

Dumont

HONORE JAXON, SAINT OR LUNATIC?

One of the most colorful and romantic figures in Canadian History was Louis Riel's secretary, who was a Protestant of English extraction. His name was William Jackson. William Jackson moved west from Ontario with his father and mother in the early 1880's. He had attended university in Toronto, and although it was denied that he was ever a student there, a record of his marks earned at that university are on record at the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Regina. His marks show that he was one of the top students in his class.

The Metis were involved in a struggle to obtain title from the federal government to the lands they occupied along the Saskatchewan River during the early 1880's. Although the government had granted title to the English-speaking "Half-Breeds" in the region, it had failed to grant title to their neighbors, the French-speaking Metis. The Metis, under Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont, organized a political pressure group to put pressure on the conservative government of Sir John A. Macdonald, to force this government to grant the Metis and Indians of the region a decent land settlement.

Although the white settlers and Half-Breed farmers in the Prince Albert district were finally given title to their lands just prior to the Metis armed resistance of 1885, they, too, had many grievances with the federal government. Riel hoped to unite the struggles of the Metis to the discontented Half-Breed and white farmers who were angry with the government because of its policies of high tariffs on farm machinery, and the lack of

markets for local farmers produce. A severe local depression plagued the North West Territories in 1884, and many people correctly blamed the federal government for the economic disasters that were overtaking them.

William Jackson was a leader of the farmers union, and other militant organizations who sought reforms from the federal government. Many of the white and Half-Breed residents sympathized with the Metis, and were ready to join forces with them in a united front against the government's western policies. They were scared off, however, when fighting broke out between the Metis and the local militia at Duck Lake in March of 1885. Not so with William Jackson. Rumor had it that Will was in love with a young Metis woman, the daughter of Mois Oulette. Whether it was this love, or his keen sense of justice that inspired him, no one knows for sure. He changed his name to Honore Jaxon and joined the Metis in their military struggle against the federal government.

When the struggle was over, Riel was sentenced to death. Honore Jaxon was adjudged insane, and incarcerated in a mental institution in Winnipeg. At his trial Jaxon argued that he was as guilty as Riel and should, like Riel, suffer the same fate. However, the sentence was not changed. The brilliant and dynamic Jaxon was classified as insane. He escaped from the insane asylum and fled across the border, appearing a few years later in Chicago. Before his career ended in 1952, Jaxon had acquired and lost a fortune. He dreamed of setting up a colony in Mexico for the Metis of the North Saskatchewan who had suffered so much

under the Canadian government's policies. In Mexico, Honore joined the revolutionary Pancho Villa. Later, he became an organizer for a revolutionary group, the Industrial Workers of the World, who felt that it was the age-old class system that pitted man against man, creating wars and misery. They felt that since it was working people who created all the wealth, it was working people who should share it and control it, without the interference of governments which they felt were all corrupt. Jaxon lived in a makeshift hut on the banks of the Bronx River in New York until his old age.

In 1952, a newspaper story brought Jaxon to the public's view once more. In December of that year he had been evicted from the basement of a slum tenement building in New York. Jaxon was dumped onto the street, penniless, at age 92. Along with his eviction went some 2½ tons of written material that he had gathered over a life time. The material all dealt with Indian and Metis history. The old man, in attempting to retrieve some of the documents worked for hours in the cold as the falling snow began to ruin them. He took sick and died of pneumonia in the psychiatric ward of the hospital two days later. The mountain of material that he had hoped to ship north to Batoche to provide a library for Native people sat for two days on the sidewalk, covered with snow. Then it was buried in the New York City dump.

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