

Magnus Bernard Birston (Burston). (b. 1828)

Birston was a Scottish Half-Breed from St. François Xavier, the son of William Birston and Angélique Bercier dit Marchand. He has been described as one of the leaders of the “English Plains Buffalo Hunt” along with William Hallett. He was married to Madeleine Paul (b. 1828), the daughter of Jean Baptiste Paul and Angelique Piche.

Birston had been appointed to the Council of Assiniboia on August 6, 1868. The Council existed for 35 years, 1835-1870. He was the St. Paul delegate to Louis Riel’s Convention of Forty in 1870. He later moved to Duck Lake (now Saskatchewan).

On October 10 1885, he was tried for treason-felony at Regina for his Resistance activities at Duck Lake on 26th March and 3rd April 1885. He appeared before Judge Richardson on Monday October 26, 1885 and the judge stated that although some evidence weighed against the prisoner there were some favourable points for him, and sitting as a juror he could not convict. He warned the prisoner to be more careful of himself in the future. He was the only Metis other than Riel to go to trial.

Hillyard Mitchell had left Birston in charge of his store at Duck Lake before the battle there. Birston may have looted the store and burnt down Mitchell’s house but there was little evidence.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute