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Inter-Ethnic Perspectives on a Sacred Site**

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ABSTRACT

In 1818, Father S. Dumoulin established a Roman Catholic mission at Pembina, Red River Settlement, to provide religious and educational support to Métis families and to convert the Ojibwe. In the 1870s, the Assumption Catholic Church moved into the village onto land donated by Mme. Angélique Rolette, and a new non-denominational cemetery was established on the periphery. In 1893, State Senator Judson Lamoure sponsored an appropriation bill for \$500 through the North Dakota State Legislature to purchase and maintain the site. Unfortunately, it was never implemented and the site fell into the hands of a private landowner. Although originally respecting the cultivation line around the site, this private owner later farmed over the site and, despite objections from local residents from the 1930s to the 1990s, the family refused to recognize it as a sacred site. The paper summarizes the attempts to protect the site, the research done to identify the location and the unresolved inter-ethnic conflicts that have arisen over it. Because the Métis are not recognized as Aboriginal in the U.S.A., local descendants and their supporters were largely ignored by state officials. They invited Canadians to support their efforts since the Métis were recognized in the Canadian Constitution of 1982 and are well known in Canadian history.

Keywords: *Métis; Michif; Ojibwe; Chippewa; cemeteries; burial markers*

For most of the nineteenth century, Pembina, Dakota Territory, was the home base for the Métis bison hunters and freemen who challenged the trading monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). Yet, the significance of their history has been downplayed in the public history displays of the North Dakota State Historical Society describing them as "Euro-American" and in community recognition of their heritage. The following paper presents a brief history of the French Métis cemetery at Pembina, North Dakota, and of the changing social and political contexts and conflicts surrounding it. This historic sacred site has become an object of controversy because, since the 1920s, a local farmer and his relatives have been farming it and planting crops over the graves.¹ The paper will not review the extensive literature on repatriation and sacred sites which are generally connected with Indian as opposed to Métis burials and are often prehistoric or non-Christian (Snow 1977;

Molyneaux 1983; Reeves and Kennedy 1990). Human beings generally regard burial grounds as sacred, no matter what their religion or culture. The term *sacred* for Aboriginal people, however, refers not only to burial grounds, but also to landmarks or places where spirits dwelled. Partly as a result of attempts to protect the site and research done to identify the location, inter-ethnic conflicts have arisen over it, and its Métis connections have been publicly repressed or ignored.

Contrary to the popular myth which suggests that the Roman Catholic mission at Pembina was established to serve the non-Aboriginal Selkirk Settlers, the first Christian mission mainly served the French Catholic Métis community, who were the descendants of Canadian traders and Aboriginal women, as well as a few Ojibwe converts.² In 1818 under the direction of Father Joseph Provencher and with the support of Lord Selkirk, Father Severe Dumoulin built a church and resi-

Ruth Swan, Dept. of History, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3T 5V5

Edward A. Jerome, P.O. Box 402, Hallock, MN 56728

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dence and started a cemetery. Canadian historian A.S. Morton described Pembina as "the resort of the halfbreeds" (Morton 1939:645). Minnesotan Grace Lee Nute suggested that as Pembina was "closer to the plains and thus to the buffalo, [it] managed to supply food to the distressed colonists."³ There were some regular colonists and many half-breed families settled, forming quite a community" (Nute 1942:xv). Since most of these people of mixed descent were French Canadian in background, they tended to be Catholic already.

One of the goals of the mission was to convert the Ojibwe who had moved west with the fur trade from the Great Lakes, but these trappers, with their strong religious beliefs based on the Midewiwin (Grand Medicine Society), did not readily accept Christianity (Nute 1942:148, 363; Rich 1958-59:430). By 1821, Father Destroismaisons at Saint Boniface estimated that there were 450 Catholics and 50 catechumens at Pembina, 100 more than at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. He noted that there were probably over 1000 Catholics in the North West at that time, but it was difficult to estimate exactly as the "voyageurs and engages were always on the move" (Nute 1942:328). Provencher was a little jealous of the success of the Pembina mission (Nute 1942:373). Yet, because of starvation at the Forks, he admitted that Pembina had its attractions. He wrote to the Bishop of Quebec September 1, 1822:

Mr. Dumoulin is on the prairies about Pembina. He is following the *bois brules* [Métis], who almost entirely abandon the post when they leave for the hunt, being obliged to go in large bands to protect themselves from the insults of the Sioux, who had not done any harm since I wrote last. He is busy instructing them how to prepare the infants for baptism; he also says Mass on Sundays. I have not yet made the trip to Pembina. The journey is not without danger; perhaps I shall spend the winter, or part of it, there. Life is easier there (Nute 1942:373).

Provencher was following the custom of the Selkirk Settlers who wintered at Pembina to avoid starvation at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. These Scottish and Swiss settlers went to Pembina because a large Métis community had already established itself there and these local residents had the skills to survive on the Prairies (Friesen 1984:73-4). The bison migration route

crossed the Red River in the vicinity of Pembina. The Scottish, Swiss and Canadian immigrants learned to hunt and trap from the Métis and Aboriginal groups (Cree, Assiniboine and Ojibwe) to supplement their subsistence as farmers in the Red River Valley which required a difficult adjustment to the new environment (Nute 1942:354).⁴

In 1823, after the Hudsons Bay Company (HBC) learned that the site was located south of the 49th parallel,⁵ it ordered the church to close the Pembina mission and offered the church a new settlement on the White Horse Plain under the leadership of Cuthbert Grant. The company wanted to discourage American free traders from coming north to challenge its monopoly and was concerned with provoking the Dakota farther south who resented the incursions of the Métis and Cree, Assiniboine, and Ojibwe hunting bands (Rich 1958-59:417, 425, 430; Nute 1942:339-340). Father Provencher was not unhappy to see Pembina close. He notified the Bishop of Quebec (Nute 1942:373):

I think the departure of Mr. Dumoulin, and the consequent prospect of being without a missionary, will make them abandon it [Pembina] easily enough. It appears from this prospect that we shall be reunited next spring, unless the people of Pembina establish themselves so far that it will be impossible to minister to them from here. On that point I am still ignorant.

Unfortunately, most the early records of the Catholic burials were lost in the St. Boniface fire of 1860, so it is difficult to know who was buried at Pembina in the early years. However, Father Dumoulin's published correspondence gives some data. For example, by 1822, he reported to the Bishop of Quebec that he had performed 394 baptisms, 68 marriages and 49 burials (Nute 1942:378). "The spiritual welfare of the Pembina mission is prospering, but temporal affairs are going very badly....The settlers are very unwilling to abandon the fruit of their labors here."

Dumoulin's burials have not been identified by name, so it is not possible to determine the ethnic breakdown of the 49 mentioned. While some people in Pembina claim that some of the Selkirk Settlers were buried in the Pembina cemetery, this has not been documented. Furthermore it is unlikely that they were included unless they were Catholic.⁶ The colony refused any financial sup-

port to the mission and the priests hesitated to baptize the children of non-Catholics, indicating some friction between Selkirk's officials and the Catholic mission (Nute 1942:378).

In 1968, for its 150th anniversary, Assomption Church in Pembina compiled a list of 166 burials recorded between 1848 (when Father Belcourt arrived) and 1892. In the 1870s, a new church had been built in town and use of the old site had gradually been discontinued. An analysis of these burials follows in Table 1 based on ethnicity of surname and family identification:

Table 1: Ethnicity of Pembina Burials

French Métis	135	81.40%
English/Scottish Métis	12	7.20%
Aboriginal Converts*	10	6.00%
English/Scottish	4	2.40%
Other	5	3.00%
TOTAL:	166	100.00%

*Ojibwe/Assiniboine/Cree

Because French Canadian names cannot be distinguished from the Métis names since most Métis originally had French fathers, they have been included in one category; however, it should be understood that these Canadian voyageurs who adapted to the culture of the bison hunt assimilated into the Métis culture of the Plains. For example, Alexis Bellegarde was 70 years old when he died in 1852, putting his birthdate at around 1782. He was born in Louiseville, Quebec, and his Métis wife was Marguerite Dufort. Their son, Alexis, Jr., was married by the Catholic priest on January 9, 1849, to Suzanne Grenon and their first son was born December 29 of the same year. These young parents had another son Louis buried at Pembina January 8, 1855. There was a large extended family of Bellegardes in the Pembina Parish, but Alexis, Sr., died at Turtle Mountain in 1852, possibly while out on the bison hunt (Assomption Catholic Church Records).

Some Pembina families' Canadian connections came from the Great Lakes area. For example, Antoine Collin and his wife Magdeleine Katavves, buried an infant daughter Marie on March 9, 1851. Collin's father was Jean-Baptiste, a voyageur whose parents lived in the Fort William area on Lake Superior and were both probably descended from sev-

eral generations of mixed ancestry French Canadian and Ojibwe people. Antoine's mother was Betsy Henry, whose father was the famous fur trader, Alexander Henry the Younger, who traded at Pembina from 1801-1808. Her mother was the daughter of "The Buffalo," the leader of an Ojibwe hunting band at Pembina (Gough 1988:xx, Swan and Jerome 1997).⁷

Similarly, men with English or Scottish names also assimilated into the Métis extended families. Norman Kittson, the American Fur Company trader, married Elise (or Louise) Marion of St. Boniface. Their daughter, Lucie, age four years, was buried in Pembina in 1853. Because she and her brother Alexandre had French Christian names, it is assumed that French or Michif was the language of the family. Charles Grant was a well-known trader who lived between Pembina and St. Joseph. Married to Euphrosine Gladu, they baptized a son Joseph on May 27, 1850, born the day before. They buried this same son on August 11, 1850; he had died July 10, 1850. Apparently, the family buried the body and then had the ceremony done when the priest visited the community. They had two more children buried: Paschal Edward on February 15, 1854, aged four months, and an infant, buried on June 13, 1855. Infant mortality was high at that time.

Some Selkirk Settlers married into the Pembina Métis Catholic community, although the majority were Presbyterians. For example, Peter Heden, son of Irish immigrant Michael Heden, lived at Pembina most of his life. His daughter, Isabelle, died at eight days and was buried May 25, 1866. Her mother was a Christian Ojibwe, Marie Sautouse, but the parents did not witness the burial. The witnesses were Joseph Bushea [Boucher] and Baptiste Heden. The economy at Pembina was based on the bison hunt and settlers in that area integrated into the local economy and culture, especially if they were Catholics. The major language of the fur trade was Cree, rather than French or English, and people of mixed heritage developed mixed languages of Cree and French or Cree and English, which they used among themselves.⁸

Overlaps occur within ethnic categories. At this time, Ojibwe Catholic converts were marrying in the church and sometimes marrying Métis or non-Aboriginal fur traders. For example, Marie

Sauteuse was an Ojibwe child who was baptized before her death at two years of age in 1868; her parents were not listed, but the witnesses, Roger St. Matthe and Joseph Godon, were Métis. "Sauteuse" is a French word meaning "Ojibwe woman." The Catholic priests gave French Christian names to converts and used the woman's tribal affiliation for a surname. In this case, Marie Sauteuse may have been an orphan adopted by a Métis couple.

It is even more difficult to know how to categorize native women who married Christian men and were baptized with Christian names and thus could not be identified as native. The ten people listed as "Aboriginal" were so designated because they maintained their Aboriginal names. This custom did not last too long as the church encouraged the use of Christian names. For example, Betsy Henry's mother, the daughter of The Buffalo, as her husband called her in his will in 1814, had the Christian name, Madeleine Sauteuse on her daughter's scrip application in 1878 (NAC, Department of Interior, Half Breed Affidavits).

Of the 166 burials listed in the Assumption Parish between 1848 and 1892, all could be identified as French Métis, English/Scottish Métis or Aboriginal except for those nine whose ethnic identity could not be identified or who had no Métis connections. That is, 88% were Métis or had Métis connections and 94% had Aboriginal ancestry (in Canada, the Métis are recognized as Aboriginal in the Constitution of 1982). Since it was the southernmost parish of the Red River Settlement, people who died elsewhere, such as on the bison hunt, would be brought back to Pembina for burial. For example, Alexis Bellegarde, Sr., age 70, died at Turtle Mountain on the first Sunday of December, 1852, but was buried at Pembina December 9. Francois Rainville, age 65, died at Georgetown and was buried at Pembina five days later on February 12, 1866. On May 21, 1866, Father Leduc buried Joseph Frederic Langis, two years old, who had died "the previous autumn" at "Linierie au Boeuf." This custom of burying their relatives in sacred ground was important to the Métis and persisted, despite the twice-yearly trips to the Plains.

When the Catholic Diocese of Fargo conducted a title search a few years ago, they found no registered title to the cemetery. The cemetery had been

abandoned in the 1890s and apparently no official record was made of it. The land was included in a homestead and sold in 1919. Since then, it has remained in the same family. The cemetery area was not cultivated when the homestead was purchased, suggesting that its location and use were still recognized then.

ATTEMPTS TO COMMEMORATE THE PEMBINA MÉTIS CEMETERY

There were numerous attempts to protect the Pembina Métis Cemetery in the last hundred years. Some attempts included historic designation such as plaques or the placement of a religious symbol such as a cross. In 1993, the site was part of the farmer's wheat field, surrounded by a barbed-wire fence and No Trespassing signs posted on the utility poles. It was not accessible to visitors.

In 1893, State Senator Judson Lamoure proposed an appropriation of \$500 to purchase and maintain the site. Since land in the area was worth \$4.00 to \$5.00 an acre, this sum would have purchased at least fifty acres with a sizeable amount left over to invest in the future care of the site. Unfortunately, Senator Lamoure's proposal was never put into effect and the "Selkirk Cemetery," as it was called, was abandoned. The Catholic Church never registered the land because it assumed that the state was responsible for it (Bishop James Sullivan, Fargo Diocese).⁹

In the 1930s, Father Belleau, the priest at Pembina, collected extensive documentation on the history of the parish. In his research, he interviewed local Métis elders who had good memories. Francois-Xavier Gosselin had been born in 1854 and was over 80 years old when interviewed by the priest. He had lived across the river from Pembina in St. Vincent, Minnesota, all his life. His grandparents and his brother were buried at Pembina and he claimed "to know the place well." Gosselin estimated that the land around the mission buildings was about five acres and the cemetery was about ten acres.¹⁰

In the early 1950s, Father James Reardon was researching a biography of Father Georges Belcourt. When Reardon visited Pembina in October 1953, he examined the site, noting that:

The Diocese of Fargo is anxious to obtain pos-

session of this site of the first church built within its confines with a view to the erection of a suitably inscribed monument to mark the historic spot (Reardon 1955:104).

We have not been able to access the files of the Diocese of Fargo to determine whether there is any evidence to support Reardon's claim that the church wanted to reclaim the site and mark the historic spot. However, it seems likely that the bishop had told him so.

Reardon described the site in detail, suggesting that it was "uncultivated until 1922 because of the presence of grave markers, probably from the original cemetery" (Reardon 1955:103). These probably were wooden crosses which can be seen in modern Métis cemeteries such as at Belcourt, North Dakota, St. Vincent, Minnesota, or the new Pembina Cemetery west of town (Figure 1). In Canada, we have seen these crosses at Sageen (Fort Alexander) in both Catholic and Anglican cemeteries and at St. Peter's Anglican Cemetery. To date, we have researched 14 Aboriginal cemeteries in Manitoba,

Minnesota and North Dakota. Such wooden crosses are not uncommon.

Reardon viewed the site and described its location as "a slight rise or mound on the prairie. He said it was "sufficiently elevated to escape inundation whenever the Red River overflowed its banks" (Reardon 1955:103). In 1922, Reardon claimed, the landowner seeded the area without plowing it and reaped a crop. In 1923, the owner plowed the field and unearthed wooden timbers from one of the mission buildings, the foundations of a building 20 x 30 feet. He found glass pieces and fragments of bone. While Reardon thought that the building belonged to Father Dumoulin, who had built one-quarter mile west of the river, it seems more likely to have been Belcourt's chapel which was farther back. The presbytery was 20 x 16 feet, and Belcourt also described a "boutique." This was probably the blacksmith's cabin known to be at the mission. Reardon also gave the location with only a slight error. The correct description is: the northwest corner of the southeast quarter of the northwest



Figure 1. Métis burial markers, including white wooden crosses common before stone was available. St. Vincent Cemetery, St. Vincent, Minnesota (photo by Ruth Swan).

quarter of Section 33, Township 164 north, Range 51 west (Reardon 1955:104 as corrected by Edward A. Jerome).¹¹

In the later 1950s, another initiative was organized by community leaders in Pembina, in particular, the mayor, Albert J. Christopher, his wife Henrietta, and the parish priest, Father Victor J. Drapela. They requested the State Historical Society of North Dakota to replace a broken billboard with a historic marker at the highway rest stop on I-29. The Christophers determined the location:

Albert & I drove out on the new highway (unfinished) today to check the distance between it and the historical site. We did not measure, but he judged it to be about one hundred yards.¹²

Cemetery supporters in Pembina have told us that the location of this historic cemetery is well known to people in the community. Mrs. Henrietta Christopher was a Catholic of French background from Canada and, not surprisingly, was an ally of Father Drapela in commemorating the mission site. Her birth name was Conmy and her father was of Irish descent; her mother was French Canadian. Her husband, Albert Christopher, was raised in Nova Scotia. The parish priest, the mayor (who was also state representative) and his historically minded wife were a powerful combination. They succeeded in persuading the State Historical Society to approve a metal plaque. The highway department erected it on June 9, 1963.¹³ They did not achieve their goal to have a cross erected at the site.

The demand for the religious symbol, however, suggests that they also wanted the burial site protected from farming. The letter that Mrs. Christopher wrote to the State Historical Society on October 5, 1959, reflected differences of opinion:

[The Landowner] has decided that he will not allow the erection of a cross. We are all disgusted with him. If, in the future, it might be possible, the public would get the connection even though [it was] not specified on the marker.

In this campaign, which took at least five years, the leaders involved influential people such as Governor William Guy to intervene with the Historical Society. Father Drapela approached the governor on the basis that the marker would help to promote tourism, especially from Canada. He

noted that the historic site "marks the site of the first Christian church, school and cemetery from the Selkirk period of the western migration in 1818."¹⁴

It is significant that, in the lobbying effort as well as in the legend provided by Father Drapela and the Christophers, the role of the Métis was not mentioned and the connections with Christianity and the non-Aboriginal Selkirk Settlers were emphasized. The last sentence of the legend reads: "The cemetery was not moved; and here where they were buried, hidden by the years of progress, still lie the remains of North Dakota's earliest pioneers." By denying the Aboriginal and French history of the site and by changing the thrust from a "Catholic" to a "Christian" connection, the Christophers and Father Drapela made the historic marker politically palatable to other factions in the community and to state officials. Such tactics reflected both efforts to broaden support and the discrimination faced by North Dakotans and Minnesotans whose ethnic background was French Métis, Indian and/or Catholic. As the Métis became a minority group, they had three strikes against them.

Another manifestation of a desire to deny their Métis background and distance themselves from their identity was the practice of anglicizing French Métis names so that they would appear in phonetic English. Names such as "Boucher" became "Bushea", "La Fontaine" changed to "Lafountan", "Gosselin" to "Gooselaw" and "Boyer" became "Bouey." While some of these changes could be attributed to Anglophones who could not understand or write in French and misspelled these names, it was also reinforced by families who denied their background because it was easier to assume an American identity than to maintain ethnic differences.

In 1968, in honor of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the mission, the Catholic Church in Pembina pursued the idea of the cross and monument at the mission site, led this time by a new priest, Father Gerald Weber. The congregation prepared a questionnaire to find out the family histories of the 166 names of burials in the parish register.¹⁵ The goal of the anniversary committee was to erect "a cross or a tablet of bronze with the

names of the dead engraved on it....in honor of these early pioneers." The church hoped to persuade the landowner to give permission to place these monuments at the site. Once again, the family refused access to the site which they were using for a wheat field. The anniversary committee instead erected a bronze plaque with the names of the 166 burials outside the church in town.

In the 1968 attempt, heritage supporters and the Catholic priest continued to emphasize the non-Aboriginal history of the cemetery. While the first plaque (1963) by highway I-29 described the site as the "Dumoulin Church," the marker at the Assumption Church in town calls the cemetery the

"Selkirk or Belcourt cemetery." They do not mention the Métis although, as noted in Table 1, Métis composed over 88% of the burial list. The people buried there are referred to as "North Dakota's earliest settlers." Using words such as "pioneers" and "settlers" gave the unspoken message that these people were connected with "settlement," implying that they were not nomadic and therefore non-Aboriginal.¹⁶ Such words distanced them from their Native ancestry, even though some Aboriginal names are visible on the plaque at the church. As noted, when Aboriginal people were baptized, they usually adopted Christian names. These ten Ab-

original names on the plaque as well as the Aboriginal names in the church registry are unusual and probably did not persist to the next generation.¹⁷ The failure of the anniversary committee to place a cross at the site and to protect it from farming has left deep scars on the Catholic parish in Pembina. Some interpreted resistance to their anniversary initiative as being anti-Catholic. As a result, some local Catholics have hesitated to raise the issue again and prefer that any further attempts to protect the cemetery be made by outsiders.¹⁸

The cause then was taken up by academics who were indeed outsiders. Dr. Jacqueline Peterson, History Department, University of Minnesota,¹⁹ Diane Payment, historian of the Batoche Historic Site, Parks Canada, and Dr. Mary Black-Rogers, anthropologist, Royal Ontario Museum and a Pembina Métis descendant, visited the cemetery in June 1988 from Winnipeg, Manitoba. In accordance with state law, Peterson contacted the North Dakota State Historical Soci-



Figure 2. Mrs. Claudette Ek of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, stands in front of a grave marker for Elizabeth Goulet Parenteau. She was the sister of Mrs. Ek's grandfather, Roger Goulet.

ety and the Department of Health and registered a complaint about the farming. Unfortunately, the location she gave was not entirely correct; the historian at the Historical Society died shortly after, and Peterson became involved in another project and did not have time to pursue the Pembina site.²⁰ As a result, no action resulted from her initiative.

Although federal law does not protect unmarked graves on private land, North Dakota state law does provide such protection. The law (NDCC 23-06-27) states: "person is guilty of a felony who, without authority of law, willfully...disturbs a human burial site, human remains, or burial goods found in or on any land, or attempts to do the same, or incites or procures the same to be done." It further states: "Any person who knows or has reasonable grounds to believe that that person has encountered or discovered a human burial site, human remains, or burial goods associated with a human burial, in or on any land, shall refrain from any activity which might disturb such burial, remains, or goods to the local law enforcement agency."

The most recent attempt to protect the site began in the summer of 1992 with the organization of the Pembina Cemetery Commemoration Committee (PCCC), founded by the authors. It was a coalition of Métis, Aboriginal, heritage and church representatives from Minnesota, Manitoba and North Dakota who are concerned about both the protection of the graves and commemoration issues. Meetings were held in Winnipeg, Pembina and Selkirk to discuss options. We also offered tobacco to Mr. Francis Cree of Dunseith, North Dakota, and invited the Turtle Mountain Ojibwe to work with us. We provided him with a copy of the burial list in September 1992, because many Pembina Métis moved to Turtle Mountain when the reservation was established in the 1880s. Many of their descendants still live on that reservation. We agreed to lobby the State Historical Society to intervene, stop the farming, protect the site and make it available for visitors.

On October 23, 1992, a meeting was held in Pembina with an archaeologist from the State Historical Society, Fern Swenson. She subsequently contacted the landowner, who, Swenson reported, refused permission to do a site survey.²¹ Swenson told the committee that the exact location of the

cemetery was not known and she needed "more research." Edward Jerome of Hallock, Minnesota, one of the authors and a descendant of the Pembina "pioneers," located a map produced by the State Highway Department which pinpointed the exact location of the site. Swenson later provided us with a site record by Bob Christensen of the State Highway Department written in 1993 when the department was considering repairs to the highway and wayside stop. Although Christensen had been granted access to the site, Swenson had not. Swenson explained that she could not do the site survey without the landowner's permission because it was on private property. Although some descendants felt that the landowners were breaking the law by plowing the gravesites, Swenson was unwilling to seek a court order to gain access to the site.

According to Christensen (1993), "the cemetery was not moved from the site and probably remains somewhere in the cultivated field." He reported finding animal bone fragments, ceramics, and fire-cracked rock at the site during his survey. Christensen's report mapped the probable location of the cemetery, based on archaeological remains and historic documents. State records indicate there were 48 burials at the cemetery by 1823 and that up to 167 people were buried there before the cemetery was abandoned.

The owner had told Swenson that all the graves had been moved, but was unable to document this. Representatives of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe at Belcourt visited Pembina at our invitation in October 1992 and subsequently wrote a letter to the nephew renting the land from the owner, protesting the farming and requesting a meeting.²² To our knowledge, they did not receive any acknowledgement of their letter. Ruth Swan telephoned and wrote to the landowner on October 19, 1993, to propose a meeting with family. The landowner refused. She also denied that the state archaeologist had called her a year earlier. Generally, the owner and her family refused all requests by descendants for a meeting.

Although one farmer from Pembina who does survey work for the county supported the landowner's assertion that two of his ancestors' graves had been moved from the cemetery, he provided no documentation of this. Other descendants

of Pembina Métis state that the cemetery was not moved. Neither Pembina County, the North Dakota Historical Society, nor the State Department of Health had any records indicating that the graves had been moved.

Swenson proposed in 1993 that infrared photography might be useful in pinpointing the location. This caused a controversy between the Intertribal Reinterment Committee (IRC) composed of representatives of the four tribes of North Dakota and the PCCC. The tribal members objected to the use of the infrared photography on the grounds that it would disturb the spirits. They lobbied the Superintendent of the State Historical Society not to use it (Swenson, 1993). Because the IRC had been established to make decisions about prehistoric Aboriginal burials whose direct descendants were unknown, the PCCC members felt the IRC lacked authority over the Pembina burials. The identities of people buried at Pembina are known, as are the identities of some of their descendants. As a direct descendent of the Métis buried there, Edward Jerome gave permission for the project and paid for the small plane that he rented for the archaeologist (Figure 3). Swenson did the photography on June 12, 1993, and she felt that the outcome was partially successful. The colored slides she lent to Ruth Swan for her presentation to the Plains Anthropological Conference in October 1993 in Saskatoon showed a dark area on the cultivated field. This was significant in determining the location of the mission.

The controversy over the infrared reflected to some extent the historic divisions between status Indians and Métis. Because the Métis do not have legal status in the United States, historically they have been forced to identify themselves as Indian or white. When the reservations were established, the Métis had the choice of taking halfbreed scrip or treaty status. Those who chose scrip intermarried with Scandinavians, Germans and other ethnic groups in Minnesota, North Dakota and Montana if they did not migrate to Métis communities in Canada such as St. Laurent and Duck Bay, Manitoba or Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan. The Métis who moved onto American Indian reservations have adopted a Ojibwe identity even when they were the majority, such as at Turtle Mountain. Despite this repression of their heritage and ethnic

identity, some residents of the reservation still maintain the Michif language and identity. While some people have been told that their Euro-Canadian or Euro-American names were adopted at treaty time, in fact, most of them can be linked through historical records to the fur trade.

In the summer of 1993, we had the opportunity to question a number of Aboriginal spiritual leaders on the question of the protection of the sacred site and what measures should be used to identify it. A pipe-carrier who grew up at White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, but now residing in Duluth, who is also a Catholic deacon, advised that doing the infrared photography would not disturb the spirits. He believed that the spirits do not stay at the cemetery site after seven days. Tom Porter, a spiritual leader from the Mohawk reserve at Akwasasne, Ontario, suggested that the farming was more disruptive to the spirits than the photography. He urged the Intertribal Reinterment Committee to cooperate with the archaeologists and to use whatever legal means were available to stop the farming. He had confidence in the scientists to respect the site and Aboriginal concerns.

We also consulted Métis elders at Belcourt on the Turtle Mountain Ojibwe Reservation. They are Catholics and proud of their Michif heritage. They felt strongly that the cemetery should be preserved because they have relatives buried there. They observed that the young people on the reserve do not know their history and are beginning to identify with Indian spirituality. After consulting with a young Ojibwe-Métis pipe-carrier, a nephew of one of the elders, the elder convinced him that the farming should be stopped and that the photography would not be disruptive.

By 1994, the preservation of the site remained unresolved. The owner refused to discuss the problem and claimed that the graves had been moved. The owner continued to refuse archaeologists access to the site. On the basis of the North Dakota anti-desecration statute discussed above, Edward Jerome lodged a complaint with the Pembina County state's attorney in August 1993 and with the Attorney General of North Dakota in the spring of 1994. Research by members of the PCCC continued.

The basic issue which emerged from the latest attempt (1992 on) to commemorate and preserve the Pembina Cemetery is the importance of the

Métis heritage. Because Métis status is not recognized in the United States, it is difficult for Métis descendants to learn about their history and vocalize their protests. Long-term denial has not made the issue go away, but it has silenced the context for identity. When people are ashamed of who they are, it is difficult for them to value their history; history is better forgotten. While most people in Pembina seem aware of the existence of the cemetery, probably few realize its Métis connections. In 1997, when the town celebrated its bicentennial, it commemorated the landing site of the non-Aboriginal Selkirk Settlers in 1812 at the "Fort Daer landing."

In November 1993, the State Historical Society organized a public meeting in the town to display plans for the new \$2.2 million museum that was being planned. One of the fundraisers claimed that Pembina was important because it was the "first place that the Whiteman [La Verendrye and his sons] came to North Dakota." Unfortunately, this woman did not realize the important Aboriginal history of the community. Pembina was important

because it was the home of the Métis freemen and it was the place where Métis culture flourished in the buffalo hunters' camps and in the river-lot parishes along the Red River. Linguists like Dr. John Crawford and Dr. Peter Bakker consider the structure of the Michif language, composed of French nouns and Cree verbs, to be unique in the world.

The Métis and Aboriginal hunting families (Ojibwe, Cree and Assiniboine) shared the Red River Valley during the fur trade era while maintaining

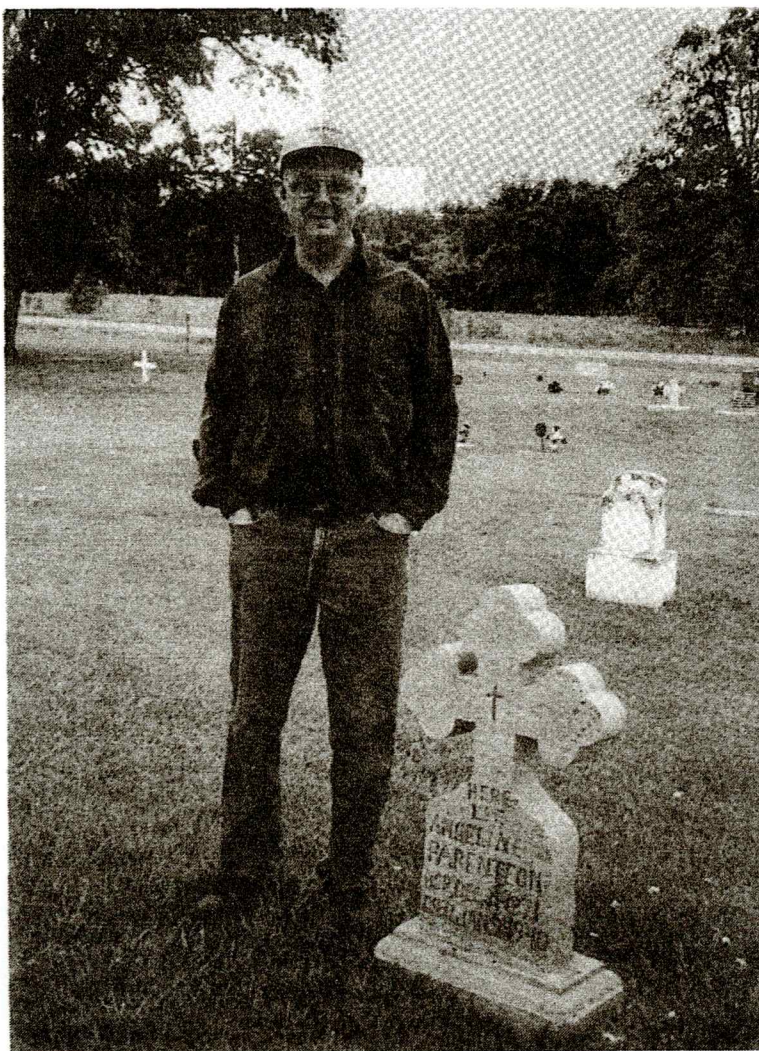


Figure 3. Edward A. Jerome, Hallock, Minnesota, stands next to the marker for Angelique Jerome Parenteau in St. Vincent Cemetery, St. Vincent, Minnesota. Angelique Parenteau was the sister of his grandfather, Alexandre Jerome.

their ethnic boundaries. The people buried at Pembina are important because of their ethnic background; they were not "whitemen," but were linked to the Aboriginal, French-Canadian, Scottish, Irish and British Canadian traders who organized and carried out the fur trade in the northwest of North America. They were special people with a unique heritage and they deserve to be remembered in North Dakota.

UPDATE TO JUNE 1999

After the Plains Anthropological Conference in October 1993, the PCCC lobbied for the use of geophysical testing to determine the location of all graves at the cemetery site. In May 1994, the state archaeologist obtained permission to survey the site through the intervention of the office of the Pembina County state's attorney. The first site survey was done in June 1995. In June 1996, the state archaeologist set aside 2.5 acres based on her estimate of the cemetery boundaries. In September 1997 ground-penetrating radar was used to more exactly determine the locations of the graves associated with the cemetery. The radar survey showed 480-600 potential gravesites, 118 of which were outside the 2.5 acre site boundaries. In 1995, Pembina County Commissioner Charlie Walker had registered the cemetery with the State Health Department. Walker reported that there were 117 burials, although he had obtained a list of 166 burials from one of the Pembina descendants. The actual number of burials thus remains a matter of controversy.

In May 1998, the state archaeologist's office excavated four shallow test pits at the site. Three of these were within the original 2.5 acres. At the Intertribal Reinterment Committee's direction, they limited their excavations to less than two feet deep, to avoid disturbing any human remains. The off-reservation descendants were not invited to observe these excavations, but watched from the nearby road right-of-way. These descendants later informed the media that they considered these excavations inadequate to accurately determine the site boundaries. They also felt that, as the direct descendants of those buried in the cemetery, they—rather than the IRC—should have been consulted about the investigations at the cemetery.

In August 1998, local officials hired a Minnesota firm to conduct additional geophysical testing at the site. Again, the descendants were not invited to observe the fieldwork. The state archaeologist's office described the results of this survey as "confusing."

On October 25, 1998, the PCCC organized a public meeting in Pembina and invited the state archaeologist, the Pembina County state's attorney and the geologist who conducted the first geophysical survey. The archaeologist did not attend.

The states' attorney and geologist attended and gave statements. A week later the state archaeologist's office released their survey report to the media. This included a recommendation that the site area be increased from 2.5 acres to between 3.2 to 3.7 acres.

The Pembina County commissioners met on November 17 and December 1 to discuss the situation. Only three local descendants (North Dakota and Minnesota) were invited the commissioners' meetings. (Some descendants did not realize that all such meetings are open to the public and that public notices announce their times and locations.) Only one of the three invited descendants was able to attend the December meeting. At that meeting the commissioners accepted the state archaeologist's recommendation to increase the boundaries to 3.7 acres. On June 22 the commissioners met with the landowner's attorney to discuss terms and conditions for the sale of 3.7 acres site. At this time local officials offered to buy the 3.7 acre site. Under the terms of this agreement, access to the site will be limited to a mowed path through the surrounding field. This access path will be maintained by the county.

In the wake of this decision, local descendants of the Pembina Métis community have clear objectives for the cemetery site. They want all graves protected from further disturbance. They are concerned that many graves may lay outside the site boundaries as they are currently defined. They want the cemetery boundaries accurately established using geophysical survey methods both inside and beyond the current site boundaries. They want access for vehicles and they want the cemetery fenced to prevent plowing or encroachment. They want the current vegetation (wheat and weeds) replaced with grass. They want the cemetery maintained in a respectful manner. They want free access to the cemetery containing their ancestors' graves, without fear of being accused of trespass or vandalism that may result from the current arrangement. In other words, they do not want to have to hike through a grain field to get to the cemetery site. They do not want the land to revert to private ownership under any conditions. They want to be treated respectfully and they ask the same for their ancestors' graves.

APPENDIX

**Pembina Métis Cemetery Plaques
Document #1: Dumoulin Church**

The first church in the northwest stood about three hundred feet west of this marker. It was founded in 1818 by Father Joseph Dumoulin along with a school and cemetery. The site was abandoned after the boundary survey and was not used until 1848.

Father Belcourt, North Dakota's pioneer priest, rebuilt the mission which stood until 1863 when it was destroyed by cannon fire from Hatch's Battalion. The mission was later transferred to Pembina.

The cemetery was not moved; and here where they were buried hidden by the years of progress, still lie the remains of North Dakota's earliest pioneers.

**North Dakota State Historical Society 1963
Document #2: [Plaque outside Assomption
Church, Pembina] [Erected 1968]**

The mission cemetery of Assomption Church (also called the Selkirk or Belcourt Cemetery) was founded one mile north of here with a church and school in 1818 by Father Severe J. Dumoulin. When the Parish was transferred to the present city of Pembina, the cemetery was not moved. Here, where they were buried, still lie the remains of many of North Dakota's earliest settlers. Father Dumoulin officiated at 49 of these funerals, the records of which were destroyed by fire. His successors [sic] recorded the burials of the pioneers listed here.

NOTES

1. See Appendix, Document #1 for wording of the plaque at the wayside stop on highway I-29 which suggested that the cemetery was "three hundred feet to the east of this marker".

2. The North Dakota State Historical Society organized a meeting in Pembina on November 20, 1992, to unveil plans for the new state museum. In discussing the storyline, the curator placed the section on the Hudson's Bay Company and the Selkirk Settlements before the Métis and the buffalo hunt, suggesting that the Métis arrived after the Selkirkers. Since the Canadian traders came into the area in the 1790s in larger numbers than the HBC, their influence was more extensive. The Selkirk Settlers did not arrive in Pembina until 1812 (Swan 1997). A newspaper article in the *Pembina New Era*, November 19, 1992, noted that "Pembina is the oldest Euro-American settlement in North Dakota," reflecting the public perception that Pembina's historic importance was related to its

"European-American," that is, non-Aboriginal and non-Canadian, roots. See Kelsch 1996 who articulates the popular myth that the Selkirk Settlers "settled" in Pembina.

3. The authors recognize that the word halfbreed has modern pejorative connotations, but it was used commonly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to describe people of mixed background, especially if they were of partly English or Scottish descent. In this paper, the term Métis is used unless in quotation.

4. In writing to Father Provencher on July 20, 1822, John Halkett of the HBC complained that the Métis congregated at Pembina in such great numbers that they prevented the herds from migrating north to the Forks (present-day Winnipeg). There is no evidence for such an allegation. The HBC wanted the Métis north of the American border where they could more easily control their activities. The company's motivation was economic and there is no evidence that the bison would have migrated north if left alone by the bison hunters (Nute 1942:353-354).

5. The Treaty of Ghent established the border as the 49th parallel in 1818.

6. In a letter to Bishop Plessis in Quebec dated August 11, 1822, Provencher observed that the Presbyterians were not inclined to attend the meetings of John West, the Anglican minister at Red River and "the Swiss do not recognize him either" (Nute 1942:363). With such ethnic divisions amongst the Protestant Selkirk settlers, it is not likely that they would be involved in a Catholic mission except through intermarriage.

7. Ruth Swan and Edward A. Jerome, "The Collin Family at Thunder Bay: A Case Study of Métissage," paper presented to the *Proceedings of the Algonquian Conference*, October 1997, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

8. John C. Crawford, What is Michif? Language in the Métis Tradition, in Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown, (eds.) *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985; Eleanor Blain, *The Bungee Dialect of the Red River Settlement*, M.A. Thesis, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1989; Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

9. Assistant Attorney General David Clinton provided us with a copy of this bill from the North Dakota State Library.

10. Belleau Papers, Richardton Abbey Archives, Richardton, North Dakota, microfilm copy at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

11. Reardon gave the location as the northeast corner of the southeast quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 33, Township 164 North, Range 51 West.

12. Mrs. Christopher to Mr. Russell Reid, Superintendent, SHSND, November 10, 1958, from the Pembina file, Historic Sites Branch, ND Archives, Bismarck, North Dakota. We would like to thank Fern Swenson who made this material available.

13. Program for Dedication Ceremony, Pembina File, Historic Sites, North Dakota Archives, Bismarck, North Dakota.

14. SHSND file: Drapela to Governor Guy, July 15, 1962.

15. The list was published in 1990 by the Red River Valley Genealogical Society, Fargo, North Dakota, which claimed that the source of the list was unknown. However, it is the same list that was circulated by the Assumption Church. We would like to acknowledge the late Frank Jerome of Midwest City, Oklahoma, who preserved the church's bulletin and survey and Mrs. Dorothy Jerome Kalka of Pembina who was one of the church volunteers who compiled the list.

16. Treatment of the Métis in the Pembina area is problematic. On the one hand, they have faced a history of racism since the large-scale immigration of European and American settlers made them a minority. On the other hand, they do not enjoy any of the benefits of "Aboriginal" status. For example, State Historical Society sites such as the Pembina Museum and the Gingras Trading Post at Walhalla refer to the Métis and their culture as "Euro-American." In Canada, modern Métis sometimes refer to themselves as "second-class Aborigines."

17. Aboriginal names on the plaque are generally misspelled, for example, Wifwkicham, and it is difficult to interpret that in modern Ojibwe. Attagawinin should probably be "ataagewinini," "Assinibavan" should be "Assiniboine" and "Shetchewckijik" should be "Shetchewgiizhig". Swan would like to thank her Ojibwe teacher, Pat Ningewance, at the Department of Native Studies, University of Manitoba.

18. Various informants in Pembina were interviewed, but will remain anonymous to protect their privacy.

19. Peterson co-authored with Dr. Jennifer S.H. Brown *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, 1985, University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg. Diane Payment is author of *Les Gens Libres - Otipewisiwak, Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930*, Environment Canada, Parks Service, Ottawa, 1990. Dr. Mary Black-Rogers is the author of numerous articles on the Ojibwe of Northwestern Ontario.

20. Peterson had specified the association as "Section 28" instead of Section 32.

21. Letter from Fern Swenson to Laurie Fontaine, October 11, 1993.

22. Alta Bruce, for the North Dakota Intertribal Reinterment Committee, to Jim Morris [sic].

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