

Joseph Félix LaRocque

LAROCQUE, JOSEPH (perhaps **Joseph-Félix**), Hudson Bay Company chief trader; b. c. 1787; d. 1 Dec. 1866 at Ottawa, Canada West.

Joseph Larocque, whose brother François-Antoine was also active in the fur trade, was the son of François-Antoine Larocque, member for the county of Leinster (L'Assomption) in the first parliament of Lower Canada, and Angélique Leroux, and may have been the child, baptized François, born 20 Sept. 1786 at L'Assomption, Province of Quebec. If this identification is accepted, Joseph would have been 15 years old when he was a clerk in the XY Company in 1801. At this time, the XY Company was challenging the dominance of the North West Company. When they settled their differences Joseph Larocque transferred to the NWC and was sent to serve on the upper Churchill (or English) River. He is known to have been at Lake La Ronge in 1804 and at Fort des Prairies in 1806. He was transferred to the Columbia River Department of the North West Company, but no details of his career are known until he appears in 1812 in the neighbourhood of Fort Kamloops (Kamloops, B.C.), among the Shuswap Indians. In 1813 he joined John George McTavish* in his descent of the Columbia River and take-over of Fort Astoria (Astoria, Oreg.) from the Pacific Fur Company. Larocque spent the next three years in the Columbia River Department, travelling much, often with dispatches, and managing posts among the Flatheads and at Okanagan, Fort Kamloops, or Spokane House, until in 1816 he returned over the mountains from Fort George (Astoria, Oreg.) to Fort William (Thunder Bay, Ont.), carrying dispatches.

In the spring of 1817 Larocque was again sent west to the Columbia, taking strong reinforcements for the Nor'Westers as their struggle with the Hudson's Bay Company gathered momentum. Athabasca and Île-à-la-Crosse were, however, the main areas of trading opposition, and Larocque was brought back over the mountains to Fort Chipewyan; he was arrested at Fort Wedderburn in May 1820 for complicity in the outrages perpetrated at Île-à-la-Crosse by Peter Skene Ogden* and Samuel Black*, on warrants sent into the Indian country by Lord Selkirk [Douglas*]. Colin Robertson* of the HBC, who, in effect, made the arrest, described Larocque as "one of the Principle bullies" of the NWC. Robertson provided canoe transport to take him down to Montreal to stand trial, but in June 1820 a strong party of Nor'Westers captured the brigade of canoes at the Grand Rapids of the Saskatchewan and Larocque was freed. He was sent back to Athabasca, where the "grand push" was to be made by the North West Company. In September George Simpson* found him one of the two men in command at Île-à-la-Crosse, and though he appears to have gone "into the mountains" to escape possible arrest, along with Black and other "outlaws and felons" (as Simpson called them), he was reported to be most uneasy at the way in which the Nor'Westers were behaving and to be a man of great spirit.

On the coalition of the Hudson's Bay and the North West companies in 1821 Larocque was accepted into the joint concern as a chief trader and served in the English River district and at Edmonton House and Lesser Slave Lake. In 1825 he was sent to the lower St Lawrence, where he was responsible for the Mingan seigneurie, whose fur trade and fishing the HBC rented until 1831. Neither activity was profitable and the seigneurie was kept going largely as a challenge to the lessees of the King's Posts until the posts were bought out in 1831. Larocque had retired in 1830, with a fortune of 15,000 louis (approximately \$60–75,000) to which he added when he married Archange Guillon-Duplessis in March 1833.

In 1837, when rebellion broke out in the Canadas, Larocque went to France, where he lived until 1851. He retained his interest in Canada. In 1843 he donated £225 for the construction at Willamette (Oreg.) of a college, Saint-Joseph, for French Canadians. On his return to Montreal he continued his philanthropic activities. He and his wife retired to the convent of the Grey Nuns at Ottawa in the fall of 1857 and he helped establish the Hôpital Général there. He died in 1866 leaving his fortune to the Grey Nuns.

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