

The 1809 Scalping of Maguerite Trottier

Several versions of this event have been published over the decades. Following are two descriptions recounted here as originally published. As additional versions or pertinent related information is located, they will be added to these descriptions with a goal to establishing a detailed accurate account.

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## An Incident

as related in Martin Kavanagh's "*The Assiniboine Basin*", page 32.

There were other incidents more grim than that of Donald McKay, le malin, lying in wait for "Old Auge." Both we gather, were cranks. We have considered carefully whether we should repeat the following story but have decided to do so because it dispels the false glamor in which we are wont to dress the heroic past, and enables us to realize the barbarism of the valley, little more than one hundred years ago.

Agnes Laut tells the tale of a French-Canadian named Trottier who had a beautiful daughter, Marguerite, by a Cree wife. He pondered long whether he should bestow her on an Indian brave or on a white trader, both of whom desired her hand. At last the white trader, Jutras, won. The advantages were many. The happy party came up the Assiniboine in the spring to Qu'Appelle. In the summer a child was born. In the fall, near Whitewood, on the trip down river to The Forks, the word was passed that the Assiniboines were on the war path. Two bourgeois, Daniel MacKenzie and John McDonald, of Garth, on their way to Fort William rode far behind the canoes. The Indian girl's white husband fled before the yells of the redmen to seek refuge in the nearest fort. The braves quickly scalped and stripped the women and carried off the child.

When the horsemen caught up, Daniel MacKenzie discovered the canoes soaked in blood and their occupants apparently dead . . . then a feeble voice was heard calling for her child. It was the woman, Marguerite Trottier, who feigning death had outwitted the enemy. MacKenzie went in search of the baby. He found it too, scalped, yet breathing. The "braves" had fixed the scalp to a tree and shot arrows at it. MacKenzie, Catholic as he was, ensured the child's passage to heaven, by baptizing it in his tears, and returned t

The party moved to Brandon House. Later returning to Pembina, Marguerite embraced the religion of her rescuer, and scorning her caitiff husband, married a Mr. Gingras and lived to be nearly one hundred years of age. The incident is gruesome, but it illustrates the savage background of the period (1809).

Marguerite Trottier  
as related by Nan Shipley  
In *Road to the Forks*, p. 39-41

The Chevrier family treasure the colourful history of a maternal grandmother named Marguerite Gingras.

Sixteen-year old Marguerite Trottier lived in Pembina with her French Canadian father and Cree mother. She was a very lovely Metis girl and numerous powerful chiefs offered Trottier a fortune in furs and horses for his daughter. But he believed that she would have a better life as the wife of a white man and in 1808 Marguerite married a French Canadian named Jutras.

Like all the men of that place and period, Jutras was employed either by the Nor'Westers or the Hudson's Bay Company as hunter in winter and voyageur during the summer months moving furs across the prairie from the trading posts. Jutras travelled with Alexander Henry's canoe brigades. This famous explorer-trader was the nephew of Alexander Henry the Elder in Montreal.

In the summer of 1809 Marguerite and her six-month old baby accompanied Jutras and five other voyageurs, each man in his own canoe, on their trip from Fort Qu'Appelle down the Assiniboine to the Red River. At Fort Gibraltar, the Nor'Westers' Red River fortress, other boatmen would continue with the furs to Fort William.

It was the custom that two or three officers accompany the fur brigades on the entire journey and attend the annual rally at headquarters in Fort William. The two that travelled with the Jutras party in 1809 were Daniel McKenzie and McDonald of Garth. Their canoe moved some distance ahead of the voyageurs and they ate and slept apart.

At the place known as Whitewood, where the river is very narrow and thick bush grows down to the water, the voyageurs paddled into an ambush and were attacked by the Sioux with arrows and bullets. The men in the first two canoes were instantly killed and two others seriously wounded. Jutras and the sixth man panicked, and leaping from their canoes, raced through the shallow water and into the woods to escape.

Marguerite and her child were left defenseless in Jutras' canoe.

By the time the Nor'Westers, who heard the shots and shrieks from the ambush, had turned around and paddled back to the scene of the attack, they were aghast to find four men stretched on the sand and Marguerite still in the canoe. All had been scalped, stripped naked and mutilated.

When the shocked white men bent to remove Marguerite from the canoe they were astonished to hear her crying for her baby. They found the child, scalped and impaled to a tree with many arrows. McKenzie told Marguerite that the little girl was dead, then he and McDonald bound up her hacked hands in splints, covered her torn,

sightless left eye, and tied up the loose skin of her scalp with a fresh animal bladder. This crude piece of surgery undoubtedly saved her life.

The men paddled to the Nor'Westers trading post at Souris where kindly John Sutherland in charge, and Pierre Falcon, known as the Rhyming Minstrel of the Prairies, carefully nursed her back to health.

A month later Marguerite was recovered sufficiently to join another fur-brigade going down to the Forks. Here she met her father at Fort Gibraltar and returned with him to Pembina. Months later when Jutras appeared, she turned her back in scorn on him. Marguerite's beauty might have been impaired but her charm and fine character were intact. She married into the prominent Gingras family and bore a number of children and lived to reach almost a hundred years.

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