

Dumont dit Cayole, Henri (b. 1863)

Henri Dumont was born on April 1, 1863 at St Boniface, the son of Vital Dumont and Adelaide Gagnon.¹ Vital was a Headman of One Arrow's Band. Henri married Mélanie Fagnant (b. 1861), the daughter of Antoine Fagnant and Marie Ledoux on April 29, 1884 at Lebret. Their first child, Marie Philomène² was born on July 10, 1885 at Fort Qu'Appelle; she died in March 1886 at Swift Current. A son, Willie Dumont was born in 1887. The family's story was told in the *Old Forts Journal* (below).

The Dumonts of the Sweet Grass Hills

By Gord Tolton, with information from Frances Dumont Wilson
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Too often history books present the installation of a railroad track as a single line, glossing it as if some railroad tycoon laid it out himself in a single period. There is usually not much background into the actual toilers who performed the operation. Recently, this writer has become acquainted with a lady whose family connections were not only part of the Great Northern Railroad, but deep into the heritage of western Canada's plains. Francis Dumont Wilson lives in Coaldale, and holds the history of the family that is the subject of this article.

Jean-Baptiste Dumont was a Montreal voyageur who came west to trade furs with the Hudson's Bay Company, moved to the plains, and in marrying a Sarcee woman, helped to create the Métis people. A grandson, Gabriel Dumont was born to the life among the plains, hunting buffalo, travelling in semi-nomadic caravans and carrying on the warrior tradition. In 1885, as Louis Riel's chief military officer, Gabriel Dumont led the resistance and counter attack forces of his people against the Canadian military.

¹ **Vital Dumont dit Cayole**, (1830-1895)

Vital Dumont, called Cayole was the adopted son of Gabriel Dumont's uncle, Jean Baptiste Dumont also known as Sha-ha-ta-ow. Vital Cayol received Half Breed Scrip pursuant to the 1864 Treaty with the Red Lake and Pembina Bands of Chippewa Indians. In 1872 he received a scrip stubb for 160 acres, Scrip # 15.

Vital's mother was Marguerite Laframboise; his father was Henry Munroe Fisher both from Prairie du Chien. His mother married Jean Baptiste Dumont at St Boniface on April 14, 1834 when Vital was about four years old.

On October 4, 1852 at Pembina, Vital married Adelaide Gagnon. On December 9, 1871, he married Helene Ledoux at St. Laurent on the South Saskatchewan on December 9, 1871. He was also known as Vital Creole or Kayole. A Métis, he had taken treaty status and was living on One Arrow Reserve as a Headman and Band member # 56.¹ He was a member of Captain Antoine Belanger's company, one of the 19 *dizaines* led by Gabriel Dumont during the 1885 Métis Resistance.

Vital died on December 6, 1895. He is buried at St. Antoine de Padoue Cemetery, Batoche.

² Scrip application: Dumont, Henry; heir to his deceased daughter, Marie Philomene; claim no. 1245; Dumont; born: July, 1885 at Fort Qu'Appelle; died: 1886 at Swift Current; address: Whitelash, Montana; father: Henry Dumont (Métis & deponent); mother: Melanie Fayant (Métis); scrip cert.: form D, no. 1206; file ref. 4154023

Henri Dumont, a cousin of Gabriel, was born in 1860. As a teenager, travelling with the Métis hunting parties, he first visited Fort Walsh when the Police were still there, sometime previous to 1881. He married Melanie Fayant on April 29, 1884, at Fort Qu'Appelle. Henri and Melanie lived at Saskatchewan Landing, in the Swift Current area, and were there during the North West Rebellion of which Gabriel Dumont was a resistance leader. Gabriel escaped from the Canadian Militia, and made his way through the Cypress Hills to the Métis settlements near Fort Assiniboine, near modern day Havre, Montana. We will never know for sure, but Gabriel no doubt had assistance in his flight, and for all anyone knows was probably assisted by his relative Henri.

Their first child [sic], Willie Dumont was born in 1887. In 1888, Henri and Melanie themselves moved to the Havre area, taking a job as a cowhand for the Pepin Ranch.

As the family moved south to Montana, they stopped to make night camp as a thunderstorm brewed. During the lightning storm, Henri noticed an Indian lurking about their camp, hiding behind a wash tub, obviously desiring the family's horses. But Henri, as a plainsman, knew some of the native tongues. In the would-be thief's language, Henri called into the night that these few horses was all he had in the world, and needed them to move his party. Dumont then said that there were camps further ahead, with more horses than he had. "With the next flash of lightning, the Indian was gone, so he must have gotten the right language."

In 1889, rising railway magnate James Jerome Hill began his magnum opus, the Great Northern Railroad, connecting the east with Seattle. The GN route came through the extreme north of Montana, within miles of the Canadian border. For residents of the area, including Henri Dumont, that meant jobs.

Once hired on to the construction crew, Henri moved his family to a ranch on Breed Creek, on the American side of the Sweet Grass Hills. In the summer, Henri would build grade on the right-of-way with a horse drawn slip scraper between Havre and Shelby. In the winter, he picked up a broad axe and cut timber in the Hills for railroad ties.

In 1893, Henri's young son Willie was sent to a residential school at a convent near Fort Shaw, where he became chums with a couple of older boys also from the Hills, Joe Clark and Charles Chartier. After six months of strict Catholic discipline, the boys decided to run away from the school and go home.

"We got some matches from the store that was there for the school." plotting their escape with precision. "We would put a little bread in our shirts during each meal, we did this for a week before running away. We had fifty cents between all three of us. Just before they locked the door before bedtime, we ran away. They had roll call before bedtime every night as a lot of kids tried to run away. The older boys did all the planning and had other boys answer for us."

The boys knew they were fugitives and that there was a \$10 bounty for any kid that left a residential school. "The first night out, we walked all night and crossed the Sun River

during the night. We would make a fire and hide out during the day. By keeping our matches in a waterproof container we were able to keep them dry.”

“The third day out we came to a winter camp with a stove, bed and a few old blankets. We picked up one of the blankets and in two days we had reached the Teton River. “We stayed near the river all day and ate berries and dry bread”, and unsuccessfully tried to kill a rabbit with rocks.

We saw an old wagon trail crossing the river and knew the water wouldn’t be deep so we crossed there. “After crossing the Teton we walked all day camping at night in haystacks, and building fires only when we got wet.” A ranch woman provided them with bread, refusing their fifty cents. Reaching another ranch owned by two bachelors, they stayed a week, performing odd jobs for the bachelors for room and board. Seeing a good life, Joe Clark hired himself to the ranch for \$40 a month, leaving Willy and Charles to continue alone as they had, camping out and sleeping in prairie hollows.

The Marias River proved too deep and cold to cross, so they went to a ranch they knew, where “Old man Turner knew us and our folks and was surprised to see us.” Turner fed the boys and ferried them across the Marias in a wagon.

Aiming for the Sweet Grass Hills, about half way between Chester and Shelby, the boys found the railroad and followed the line east. “At that time there were camps all along the railroad, making short cuts and cutting off the big turns. “We walked right into the first camp and the cook gave us a good meal.” Figuring they’d found the gravy train, the boys followed the tracks to the second camp, and another free meal. Moving on, they “walked into the third camp, we were surprised to see our dads working there.” Willie never related his father’s reaction, but it was probably not a warm reception for the runaways. But “it was too late and too far to send us back to school, as they (the fathers) had to stay there to work. We stayed there until they finished work, and came home” to their Sweet Grass Hills ranch on Breed Creek.”

Growing up in the hills was an adventure for the Métis boys: “Charlie and I wanted to ride over the top of the Sweet Grass Hills, so we did. There’s a lot of shale and the horses were slipping and sliding. We would never do that again. We also played in the Bad Lands of the Writing On Stone park. One spring day we were coming up out of the river bottom to climb the hills with our horses and stopped. Ahead of us on the side hill was a swarming mass of rattlesnakes.” Bill and his kid brother Louie Dumont hunted wolves with their dad, and hunted by themselves for all manner of game. When it was time to go to work, Henri Dumont bought Willie a horse but “now he needed to buy himself a saddle, so he then went to work for (Tony Day’s) Turkey Track ranch as a horse wrangler to buy himself this saddle. The cook brewed strong coffee and when Bill complained of dizzy spells the cook told him he should lay off the coffee.”

Willy’s cowboy experience was like any other: “When we rolled our bed rolls out at night in the dark, we didn’t know if it was over an ant pile, sage brush or gopher holes. Sometimes we were caught in a hail storm” and used the saddle to cover their heads. In

1902, Henri and Melanie's family moved back across the line, checking in at the Pendant d'Oreille [sic] NWMP post. They lived at or worked for several ranchers, breaking and selling horses and trapping. Willy worked many of the big ranches of that large country on the southern border, rounding up cattle, working horses, and building dams. In 1906, Henri and Melanie and family moved to a homestead in the Cypress Hills, and owned the land around Benton Hill, 4 miles west of Fort Walsh. In the tragic winter of 1906-07, Henri's horse sense made sure that not a single head was lost. Mary was sent to school in Regina, and later married a man named LeBarge.

The Dumonts built a large house that burned down in the 1920s; the fire also consuming Melanie's wedding dress. Undaunted, the family moved into the store house as they rebuilt. Henri and Melanie lived out their full lives in the Cypress Hills.

Willy Dumont and Mary Dumont LeBarge dictated their stories to Frances Wilson before their deaths in 1963 and 1967. Today, Frances lives in Coaldale, and has graciously shared her family's story with the readers of the Old Forts Journal.



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