

THE LAROCQUE–MARCHAND FAMILY AND THEIR ROLE IN THE MÉTIS STORY

Reconstructing Five Generations of Silence

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ABSTRACT

This historical manuscript reconstructs the lives, political involvement, landholdings, and intergenerational experiences of the Larocque and Marchand families of Red River and the North West. Drawing on archival documents, petitions, census records, land maps, scrip affidavits, oral histories, and Métis community memory, it reveals the deeply rooted relationship between these families and the world that shaped Louis Riel and the Métis Nation.

For over five generations, silence and fear obscured this history. This work restores it.

Author's Note:



Patrick Stewart is a Métis researcher and citizen of the Métis Nation of Alberta. His work focuses on Red River genealogy, Métis political history, and the intergenerational effects of suppression following the Riel era. This document represents three years of research into his direct ancestral line.

Taanishi (Hello)

My name is Patrick Stewart. I was born on July 1, 1983, and I am a citizen of the Métis Nation within Alberta. I was raised in Edmonton, where I built my life, my work, and my identity long before I understood how deeply my family's history was tied to the story of this land. For most of my life, I knew almost nothing about where we came from. I grew up hearing fragments, hints, and quiet remarks that never made sense until much later. Like many Métis families, ours carried a silence that stretched across generations. Elders were told not to speak about who they were. Children grew up being told they were not Métis. Entire branches of families disconnected from their own past because speaking the truth once meant danger, or perhaps worse.

It was not until I began researching my ancestry that I finally understood why that silence existed, and how much had been buried because of it. For nearly three years, I devoted myself to uncovering this history. Day after day, I searched archives, studied land records, followed scrip documents, read letters, compared maps, and pieced together fragments scattered across more than a century. I spent countless hours learning what should have been passed down naturally through the generations.

Generations of silence shaped my family's story. Five generations ago that silence began. What happened to Riel, and what happened to families like mine, created a fear so deep that our identity was pushed underground. That silence lasted until now, and this work is my effort to break it.

This article is dedicated to the Larocque family, the Marchand family, their descendants, and the broader Métis community. My hope is that it becomes a foundation for other researchers, future family members, or anyone trying to reconnect with where they come from. Everything I have learned so far has been fulfilling and eye-opening. It has given me a new understanding of what happened to Riel, what happened to families like mine, and why so many Métis people had to go underground afterward.

Through research, education, and the willingness to confront our own history, we can undo the stigmatization placed on our people. We cannot undo the trauma that took root in our families, but we can make sure this never happens again. If someone has never learned about Louis Riel, the Métis people, or the Resistance, my hope is that they begin here and then go further. Read the books. Study the land. Learn the names that were almost forgotten.

I want to thank the people who helped guide this work: Professor Derrick M. Nault, the Government of Manitoba archives staff, the Gabriel Dumont Institute, researchers such as Charles Barkwell, Gail Morin, and Nadine Martin, as well as the Métis research groups online whose members shared their knowledge, stories, and oral history. My Métis grandmother, now 93 years old, still says, "Louis Riel... he was our family. He lived with the family." And then,

almost in a whisper, she adds, “They killed him.” That sentence, spoken softly after nearly a century of living, carries the full weight of what was lost and what was hidden. My grandmother planted that seed and that seed grew into a forest of knowledge.

This is where my family’s story begins, before Louis Riel was born.

RED RIVER SETTLEMENT

The Red River Settlement, founded in the early 1800s, had grown into a multicultural community of Métis, First Nations, Scottish settlers, retired Hudson’s Bay Company employees, and French-Canadian families. By the 1840s, when the Larocque and Marchand families were already established on their river lots, Red River had become the political and cultural heart of the Métis Nation. Its river-lot system, with long narrow properties stretching toward the Red, Assiniboine, and Seine Rivers, created neighbourhoods where families lived side by side for generations. Into this world was born Louis Riel (1844).

Louis Riel was the political and spiritual leader of the Métis Nation and one of the most influential figures in the creation of Western Canada. He led the Red River Resistance in 1869–70 after the Canadian government attempted to take control of Red River without consulting the Métis who lived there. Riel formed a provisional government, negotiated directly with Ottawa, and secured the terms that created the Province of Manitoba. His leadership protected Métis land, language, culture, and civil rights at a moment when all of them were at risk.

He became a national figure because he insisted that Métis people held the same political rights as any other citizens. When the federal government failed to honour the promises made in 1870, tensions rose again, leading to the North West Resistance of 1885. Riel returned from exile in the United States to defend his people once more. After the conflict, he was arrested, tried, and executed for treason, a decision still regarded as one of the greatest injustices in Canadian history. Today he is remembered as a visionary leader who fought for justice, self-determination, and the survival of his Nation.

Riel did not emerge from nowhere. His political foundation was set long before he was born in 1844. His father, Louis Riel Sr., was a respected Métis leader at Red River, a farmer, mill owner, buffalo hunter, and community organizer who helped defend river-lot boundaries and Métis land rights in the 1840s and 1850s. Riel Sr. famously resisted early Canadian survey attempts and opposed land speculators such as William McDougall. He worked closely with other community leaders, including Jean Baptiste Lépine and the father of Ambroise Lépine, helping to build a strong culture of political awareness and collective action.

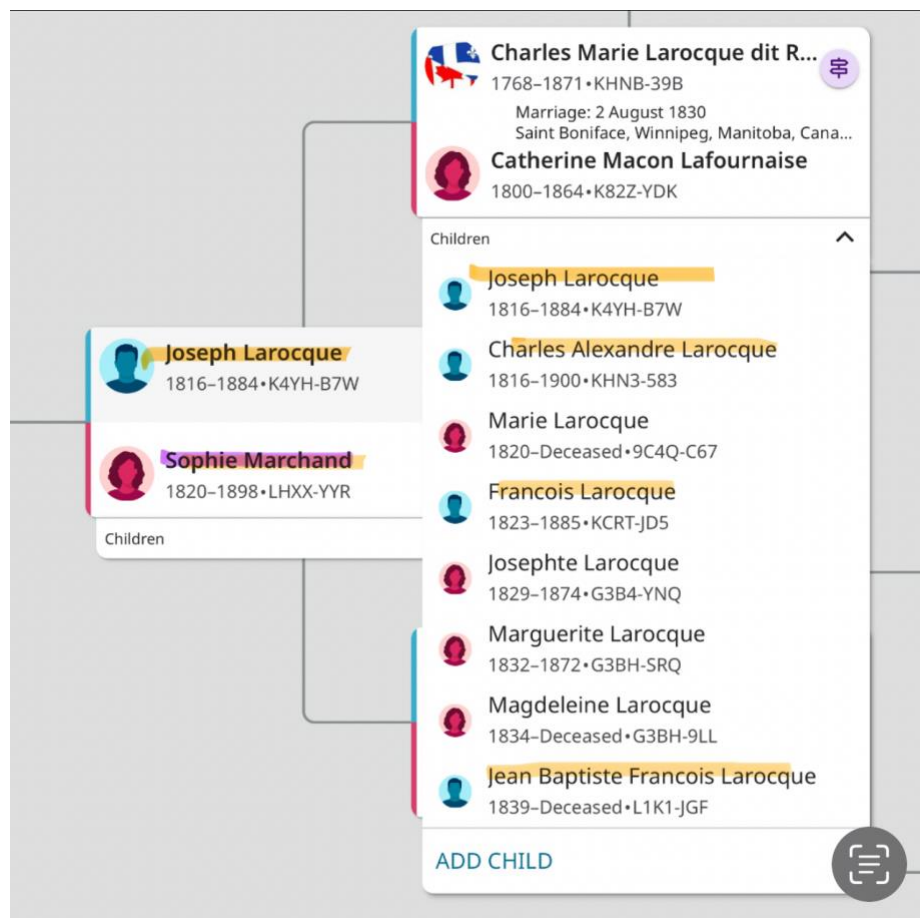
Louis Riel grew up watching his father confront colonial authority and defend his community. The values he learned at home, protection of the land, pride in Métis identity, and responsibility to one’s people, became the foundation of his own political life. In many ways, Riel’s leadership was a continuation of his father’s work, carried into a new generation under far greater pressure.

But the story does not begin with the Riel family alone.

Before Louis Riel could lead a nation, an older generation had already shaped the ground he walked on. These were the families whose river lots bordered his own, who raised their children beside him, who stood against the surveyors in the earliest days of the 1869 crisis, and who later sheltered him, defended him, and followed him into exile. Among them was the family whose story this article tells.

This story examines the union of Joseph Larocque and Sophie Marchand, my grandparents five generations up the family tree. A family tree is attached for reference. Sophie's parents and siblings are highlighted in **purple** (the Marchand family), and Joseph's parents and siblings are highlighted in **yellow** (the Larocque family). The focus is on these highlighted individuals and their roles in the Resistance and their wider community.

The children of Joseph and Sophie are not included, as their lives became largely quiet after the Resistance, with only limited later references.





Charles Marie Larocque dit R...

1768-1871 • KHNB-39B

Marriage: 2 August 1830

Saint Boniface, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Cana...



Catherine Macon Lafournaise

1800-1864 • K82Z-YDK

Children



Joseph Larocque

1816-1884 • K4YH-B7W



Sophie Marchand

1820-1898 • LHXX-YYR



Children



Benjamin Marchand

1783-1868 • GM5L-B2C

Marriage: 1811



Marguerite Anne Nadeau

1789-1899 • LQRK-T3X



Children



Marguerite Marchand

1815-Deceased • LWFC-FQS



Julie Marchand

1815-1898 • L7LG-HJK



Sophie Marchand

1820-1898 • LHXX-YYR



Benjamin Marchand Jr.

1822-1890 • LHXX-BMT



Cyrille Marchand

1826-1907 • 2NQS-4MN



Marie Marchand

1832-1930 • L2HH-LW7



Guillaume Marchand

1833-Deceased • L2HH-LNS



Catherine Marchand

1835-Deceased • L2HH-LL5



Goodwin Marchand

1838-1904 • KHQ3-KNH



Felix Marchand

1840-Deceased • K8LC-VHQ

CHARLES MARIE LAROCQUE SR. (BORN 1768) JOSEPH'S FATHER

The story of my family in Red River begins with Charles Larocque Sr. He is the man whose children would later stand at the centre of their community, each in their own way playing a part in the world that shaped Louis Riel, the Resistance, and the future of the Métis Nation. Charles Senior was the foundation. Everything that follows traces back to him, to the land he lived on, the family he raised, and the place he occupied in the early Red River settlement.

Very little was written about Charles Senior in the public record, which is the case for many Métis men of his time. They worked, raised families, hunted, traded, fished, freighted, and built the community long before historians thought to record Métis lives. But what we do know is that he lived in the heart of the old settlement, connected through marriage, kinship, and land to the network of families that became the backbone of the Métis Nation. His children were raised in the centre of this world. They grew up beside the Marchands, the Naults, the Lépinses, the Sansregrets, the Delormes, and the Riels.

From Charles Senior came four sons whose names appear again and again in surviving records: Joseph, Charles Jr., François, and Jean Baptiste. These were the men who placed themselves in situations that shaped their community's future. Each lived through moments that demanded courage, loyalty, and resilience. Each carried a role that connected them directly or indirectly to Louis Riel and the shifting political currents of Red River.

The Larocque children grew up in a world where family ties meant survival. They were raised in a community that relied on one another, where neighbours were more than neighbours. The land around them formed a web of relationships. Families lived on adjoining river lots, shared food, shared labour, and shared responsibility. Marriage and kinship were political forces. Your relatives, your in-laws, your godparents, and your neighbours shaped the alliances that later allowed Riel to do what he did.

What makes Charles Senior so important is not only that he fathered the men who became part of this broader history, but that through him, his family line was placed directly inside the geography of Red River where everything unfolded. His children were born and raised in the centre of the settlement. They came of age on the same paths Riel walked. They lived in the same cluster of river lots that connected the Marchands, the Riels, the Lépinses, and the Larocques. These geographical details matter because proximity was often the difference between being a spectator and being part of the story.

From this small piece of ground grew a family that would one day shelter Riel, support him financially, participate in the struggles around him, and later suffer the consequences of standing too close. The choices of Charles Senior's children would shape not only their own lives, but the future of their descendants, including mine.

BENJAMIN MARCHAND SR. (1783-1868) SOPHIE'S FATHER

Benjamin Marchand was born in Quebec in the late eighteenth century and entered service with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1815. He worked as a voyageur in the western interior, including postings at Isle-à-la-Crosse and within the Athabasca District, both key regions in the northern fur trade. His period of service overlaps with the final years of competition between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, and he may have worked for the latter prior to the merger.

After completing his contract, Marchand became a freeman at Red River. No longer employed by the Company, he settled independently, acquired several river lots, and established himself as a landholder within the growing settlement. These holdings indicate long-term residence and participation in the early agricultural community.

Marchand married a Métis woman and raised his family within the Red River community. While surviving records offer limited personal detail, census entries and land records place him among the early settlers whose lives bridged the fur-trade era and the permanent colony that followed.

Sophie's father passed away in 1868 in the Red River settlement, one year before the Resistance began in 1869, and never saw what unfolded. Perhaps it was a mercy because what followed was the Reign of Terror. If you don't know what the Reign of Terror is, it was a deeply sensitive and painful time in our history. It must be talked about. It was a period marked by murder, assaults, and violent intimidation against the Métis community, something hard to learn, but essential to understand, and something that drove many families like mine into silence for over 100 years.

"My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back." — **Louis Riel**

The story now shifts to Joseph Larocque, the eldest of the Larocque brothers, and his wife, Sophie Marchand.

JOSEPH LAROCQUE (1816-1884) SOPHIE MARCHAND (1820-1898)

Joseph Larocque (1816–1884) was born at Ste. Agathe in the Red River Settlement. He is the first clearly traceable ancestor on my direct line and my grandfather several generations back from whom my branch of the Larocque family descends.

He married my grandmother several generations back, Sophie Marchand (1820–1898), who was born at St. Boniface. Their marriage placed them directly inside the heart of the St. Boniface Métis community, surrounded by the families who shaped the political and social life of the region.

Joseph and Sophie's first son was born in 1844, the same year Louis Riel was born. Their homes, church, fields, and daily routines were all within walking distance of one another. This is the land they lived on and the world they shared. They were neighbours. They were family.

Life in the Red River Settlement was shaped by water, land, and the tight network of families who lived along the river lots. To the east ran the Seine River, and to the west flowed the Assiniboine as it joined the Red, forming the centre of Métis trade, travel, and parish life. Along these riverbanks stretched long, narrow lots where families like the Larocques, Marchands, Riels, and Lépins lived side by side. Many lots held more than one dwelling or shared buildings where extended families worked and raised their children together. The St. Boniface Cathedral, the mission grounds, the trails leading toward Upper Fort Garry, and the small cluster of shops and workshops formed the heart of daily life. Beyond the riverbanks lay the open prairie where hay fields, gardens, and buffalo traces reached toward the horizon. Everything moved by water or by the river trails; the Red, Assiniboine, and Seine carried canoes, York boats, and freight, while the cart paths beside them carried the Red River carts that linked the settlement together. These waterways and trails kept the Métis community connected, supplied, and thriving, forming the living arteries of a world that shaped Joseph, Sophie, and those who grew up beside them.

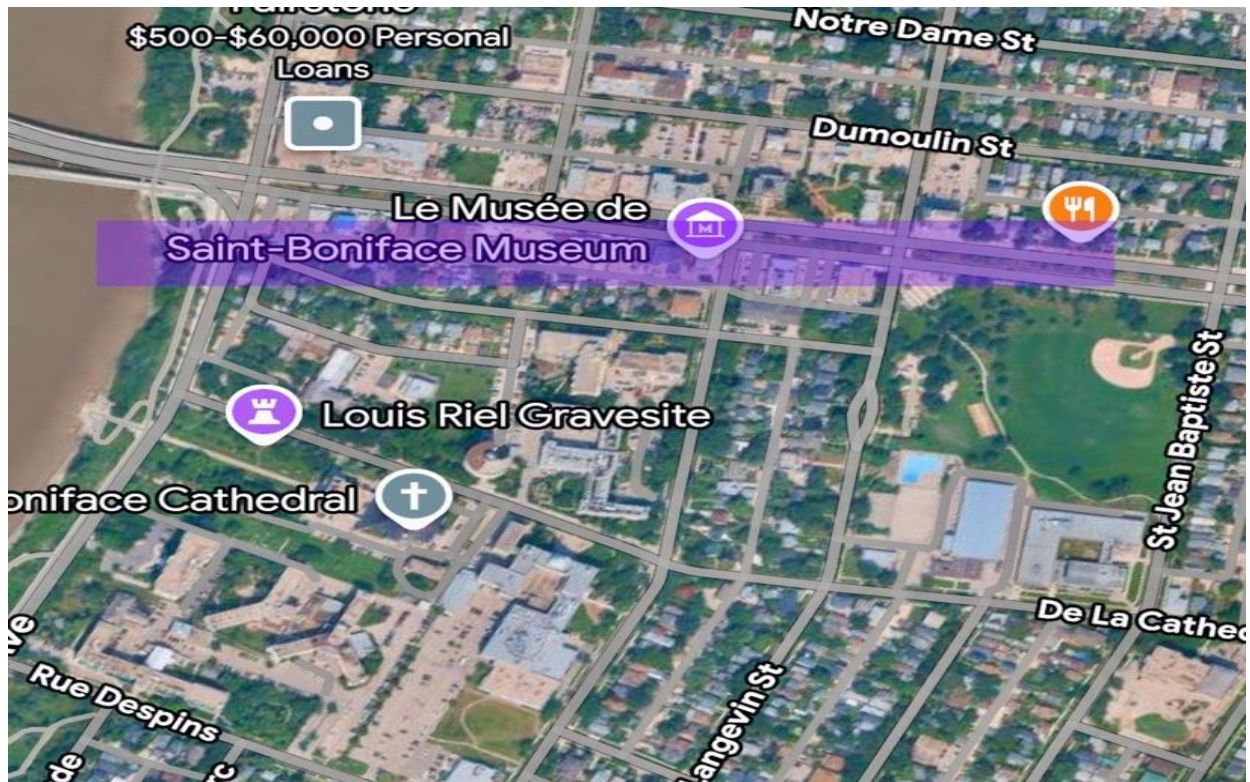
The centre of this settlement life was defined by two landmarks facing each other across the Red River: Upper Fort Garry on the west bank, and the St. Boniface Church on the east bank, where Louis Riel rests today. The joining of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers created the crossroads of the entire region, a place where trade, worship, council, and community all converged. This crossing linked the daily worlds of all the families and formed the spiritual and political centre of the Métis Nation, the place where the community's identity was shaped long before Riel emerged as a leader.

WHERE THEY LIVED

To understand why the Larocques later stood so closely with Riel, it is important to understand the land itself. These neighbouring lots created a tight circle of families who knew each other's voices, shared meals, traded work, and watched their children grow side by side. This was not a scattered settlement, but a network of households bound together by kinship, faith, and daily necessity. From this ground grew the loyalties and relationships that would later shape the events of the Red River Resistance. Joseph and Sophie and their families were at the centre of that world.

LOT 699 (Purple) MARCHAND

Owned by Sophie's father Benjamin Marchand (1783-1868), Lot 699 sat two lots north of the St. Boniface Cathedral (Lot 701), Louis Riel's gravesite, and lies beside what is now the St. Boniface Museum. This was the northern anchor of the family's land and placed the Marchands at the centre of parish life.

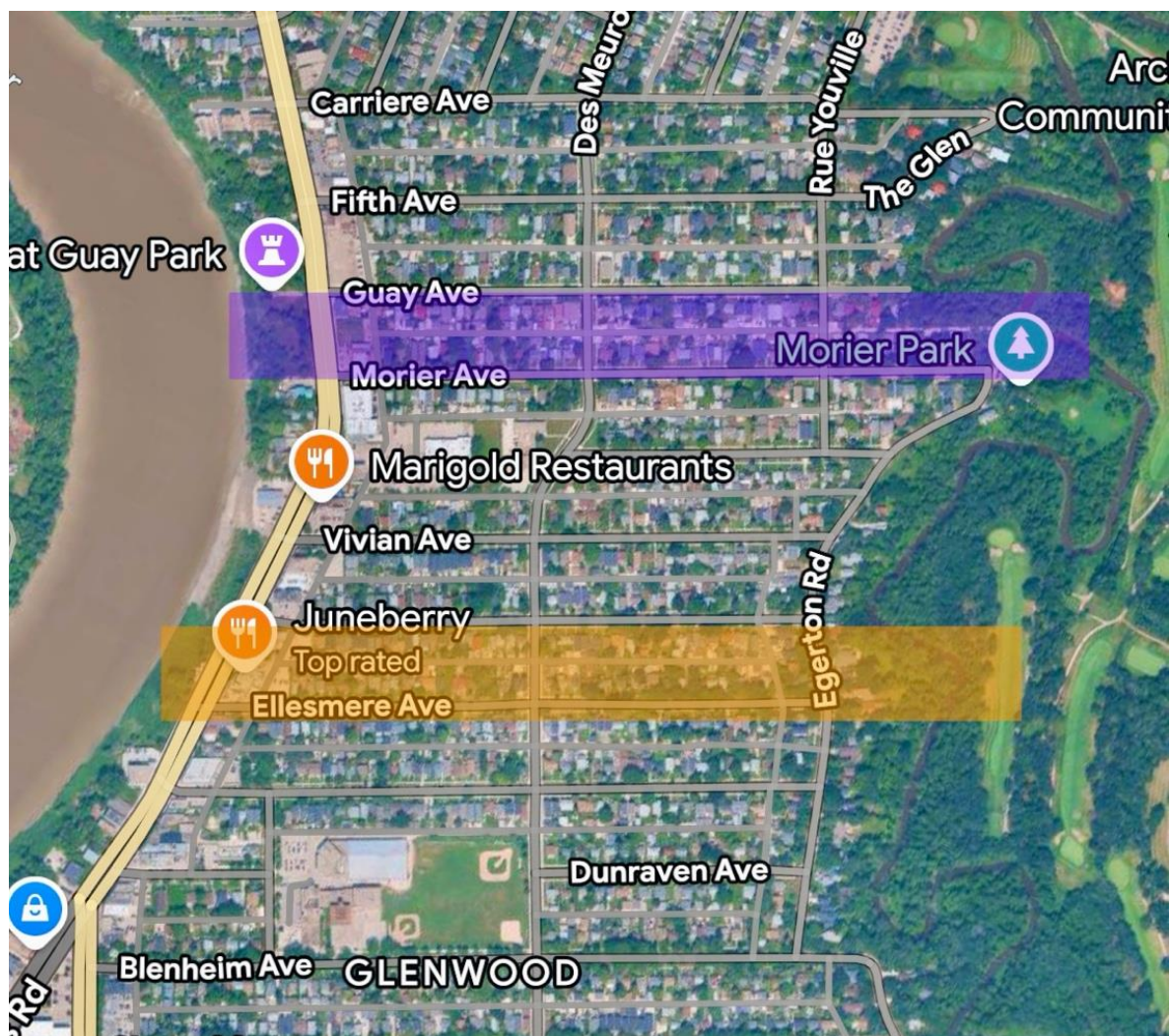


LOT 756 (Purple) RIEL – LÉPINE

South of Lot 699 was Lot 756, the land of Louis Riel's father and Ambroise Lépine's father. Today this aligns with the Guay Avenue and Morier Avenue area along the Red River and extends toward the Seine River.

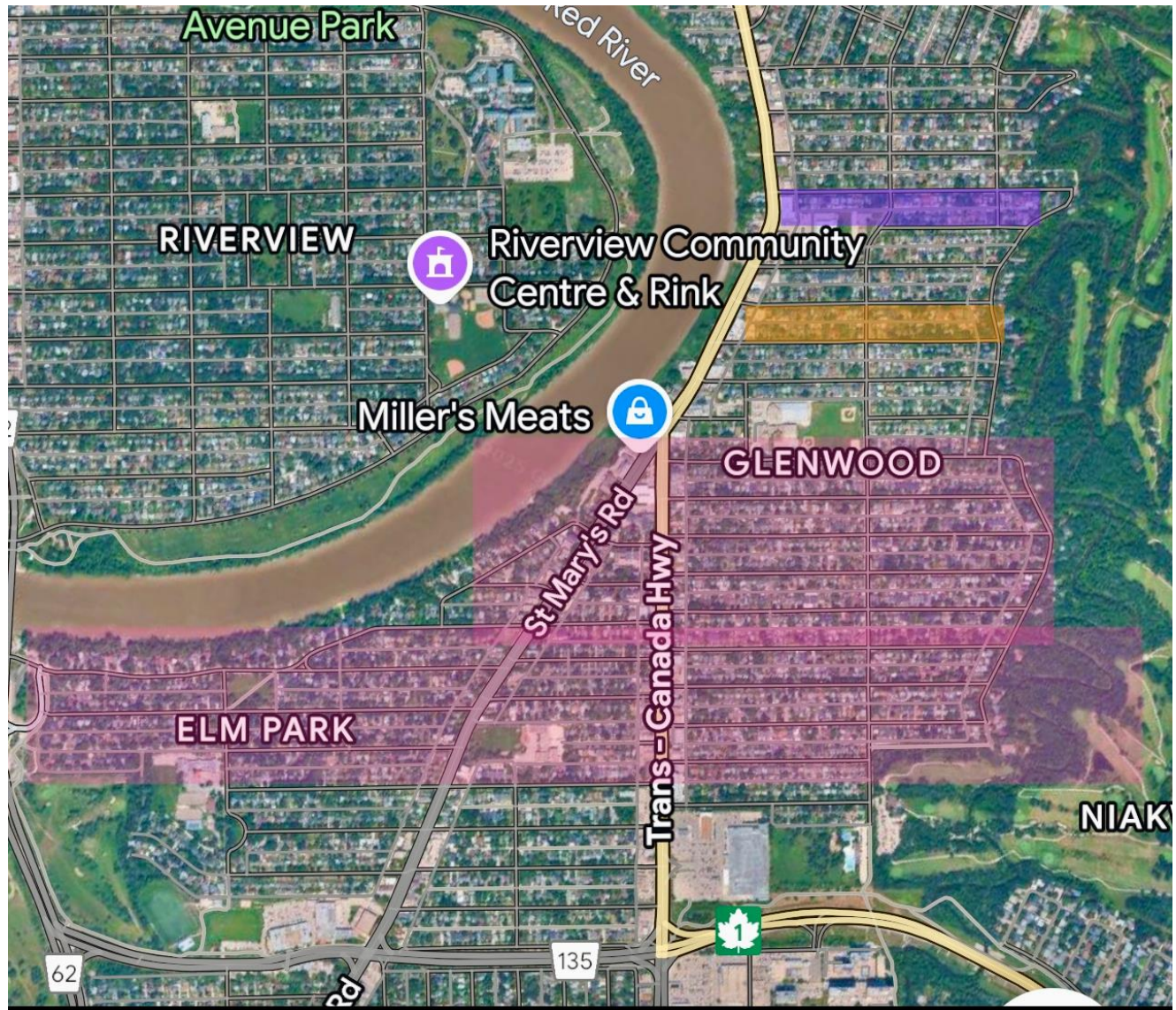
LOT 760 (Orange) LAROCQUE

South of Lot 756 was Lot 760, the main homestead of Joseph Larocque and Sophie Marchand. This lot aligns with the Essex and Ellesmere area and runs from the Red River across to the Seine River. Records show it was also held by Sophie's father, possibly at the same time.

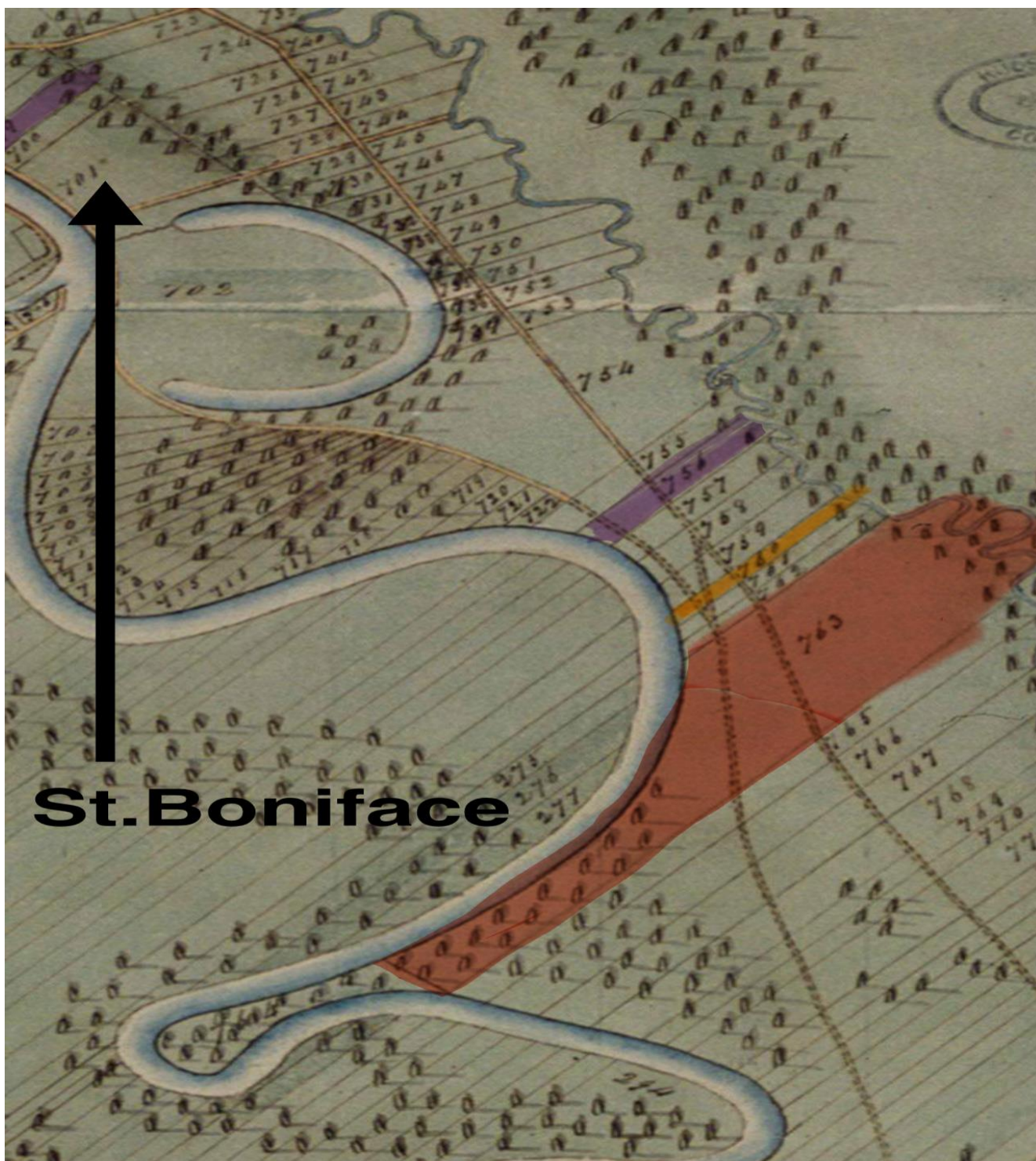


LOT 763 (Pink) LAROCQUE

Further south was Lot 763, also held by Joseph. Based on the historical maps, Lot 763 would be roughly equivalent to about two hundred modern acres. In modern terms it covers the Glenwood and Elm Park area along the Red River, stretching across to the Seine River. This would have been one of the largest river lots in the area.



The **pink** highlight represents the large farming tract held by the Larocques. The **orange** highlight shows their smaller parcel, while the **purple** area above shows the Riel and Lépine holdings for comparison. These highlighted areas are approximate, based on close estimates from the original historical map snippets below.



The river lots show where the Larocque and Marchand families were rooted in the heart of Red River.

The distance between Joseph's home on Lot 760 and the Riel and Lépine family lot on Lot 756 was less than one thousand feet, roughly the length of three soccer fields placed end to end. Families living that close could easily hear each other's dinner bells and smell the scent of buffalo stew, bannock, and smoked fish drifting across the river lots.

Given that Joseph's first son and Louis Riel were born in the same year and grew up only a few hundred feet apart, it is almost certain they shared the same parish life. Children in St. Boniface were baptized in the same church, attended the same catechism gatherings, celebrated the same feast days, and took part in the same Métis community events. Boys born in the same year on neighbouring river lots would have moved through those early life stages side by side.

Joseph would have watched Riel grow from a young child into a young man. The closeness of their families and the land they lived on created a connection that felt almost familial, and the actions taken by Joseph and his brothers in the years to come reflect that closeness. So, when the settlement entered a period of uncertainty and conflict, the Larocques and Marchands were already positioned inside the very network that would support Riel's leadership. Their involvement became clear in the years leading up to the Red River Resistance.

THE LAROCQUE AND MARCHAND INVOLVEMENT IN THE RESISTANCE

By the late 1860s and into the 1870s, the Larocque and Marchand families were operating inside the same community network that supported Louis Riel during the political struggles in Red River. Their roles were practical and grounded in the everyday work of Métis families.

Joseph Larocque (1816–1884) was known as a blacksmith, farmer, and buggy maker. These occupations carried influence because ironwork, wagons, sleighs, and repairs were essential for farm operations, freight transport, hunting trips, and militia movement. A blacksmith shop was not only a workplace; it was a gathering point where information travelled between households. Joseph's position placed him naturally inside community discussions as tensions rose. Joseph also changed his name at some point during the Resistance to Joseph Laroche, according to United States census records.

Sophie Marchand Larocque (1820–1898)

Not much is recorded about Sophie in the written archives, but her role was unmistakable. She was the centre of the household, the one who kept the family together and the home running through years of change, uncertainty, and movement. Métis women like Sophie were the core of daily life on the river lots. They cooked, gardened, preserved food, hauled water, tended fires, and sewed the clothing that carried their families through each season. They cared for children and elders, maintained the household economy, and kept strong ties with neighbouring families. While Joseph worked as a blacksmith and provider, Sophie held the heart of the family.

Her wider Marchand relatives appear frequently in the records of the period and played meaningful roles in the community that supported Riel during the Resistance, just as many Métis families did.

The Marchand family did not stand on the sidelines of history. Sophie's family became part of the same community network that supported Riel during the years of growing tension. The earliest of these connections begins with her brother, Benjamin Marchand Jr.

BENJAMIN MARCHAND JR. (1834–1903)

Benjamin held and operated a few of the Marchand family lands in St. Vital and St. Boniface during this period. The Marchand family appears regularly in parish records, land transactions, and in the writings of Louis Riel. They were active in farming, hay supply, transport work, and seasonal labour. These activities put them in direct economic contact with many of the families who supported Riel. Today the name Marchand is associated with the name of a village, a lake, and a provincial park in Manitoba. It is uncertain who they were named after. WikiTree suggests a possible connection to the Marchand family; however, no citations or proof are provided. The same source claims the family owned a vast amount of land, more than discussed here, and donated significant portions to municipalities, the government, and the church, but no records were found to support these claims during research. From my genealogical research, I could not identify any original Marchand families other than this one among the early settlers. While this cannot be stated with absolute certainty, the available evidence suggests this family was the original Marchand family to settle in the area and form lasting unions.

Among Sophie's brothers, Benjamin stands out clearly in the historical record. His relationship with Riel is proven not by memory alone, but by Riel's own handwritten letter addressed to him in 1873.

LETTER FROM LOUIS RIEL TO BENJAMIN MARCHAND

St. Vital

20 March 1873

Benjamin Marchand, Esquire

My dear friend,

It has been a long time since I ought to have written to you, but today that I am more free, I want to send you news from me, which are better at present. Some time ago illness visited my family. I even had the sorrow of losing one of my sisters. As for myself, I was greatly affected by illness, but thanks to God I am better. And now I can once again look after my friends and public affairs.

My dear friend, we must be very careful. Because the government will deceive us if it sees that we are not paying great attention to our interests. But if the government wants us to absolutely have our rights, and if we will put before all the Canadian papers the injustices that its employees want to commit against us, then it will give us what belongs to us. Because the government does not like us to reveal in the newspapers things that the public would not approve of.

Our two miles of hay our claims taken before the transfer the government would like to take them away from us and let others take them and buy them. But we are as much as any Orangeman, and when we have rights it is for that reason that the government must give us what is just.

My dear sir, I wish for your family and for you good health and every sort of success. I thank you for what you did for me during the elections last autumn. I thanked everyone in the papers of that time. But I am also happy to thank you as often as possible and for having been with us this winter when our enemies wanted so much to break my head. Thanks to God and to my friends, I will bring our business to completion.

***Believe me, your sincere friend,
L. Riel***

This letter shows two critical facts.

First, the economic partnership between Riel and the Marchands was real, documented, and central to their relationship. Benjamin was part of the local farm, hay, and transport economy that supported many Métis households, including Riel's. The letter shows that Riel relied on him during political disputes, elections, and ongoing negotiations about Métis land rights.

Second, Riel considered Benjamin Marchand Jr. and his family trusted allies during periods of danger. When Riel was a fugitive in the Dakota Territory in 1872, he took refuge with Benjamin Marchand and Sophie. This aligns with oral history in the Larocque families, including the stories passed down to my grandmother, who always said Riel lived with our family at different points in his life. The letter supports that memory. It shows that Benjamin was not just a neighbour but someone Riel turned to for safety, support, business partnerships, and continuity during the years often referred to as the "Reign of Terror," when many Métis families lived under threat.

Taken together, the written record and the family oral history show that Benjamin's relationship with Riel was not a single event, but part of a longer pattern of trust, familiarity, and shared responsibility inside the Métis Nation.

This has no direct connection to the Resistance but is an interesting historical aside. A CBC interactive article, *Manitoba's First Outlaw*, references a fatal bar fight in 1876 involving a son (also named Ben) of Ben Marchand Jr. — you can read more here. <https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/manitobas-first-outlaw>

The Marchand family's ties to this world can be seen not only through Benjamin, but also through Sophie's other brother.

CYRILLE MARCHAND (1831-1903)

Although Cyrille Marchand did not play a documented role in the Resistance, his river lots reveal the landscape the Marchand family lived inside. Where a family's land sat along the river often determined its social world, its neighbours, and the political circles it naturally became part of. Cyrille's properties placed the Marchands directly beside some of Riel's most trusted allies,

showing how deeply the family was situated inside the parish network that shaped the early Resistance.

Cyrille Marchand (1831–1903) held multiple river lots in the St. Vital region, including Lot 52 and Lot 185. These placements put the Marchand family directly beside some of the most influential Métis political figures of the Red River era.

Cyrille's Lot 52 sat immediately beside Lot 53, the property of Pierre Delorme (1832–1912).

Delorme (Photo below shows him standing with Louis Riel and Charles Larocque) was one of the most influential Métis leaders of his generation. During the 1869–70 Red River Resistance, he served as a senior advisor to Louis Riel, helping shape the decisions of the provisional government at a critical moment. He later became one of the negotiators of the Manitoba Act, working directly on the terms that brought Manitoba into Confederation while protecting Métis rights. His leadership did not end there: after the Resistance he continued serving his community as the Member of Parliament for Provencher and later as Minister of Agriculture. Living beside a man of this stature placed the Marchand family inside the same political and social world that surrounded Riel's earliest supporters.

Because Cyrille and Delorme's lots touched, their families lived side by side. In the river lot system, neighbours were not separated by streets or modern distances. They worked together, traded together, and lived within close walking distance. Their proximity placed the Marchands inside the same political and social circle as one of Riel's key advisors.

This lot is located today on Marchand Rd. and Red River Drive, just east of Selkirk Highway, Ritchot, Manitoba.

Cyrille also held Lot 185, which bordered Lot 186, owned by Louis Sansregret (1825–1905). Sansregret was a respected St. Vital community member involved in parish affairs, local militia (1871) organization, and Métis civic life.

By holding land next to Sansregret, the Marchand family lived among households deeply embedded in the political developments leading up to the Resistance. Their daily world was shaped by the same networks, tensions, and responsibilities that surrounded Riel's closest allies. And while Cyrille's role was defined mostly by proximity, another of Sophie's brothers appears directly in the historical record.

GOODWIN MARCHAND'S ROLE

Goodwin Marchand was born in 1828 and died in 1885. He was the brother of Sophie Marchand and Benjamin Marchand Jr. and appears in surviving accounts as one of the men charged in connection with supplying guns during the period surrounding the 1885 Resistance.

The information that survives is brief, but it is enough to show that Goodwin was pulled into the same political pressure that surrounded the rest of the Marchand and Larocque families. His brothers were tied into Riel's world through land, economics, and long-standing relationships. Goodwin's appearance in the records demonstrates that multiple members of the Marchand family were involved in different ways during the unrest.

Goodwin's record, though brief, shows that even those Marchand brothers who left only a small paper trail were still swept into the political tensions surrounding their community. And decades later, long after the Resistance had ended, the next generation of Marchands would publicly affirm the family's long-standing connection to Riel.

1925 PHOTOGRAPH

A surviving newspaper photograph dated July 6, 1925, shows Simon Marchand and Joseph Marchand, sons of Cyrille Marchand, seated among a group of respected Red River elders who publicly stated they had known Louis Riel. This serves as continued evidence that Cyrille's sons still had direct ties to Riel, even if Cyrille himself was not involved in the Resistance. It shows how closely connected the families of St. Vital and St. Boniface remained, and how the community's relationships with Riel extended across generations.



THE SEIZURE OF CAPTAIN CAMERON

A 1978 *Winnipeg Tribune* article, which referred to a “Larocque cabin” involved in the detention of a Canadian officer during the opening days of the 1869 uprising.

On December 3, 1869, Louis Riel’s men intercepted Captain C. D. Cameron of the Royal Artillery. Cameron had been sent toward Fort Garry in support of William McDougall and the Canadian takeover of the territory. Before McDougall could enter the settlement, Riel issued orders to prevent Canadian officials and their agents from reaching Fort Garry.

Riel’s men seized Captain Cameron, his luggage, his papers, and all belongings. He was taken prisoner and held for a period of days until the provisional government could determine its next steps. This was part of a broader effort by Riel to prevent Canada from asserting control over the region before negotiations were complete.

The Canadian captain was captured and held inside “the Larocque cabin.” The sources do not identify which Larocque cabin was used, but based on location, timing, family proximity, and consensus, Joseph Larocque is the strongest candidate.

Joseph Larocque lived in St. Vital and St. Boniface through the most important phases of Métis political life in the 1860s and 1870s. By the mid-1870s he followed the larger migration of many Métis families into Dakota Territory.

Before leaving Red River, Joseph applied for Métis scrip. On December 13, 1875, he received scrip witnessed by:

- Benjamin Marchand Jr. (his brother-in-law), and
- Antonine Letendre Batoche, a member of the historic Batoche family.

Métis scrip was introduced by the federal government after 1870 as the mechanism to settle Métis land rights. Instead of receiving the river lots their families had lived on for generations, Métis people were issued certificates that could be exchanged for land elsewhere or for a cash payment.

The process was complicated, slow, and often confusing, and it took place during a time when Métis communities were under intense pressure. Many families found themselves displaced, separated from their home lots, or forced to start over in unfamiliar territory.

This system played a major role in pushing Métis families away from Red River and scattering communities across the Prairies and into the United States. When you follow the paper trail of scrip, you see the moment when families like mine began to disappear from the land their ancestors had built. Today historians widely view the scrip system as a tool of dispossession rather than a fair settlement.

Antonine Letendre Batoche was the cousin of Xavier Batoche, founder of Batoche, Saskatchewan, where Gabriel Dumont and Louis Riel later fought during the 1885 Resistance. His presence as a witness reinforces how deeply Joseph was tied into significant Métis kinship lines, including the Batoche and Letendre networks.

It is also noted that his first-born son in 1844, the same year as Riel was born, married a Batoche as well.

After crossing the border, the political struggle did not end. Riel and the Métis community continued organizing from the United States, and Joseph remained part of that effort. One of the clearest records of this involvement is his signature on a major petition organized by Louis Riel.

RIEL'S PETITION

The petition Joseph and his youngest brother Baptiste signed was the 1880 Musselshell River petition addressed to Brigadier-General N. A. Miles (U.S. Army). It was a Métis (Halfbreed) petition asking the U.S. authorities for help, forwarded through General Miles.

The Métis at the Musselshell were requesting protection, recognition, and assistance because they had been displaced from Canada after the 1870s conflicts and had no formal land rights or political security in the United States.

Joseph Larocque died in 1884 at the age of 68 in Leroy, Dakota Territory, his life ending far from the river lots where it began. For five generations his name drifted into shadow, forgotten by history but not by the land.

After Joseph Larocque's death in 1884 and the execution of Louis Riel in 1885, the federal government began actively monitoring Métis families who were known to have supported Riel politically, economically, or through kinship. The Marchand and Larocque households were among those watched. Government agents and scouts moved through the Dakota and Turtle Mountain regions attempting to identify former participants, suppliers, or sympathizers.

One of the most striking surviving documents from this period is the 1886 report written by Alexander McKay, a government scout. McKay had married Joseph and Sophie's daughter Virginie Larocque in 1865. His marriage placed him directly inside the Larocque–Marchand family network even as he was tasked with reporting on the political landscape of Métis communities after the Resistance.

McKay's detailed memorandum describes travelling through Pembina, St. Vincent, Turtle Mountain, and surrounding areas while seeking information. During this tour he arrived at the home of his mother-in-law, Sophie Marchand Larocque. Sophie questioned him directly about his purpose, noting his long silence and the rumours surrounding his arrival. McKay's writing reveals clear tension. Métis families feared renewed arrests, while scouts were attempting to understand loyalties, movements, and potential gathering points.

His report, submitted to Lieutenant Governor Edgar Dewdney in January 1886, is one of the only written accounts describing how government surveillance intersected with the Larocque family after the fall of Batoche. It offers a rare glimpse of Sophie's resilience, her instinctive protection of her household, and the atmosphere of suspicion surrounding Métis communities in the immediate aftermath of Riel's execution.

Sophie Marchand-Larocque passed on Christmas Eve 1898 at the age of 78 from an unknown cause. She is buried in Ritchot, Manitoba, beside her family's land on Marchand Road and Red River Drive, only steps from the river-lot country that had shaped her family for generations.

The story continues with Joseph's brother, Charles Larocque

Riel's Council 1869



Back row: left to right, Charles Larocque, Pierre Delorme, Thomas Bunn, François Xavier Pagée, Ambroise Lépine¹, Jean Baptiste Tourond, Thomas Spence; centre row: Pierre Poitras, John Bruce, Louis Riel, William Bernard O'Donoghue, François Dauphinais; front row : Hugh F. O'Lone and Paul Proulx.

CHARLES “LE ROC” LAROCQUE JR. (1817–1900)

Charles “Le Roc” Larocque Jr., appearing in the 1869 council photograph taken during the earliest phase of the Red River Resistance. He lived his entire life in St. Boniface and St. Vital, places that formed the core of Louis Riel's earliest political base.

Charles held HBC River Lot 302 in St. Vital. His household appears in the 1870 Manitoba Census, and his neighbours included families who later became directly involved in the Resistance.

His son, Cyrille Larocque, is recorded as a Métis soldier at La Barrière, the southern barricade that protected the settlement during the 1869–70 stand-off.

A critical detail linking Charles to Riel's political circle is the signing of his scrip. In 1875, his scrip affidavit was witnessed by Louis Sansregret and Benjamin Nault, two men tied directly to the early confrontations that ignited the Resistance.

Louis Sansregret was the half-brother of Jean Baptiste “Johnny” Pontbriand Sansregret, a committed supporter of Riel who helped block the surveyors on André Nault’s river lot on 11 October 1869. That moment is widely recognized as the spark that set the Red River Resistance in motion. Johnny Sansregret later appears in the well-known 1885 photograph of Métis prisoners held at Regina after the North West Resistance.

Benjamin Nault, who also signed Charles’s scrip, stood with Riel on the same day. His presence among the signatories places Charles inside the earliest organizing circle around Riel.

Taken together, these facts situate Charles “Le Roc” Larocque Jr. inside the same world of kinship, landholdings, parish networks, and political loyalties that shaped Riel’s rise. His proximity to Resistance families, the testimony embedded in his scrip witnesses, and the corrected identification of the 1869 photograph show a Larocque presence that was active, visible, and historically significant.

Charles Larocque took scrip and, at the age of 83, passed away. He is buried in St. Boniface Cemetery, right at the heart of the historic Métis Nation.

Just as Joseph and Charles represented the Larocque presence within Riel’s immediate circle, another brother and his child carried the family’s legacy into entirely new terrain. From Arctic exploration to the fragile communication lines of the Resistance, François Larocque and his son left their own unmistakable mark.

FRANCOIS LAROCQUE AND HIS SON - RIEL’S MESSAGE RUNNER AT AGE FOURTEEN

We start with François Larocque’s son, **François Larocque Jr. (1854–1923)**, who entered the history of the Red River Resistance in a remarkable way. At only 14 years old, he served as a note runner for Louis Riel, carrying messages between political leaders at a time when the settlement was full of tension, fear, and uncertainty.

Men across Red River were afraid to openly support Riel during the early years of Resistance. Yet this Métis boy travelled through dangerous territory, delivering written orders and messages that helped hold the community together. Such a task was not given lightly. Riel would have trusted only a few people with sensitive communication, and the fact he chose a Larocque child speaks to the reputation, courage, and reliability of the family.

That courage did not come from nowhere.

His father, **François Larocque Sr. (1822–1885)**, though not part of the political Resistance, was one of the toughest men of his generation. He served as a steersman and bowman on Dr. John Rae’s Arctic expeditions, including the missions that tried to uncover the fate of the Franklin expedition, one of the most perilous undertakings in the history of northern exploration.

Only elite Métis were chosen for these expeditions. They needed unmatched strength, navigation skill, and endurance to survive conditions that killed entire British crews. François was part of the group that guided Rae safely through the Arctic and helped map enormous sections of the northern coastline. He was trained to survive blizzards, starvation conditions, shifting ice, and months in isolation. He was among the men who gave Rae the Indigenous and Métis knowledge he needed to succeed where Europeans had failed.

A boy raised in the home of a man like that would grow up watching courage as something ordinary. When the Resistance began, François Jr. rose to the challenge of his community just as his father had risen to the challenge of the Arctic.

Louis Riel must have seen this same character in the boy. He trusted him with his life.

François and his son may not have stood on the political front line, but the strength, loyalty, and fearlessness that defined this family shaped both the Métis Nation and the early story of Canada. Their presence, whether in the frozen Arctic or in the hidden communication lines of the Resistance, shows exactly what kind of men they were and why their names are to be remembered.

François Larocque died between 1883–1885, estimated around the age of 63.

Father and son both took scrip. The cause of François's death is unknown.

With François's passing, the focus of the family story shifts to the youngest of the brothers, the one whose life traced the Métis movement westward and into the final years of Resistance.

JEAN “BAPTISTE” LAROCQUE (BORN 1840)

A political actor, Resistance soldier, and a trusted member of Riel's exile community and Gabriel Dumont's inner circle.

Jean Baptiste Larocque, born 1840, represents the branch of the Larocque family whose life carried the Métis story westward into the heart of the North West. He married Louise Chartrand in 1862 at St. Boniface and moved through the central Métis corridors of the period, living at Lac Qu'Appelle, Carlton, St. Laurent, and Duck Lake. These were the same communities where Métis political identity, buffalo hunting culture, and Resistance organizing were developing.

He appears in the 1870 Manitoba Census and again in the 1872 North West Territories Census. These records confirm his presence inside the Métis settlements that were forming the foundation of later political action. Although he never applied for scrip, his political involvement is well documented in three surviving historical records.

The 1876 Petition to Join Treaty Number Four

In 1876, Métis families living in the Qu'Appelle and Touchwood Hills regions drafted a petition to the Government of Canada requesting admission into Treaty Number Four. Their goal was simple: protect land, families, and rights in a landscape being reshaped by surveyors, settlement, and government policy. Jean Baptiste Larocque signed this petition.

This act places him among the Métis leadership in the area at a moment of major political uncertainty. The petition was a collective attempt to gain recognition and secure land in the face of the same pressures that had driven Louis Riel to form a provisional government only a few years earlier.

The 1880 Petition to General Nelson A. Miles for a Métis Reserve

Four years later, Jean Baptiste appears again in a second political document.

On 6 August 1880, Louis Riel and a community of Métis refugees in Montana sent a formal petition to General Nelson A. Miles of the United States Army. They requested land for a Métis reserve on the Musselshell River.

Two Larocques signed this petition:

- Joseph Larocque
- Jean Baptiste Larocque

This petition shows that both were physically present with Riel during his exile. The Montana years were a time of fear and uncertainty, with Canadian agents pursuing Métis leaders and families scattered across the plains. For Jean Baptiste to sign this document demonstrates that he remained politically engaged and was trusted by Riel inside a vulnerable exile community.

The Montana Poem: Riel's Personal Reference to "Monsieur Jean Baptiste Larocque"

A third key document strengthens his connection to Riel. In Riel's collected writings, specifically the section that contains the poem of Joseph Parisien from Montana dated between 1879 and 1883, Riel references "Monsieur Jean Baptiste Larocque." He describes an incident in which Jean Baptiste was nearly struck unconscious by a piece of logwood. This is a rare personal glimpse into the daily life of Riel's Montana followers. It confirms:

- Jean Baptiste lived with Riel in Montana
- Riel knew him by name
- He was part of the close-knit inner circle during exile

Not many men appear in Riel's personal writings. Jean Baptiste does. This reinforces the trust placed in him.

Military Service Under Gabriel Dumont, 1885

Gabriel Dumont was the military leader of the Métis Nation during the 1885 Resistance and one of the most respected buffalo hunt captains of his generation. His skill in organization, mobility, and community defence made him the natural choice to command the Métis forces at Batoche. To serve under Dumont was a sign of trust and capability, and men in his dozens were expected to be disciplined, experienced, and reliable.

When the North West Resistance erupted in 1885, Jean Baptiste served in Captain Jonas Moureau's company. This unit was one of the dizaines organized under Gabriel Dumont, forming the defensive structure at Batoche.

Jean Baptiste Larocque stood on the same battlefield as Riel, fighting for the same cause, under the leadership of Gabriel Dumont.

While Joseph Larocque and Charles "Le Roc" Larocque Jr. anchored the family inside the St. Boniface world that shaped Riel's rise, Jean Baptiste extended the Larocque presence into the western Métis heartland and the final battleground at Batoche.

His life shows the continuity of courage that began with his older brothers and carried into the next generation. He stands as a vital link between the family's Red River origins and the wider struggle that shaped the Prairies.

Jean was the last Larocque to stand with Riel's forces before the fall of Batoche. When the final battle came in May 1885, Jean Baptiste was there inside the community defences under Gabriel Dumont's command, fighting for the same cause as Riel in the last stand of the Métis Nation.

This was the final moment in which a Larocque and Riel shared the same struggle before Riel was captured, tried, and executed later that year.

Jean Baptiste was 4 years older than Louis Riel and 25 years younger than his eldest brother Joseph. In many ways, Joseph and Charles "Le Roc" had acted as father figures to Riel's generation. Their loyalty, courage, and community ties created a bridge between the older Red River families and the younger men who rose to defend their homeland.

We do not know when Jean Baptiste Larocque passed away. The written record becomes quiet after the Resistance. But we do know this: his son later married Gabriel Dumont's niece, a final sign of how deeply the Larocques remained connected to the political and military heart of the Métis Nation.

CLOSING

Louis Riel was only 19 years old when his father, Louis Riel Sr., passed away in 1864. He entered adulthood without the guidance of the man who had been one of Red River's respected community leaders. Just 5 years later, at only 25 years old, Riel would find himself leading an entire nation into the Red River Resistance of 1869–70.

Louis Riel was 41 years old when he returned in 1885 to lead his people through the North West Resistance at the Battle of Batoche. It was a decision he knew placed his life in danger, yet he came back out of duty, not safety. After the fighting ended, he was captured, tried for treason, and executed on November 16, 1885. His death marked one of the greatest injustices in Canadian history, but it did not silence the Nation he fought for.

For the older generation of Métis men around him, including Joseph Larocque, Charles “Le Roc” Larocque Jr., and the Marchand brothers, Riel was not simply a political leader. They had watched him grow from childhood, seen him baptized in the same parish, and observed his character form year after year. When he stepped forward at 25 to defend the rights of his people, these older men would have seen a young man they had helped raise through community, kinship, and daily life.

Their support for him during the Resistance was more than political alignment. It reflected affection, loyalty, and a sense of responsibility that older generations often feel toward the children who grew up beside their own. For Riel, who no longer had a father, these elders formed the circle that steadied him. And for Joseph, Charles, and the Marchands, standing with Riel was not an abstract cause. It was standing behind a young man they had known since birth, someone they loved and believed in.

This loyalty endured even through danger, because for them it was not only history. It was family.

Almost a century and a half later, these stories are resurfacing. The voices of these men and women, once silenced or buried, are speaking again. They tried to erase them. They tried to erase us. They tried to scatter our families, extinguish our language, and push our culture underground. But like a seed driven into the earth, we grew back stronger. Louder. Rooted deeper than before.

For generations my own family never publicly spoke about being Métis. Five generations of silence. We never knew why. We never knew the depth of our involvement. We never knew how close our ancestors stood to the fire. It was only when I began to uncover this history that the silence finally made sense. I know my family is not the only one.

Across the Prairies there are families who carry the same quiet gaps in their history. Families who were taught not to speak. Families who were disconnected from their own identity because fear once made it dangerous to be Métis. I hope that when they read this, they see a reflection of themselves. I hope it inspires them to search, to ask questions, to reclaim what was buried.

They wanted our stories to be forgotten.

But they survived.

These were not just the stories of Resistance.

These are the stories of resilience.

Patrick Stewart

A handwritten signature of Louis Riel in cursive script.

Louis Riel (October 22, 1844 – November 16, 1885)

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