

Historic Metis Community: Pembina, North Dakota.

The first people in the Pembina area were the Chippewa (Ojibwa) bands. They lived along the river as hunters and ate the high bush cranberries, “anepeminan sipi”, for which the river and community are named. Pembina was the site where, for over two centuries, the native people and Metis hunters would assemble before starting to the prairies for the buffalo hunts.

The town of Pembina, located on the Red River just south of the 49th parallel is the former heart of the Metis territory. Once the border was drawn at the 49th parallel and it was found that Pembina was in the United States and not in Canada many of the Metis migrated north to St. Boniface, St. Vital, St. François Xavier and Fond du Lac (now St. Laurent). Pembina was known to be an inhabited place as early as 1780 and the first fur trading post was established at Pembina in 1797 when Charles Chaboillez of the North West Company established a post there.



Red River Cart at Pembina 1880-1910. State Historical Society of North Dakota (00394-028).

This community evolved over the years from a fur trade site to colony, river town, shipping centre, military outpost, and scene of international disputes. Pembina was a primarily Métis town. It hosted missionaries and explorers; it was also a staging centre for surveyors moving west. In 1818, Father Sevine Dumoulin established a mission (St. François Xavier) at Pembina to serve the Metis and Chippewa Catholic converts. In the winter, almost the entire population of Red River would move south to Pembina to winter there, thus avoiding the harsher climate at the forks. At its peak of activity, it had over 500 residents and 40 permanent buildings. Pembina was an important centre for the buffalo hunt and important as a stopping point for the Red river cart trains between St. Paul, Minnesota and Fort Garry. Before the borders of North Dakota were established, Pembina was part of the Minnesota Territory. The famous Joe Roulette was sent to the legislative assembly in St. Paul in 1853 to represent this district on the Territorial Council. He served from 1853 to 1857. At the time the Metis population in Pembina was about 5,000, roughly equal to the Metis population in British controlled Rupert's Land.



Pembina 1882, State Historical Society of North Dakota (00394-023)



Carts at Pembina between 1880-1890, State Historical Society of North Dakota (00394-029-1)



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