

Sayer, Pierre Guillaume. (1799-1868)

Pierre Guillaume Sayer was the son of John Sayer (b.c. 1850) from Sainte Anne, Canada East (Québec). Pierre Guillaume was born on October 8, 1799 and baptized on July 21, 1815 at Pointe-Claire, Canada East by Joseph Norbert Provencher. John Sayer spent the winter of 1893-04 on the Yellow River, Fort Folle Avoine. In 1804-05, he was on the Snake River. John Sayer took his allotted furlough in 1905 and traded for the North West Company (NWC) at Lac des Chats post near Quyon on the Ottawa River. In 1807, Duncan McGillivray forced John to retire from the company for “irregularities” i.e. absenting himself from his post on two occasions prior to 1807. During one of these absences, he married Elizabeth McPherson (19 years) at Trois Rivières on October 22, 1806. In 1809 he sold his estate to Duncan Cameron and was living at Sainte Anne. He died in 1818 at age 68.¹

Guillaume moved to Grantown in 1824. He farmed there and participated in the buffalo hunt. He married Josephite Frobisher, elder daughter of fur trader Alexander Frobisher and his Cree wife, on March 2, 1835 at St. François Xavier. Josephite who was born about 1795-1807 was baptized the same day as the wedding. She and Sayer had eight sons and four daughters.

According to the church records at St. Laurent, Manitoba, Guillaume died on August 7, 1868 and was buried at St. Laurent August 8th, 1868 at the age of 75 years. Father Laurent Simonet OMI, who started the mission and became the first parish priest in 1864, officiated. The witnesses were Baptiste Lavallée and Pierre Chartrand.

Pierre Guillaume Sayer signed up as a voyageur with the Mactavish, McGillivray & Company on April 7th, 1818. This was registered by the notary public J.-G. Beek at Ste Anne Bout de l'Isle. He was hired to work in NWC-controlled areas.

According to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) Archives, William worked for the NWC at Cumberland House from 1818 to 1821, the year of the union of the two companies. In 1828-1829 he worked for the HBC as a Bowsman at Fort Pelly in the Swan River District. He stayed on as a Steersman from 1829-1832. In 1832, he was freed from his service in the HBC and began working as an independent trader.

In 1849, HBC Chief Factor John Ballenden arrested Pierre Guillaume Sayer, André Goulet, Hector McGinni,s and Norbert Larond of Grantown as they were about to leave on a trading trip to Lake Manitoba. They were subsequently brought to trial before the General Quarterly Court of Assiniboia on May 17, 1849.

¹ Information provided by Wayne Jones, personal communication, October 9, 2018.



The man on the left is believed to be Guillaume Sayer, with Louis Riel Sr.
Archives de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, Antoine Champagne Fonds
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Prosecutor Ballenden called two witnesses against Sayer, Magnus Linklater and Louison Sayer, Guillaume's son. Sinclair called two witnesses for the defense; Antoine Morin and Alexe Goulet. Both testified that the HBC had been encouraging Métis trading. Upon deliberation Donald Gunn, foreman of the jury, found Sayer guilty but recommended mercy as it was apparent that he and the other three accused were under the impression that as Métis they had a right to trade in furs. Ballenden acceded to the recommendation of mercy and declared that he would not proceed with the other three cases.

In a loud voice, Louis Riel Sr. announced to the waiting crowd that the case had been settled and that the accused was a free man. Hearing this, the crowd repeated his triumphant exclamation:

« Le commerce est libre; vive la liberté! »

Sayer had been set free and the company's monopoly effectively destroyed. The Recorder was discredited by this incident, which some said was brought about by his own scheming, and was no longer seen on the bench. He was eventually replaced by a judge who came from Montréal.

Children of Pierre Guillaume Sayer and Josephte Frobisher:

- Édouard, born 1823, he married Madeleine Delorme.
- Louis, born 1826, he married Suzanne Fleury.
- Guillaume, born c. 1827, he married Catherine Pangman.
- Isidore, born 1832, died as an infant.
- Marguerite, born 1834, she married Joseph Vermette.
- Isabelle, born 1834.

- Josephte, born 1838, she married Joseph Hamelin.
- Henri, born 1841, he married Mary Bremner, then married Elise Beauchamp.
- William, born 1843, he died as an infant.
- Joseph, born 1844, he married Euphrosine Desjarlais.
- Cleophas, born 1850, he married Marie Caplette.
- Rose, born 1853, she married Bernard Desjarlais.

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