

Lac St. Anne, Alberta

The elder Gabriel Dumont (1795-1880) and his extended kin group of bison hunters established Lac St. Anne west of Edmonton. In the 1850s there were well over 200 Metis living at this location. Lac St. Anne, known as Manitou Sakahigan to the Metis and Indians, is the site of an annual Metis religious pilgrimage. The lake is located about 45 miles northwest of the city of Edmonton. The feast day of St. Anne falls on the 26th of July and the nearest Wednesday is always the first day of the Alberta Metis pilgrimage. In 1841, Alexis Piché Sr., a Metis who lived in the area, traveled to St. Boniface to ask that priests be sent to live among them. Even though priests were scarce bishop Provencher sent Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault who was a Cree speaker to check things out. Gabriel Dumont Sr., the uncle of Gabriel Dumont of Batoche fame, guided him to Lac St. Anne.

In 1844 a mission was set up and a small house built to house Father Thibault and Joseph Bourassa, the young priest who accompanied him. Father Thibault blessed the lake and renamed it Lac St. Anne. This was the first permanent Catholic mission west of Winnipeg. By 1887 the buffalo had disappeared and the lake lost importance as a traditional gathering place. Father Lestanc, the Superior at St. Albert had decided to close the mission but during a holiday in France he had a revelation at the Shrine of St. Anne d'Auray that he must build a shrine in Canada to honour St. Anne the grandmother of Jesus. Thus inspired he built the shrine and the first pilgrimage was held in 1889. The lake is located about 45 miles northwest of the city of Edmonton.



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