

## **Batoche: Economy and Society**

From its founding in the 1870s until its eventual demise in the 1920s, the village of Batoche had a middleclass (or bourgeoisie) and a working class. There were also Francophones such as Philippe Garnot who had influential positions in society. However, despite there being a division between the classes and between Métis and the Francophones, the Batoche Métis were democratic and respected the opinion of all community members. Batoche's leadership included businessmen, teachers and various holders of public office or government employees. Nevertheless, most Batoche-area Métis were labourers or farmers, who managed to incorporate wage labour and seasonal farming into their traditional seasonal cycles.

At the time of the 1885 Resistance, the following Métis businessmen dominated Batoche's economy: Xavier Letendre, Salomon Venne, Georges Fisher, Baptiste Boyer, and Emmanuel Champagne. Letendre and Venne had stores at Batoche, where they hired local traders, interpreters, freighting crews, store clerks, farm labourers, and cowboys. Cousins, Baptiste and William Boyer, first settled in Fort Qu'Appelle, and then later opened stores at Batoche, St. Laurent and Green Lake. Georges Fisher and his brothers, Michel and Joseph of Fort Qu'Appelle, were members of an old Red River trading family. Some of these Métis businessmen also held important community positions. For instance, Fisher and Venne acted as Justices of the Peace and postmasters, and sat on the parish council, while Letendre was the president of the school board and served on committees.

Politicians in the community included Charles Nolin, Maxime Lépine, and Louis Schmidt in the 1880s, and then Charles-Eugène Boucher and Charles Fisher at the turn of the twentieth century. These men held government positions, directing local public works. Some of the teachers in the Batoche region included: Octave Régnier (St. Louis), Jean Letendre (Fish Creek), Philippe Garnot (Gabriel's Crossing) and Mme Dorval (Batoche).

After the 1885 Resistance, the Batoche-area Métis underwent the same changes that occurred throughout the larger Prairie society. Euro-Canadian law and an agricultural economy became permanent fixtures. The North-West Mounted Police established a detachment in the 1890s and tried to become part of the community when Sergeant St. Denis and Inspector Bégin married local women. The police also hired the local Métis as guides, interpreters, carpenters, and general labourers, and a few were recruited as constables. By the start of the twentieth century, most Batoche-area Métis were traditional labourers; however, they were increasingly becoming employed in the agricultural sector. Between 1886 and 1925, 63% of the Batoche-area Métis listed farming or farm labour as their primary job, while those who had been hunters in the 1870s trapped, fished, and cut cordwood.

### **Reference:**

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### **Further Readings:**

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