

## **William McKay II.** (1818-1882)

William was John Richards McKay's second son. He joined the HBC in 1837 and saw most of his service in the Swan River District; this included 12 years at Fort Ellice. He started with the HBC as a "coopers" apprentice and rose through merit to postmaster then clerk and was commissioned as a Chief Trader in 1865. He worked at Touchwood Hills and Egg Lake before his appointment at Fort Ellice. In the late 1850s McKay was renowned as a horse trader, Isaac Cowie related that "Billy" was able to recognize any horse he had ever seen, no matter how altered by age. The animals were traded to Indians, other traders and freighters passing through Fort Ellice on the Carlton Trail from Fort Garry. The post was also a centre for the repair of Red River carts. The *Saulteaux* and *Cree* called McKay Bear Skin, a name inherited from his father; the *Sioux* named him *Watanaak* or "Trader of Useful Things."

McKay was promoted to Chief Trader in 1865 and was placed in charge of the Fort Pelly District in 1870. In 1870, McKay was transferred to Fort Pelly to succeed chief Factor Robert Campbell, however, he was transferred back to Fort Ellice in 1872 and had a final transfer to Fort Pitt in 1873. In 1873, he became factor for the Saskatchewan District at Fort Pitt. He died in Edmonton on December 24, 1882

He and his wife, Mary Cook, had ten children. Mary, born in 1824, was the daughter of Joseph Cook and Catherine Sinclair. Their daughter, also named Mary, married Walter Traill also of HBC. Their son Thomas was a well-known businessman of Prince Albert and a member of the North West Territories Legislature. Their daughter Katherine married Chief Factor Lawrence Clarke. Their son, Henry, born in 1856 at Fort Ellice, went on to become the HBC postmaster at Grand Rapids where he married Anabella Inkster. Another son, George, studied for the clergy and became an Archdeacon in the Anglican Church. Their son Angus, spent all of his working life with the HBC in the Saskatchewan District and was in charge of numerous trading posts. His last assignment was at La Ronge in 1920 after which he retired to homestead near Prince Albert.

The McKay's son James was a law graduate practised at Prince Albert was subsequently elected to parliament and later appointed as a Justice of the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal.

Their son William Jr. (III) (1852-1931), was also a fur trader and took part (on the Dominion side) in the 1885 Resistance as a scout, combatant and interpreter. He is most famous for heading off Poundmaker and war chief Fineday at Battleford in 1885. He died on his farm at Prince Albert in 1931.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell  
Coordinator of Metis Heritage & History Research  
Louis Riel Institute