

## **Caron, Jean Sr.<sup>1</sup> (1833-1905)**

Jean was the son of Antoine Caron and Angelique St. Germain. He was born on June 22, 1833 at St. Boniface. In 1861, he married Marguerite Dumas and they had 14 children together. The family lived at St. Norbert then emigrated to St. Laurent and Batoche Saskatchewan in 1872. They moved to Lot 52 in 1881. Jean was a member of Captain Edouard Dumont's company, one of the 19 *dizaines* led by Gabriel Dumont during the 1885 Métis Resistance. He later died at Batoche in 1905 at age 71. He is buried at St. Antoine de Padoue Cemetery, Batoche.

Jean Caron's account of Duck Lake:

The Indian was not blind; he was, nevertheless shortsighted. He along with Isidore Dumont are both killed first. Wounded are Jean Baptiste Parenteau and Gabriel Dumont. Tom McKay shot the Indian and Isidore but he is not the leader of the expedition.

The English left seven of their soldiers on the battlefield. The bodies remained there for three days. Riel wrote and told them to come and fetch their dead.

As for the Metis, there were about one hundred fighters, but it is doubtful whether they all took part in the action. Their plan was to surround the enemy and for this purpose they had spread out in a long line. But when the English saw what they were doing, they fled in haste.

There were only about twenty-five or thirty Metis who arrived at the outbreak and who were actively involved in the battle... they placed themselves in the hollow. Everyone came on foot. The others were just leaving Duck Lake when the battle started.

Upon arriving on the road, they saw it already occupied by the English with their thundering cannon. Therefore, following their own inspiration, they spread out on each side of the road thus putting into action their plan to hem in the enemy. When the English saw this they fled.

Caron was in the little hollow where Laframboise was killed. The two of them were about one hundred yards from Isidore Dumont and an Indian who was killed. Both of them were running to see who would be the first to reach the police.

McKay, who was shooting, was also on foot; all the police had come in sleighs.<sup>2</sup>

Jean Caron's account of Tourond's Coulee:

The wounded from this battle were Charles Thomas, Charles Carrière and Pierre Tourond. Some 300 people, of which 200 were Metis and 100 were Indians, left the night preceding the battle at the coulee. All had supper at Roger

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<sup>1</sup> A signator of Gabriel Dumont's petition (dated St. Antoine de Padoue, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1882) to the Prime Minister for a survey and land grants.

<sup>2</sup> SHM, pp. 6-8.

Goulet's place. At about 7:30 or 8:00 o'clock, while they were still eating, Edouard Dumont and Emmanuel Champagne arrive and make it known that an enemy troop is advancing toward Batoche by way of the Qu'Appelle road. They discuss what they should do and decide that Riel will go back to Batoche with half the men, that is, about 150; he takes those who are better armed. In the end, what they thought to be an enemy army turned out to be nothing more than a band of horses. There were already about forty men at Batoche.

The remaining men continue past the coulee to Angus McIntosh's then turn back so as to reach the coulee by daylight.

The Metis troops, at the outbreak of the attack, were all positioned in the cove of the coulee, some in a little bluff to the right (the Sioux); and others alongside a little creek. Little by little Gabriel Dumont, while skirmishing, signaled his small troop to move toward the west; the majority, including most of the Indians, followed him. But those who were in the bluff and had to face the enemy on two fronts did not realize their precarious position. They were being left alone on the battlefield while the larger part of their forces was retreating toward Batoche with Riel.

Around six o'clock, the English decide to abandon the fight and try to pick up their dead. To distract the Metis, and also in an attempt to frighten them during this maneuver, they fire their cannon on the house of the widow Tourond. The house is soon demolished. The Metis, although they sometimes aimed at close range where the bravest among them had fallen, allowed the English to pick up their dead. Only one Englishman was killed by an Indian during this activity. He was the last one to be killed on that day.

While this was going on, a gunshot was heard coming from somewhere near Pierre Tourond's house. The Metis were precisely in the midst of wondering how they would manage to get out of there come nightfall, without being blown to pieces when they heard Peter Hourie shout: "Here are your people who have come to rescue you." And so it was. A short while later the profile of riders appeared on the north side of the coulee near the house of the widow Tourond. Like a whirlwind, they came straight down the steep slope and reached their people who shouted out cries of joy. Already, the English, having been put to flight by the arrival of the enemy's reinforcement without even taking one shot at them as they were coming down the slope in full sight, were retreating in confusion.

Then the Metis gather up their dead, and before leaving, one of them said: "We must make a count to see how many of us were here all day." There were, including the ones killed and wounded, exactly 45 Metis fighting men. Some of them were: Francois Tourond, Pierre Tourond, Jean Caron Sr., Jean Caron Jr., Charles Thomas, Charles Carrière, Joseph Delorme, Charles Trottier, Isidore Dumas, Philippe Gariépy, James Short, Baptiste Vermette, Gilbert Breland, Maxime Lepine and Louis Ross.

At the outbreak of the battle, the English were shooting at the Metis' horses, which were tied to small poplars situated at the northern tip of the bluff.

The Metis had shot quite a bit, although only in the morning. The Caron's had hardly 20 bullets each. In the evening they rationed their shots. They said

that for the most part the others did not have any more bullets than they did. Nevertheless, they had a few left over at the end. A few of the Metis did pick up some guns and bullets belonging to some of the English who had been shot nearby. It was a stupendous and marvelous feat that the Metis held off an enemy armed with war rifles and canons, while armed with shot-guns with percussion caps, some even equipped with flints, and only three or four carbines.<sup>3</sup>

Jean Caron gives the following report of those killed and wounded during the battle at Tourond's Coulee:

Around noon, while they were smoking, a Metis bearing an Indian name,<sup>4</sup> was hit in the head so that the blood just poured out. Nevertheless, he did not die right away. He was brought back to Batoche in a wagon; all the way he uttered heart-rending screams. He died but only after arriving in Batoche.

Charles Thomas, having been wounded, remained in a little creek all day, hidden by a thicket of shrubs with only his head above water.

Old Vermette who had remained near the horses was wounded there. Jean Caron Jr. did not notice him before the afternoon when he was still alive.<sup>5</sup>

Caron makes these comments on the fighting at Batoche:

Batoche's house was taken at three o'clock. The Tourond's were killed at the same time. Their father was with them.

Jobin's upper thigh was pierced by a bullet. Caron helps him to get under the cover of a cluster of uprooted willows. He tells him:

"You are safe here as you can speak English; they won't finish you off."

The English took him to the hospital in Saskatoon where he died.

It was also then that Joseph Delorme was wounded between the legs. Jim Short carried him on his shoulders to the open prairie without getting hit. Jim Short's courage was praised very highly.

The Carons left St. Norbert, Manitoba for the West in 1872, first settling at St. Laurent de Grandin and then at Batoche, SK in 1881. Although Caron first made entry for river lot 52 in 1884, he only obtained patent in 1903, almost 20 years later. The family remained on the land until the 1970s when the property was incorporated into Batoche National Historic Site.

Marguerite Caron née Dumas was a heroine of the 1885 Resistance.

Marguerite was born on November 22, 1843 at St. Vital, the daughter of Michel Dumas Sr. and Henrietta Landry. Her brother Michel Jr. was one of the men who travelled to Montana to get Louis Riel. Marguerite married to Jean Caron Sr. at St. Boniface on February 5, 1861. They had ten children. Both her husband and sons Jean Jr.,

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<sup>3</sup> SHM, pp. 15-21.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Desjarlais

<sup>5</sup> SHM, p. 23.

Theophile, and Patrice were involved in the Resistance.

Marguerite recalls the battle of Duck Lake:

“When the shooting started,” said Mrs. Caron, “I had just begun to wash my floor; I continued, although I was quite worried because my husband was over there; it was all over before I had half the floor washed.”<sup>6</sup>

It was Marguerite Caron who motivated the men at Batoche to go and rescue the Métis men who were surrounded and out of ammunition at Tourond’s Coulee.

During the battle at the coulee, Jean Caron’s wife wasn’t at the camp near Batoche, but she had stayed at Pierriche Parenteau’s home. Caron’s wife had heard the shooting like the others. Her husband and her sons were at the coulee. She came to the houses to get the news, and when they arrived ‘How come you are here?’ She asks of Riel. ‘Do you have news?’ – ‘No news- Are you going to get some?—They aren’t all dead since we can hear them firing. Aren’t you going to see!’ Another soldier arrived, Maxime Poitras—‘Where are your people? Are they coming? Oh no! They are surrounded like that in the coulee (making a circle with her thumb and index finger) ‘What are you picking up here?—Ammunition?’ She said to Riel: ‘Why aren’t you going to see? Who will bring them ammunition? Not just one young man. What are you all doing here?— A gang who passes their time looking around. Go find them. You would do better to go yelling on the other side—you would get strength.’ Riel said— ‘Do not get angry without reason; you would do better to pray for them—go up to the chapel and pray.’ She answered: ‘I don’t want to pray the way I am now, I’m too angry.’ The people from the Council were there—she said to them, ‘Get dressed to go help them. You were more ready to charge ahead and loot stores than going to help our people that are in risk there. If you don’t want to go, tell me, I will go to see if they are alive, yes or no.’

Jean Dumont’s wife (Domitilde Gravelle) offered her wagon to Jean Caron’s wife and also offered to accompany her.

Old Pierre Parenteau said: ‘Go home—I will go see, me.’ ... and many went to the rescue of those surrounded in the coulee.<sup>7</sup>

The Council minutes of April 27, 1885 show a motion that “Madame Caron be rewarded and receive a yearly salary for her services and cooking, and that the sum be \$28.” (Carried unanimously)

After the battle of Duck Lake, Marguerite kills their seven dogs to maintain absolute silence. Prior to the battle of Batoche, the family left their house after the Sunday Mass which preceded the battle. The priests told Marguerite to leave the holy pictures on the walls to protect the house.

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<sup>6</sup> SHM, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Journal of Abbé Cloutier typescript , Vol. 2, p. 21, translation by Rose-Marie Carey, Parks Canada, Batoche Historic Site.

“Alas!” said Marguerite, “When I went home, I found nothing but a basement with only scraps of iron and stoves broken to pieces lying in it.”<sup>8</sup>

Wiebe and Beal give the following account of Marguerite’s assertiveness.

During the battle and even several days later, the women would change places constantly so as to avoid the fire of the enemy. They would hide behind trees or in damp holes.

A few days after the surrender of Batoche, Jean Caron and his family were at Azarie Garneau’s in Bellevue just east of Batoche. As an English column passes through, Mrs. Caron recognizes one of her best mares, which had been left some distance away, is now ridden by a medical officer. She goes straight up to the horse, unsaddles it and seizes it. The English, dumbfounded, do nothing.<sup>9</sup>



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<sup>8</sup> Fonds société historique métisse. Boite 1346, chemise 066: 35.

<sup>9</sup> Wieb and Beal, 1985: 132.