

## **Warriors of the 1885 Resistance :** **Ignace Zenon Poitras Sr.**<sup>1</sup> (b. 1829)

Ignace also known as “Betillet,” was born at Red River, the son of Andre Poitras and Marie Grant. His mother was Marguerite Grant, sister to Cuthbert Grant and his father was Andre Henri Poitras from St. Foye, Quebec. Andre Poitras was one of the founders of St. François Xavier. This was a buffalo hunting family always active on the plains. The family was quite large with relations on both sides of the border. Andre, sometimes known as Henri died circa 1831 at St. Joseph, Dakota Territory. Ignace married Helene McGillis, the daughter of Alexandre McGillis and Marguerite Bottineau. They had thirteen children together.



Ignace Poitras

His brother, Pierre Poitras was a representative to Riel’s Convention of Forty representing his home district of St. Francois Xavier. He was also a delegate to the previous Convention of 24, November 16, 1869. Pierre became one of the 24 members of the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia led by Louis Riel. On June 24, 1870, Hon. Mr Pierre Poitras seconded Hon. Mr Louis Schmidt’s motion “That the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia accepts, in the name of the people, the Manitoba Act”, thus entering the Dominion of Canada on the terms proposed in the Confederation Act. Their brother François was a captain during the 1869-70 Resistance and served under Ambroise Lepine, Riel’s adjutant general in Manitoba. Pierre would also witness the signing of Treaty Number 4 in the Qu’Appelle Valley, in 1874.

For his participation in the 1870 movement in Manitoba his life was endangered, and he would have to leave along with many others. During the Reign of Terror of Wolseley’s troops Pierre was arrested on August 24, 1870 while scouting with Francois Xavier Dauphinais and Francois Xavier Page. He was abused and severely beaten and wounded by the Red River Expeditionary Force. At the age of sixty, he left Manitoba because of

---

<sup>1</sup> A signator of Gabriel Dumont’s petition (dated St. Antoine de Padoue, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1882) to the Prime Minister for a survey and land grants.

the hostilities and returned to the Qu'Appelle Valley for a while and then moved to Duhamel, Alberta where he died at the age of 79.

His older half brother Andre Henri Jr. Poitras lived and hunted on both sides of the border but would eventually settle in the US. The descendents of his family would become involved with the Little Shell Tribe in its struggle for recognition in Montana.<sup>2</sup>

Ignace was a member of Captain Calixte Lafontaine's company, one of the 19 *dizaines* led by Gabriel Dumont during the 1885 Metis Resistance. They had four sons; Ignace Jr., Maxime, Jean Baptiste and Michel involved in the 1885 Resistance and two of their daughters, Elise (Vandal) and Helene (Ledoux) were married to Resistance activists. He is buried at St. Antoine de Padoue Cemetery, Batoche.



Ignace Poitras

In his testimony of August 13, 1885 at the Regina trial Father Alexis Andre says:

I have known the old man (Ignace Sr.) for fifteen years since he came and settled on the Saskatchewan. He is one of the most simple honest and peaceable men in the whole settlement, never mixing in any agitation or trouble. I am very intimately acquainted with him. I have often been his guest, and always found a welcome at his hospitable house. His industry and economy made him a comfortable and well-off man. He was, fortunately for the prisoners in Riel's care, one of their guards, and I was told by several of them that he was kind and good to them always. He is about sixty (sic) years of age and has a wife and ten children, he has lost everything. The young man (Ignace Jr.) was with his father and is a harmless youth. The old man is old and feeble, and has suffered very greatly in health and prosperity. The best interests of justice would, I think be satisfied by sending him home to his poor family. (CSP, 1886, Vol. 13, p. 385)

Ignace was arrested on May 19, 1885 and on August 14, 1885 at Regina was sentenced to a jail term of one year with hard labour.

---

<sup>2</sup> Reference: Joseph-Isidore Poitras at <http://www.mendel.ca/quappelle/edwardpoitras/resident.html>



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