

Andrew Spence. (b. 1837)

Andrew Spence was born at St. Andrews on February 5, 1837, the son of George Spence and Nancy Ward. He married Letitia Cook in 1867 at St. Paul. Spence and his sons, George, Edwin, Ronald and Alfred moved from High Bluff to the Lindsay Settlement (also known as the Pocha Settlement) and Red Deer Hill area near Prince Albert.

Spence, although a Scottish Metis from Prince Albert was fluent in the Michif and Cree languages. He was President of the united French and English Metis Committee and was responsible for the idea that Louis Riel be recalled to the Northwest Territory to assist with their grievances. Gabriel Dumont recollected: An English Metis named Andrew Spence answered: “there is only one man who can help us now: Riel.”¹

In late 1884 Riel and Jackson met at Prince Albert to draw up a petition to the federal government. On December 16, it was sent to Ottawa, signed by Andrew Spence as chairman and Jackson as secretary of the joint English-Métis organization. The petition was a long one with 25 sections, land claims occupying a prominent place. The grievances of the Metis and Indians were recited and it was noted that while the territories had a population of 60,000, Manitoba had been granted provincial status with only 12,000. The petitioners included the suggestion that they “be allowed as in [1870], to send Delegates to Ottawa with their Bill of rights; whereby an understanding might be arrived at as to their entry into confederation, with the constitution of a free province.”

At trial Charles Nolin testified that since 1884 there was a committee which was called a council. The witness said he was one of the members of that committee or council. He was only an ordinary member - not president. Mr. Andrew Spence was president. He was an English half-breed.

The witness is asked if the council which he spoke of a while ago, and which was presided over by Mr. Andrew Spence, was the same that condemned him to death, and he says no.

Mr. Justice Richardson interjected: “That is, the old council was not the council that condemned him to death?”

Nolin replies says that the council that condemned him to death was one that was called exovede (sic).²



¹ Cited in Paget James Code, “Les Autres Métis”, 2008: 5, from Michael Barnholden (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1993: 40))

² CSP, 1886, Vol. 19: 130.

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