, no. 150; claim no. 353.

Welsh, Norbert; heir to his deceased children: Marie Philoméne, born: 1878 at Qu'Appelle; died: 28 November, 1880; Philoméne, born: 7 August, 1881 at Qu'Appelle; died: 18 September, 1889; Victoire, born: 11 May, 1883 at Qu'Appelle; died: 23 May, 1890; John, born: 4 June, 1885 at Qu'Appelle; died: 3 June, 1886; address: File Hills; father: Norbert Welsh (Métis and deponent); mother: Cecile Boyer (Métis); Marie Philoméne, scrip cert.: form F, no. 62; Philoméne, scrip cert.: form F, no. 64; Victoire, scrip cert.: form F, no. 66; John, scrip cert.: form F, no. 68; claim no. 514.

Scrip affidavit for Welsh, William; father: Norbert Welsh (Métis & deponent); mother: Boyer; children: William, born: March 1, 1867; Marie Cécile, born: December 5, 1869; wish their share in allotment of land set apart for Métis children

Reference

Mary Weekes, *The Last Buffalo Hunter (Account of Norbert Welsh)*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1945. First published in 1939 by Thomas Nelson and Sons and now reprinted, Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 1994.



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