

Cardinal, Michel (Okenase, Little Bones). (1790 - 1870)

Michel Cardinal was known as Okanase or Oukannaysic or “Little Bones.” Michel’s father was Jacques Cardinal, after whom Camp de Cardinal, Jacques Creek and Jacques Pass in Alberta were named. Jacques served as George Simpson’s guide through the Canadian Rockies. Michael’s mother Sarah (Salley) was a Saulteaux woman. Jacques and Sarah had at least four children, André, Alexis, Michel, and Susan. André remained in the Jasper area as a guide, Susan married Jasper House fur trader, H.J. Moberly and Alexis became famous Canadian missionary Albert Lacombe’s assistant. Sarah had a subsequent marriage to James Peter Whitford Sr. One of their children was Margaret (Peggy) Whitford, thus making Michael Cardinal and Margaret Whitford half-siblings.

As was customary with powerful Native men in his era, Michel Cardinal took more than one wife. His Assiniboiné wife, Josephte, bore children Chief Meekis,¹ Chief Louis Ochoup (O’Soup, b. 1839), Tail Feathers Wuttunee, Baptiste Cardinal, St. Paul, Chief Red Pheasant, and Mary Cut Sleeve Keekakanekwas (who married David Ahenakew).

From his Orkney wife came children Chief Keesikoowenin (b. 1818, also known as Moses Burns), and Baptiste Bone (Okanase, b. 1836).

Michel’s Métis (French-Saulteaux) wife, Lizette Slater (b. 1831), had children John JoJo (b. 1846), William Mucatehpense or Blackbird² (b. 1849), George Bone (b.1856) and Antoine Bone.³

Michel Cardinal moved to the Riding Mountain area in the early 1820s. It may well be that he had come eastward with his half-sister, Margaret and her husband, George Flett, a Métis trader. By 1816 the Fletts lived in the Prince Albert region and by 1882 were living at Fort Garry. The Fletts had at least six children: James, John, George, William, David and Margaret Atkinson. By 1869, William was Chief Trader at Fort Garry. Son George became a noted Presbyterian missionary at Prince Albert and the Riding Mountain area.

It is notable that nine of Michael Cardinal’s sons became powerful chiefs and played significant roles in the history of the West.

Michael Cardinal’s nephew (Margaret Cardinal Flett’s son) George Flett played an outstanding role in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Son of a prominent Hudson’s Bay Company trader, George worked for a while as an interpreter during Treaty negotiations. He also served in the Provisional Government headed by Louis Riel. For many years he served as minister and farm instructor for Keesikoowenin Reserve. For his long service as missionary in Prince Albert, George Flett rightly deserves the title of “Father of Prince Albert.” George Flett was no doubt strongly influenced by two close friends: his brother-in-law, Winnipeg’s first Presbyterian minister, John Black (who married a Métis girl,

¹ When Okanase died about 1870, his son Meekis, the Eagle became chief of the Riding Mountain Band and it was referred to as Meekis Band at the time of Treaty 2 signing in 1871. Upon Meekis’ death in 1874, his half-brother Keesekoowenin became chief and the band is now known by his name.

² Cardinal, William; address: White Fish Lake; claim no. 710; born: 1849 at Riding Mountain; father: Michel Cardinal (Métis); mother: Lizette Slater (Métis); married: 1866 at Riding Mountain to Mary; children living: 9 (names on application); scrip for \$160.00.

³ Antoine’s daughter Angelique married Joseph Boyer.

Boyer, Joseph; for his deceased children: Joseph, born: November, 1876 at Riding Mountain, died: 2 May 1880; Mary, born: May, 1879 between Riding Mountain and Fort Ellice, died: 7 May 1880; address: Elphestone; claim no. 277; mother: Angélique Bone (Métis); father: Joseph Boyer (Métis and deponent)

Flett's wife's sister) and Reverend James Tanner (also a Métis), who was the first Presbyterian missionary west of Winnipeg. (Contributed by Dr. Peter Lorenz Neufeld.)

Reference

Peter L. Neufeld, "How the Saulteaux-Cree Were Driven Out of Riding Mountain Park." *Indian Record*, Part I-V, Vol. 44, No. 3, 1981: 16-17, Vol. 44, No. 4: 21-23, Vol. 45, No. 1: 20-23. This five part series gives the history of the Saulteaux-Cree-Métis of the Clear Lake-Riding Mountain area of Manitoba. Neufeld extensively covers the story of John 'Falcon' Tanner (the white Indian) and Michael (Okenase) Cardinal, the Métis from Bow River, and their association with this group. John Tanner's most famous son was Picheito, Manitoba's last great war chief. Picheito's son Gambler Tanner was negotiator of Treaty Four and took a reserve at Silver Creek, Manitoba.



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