

## **Pierre Chrysologue Pambrun.** (1792-1841)

Pierre Chrysologue Pambrun was born on December 17, 1792 in at l'Islet, Quebec, the Metis son of André-Dominique Pambrun and Angélique Hiraque. In 1821 he married Catherine "Kitty" Humfreville (b. 1805), a Metisse daughter of Thomas Humphryville and Annie Turner at Cumberland House à la façon du pays, and then in a formal manner on 8 Dec. 1838 at Fort Vancouver (Washington); they had nine children.

With the outbreak of the War of 1812 Pambrun enlisted in the Voltigeurs Canadiens, a unit under Charles-Michel de Salaberry. He was promoted corporal in January 1813 and sergeant the following month. Acting on his father's counsel and making up for lack of education with courage, he distinguished himself in October at the battle of Châteauguay, and thus earned promotion to the rank of second lieutenant in 1814. He saw his hopes for a military career dashed, however, when instead of being integrated into the regular army the Voltigeurs were demobilized.

In April 1815, Pambrun entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company as a clerk. Determined to regain from the North West Company the trade of the northwest, the company was conducting a recruiting campaign among Canadian voyageurs. Pambrun left for the Red River in May with the brigade under Colin Robertson and was first assigned to Pembina. Early in 1816 he accompanied Governor Robert Semple on his tour of the company posts on the Red and Assiniboine rivers.

On 12 April, he was sent to Fort Qu'Appelle to get supplies for the settlers that Lord Selkirk had sent out, and early in May he set out on the return journey with James Sutherland's 22 men in five canoes laden with 600 bags of pemmican and 22 bales of furs. On 12 May, as the brigade was approaching rough rapids, it was attacked by some 49 Nor'Westers under Cuthbert Grant and others. Pambrun was taken prisoner and had to follow his captors from Fort Qu'Appelle, which they left at the end of May, to Fort Douglas.

He witnessed the sacking of Brandon House and the destruction at Fort Douglas; he also learned of the Battle at La Grenouillère (Seven Oaks) and of Semple's death. Taken to Fort William, the NWC headquarters, he was released in August at the demand of Lord Selkirk, who had just arrived. In March 1818 the NWC brought charges against him for thefts said to have been committed at Red River during the winter of 1816-17.

He spent the next years as a witness for the HBC, a process that took him to York, Montreal, and in 1819 London. An account of the events he had lived through was published there in a collection of narratives relating to the conflict that also contained the testimonies of John Pritchard and Frederick Damien Heurter.

Back at Hudson Bay in 1820, Pambrun served as a clerk in the Saskatchewan district until 1825. In 1820/21 he was at Cumberland House. The following winter he was at York Factory, where he was put in charge of the fishing operations at Rock Depot. Between July 1822 and April 1823 he supervised the men in the expedition sent to build a

post on the Bow River. From this post he went to Edmonton House, and in September 1823 he was still there. He then spent the winter on the Smoky River.

From 1825 to 1831 Pambrun worked as a clerk in the district of New Caledonia, mainly at Fort Kilmars (near Babine), where he arrived in June 1825. During the summer of 1826 he accompanied James Douglas and Francis Ermatinger on a thousand-mile trip as far as Fort Vancouver, the new supply centre for the district, and returned to Stuart Lake for the winter of 1826/27. Chief Factor William Connolly subsequently gave him responsibility for Fort Kilmars (1827/29, 1830/31), as well as for Fort Alexandria (1829/30). After being refused a leave in 1829 to go and settle some personal matters in Montreal, Pambrun was granted one in 1831; he travelled by way of Norway House and York Factory.

Pambrun resumed his service in 1832, in the Columbia district. John McLoughlin made him clerk in charge of Fort Walla Walla, an important post and one of the most dangerous because of the numerous warlike tribes living near by. Despite some difficulties in 1835/36 and 1840, Pambrun acquired great influence over them. He even taught them some of the rudiments of Catholicism, thus preparing the way for Abbés François-Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers, who worked in the region from 1838.

Pambrun saw the Americans arrive in the Oregon country. In 1837 George Simpson reprimanded him for having sold tobacco and trade goods to Captain Benjamin-Louis-Eulalie de Bonneville at Freeman's prices, an action contrary to the company's interests. Despite his requests for promotion, Pambrun did not become a chief trader until 1839, after 24 years of service. He was one of the few Metis French Canadians to reach such a senior rank in the HBC. Simpson had no very good opinion of him, judging by a note in his Character book in 1832: "An active, steady dapper little fellow, is anxious to be useful but is wanting in judgement and deficient in Education: Full of 'pluck', has a very good opinion of himself and is quite a 'Petit Maitre'. Does not manage the business of his Post well owing more to a want of discretion & foresight than to indifference or inattention." Other testimonials, while mentioning his lack of education, stress his leadership qualities, his daring, and his perseverance, traits which had made him the choice to lead men on dangerous expeditions and had ensured his success at Fort Walla Walla. At the time of his death McLoughlin observed: "The Company loses an excellent officer and a most able manager of the place under his charge."

Pambrun died at Fort Walla Walla on 15 May 1841 after falling off his horse. He was buried at the fort, but in 1844 his remains were taken to Fort Vancouver, where they were interred in consecrated ground on March 9th.

Source: « Pierre Pambrun »

<http://worldconnect.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=tsmith&id=I280029>



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