

Mistawasis, Pierre Belanger (1796-1875)

By Lawrence J. Barkwell

Pierre Belanger known as “Piwaspiskomostos” (Iron Buffalo), and “Mistahi Awas Asis, or Mistawasis” (Big Child) was born in 1796 at Slave Lake. He died on June 21, 1895 in Snake Plain (Saskatchewan). He was the son of Bernard Belanger born around 1760 and “Kakakewachin” (Nakoda b. 1765).

Children of Bernard Belanger and Kakakewachin:

- ? Belanger, Mistawasis’s sister, born 1795.
- Pierre Belanger, Mistawasis (Big Child), born 1796 at Slave Lake.
- Mitchemipakwep Belanger, born 1798, Mitchemipakwep married Louis Pouillac Desnoyers.
- Jeanne Kapitchikusit Belanger, born 1820, Kapitchikusit married Antoine Cayan dit Boudreau.
- Bernard Belanger, born 1825.



Mistawasis with Joe McKay

Pierre Belanger married Iskwesis Sitipinatowe and had at least two children. Pierre Belanger then married Ann Awasis Mashe Nah Sho Wishk (b. 1800) and had 5 children.

Children:

- Oldest Daughter, Mistawasis, born 1830.
- Weyakekwapew (Lively Man) Belanger, born 1835 (mother Iskwešis Sitipinatowe).
- Jean Baptiste Otchipwam Belanger, born 1836 (mother Iskwešis Sitipinatowe).
- Marguerite or Charlotte “Ehshekashk”, born 1842, married James Joseph Mamiskittashkonke Dreaver.¹
- Judith Belanger (mother Anne Awasis Mashe Nah Sho Wishk), born 1843, married Antoine Kamiyoahcahkwcw Ahtakakooop Starblanket (1837-1896). This couple are the great-great grandparents of well-known author Maria Campbell.
- Piwiskwis Belanger, born 1847, Piwiskwis married Antoine Arcand.(1847-1888).
- Isabelle “Mistaw” Belanger, born 1848, married Joseph “Toomahtoon” Ledoux (b. 1845) the son of Baptiste Ledoux and Françoise Lacouture. They were both members of Keetoowayhow’s Band (Muskeg Lake).
- Kwataskupis Belanger, (mother Ann Awasis Mashe nah sho wishk).
- Peggy Belanger (mother Anne Awasis Mashe Nah Sho Wishk), born 1858 at Eagle Hills, married Pierre Petit Couteau.

Chief Mistawasis was the lead negotiator at Fort Carlton for Treaty Six. He represented the other Waskahikan Bands; Ahtakakooop’s Band, Chakastapaysin’s Band, Chipewyan’s Band, James Smith’s Band, John Smith’s (Badger) Band, Yayakataskinin’s Band and Keetoowayhow’s (Alexandre Cayen dit Boudreau) Band. Also the Eagle Hills bands of Red Pheasant (Poundmaker) and Strike-Him-On-The-Back, and the Paskwa Kopew Bands of Kamiscowesit (Beardy), Kahpahyakastokum (One Arrow) and Sisikwanis.

Isidore Ledoux (b. 1873), the son of Joseph “Toomahtoon” Ledoux and Isabelle “Mistaw” Belanger reports: “You see we were French Half-Breeds, but still we were Treaty Indians, and Mistawasis was my grandfather, my mother was a Belanger, you see? He had two brothers, there were two brothers that came from fort Garry to Batoche. And one of them married an Indian woman [Julie Mashe-na-sho-wishk] and he followed their ways. I don’t know how but at the time of the first treaty—Treaty Six—they made Mistawasisa chief. He used his influence to enter my mother and father into Treaty—they were poor people you know. I suppose it was because it was my father’s idea to enter us in there, and we became Treaty Indians. [Mistawasis] He was a Belanger. He was a Half-Breed. He could talk French just as well as I could. And read and write French!”²

Joachim Fromhold (2010: 310) reports: “Chiefs Mistahi Awasis and Ahtakakooop and their brothers of the Waskahikan Wi Iniwak were described in the 1850s as being “wealthy in carts, horses and tipis.”

Dr. David Mandelbaum’s research notes from the 1930s give us some insight into the life of Chief Mistawasis.

¹ Children: Margaret Dunnet b.1857; Mary Sophia Granny Bennett, b. 1860; James, Jr., b. 1865; John, b. 1867; Francois Saswe, b. 1869; George Frederick (Chief), b.1870; Louisa, b. 1874; Harry, b. 1875; George, b. 1880.

² Saskatchewan Archives Board, Interview with Isidore Ledoux, July 21, 1973, Transcript disc 23.

Joe Wolf Interview: July 21, 1934
Interviewer Dr. D.G. Mandelbaum
Dept. of Anthropology
University of California, Berkeley
Tape number: ih-dm.28, Disk: transcript disc 133
<http://ourspace.uregina.ca/bitstream/10294/1738/1/IH-DM.28.pdf>

Joe Wolf said that he lived with Chief Mistawasis for two years, being hired by the Indian Agent to interpret for and help the chief.

Mistawasis himself was a Halfbreed. His first wife was Assiniboine on her father's side and Prairie Cree on her mother's side. Before Mistawasis was married he led two horse-stealing expeditions. On one of them they went somewhere around the Red Deer River (east of Medicine Hat). He couldn't locate any Blackfeet camps for a long time. Finally he got some horses at Buffalo Lake — Mustus-ahihigau. He brought them back to Carlton, having been out for two months.

Mistawasis was a freighter for the Hudson's Bay Company. He was called either Ukimaxkau or Paskwa Ukimau or Ogihtcitau Heukimau(?). He had two wives at the same time. They were sisters. He once said to me, "I didn't kill many Blackfeet. I hate to kill a man. Any place I go, I try to do my best — everybody likes me then and I get a bunch of young fellows to follow me."

Atahkaku-p's, "Star Blanket's" band were just the same people as Mistawasis's band. These two were the only chiefs of the House People at the time of the treaty but before they became headmen there were many chiefs. Star Blanket and Mistawasis would meet at Fort Carlton and decide what they were going to do. Mistawasis usually would hunt buffalo all winter on the prairie to supply the Hudson's Bay Company with meat for their men and dogs. He would range along the Saskatchewan in the winter. In the summer he would go south to the Red Deer. Long ago there were lots of buffalo even north of the North Saskatchewan. But in Mistawasis's day Blaine Lake and Bill Lake were as far to the north as the buffalo went. Star Blanket hunted for furs all winter, usually around Eeahiguu, "Seal Lake." In the summer he would hunt buffalo.

Star Blanket was a chief because he got lots of furs. Mistawasis and Star Blanket would do all the trading for their people. The band never went into the store — the chiefs handed out all the goods.

The Paskukpauwiyuiwuk would hunt with the House People. They would join with them in great encampments as a means of protection against the Blackfeet and Sioux who sometimes raided as far up as Carlton. At that time there were but few Savannah People. Mistawasis was chief of them all. Both these bands did not have much to do with the Cree to the south.

They were allied with two numerous people — Soto and Assiniboine, and could throw their attack in one direction. Then they were the staunch allies of the Hudson's Bay Company and thus were nearest to the source of manufactured commodities.

Carlton was called "Meeting Place" because it was where all the Indians would congregate and wait for the supplies.

After the treaty the bands were split up into smaller groups. Uktuwehau was made chief because he was well off, was a good hunter, and had lots of horses. Mistawasis and Atahkakop had about twenty horses each. They often had more but they would give their horses away. For doing this and giving other things away they would get a big name. I have seen the time when Mistawasis would be going along and he would come upon a poor old man. He would give the old man a horse and the old fellow would throw his hands up and pray for Mistawasis.

July 18, 1934

Interviewer: Dr. D.G. Mandelbaum

Tape number: ih-dm.24

Disk: transcript disc #135

Informant: Kakiceniupimuxteu "Walks Like An Old Man" or Napetcos - Peter Dreever

This man is the chief of the Mistawasis Reserve. He is the grandson of Mistawasis; speaks English fairly well. He is about 75, and a bit deaf. He is not an especially good informant since, as he said, "When I was young I was eager to learn the ways of the white people and did not take much notice of my own people." Moreover his favourite topic is the fine goods they used to get from the Hudson's Bay Company and how he has been a straight man. Every question he answers leads back to these topics. As do most of the other old men here, he has a moustache, short hair, wears pants, shirt, shoes.

The chief of our people, Waskahigaunisuk, long before the treaty was Mistawasis. He was part French and maybe part Assiniboine. At any rate he was related to an Assiniboine woman as half-brother because his mother had an Assiniboine husband besides the Halfbreed father of Mistawasis.

Mistawasis's territory extended from Ft. Pitt to Green Lake to The Pas. His people were called House people (Waskahigau, settlement, group of houses) because they lived near Carleton or at least met there. They themselves however lived in tipis which were always clean, more healthful than the houses we now have.

Mistawasis was a great help for the Hudson's Bay Co. In those days the Co. was the boss of the country for they controlled the goods. The Indian headmen "Kitciyinu" helped them keep order and were duly rewarded. Mistawasis was

such an H.B. Co. man. Before him there must have been some chiefs but I do not know their names. Mistawasis's sister's son used to be an Ogihtcitau Ukimau.

In those days we ate meat only and were very healthy. There was little flour. The Hudson's Bay Co. would give a sack of flour to the headmen on Christmas which they would use with berries to make soup. But when the government made peace between the Indian tribes, there was no peace for the buffalo. Also the white men used to poison thousands with strychnine for the sake of their hides and so there was soon no buffalo left.

I was Mistawasis's first grandchild and I lived as much in his tipi as I did in my own. I was very much spoiled; they gave me anything I wanted. Mistawasis always said that I should be chief. But when he died and the band voted for his successor, my mother's brother, Mistawasis's son and I got the same number of votes. But since he was the older, I said that he should be chief. When he died, I became Ukimaxkau.

The people here where this reserve is were called Kinepigo Wiyuiwuk — Snake Plain people. The Paskukupau Wiyuiwuk lived at the end of the bush and now are Beardy's at Duck Lake Reserve. At Witchigau and Pelican Lake they are mixed Cree and Soto.

Mistawasis was always on the prairie — Atakakop was more in the bush, Saka-wasgahigan wiyuwuk. There was also Cipiwasgahgau wiyiwuk (near Battleford) and Paskwawasgahigau wiyuiwuk (Mistawasis people). Some of Mistawasis people made their living from fish. The "House people" took their names from the place where they usually wintered.

The old chief showed me a picture of Mistawasis, Atakakop, Kakiwistahau and Cauwizes, taken evidently when they went to Regina or Winnipeg. He also showed me the medal that Mistawasis had received from Lieut. Governor Morris at the treaty signing. It was a two-inch silver or nickel disc with a relief of Queen Victoria and a relief of an Indian and official clasping hands. The old chief said that then Morris had told the Indians that as long as the sun and waters rose the Queen will help you and you will not be forced into any white man's war.

<http://ourspace.uregina.ca/bitstream/10294/1733/1/IH-DM.24.pdf>

Belanger Scrip claims:

Belanger, Marguerite; address: Snake Plains via Prince Albert; claim no. 1033; born: 1842 at Carlton; father: Pierre Belanger, alias Chiymistiwasis (Métis); mother: Anne (Indian); married: 1854 at South Branch to James Dreaver; children living: 9; children deceased: 3; scrip for \$160.00

Petit Couteau, Pierre alias Pas.Pas.Chase; address: Cypress Hills; born: September, 1872 near Blackfoot Crossing; father: Pierre Petit Couteau (Métis); mother: Peggie Belanger or Mistawasis; (Métis); scrip cert.: form E, no. 1276; claim no. 1984.

Belanger, Peggy; address: Edmonton; claim no. 549; born: 1858 at Eagle Hills, North West Territories; father: Mistawassis Belanger (Métis); mother: Mashe-nah-sho-wishk (Métis); married: 1872 at St. Paul des Cris to Pierre Petit Couteau Pas-pas-chess; children living: 4; scrip for \$240.00

Johnstone, Edward; heir to his deceased daughter, Catherine Laur; claim no. 393; Johnstone; address: Snake Plain, Saskatchewan; born: 25 Nov., 1884 at Snake Plain, Sask; died: 17 Jan., 1885 at Snake Plain; father: Edward Johnstone (Métis & deponent); mother: Caroline Belanger (Métis); scrip cert.: form D, no. 925 for \$240.00.

Belanger, Caroline; address: Snake Plain, Prince Albert P.O. [Post Office]; claim no. 1049; born: 1865 near Carlton; father: Gabriel Belanger (Métis); mother: Nancy Chatelain (Métis); married: 1882 at Snake Plains to Edward Johnston; children living: 2; children deceased: 1; scrip for \$240.00.

Children of Marguerite or Charlotte “Ehshekashk”, and James Joseph Mamiskittashkonke Dreaver:

Dreaver, Margaret; address: Prince Albert; claim no. 1044; born: 6 January, 1857 at South Branch; father: James Dreaver (Scot); mother: Marguerite Belanger (Métis); married: 1874 at Prince Albert to Robert Miles Isbister; children living: James, Francis, Ellen, George and John; scrip for \$240.00

Dreaver, Junior, James; address: Snake Plains via Prince Albert; claim no. 1029; born: 7 January, 1865 at Muskeg Lake; father: James Dreaver Senior (Scot); mother: Marguerite Belanger (Métis); married: 1 June, 1886 to Isabelle Arcand; scrip for \$240.00

Dreaver, Frederick; address: Snake Plains via Prince Albert; claim no. 1030; born: 8 January, 1870 at Battleford; father: James Dreaver (Scot); mother: Marguerite Belanger (Métis); scrip for \$240.00

Dreaver, John; address: Snake Plains via Prince Albert; claim no. 1028; born: 30 July, 1867 at Muskeg Lake; father: James Dreaver (Scot); mother: Marguerite Belanger (Métis); scrip for \$240.00.



Chief Mistawasis 1886
Saskatchewan Archives Board R-B2837

Department of Indian Affairs Report in 1906:

MISTAWASIS' AND MUSKEG LAKE BANDS.

These bands are under the immediate supervision of the agent, the agency headquarters being located near the centre of Mistawasis reserve.

The health of these bands has been unusually good during the past year. There has been practically no medical attendance, and yet the want of it has not been severely felt. The services of the agency clerk in this connection are much appreciated by the Indians. In one instance in which a boy's leg was amputated, the medical attendant was unable to return after the operation to dress the limb and look after the patient's condition. This work accordingly devolved upon the clerk, who attended to it for nearly a month with most satisfactory results.

A number of able-bodied men belonging to these bands, who left the reserve some years ago, continue to live abroad, earning their livelihood in various ways; but, so far as I can learn, conducting themselves in an orderly manner wherever they may go.

The regular inhabitants of the reserve show a distinct improvement in their condition. There is a satisfactory increase in the area of land cultivated, and the yield for last season was very good. The cattle industry also is once more on a good footing.

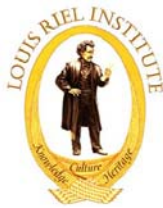
Among the young men of the band the following may be regarded as making satisfactory progress: Willie Dreaver, Robert Head, Jean Ledoux, Jacob Badger, Willie Muchahoo, Solomon Johnstone, Andre Lafond, Edward Lafond, and Edward Arcand, all ex-pupils of the boarding or day schools, and accordingly equipped with all necessary education. They have recently received substantial assistance from the department, by which they are much encouraged.

DOMINION OF CANADA ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30 1906. pg. 189

References:

Joachim Fromhold, *The Western Cree (Pakisimotan Wi Iniwak): Ethnography*. Author, Heritage Consulting: 2010. ISBN 978-0-557-49765-2

Helen Isbister (née Johnson), personal communication at “Back to Batoche”, July 2011. Helen Isbister is the granddaughter of Solomon Johnson a former chief of Mistawasis Band.



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