

RIVER CROSSING STORIES

François Lucier Jr

As told by Tom Long, Public Interpretation Coordinator for Fort Edmonton Park



This is the story of a titan of a man who built an unassailable reputation for himself as one of Fort Edmonton's most dangerous and capable men. This man was François Lucier Jr who once lived in Fort Edmonton IV (located within present day Rossdale).

François Lucier Jr (ca. 1796 - ca. 1867) was born in what was known in English as Rupert's Land, now Western Canada. The son and namesake of a voyageur from Recollet, Lower Canada (now Quebec), Lucier was brought up in the fur trade – that world of Company traders who fancied themselves 'Caesars of the Wilderness', wily Nehiyawak (Cree) and Nakoda (Assiniboine) trappers and warriors, and the first stirrings of the mighty Métis nation, to which François belonged.

The world of Lucier's young adulthood was one where peaceful trading was sometimes disrupted by violent raiding. The Scots, Canadiens, and Métis of the Hudson's Bay Company were tolerated guests by Indigenous peoples, and relations with their hosts occasionally turned unpleasant.

All parties saw the advantage of good trade relations and peace, but at the same time all parties had need of the horse. A good horse for the Hudson's Bay Company, especially at Edmonton, was necessary to transport furs between sites where no river ran, to hunt bison, and for the horse-racing amusements of the Company men.

A good horse for the nomadic Nakoda meant transportation – not for furs – but for their families and possessions as they moved from camp to camp. A buffalo-runner was especially valuable in hunting the bison that sustained life.

The Company believed that any horses they took care of were their property until they chose to sell them. The Nakoda believed that one couldn't own anything permanently. Everything was a gift from the Creator. If a Nakoda needed a horse and he was brave and quick and stealthy enough to take it, then it was his until somebody took it from him.

This sets the stage for the events of October 1826 at Fort Edmonton IV (located in present day Rosedale). Several young Nakoda made off with twenty-four Company horses during the night: a mighty prize! Lucier was among those who pursued and, being well-mounted, began to overtake one of the men, dodging arrows as he went. As he overtook and fought the horse-taker, Lucier drew his huge hunting knife and sheathed it in his foe's heart!

The fight was a remarkable occurrence among the generally peaceful fur trading forts, and Lucier no doubt never passed up a chance to tell the tale. Over the next half-century, almost every traveller to come through Fort Edmonton recorded the story in his journals, each with his own personal touches: Governor George Simpson, visiting big game hunter Frederick Ulric Graham, and wandering artist Paul Kane.

As Graham embellished, "François is as fine little veteran 'Coureur Des Prairies,' as tough as steel, and 'game' to the backbone; the hero of several fights with the Assiniboines, several of whom he has killed, and he tells his story with a grin of how he ripped up the last fellow with his 'dag,' as if it were the best joke possible."

Lucier was employed by the Company for several more years as a 'Horsekeeper' and as a Middleman in the gruelling York boat brigades. In 1842, in his forties, he went 'free' and made his living outside the Company's regular employ. The 'Freemen' of the prairies, colourful and hard as nails, were the core of what would become known as the Plains Métis – not necessarily possessing a connection to Red River, but nonetheless taking their place as one of Canada's proud Indigenous Peoples.

See the original story published on the Fort Edmonton Park blog.

<https://www.fortedmontonpark.ca/1846-fort/edmontonians-in-the-spotlight-francois-lucier-jr/>



HERITAGE
INTERPRETIVE PLAN

RIVER CROSSING

RIVER CROSSING STORIES