

Edwin Thompson Denig and His Metis Children (1812-1858)

This fur trader and author was born on 10 March 1812, in Chambersburg in south-central Pennsylvania, the son of Dr. George Denig. In 1833, He first worked for three years in the fur trade on the Minnesota River. He then took his first contract with the American Fur Company in 1833 and was assigned as a clerk to Fort Pierre and in the winter managed a trading post on Cherry Creek. In 1837 he was reassigned to Fort Union and in 1843 became chief clerk at that post. In 1847 he became superintending officer of the post. Denig lived “according to the custom of the country” with Sina Wamniomi (Whirlwind Blanket) a Teton Lakota woman.¹ They had a son Robert (b. ca. 1833) and a daughter Sarah (b. 1844).² He was then married to Hai-kees-kak-wee-yah (Deer Little Woman), the daughter of Iron Arrow Point, chief of the Rock Band of Assiniboine and the sister of “First To Fly” who was also a noted Assiniboine chief. Denig had three more children; Alexander (b.1852)³ and Ida (b. 1854, d. 1862) and Adeline (b. 1857).⁴



Hai-kees-kak-wee-yah
(Smithsonian Institution)

For the years Denig was in charge of the American Fur Company’s post at Fort Union he had many notable guests, he entertained Audubon, the naturalist, Friedrich Kurz, Swiss artist, and the Belgian priest, Father DeSmet. Prior to 1854 he wrote his report on the Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri (*The Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arikaras, Assiniboines, Crees and Crows*).

Sometime during 1854-5 he migrated to the Red River Settlement, taking with him four cartloads of goods. He established himself as a private trader on White Horse Plain. He died there on 4 September 1858, and was buried in the Anglican Church cemetery at Headingley, Manitoba.

¹ She later appears on the tribal rolls of the Kul Wicasa Oyate (Lower Brule Dakota).

² This information was kindly provided by Terrance Delorme. Sarah was born August 10, 1844 at fort Union. Sarah Denig married Augustin Carriere on August 5, 1862 at St. Boniface. Augustin (b. 1840) was the son of Andre Carriere (b. 1805) and Marie Anne Rivard. They had five children.

³ Born May 17, 1852, died July 3, 1904 at Pilot Mound, Manitoba.

⁴ Adeline was born on May 25, 1857, died March 8, 1932 at Pilot Mound, Manitoba. She married Charles Simpson (Metis) the son of John McKenzie Simpson and Amelia Amy Fiddler.



LEFT: ADELAIDE CARRIERE *
CENTER: SARAH DENIG *

Daughter Marie Virginie on right.

His will, discovered in Pilot Mound, Manitoba, in 1946, led to the publication of a former anonymous manuscript on the Crow Indians, written in 1856 in Manitoba. From a photostat copy of the will the U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology identified the manuscript as the work of Edwin T. Denig and published it in 1950. He was the author of *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arickaras, Assiniboines, Crees and Crows*, 1856.

In the summer of 1855, Denig took his Assiniboine wife, Deer Little Woman, and his mixed-blood children to visit his brother, Augustus, in Columbus, Ohio. In St. Louis en route Denig and Deer Little Woman were formally married by Father Daemen. Their children were baptized while in that city. Denig's daughter recalled that the family found the climate in Columbus too warm for them. Otherwise they might have settled there. Instead they returned to Fort Union by a roundabout route, traveling from St. Louis to St. Paul and the Red River Settlement of present Manitoba by horse and wagon. Throughout this journey Denig was searching for a suitable future home for his family. The Denigs reached Fort Union on November 28, 1855, after a wagon trip of nearly three months duration, much of it through unsettled Indian country.

The Denigs spent the winter at Fort Union, during which the father continued his writing. But in the middle of the following summer the family moved to the Red River Settlement in Canada. Denig received a payment from P. Chouteau, Jr. and Company at Fort Union on July 13, 1856. His will, dated September 12, 1856, at Red River Settlement, Red River of the North, must have been drawn up shortly after the family's arrival there. Very little is known of Denig's life in Canada during the next two years. He placed Sarah and Alexander in Catholic schools. He "established himself as a private trader on the White Horse Plains west of the present city of Winnipeg." Late in the summer of 1858, Edwin T. Denig was stricken with an inflammation. His daughter, Sarah, believed it was appendicitis. Denig died on the White Horse Plains, September 4, 1858, and was

buried in the Anglican cemetery near the present village of Headingly, Manitoba. He was only forty-six years of age at the time of his death.

During his lifetime, and for many years thereafter, Denig's Indian writings were buried in the works of other men. We know now that Denig was both the most prolific and the most knowledgeable writer on the Indian tribes of the Upper Missouri in the mid-nineteenth century.

Copy of E. T. Denig's Will

I, Edwin T. Denig, formerly of Fort Union on the Upper Missouri and now of Red River Settlement, Red River of the North, do hereby make and declare this my last will and testament.

I hereby constitute and appoint Augustus M. Denig, Robert Morgan, and the Rev. Priest Bellecour at Penibinae and the survivors of them executors and executor of this my last will and testament.

After the payment of all my just debts and incidental charges by course of administration, I give and bequeath to my son Robert the sum of One Thousand Dollars to be paid him in one year after my death also one half of all the horses and cattle belonging to me. The other half of all the horses and cattle and other live stock belonging to me, besides all my tools, utensils, my house & land, if any, all carts, wagons, harness, cooking utensils, Buggy, watch, clothing and the whole of my private property on hand at my house or elsewhere at the time of my decease I will and bequeath to my lawfully married wife Hai Kees Kah we Yah Denig to be kept by her or disposed of by her as she pleases.

I also authorize and empower the said Augustus M. Denig and Robert Morgan or their survivors to retain and keep in their own hands all my money there remaining and the same to invest and put out at interest on good security for and during the natural lives of my wife Hai Kees Kah we Yah Denig and my daughter Sarah Denig known also amongst the Indians as Mock pe e dai or the "Fiery Cloud", and my daughter Ida Denig and my Son Alexander known also by the name of "Eau Och she", or "The Boy of Stone", except as herein directed, and the interest and income thereof shall annually be paid as follows, to wit: To my wife Hai Kees Kah we Yah Denig One half of all the interest and income of my said personal estate in money for the support of herself and her children, and in case of the death of my said wife, said sums shall be paid to her children or the survivors of them and their legal representatives, until they shall arrive at age and then shall be equally divided between them. But in case of the death of either of them without issue, then his or her portion shall be equally divided amongst the survivors of her children or their representative for the use of her children until they come of age, and then paid during life into their own hands. The one fourth of all my interest and income arising out of my money invested as beforesaid I set apart and direct to be used by my executors Robert Morgan and Priest Bellecour for the education and support of my daughter Sarah and my son Alexander whilst under tuition. The former child Sarah to be put to an English school immediately, and the other (Alexander) to be placed at an English school

when arrived at the age of twelve years, but in case of want or distress then the above fourth of my income can be expended for their support as the executors may see fit. The object being at all times to secure them a comfortable house and plenty to eat. Being yet in their infancy the executors will manage this part of their share to their greatest advantage (*See codicil)

The remaining fourth of all my income I give and bequeath to my daughter Sarah alias, The Fiery Cloud: to be paid into the hands of her legal representatives annually. That is, each year, and by them to applied for her advantage until she shall have attained the age of fifteen years, or four years from the date of this will, after which they will pay it into her own hands.

I would further state that the half I have above given and bequeathed to my wife be paid into her own hands annually, and as she is unacquainted with federal money, the executors or either of them named in this will should deposit the same in money in the hands of the Hudson's Bay Company or some other safe place, so that she could from time to time get what she wanted, and also that the executors shall take such precautions that neither the expenses of my wife or any of the children should ever exceed their annual income, but endeavor to have a fund in advance of their wants. Should I be engaged in any business or trade at the time of my decease, then all the property I have invested in such business shall become the property of my wife Hai Kees Kah we Yah Denig, and any profit arising from such business shall be invested in my brother Augustus hands for the use of herself and her children and my daughter Sarah to be divided as before mentioned.

As neither my wife nor her children know how to write any receipt for money paid them, or their signature to any paper whatsoever cannot be valid or sufficient discharge for same without the attest of one of the named executors if they are alive, or if not, then the attest of one or two respectable persons will suffice. This to be continued until some of the children of my wife are of age, educated and able to act for themselves. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this twelfth day of September A.D. Eighteen hundred and fifty six at Red River of the North.

Edwin T. Denig (Seal)

Signed sealed and delivered as his last will and testament by the testator in our presence, who at his request and in his presence and in the presence of each other have hereunto set our hands as witnesses.

Signed || Joseph Fortescue of Red River Settlement
Clerk of the Hudson's Bay Company

James McKenzie of Red River Settlement
Clerk of the Hudson's Bay Company

Robert Morgan

Codicil

I neglected to state that the fourth part of my interest and income set apart in the body of this will for the education of my children shall belong to and be divided amongst Sarah, Ida and Alexander my three children in equal shares, each annually, after is no more required for educational purposes, and also that my children above named to wit - Sarah, Ida and Alexander can during their lives will and bequeath their shares to their children or any other person to fall to them at the death of the children above named. Furthermore it is understood that the principal or the whole amount of my money belongs to my wife and children in the portions set forth though it is to be continued during her life and that of her children at interest, but the children's heirs can inherit the principal if they choose. It is not the intention that my children should be taken to the United States to be educated, at least as long as their mother is alive. My wife's feelings should be consulted on this point. I do not wish them taken far away from the mother for any purpose. Some school at Pembina or Red River Settlement would be preferable or a private teacher if her funds allow, perhaps Priest Belcourt would educate them at his house. I do not wish Alexander, my son, to be put to school before he is twelve years of age. Their ages are as follows, Sarah born 10th August 1844. Alexander born 17th May 1852. Ida born 22nd August 1854, all baptized in the Catholic faith.

Edwin T. Denig (Seal)

Witnesses:

Joseph Fortescue of Red River Settlement
Clerk of Hudson's Bay Company

James McKenzie of Red River Settlement
Clerk of Hudson's Bay Company

Robert Morgan

(END OF WILL AND CODICIL)

References:

Terrance Delorme: Personal communication, February 26-27, 2012.

Laura Whitefeather: <http://laurawhitefeather2.blogspot.com/>



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