

MUDEATER

MUDEATER

AN AMERICAN BUFFALO HUNTER
AND THE SURRENDER OF LOUIS RIEL

JOHN D. PIHACH



University of Regina Press

© 2017 John D. Pihach

All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyrights hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means — graphic, electronic, or mechanical — without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any request for photocopying, recording, taping or placement in information storage and retrieval systems of any sort shall be directed in writing to Access Copyright.

Printed and bound in Canada at Marquis. The text of this book is printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper with earth-friendly vegetable-based inks.

COVER AND TEXT DESIGN: Duncan Campbell, University of Regina Press

COPY EDITOR: Meaghan Craven

PROOFREADER: Kristine Douaud

INDEXER: Patricia Furdek

COVER ART: Robert Armstrong, circa 1925. Courtesy Glenbow Archives, NB-16-552.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Pihach, John D., author

Mudeater : an American buffalo hunter and the surrender of Louis Riel / John D. Pihach.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-0-88977-458-2 (paperback).—ISBN 978-0-88977-462-9

(PDF).—ISBN 978-0-88977-463-6 (HTML)

1. Mudeater, Irvin, 1849-1940. 2. Wyandot Indians—Biography.
3. Riel Rebellion, 1885—Scouts and scouting. 4. Riel, Louis, 1844-1885.
5. Frontier and pioneer life—West (U.S.). 6. West (U.S.)—Biography.
7. Canada, Western—Biography. I. Title.

E99.H9M83 2017 970.004'97555 C2016-907119-7 C2016-907120-0

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



University of Regina Press, University of Regina
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, S4S 0A2
tel: (306) 585-4758 fax: (306) 585-4699
web: www.uofrpress.ca

U OF R PRESS email: uofrpress@uregina.ca

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada. / Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du gouvernement du Canada. This publication was made possible through Creative Saskatchewan's Creative Industries Production Grant Program.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Canada

creative
SASKATCHEWAN

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements—vii

Introduction—ix

A Note on Terminology—xv

Maps—xvi

*U.S. Plains, circa 1870s • Southern and Central
Saskatchewan and Alberta, circa 1880s*

PART ONE: THE LIFE OF ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Chapter One: Before Robert Armstrong—3

*Identity • Wyandot History • Armstrong's Ancestors • Matthew
Mudeater, Father of Robert Armstrong • Armstrong's Siblings*

Chapter Two: Youth to 1885—21

*Boyhood, Wagon Trains, and School • Adventuring in
the Southwest • Moving North • To Canada*

Chapter Three: 1885—53

*The Conflict • Whose Scout Was Armstrong? • Capture
or Surrender? • Prior Knowledge of Riel's Location?
• Famous Deed • How It Happened • Reward
for Riel's Apprehension? • After Batoche*

Chapter Four: 1885 to 1940—81

*Prince Albert, Rosthern, and Return to Roots • Retirement
in Calgary and Death in California*

PART TWO: ROBERT ARMSTRONG'S MEMOIR

Preface to Armstrong's Memoir—105

Robert Armstrong's Memoir—111

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Riel's Apprehension: Many Versions—175

General Middleton's Accounts—175

Newspaper Reports—177

*Contemporary Accounts, Early Histories and
Reminiscences, and More Recent Histories*—181

Appendix 2: Riel's Apprehension:
Accounts by the Three Captors—191

Robert Armstrong's Account—191

Tom Hourie's Account—201

William Diehl's Account—205

Notes—209

Bibliography—233

Index—245

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is only by chance that Robert Armstrong came to my attention. During a conversation one day, my neighbour, Trevor Wheeler, informed me that his great-grandfather, Robert Armstrong, was the man who captured Louis Riel. Mr. Wheeler has my gratitude for sharing his knowledge of his ancestor with me and for informing me that Armstrong had written an account of his checkered life, that he had a copy of that memoir, and that a relative in the United States had the original manuscript. It is with the kind permission of Ella Melendrez, a resident of California and a granddaughter of Robert Armstrong, that the memoir is included in this book. Ella has been very co-operative and helpful, and I was touched when she travelled from California to visit me in Saskatchewan.

Armstrong's great-granddaughter, Eleanor Peppard, has my thanks, also, for supplying me with a photograph of Armstrong and some materials that were useful in my research. Thanks to another of Armstrong's great-granddaughters, Judy Lalonde, for answering some questions. My friend, Garry Radison, author of biographies of Wandering Spirit and Fine Day, read a draft of the manuscript and made valuable suggestions. My sister Maryellen Doucette saved me considerable time by typing Armstrong's handwritten manuscript. Thanks also to Elmer and Loretta McInnes, who took time off their work at the Kansas State Historical Society to look into matters

related to this book. I am appreciative of the co-operative assistance provided by the staff at the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, Archives of Manitoba, Glenbow Archives, Special Collections at the University of Saskatchewan Library, and the Batoche Museum. Jamie Benson, at the Prince Albert Historical Society, has on several occasions been supportive and helpful. Barbara Becker, of the Miami (Oklahoma) Public Library, provided me with useful information, as did the late Louise Kiefer, the college historian at Baldwin-Wallace University. My thanks also to Robert Bluthardt, Russell Bohach, Golda Foster, Elizabeth Grindstaff, William B. Shillingberg, Bill Waiser, and others whom I contacted during my research.

Getting a book on the store shelves involves much more than submitting a manuscript to a publisher. My appreciation to the staff at the University of Regina Press who were engaged in the many stages of this process. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the work of David McLennan, editor, who guided the pre-publication stages of the book and fortified the manuscript with his insights; Donna Grant, managing editor; and Duncan Campbell, art director—congenial, talented professionals. I am also grateful to Meghan Craven for her superb copy editing and comments.

INTRODUCTION

Robert Armstrong was born in Kansas in 1849. Before coming to Canada in 1882, he lived the life of a plainsman in the American West; he hunted buffalo for more than a decade, drove a stagecoach, and was caught up in skirmishes with the Indians of the Southwest. Soon after settling in Prince Albert, then part of the District of Saskatchewan, his life was interrupted by the 1885 conflict. Howard Angus Kennedy, a *Montreal Daily Witness* correspondent covering the North-West Resistance in 1885, met Robert Armstrong during that time and interviewed him again several decades later. In 1926 Kennedy wrote, “All over the Dominion, in fact from Halifax to Victoria, you will find veterans of ‘the 85’ with lively recollections of Bob as a scout and dispatch rider with General Middleton’s command. Few, however, knew much more about him than the fact that he played the chief part in trailing and catching the fugitive Métis leader. . . . His famous deed of ’85, big as it was in our national life, was only one of a hundred sensational incidents in his.”¹ The “famous deed” that put Armstrong in the national spotlight was the apprehension of Louis Riel after the fall of Batoche.

This book tells the story of Robert Armstrong, examines his “famous deed,” scrutinizes some of the “hundred sensational incidents” in his life, and, with the inclusion of his unpublished memoir, allows Armstrong to address us in his own voice.

In 1920 Robert Armstrong recited his life story to a family member. The handwritten manuscript, though preserved by his descendants, remained unpublished and forgotten until the publication of this book. However, Armstrong did show the memoir to several individuals who published brief summaries of it. Armstrong's personal account, to a large degree, is the testimony of someone who participated in the slaughter of the buffalo herds, their near extinction generating profound consequences for the Indigenous peoples of the Plains and for the social and political climate of the time. His revelations allow us a glimpse at the unrestrained era popularly known as the Old West or Wild West, where gritty individualism was a necessity and, in Armstrong's words, "law was but a myth or a story told but rarely enforced." Armstrong recalls his early years in his memoir, and his celebrated status in 1885 is recorded in brief in newspapers and books; nevertheless, there are at least four significant and sensational omissions in these accounts.

First, "Robert Armstrong" is an alias, a name he adopted after coming to Canada. Second, although the destruction of the buffalo herds ended his hunting career and may be part of the reason for his move to Canada in 1882, he actually came to Canada to escape justice in the United States. Third, in most accounts Armstrong is identified as an American, and in some documents his ethnic background is listed as Irish or English; in fact, he was the son of a Native American chief. Fourth, though Armstrong only makes scant reference to his family, his ancestry is unusual.

Armstrong's life in Canada was uneventful compared to his many adventures in the American West, yet it was in Canada that he emerged from the obscure life of a buffalo hunter and became a focus for the public eye. During the 1885 Resistance, three scouts—Robert Armstrong, Tom Hourie, and William Diehl—rode out together, located Riel, and brought him to General Middleton. Dissenting accounts by Armstrong and Hourie obscure what transpired when Riel encountered his captors. Both Armstrong and Hourie claim the principal role and credit the other scouts with minor, supporting contributions. Each alleges that Riel surrendered to and deferred to him, that Riel rode on the same horse with him, that Riel handed his pistol to him, and that he presented Riel to

Middleton. But Riel could have handed his note from Middleton offering safe passage to only one person, and he could only have handed one man his pistol. Finally, only one scout would have announced to Middleton that the man before him was Riel.

In his memoir, Armstrong addresses the issue, saying, “Certain other persons have at different times laid claim to Riels [sic] capture and right here I wish to say, that Louis Riel surrendered himself to me personally, and further, that he rode behind me on my horse for some few miles after which we walked the remainder of the distance to Gen. Middleton’s camp at Guardepuis’ [Gar-depuis’] Crossing, and that upon arriving at said camp I personally delivered Riel a prisoner to General Middleton.” In the same tone, Tom Hourie’s father, Peter Hourie, relates that “no one but Tom could have done it. Armstrong and Deal [sic] were green horns at the trail. . . .” More than a century and a quarter after these events, Armstrong’s and Hourie’s conflicting claims, and the discrepancies appearing in later literature regarding this event, have not been resolved. Many historians do not assign a leading role to either of the two scouts, nor do they attempt to unknot the incompatible claims. Because Armstrong’s place in Canadian history stems from his participation in Riel’s apprehension, this book makes an effort to shed light on these unanswered questions and to reconstruct what may have happened on May 15, 1885.

Armstrong and Diehl both left personal accounts of Riel’s capture, and accounts of Hourie’s involvement in the event were written by Peter Hourie and other writers. Only those scouts and Riel knew what transpired, and all other credible reports have their source in what the scouts told reporters upon their arrival at Middleton’s camp and what they may have said to other individuals present at the time or at a later date. Armstrong’s version of events appears in contemporary newspaper columns, in later interviews, and in his memoir. Hourie’s actions also were noted in newspapers and recorded by individuals who were acquainted with him, but the primary account of his activities and the source for later depictions of him as the principal participant is provided by his father, Peter. Diehl’s description first appeared in telegram dispatches written by correspondents who were present when Diehl reported Riel’s

capture, in newspaper reports based on those telegrams, and then in an affidavit given by him years after Riel's capture.

As I began examining the story of Riel's capture, I also found myself scrutinizing other events Armstrong presents to the reader in his memoir. Armstrong's life story can be conveniently divided into the years before 1885, the year 1885, and the years after 1885. Chapter One, "Before Robert Armstrong," looks into Armstrong's roots—his Wyandot background, parents, and siblings. Chapter Two, "Youth to 1885," deals with his younger days, up to when he made Prince Albert home. His memoir, with the exception of the account of his participation in the 1885 Resistance, deals almost exclusively with his life on the American frontier, and, therefore, the second chapter of this book does not include many of the stories from the memoir. However, by referring to the small number of available documents and to the reports of those who witnessed several events that Armstrong recounts, it has been possible to broaden his narrative and, at the same time, evaluate some of the claims he makes in the memoir. Chapter Three, "1885," assesses his activities during that year of conflict but concentrates on the controversies related to apprehending Riel. In particular, attention is given to resolving the opposing views of Armstrong and Hourie and the question of who played the leading role. Armstrong was not involved in any newsmaking events after Riel's capture, and, in his memoir, he does not disclose much about what he did after 1885. Even so, it has been possible to gather details about his post-1885 years and thus complete the portrayal of his life story. Chapter Four, "1885 to 1940," introduces Armstrong's wife and children, looks at his return to and ten-year sojourn in Oklahoma, explores his retirement in Calgary, and concludes with his final days in California.

In Part Two, Robert Armstrong's Memoir—in suspension for a century—Armstrong speaks to us directly.² He was a consummate storyteller and so some of his claims relating to certain historical events appear unconvincing; all the same, his story vividly depicts the saga between the buffalo hunters and the Indians and is a reliable account of the savage nature of that series of encounters. Armstrong's language further illustrates and reminds us of the callous attitudes toward Indigenous peoples that prevailed in those days.

Appendices 1 and 2 are compilations of some of the multitude of accounts of Riel's apprehension by reporters, Middleton, later writers, the three scouts, and others. I point out the inconsistencies and errors in some of those reports, and the discrepancies found in the stories provided by the scouts.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

When referring to North American Indigenous peoples (excluding the Métis and Inuit), I have in a few instances made use of the term “First Nations” (commonly used in Canada), but terminology related to first peoples in the American and historical contexts proved problematic and awkward.

In the United States, Indigenous peoples have not adopted the term “First Nations,” preferring instead to be called American Indians, Native Americans, or Indians, while some advocate First Americans. My impression, however, is that these relatively current terms are still evolving and not entirely satisfactory.

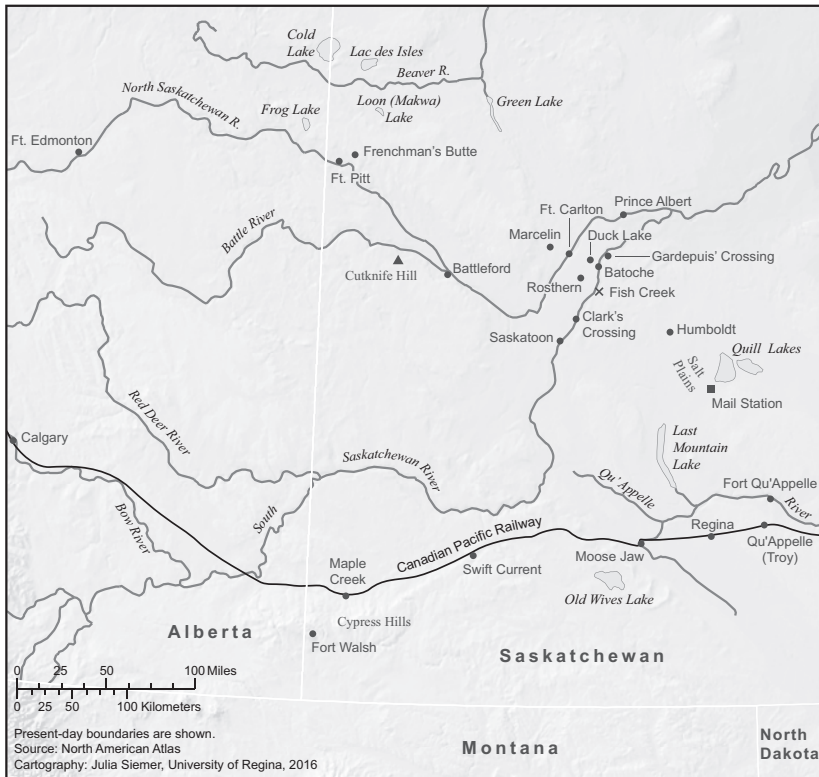
When I initially tried writing the terms “First Nations,” “American Indians,” or “Native Americans” into this story, a story set in a time long before these names were formulated, the result was sometimes jarring and incongruous—in fact, they became something like speed bumps in the narrative. When reading those terms, couched in the story, I felt their usage seemed forced and hence of dubious value.

To avoid this effect, and after hearing the opinions of a Cree Elder and other First Nations scholars, I decided to use the term “Indian” almost exclusively. Admittedly, though “Indian” has been (and still is) sometimes used in a demeaning way, and may have unfavourable connotations for some readers, I use the term in keeping with the English idiom of the era in which Armstrong lived and with no negative intentions.

MAPS



Map I. U.S. Plains, circa 1870s



Map 2. Southern and Central Saskatchewan and Alberta, circa 1880s

Part One

THE LIFE OF ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Chapter One

BEFORE ROBERT ARMSTRONG

IDENTITY

Robert Armstrong, prior to his name change, was Irvin Mudeater. This appears to be a fact known only to his family and some close acquaintances. Irvin was the son of Matthew Mudeater, a prominent member and chief of the Wyandots, and Nancy Pipe, a descendent of a Delaware chief. Armstrong does not reveal this in his memoir or elsewhere, but his son-in-law, to whom he dictated his memoir, does make an oblique reference to Armstrong's former surname when he says that Armstrong was known as "Muddy" to the hunters and plainsmen of the great [American] South West."¹ Irvin Mudeater's motive for the name change was to shed a name associated with a crime he allegedly committed in the United States. His granddaughter, Ella Melendrez, writes, "I heard that Grandpa Armstrong changed his name when he went to Canada because of trouble with the law in the United States. He crossed the border to avoid capture."² Of course, he may have had additional personal reasons for the name change that now are impossible to determine.

He had relatives with the surname Armstrong (in his memoir he mentions a cousin called Si Armstrong), so it would be natural to assume that he chose the surname of a kinsman.³ However, that is not the case. Melendrez recalls, "He did change his name in

Prince Albert to Armstrong. I'm not sure of the year but probably before he married Grandma. According to Mother, he took the name of Armstrong because he enjoyed being a scout for somebody by that name. I'm sure it was somebody he knew."⁴ He used the Armstrong name for more than two decades in Canada, but when he moved back to the United States and resided there for ten years, he reverted to his former name, Mudeater.⁵ Upon his return to Canada, he once again became Robert Armstrong.

Figuring out just how Armstrong self-identified involves turning to guesswork. He grew up Wyandot, albeit as an American citizen, in contrast with the majority of Native Americans at the time. Most of his adult life, however, was spent apart; he lived among white men and fully participated in their ways. His sense of being different from the Plains Indians of the Southwest is apparent when he refers to the Kiowa, Comanche, and other tribes as "savages" and "Redskins." In the 1901 Census of Canada, Armstrong presented himself as a white Presbyterian Englishman.⁶ All the same, he must have felt some bond to his roots since, after returning to the United States in 1904, he specified in the 1910 U.S. Federal Census that he was Indian, even though some of his siblings declared that they were white.⁷ For decades Armstrong was listed in the annual Wyandot census conducted by the Quapaw Agency, and later his children were registered as well.⁸ When back in Canada, he claimed his racial or tribal origin was "Irish."⁹ Shortly before his death, in the 1940 U.S. Federal Census, he repudiated his Indian roots and described himself as being white.¹⁰ It is fair to conclude that Armstrong represented himself variously and according to the community in which he was living at the time.

WYANDOT HISTORY

The Wyandots (also, Wendats, Wyandotts, Wyandottes), a tribe connected to the Huron Confederacy, experienced many migrations during their history.¹¹ In the seventeenth century they were forced to move from their long-term home in Ontario to several locations in the upper Great Lakes region. In the early 1700s, they settled in the Detroit region, and by mid-century they started

to migrate to the southern shore of Lake Erie (in the vicinity of Sandusky, Ohio). Beginning in the 1800s, the Wyandots were compelled to surrender much of their Ohio lands to accommodate encroaching white settlers. As the number of settlers in the area increased, the U.S. government proposed to resettle the Wyandots and other tribes to west of the Mississippi. A treaty was signed in 1842 whereby the Wyandots would be moved to the area of the state of Kansas. When some seven hundred tribal members arrived there in July 1843, they were not satisfied with the location proposed for them so they purchased land from the Delawares at the place where the Kansas and Missouri Rivers meet—in fact, where Kansas City, Kansas, is today. In the several months between their arrival and the time when they established their homes, many Wyandots died of illness and were buried on a hillside in what was later to be named the Huron Indian Cemetery, which now is usually referred to as the Wyandot National Burial Ground.¹² Years of negotiations passed before the Wyandots received the government's promised compensation for the loss of their properties in Ohio. Not every Wyandot was removed to Kansas, however, and small Wyandot communities continued to exist in Michigan and Canada.

In spite of floods, epidemics, and other problems experienced in the first few years at their new location, the Wyandots developed farms, some businesses, and a ferry across the Kansas (Kaw) River. Many Wyandots had been educated at a mission school in Ohio and a number of them had entered professions. Several of the leading members of the tribe had mixed white and Native ancestry, and some were white people who had been adopted by the tribe. The Wyandots, when still in Ohio, had taken on many of the practices of so-called “civilization” and occupied themselves in agriculture and commercial activities in Kansas. They subsequently negotiated a treaty with the federal government in 1855 whereby tribal members could become U.S. citizens. (This Wyandot society, when contrasted with the cultures of other Indians of the Southwest at the time, might explain Armstrong's feelings of being distinct from other Indian peoples and also his sense of belonging to the white cultural world.) The treaty required the dissolution of tribal

government and dividing up the reserve land to make it available for individual ownership.

Soon after 1855, the Wyandots experienced their most difficult decade. Division of communal land into individual plots had fostered the incursion of white settlers who brought with them their various vices and hostile pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions. The Wyandot Christians, from their days in Ohio, belonged to the Methodist Episcopalian Church and were opposed to slavery. However, in Kansas, one of the church's ministers was from the South and his promotion of the opposite view divided the congregation with the result that two separate churches were built, both of which were subsequently burned by opposing groups in 1856, long before the start of the Civil War. The misery of the times prompted Chief Matthew Mudeater (Armstrong's father) to lead about two hundred Wyandots to Indian Territory in 1857, to a region now called Ottawa County, Oklahoma, where they settled on reserve land offered to them by the Senecas. This migration was carried out without the consent of the federal authorities, and it was not until 1867 that a reservation for the Wyandots in Oklahoma was formalized by treaty.

During the Civil War, the Wyandots who remained in Kansas and those in Indian Territory suffered tremendously and were made destitute. When the Confederate Army advanced on Indian Territory in 1862, the Wyandots fled back to Kansas. In 1865 a number of them began returning to their former places in Oklahoma. Factionalism originating in 1855 between those who favoured citizenship (the Citizen's Party headed by Matthew Mudeater) and those who opposed dissolving tribal status for citizenship (the Indian Party) led to internal dissention that lasted many decades.

After signing the 1867 treaty that provided for a Wyandot reservation in Indian Territory, many Wyandots still residing in Kansas decided to move to Oklahoma, where Indian tribal organization had now been re-established. Some of the Wyandots who had relinquished status in favour of citizenship requested to have their tribal status reinstated. Through adoptions and petitions, individual members of the Citizen Party were able to rejoin the tribe. In 1876 the Wyandotte Council chose Chief Mudeater and two other

delegates to travel to Washington in order to secure funds owed to the Wyandots from prior treaties and obligations.

Just as the reservation in Kansas had been partitioned decades earlier, the reservation in Oklahoma was broken up. The Dawes Act of 1887 prescribed the partitioning of reserve land and for allotments to be given to individuals registered on the annual census rolls of the Wyandot Indians at the Quapaw Agency. Once the allotments were made, the Wyandotte Association, with Alfred Mudeater (Armstrong's brother) as vice-president, leased land from the allottees for a town site to be located in the area of a post office named Grand River. The town, named Wyandotte, was to become the cultural and administrative centre for the Wyandots of Oklahoma. Today there are four Wyandot Nations—the Wyandotte Nation of Oklahoma, the Wyandot Nation of Kansas, the Huron-Wendat of Wendake (Quebec), and the Wyandot Nation of Anderdon in Michigan.

ARMSTRONG'S ANCESTORS

Armstrong's ancestry is not typical. Notwithstanding his lineage from Wyandot and Delaware chiefs, two generations earlier, Armstrong actually did have a white paternal great-grandfather. His occasional reference to being English or Irish, therefore, has some justification, even though he would have had little experience of English culture as a child. His father, Matthew Mudeater, was the son of "Russia" Mudeater, who, in turn, was the son of a white man, who had been adopted as a boy by the Wyandots. Several versions of this story and of the origin of the name Mudeater are found in William Connelley's *Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory and the Journals of William Walker*:

The name Mudeater is an honored one in the Wyandot Nation. There are different accounts of the manner in which it became fixed as a family name. Alfred J. Mudeater, Esq., [Armstrong's brother] of Wyandotte, Indian Territory, gave me substantially the following: A war party of Wyandots went up the Big Sandy River about the time of

the Revolutionary War, for the purpose, as he said, of falling upon the Cherokees, but much more probably for the purpose of raiding the settlements west of New River in Virginia, or along the Watauga in what is now East Tennessee. This party went down a valley after passing the head waters of the Big Sandy River. This valley was inhabited by white settlers who fled at the approach of the Indians, who passed on and went far beyond it. They were gone for about two weeks, when they returned up this same valley to again reach the waters of the Big Sandy, which they would descend on their way home. As they were marching up this little valley they saw a small boy run down to the creek some distance ahead of them and disappear in the bushes that fringed the stream. Some of the warriors hastened to the point where the boy was last seen but he was nowhere to be found. The other warriors of the party came up and a close and systematic search was instituted for the fugitive. One of them noticed that the creek had cut in under the roots of some trees, leaving a mass of roots and earth overhanging the water. He plunged into the stream and looked under this overhanging mass. He saw a boy's legs at the farthest corner of the cavity thus found, and, seizing him by the feet, drew him forth.

The child, for he was nothing more, being only about six or seven years old, was famished and emaciated. So extreme had been his sufferings from hunger that he had been eating the soapstone found along the bed of the creek. This soapstone and clay were smeared about his mouth and over his face. The Indians, with that aptness for which they are famous in the bestowal of names, called him Mud Eater, a name which he retained ever after. The warriors gave him food, and carried him with them to their town on the Sandusky. He said that his people had either abandoned him or forgotten him in their hasty flight from the Indians, and he had been left to starve, or to whatever fate might befall him. The Indians adopted him and he grew up among them and married a Wyandot woman.

The Hon. Frank H. Betton, of Wyandotte County, Kansas, who married Kim Susanah Mudeater, the sister of Alfred J. Mudeater, Esq. [also Armstrong's sister], who gave me the foregoing account, believes it possible that the name may have been bestowed from the habits of the turtle which burrows in the mud, and which might be said to be a mud eater. This is a plausible and tenable theory, and it is quite possible that it is correct, if the boy was adopted by the Big Turtle Clan, or the Mud Turtle Clan.

He related to me another tradition. A party of Wyandots went to visit another tribe, perhaps the Shawnees, or the Delawares. Arrived at the spring at which the village supply of water was obtained they beheld an emaciated white boy eating clay from its banks. He was a captive and had been adopted and had almost starved. The Wyandots from compassion bought him and adopted him into their tribe, and gave him the name of Mud Eater, from the circumstance which caused his purchase and adoption into the Wyandot Nation. The improbable part of this version of the matter lies in the assertion that he had been starved after adoption. This could not have been, unless the whole tribe was starving. It was contrary to all Indian customs to withhold food from anyone. While one had food all had it.¹³

According to Connelley, who was the author and editor of several books on the histories of Nebraska and Kansas, the adopted white boy called Mud Eater eventually married a Wyandot, and they had a son named "Russia" Mudeater. The personal name "Russia" seems improbable—more likely it is an adaptation or corruption of a Wyandot name that sounds similar.¹⁴ "Russia" Mudeater married a daughter of Adam Brown, another white boy who had been adopted by the Wyandots and who later became their chief. One of their children was Matthew Mudeater, Armstrong's father. There is no further information about "Russia" Mudeater, but the death of his wife, Armstrong's grandmother, is noted in Provisional Governor of Nebraska Territory William Walker's diary entries for March 1848:

Tuesday, 28—Clear and frosty morning . . . To-day at 12 o'clock the widow Mudeater departed this life, a worthy and good woman gathered to her fathers.

Wednesday, 29—Clear and frosty morning. 4° below “freezing.” Attended the funeral of the widow Mudeater.¹⁵

The widow Mudeater (1788–March 28, 1848) was buried in the Huron Cemetery in Kansas City.¹⁶ Presumably, her husband, “Russia,” had died earlier in Ohio. Robert Armstrong, thus, had white and Indigenous roots. The identity of the white boy adopted by the Wyandots will likely be forever a mystery.

MATTHEW MUDEATER, FATHER OF ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Matthew Mudeater, father of Robert Armstrong, was born on February 12, 1812.¹⁷ His wife, Nancy Pipe (Armstrong’s mother), was “a direct descendant of Hopocan, or Captain Pipe, Chief of the Wolf Clan, and afterwards Head Chief of all the Delawares, and who burned Colonel Crawford at the stake in what is now Crawford County, Ohio.”¹⁸ Matthew Mudeater, in one instance, stated that he and his wife were born in Canada; in another, Ohio.¹⁹ In all likelihood, he was born in Canada, though Nancy may have been born in Ohio. An 1836 map of the Huron (Wyandot) Reserve shows Matthew Mudeater as the owner of some land in the southern tip of Ontario, just across the Detroit River from Michigan.²⁰ The couple had been educated at the Methodist Episcopal Church School in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, and both were described as being “exceedingly fair and handsome.”²¹ Three of their children—Silas, Susanah, and Dawson—were born in Ohio.²²

In the summer of 1843, the Mudeaters were part of the Wyandot exodus from Ohio to Kansas. From that pivotal year onward, Matthew Mudeater was politically and socially active, engaging in diverse activities for the betterment of his community. As mentioned previously, soon after arriving at their destination, and not willing to settle far from established communities, the Wyandots