

William Henry Jackson

William Henry Jackson was raised in the village of Wingham, In Huron Country, Ontario. Well's older brother named Eastwood was born in 1859, while his sister Cicely was born in 1863. Will himself was born in Toronto on May 3, 1861.<sup>1</sup>

Religion was prominent in the Jackson family and their household strictly forbid any smoking, drinking and card playing. Thomas and Elizabeth, Will's parents, were very strong Methodists and often times, saw the whole family gathered around the piano singing Methodist hymns and songs of the day. Elizabeth had become an accomplished pianist, after having studied music in England.

Will's education took place in his early years at home. His mother taught him at home because Will was of poor health until about 10 years old.<sup>2</sup>

During this early period Will was supposed to be a type of prankster or rebel or even a compulsive liar.<sup>3</sup>

Will concluded his schooling in Toronto attended the University of Toronto at the age of 17. He was involved at an early age in politics and his idol was William Lyon Mackenzie. Mackenzie was a journalist and organizer in the Upper Canadian Rebellion of 1837.<sup>4</sup>

Will's university was cut short when the Jackson family moved to the Prince Albert area in the North West. The year was 1881. The family business had failed and when Thomas Eastwood Jackson received a position as a pharmacist the whole family left the area. The eldest Jackson's settled on a homestead some 30 miles east of Prince Albert and had established a farm implement business in Prince Albert.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Donald B. Smith, "William Henry Jackson: Riel's Secretary", The Beaver, Spring (1981) pg. 11.
  2. Ibid. pg. 11
  3. Jackson Papers, C555/2/13.15, University of Saskatchewan, Special Collections. pg. 2
  4. Smith, "Riel's Secretary", The Beaver, pg. 12
  5. Jackson Papers, C555/2/13.15, U.OF S. pg. 2

It was in Prince Albert that Will learned the grievances of the farmers in the area. In his efforts to help the farmers in the district he set up a small editorial sheet and named it The Voice of The People.<sup>6</sup> After a few unsuccessful issues The Voice was discontinued.

Will's next move was to organize the farmers in the district. The results of his efforts was rewarded of the Settler's union. It was at a meeting of the Settler's Union that the idea was voiced to ask for the co-operation of the Metis in opposing the mismanagement of government by Sir John A. Macdonald's conservatives. Jackson was the link between these two parties and when the notion of bringing Louis Riel back to deal with Macdonald and Lieutenant-Governor Edgar Dewdney.

With Riel and Jackson doing the writing of petitions, messages and letters the movement was surely deemed as a peaceful means to awaken the rights of the residents of the North West. Those that came forward with grievances were white settlers, Indians and Metis alike.

Jackson's involvement in the movements of 1884-85 prompted police to keep track of all of his activities. Will Jackson was even under the suspicion that the police were opening his mail.<sup>7</sup>

On March 18th, 1885 Jackson was baptized into the Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> Riel, as Godfather named him Honare Joseph Jackson.<sup>9</sup> It was from this point that Riel and his followers believe, Will to be of not sound mind. Riel and members of his council decided to restrain Jackson and locked him up. "Will's attempts to escape were regarded as further evidence of insanity."<sup>10</sup>

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6. Jackson Papers, C555/2/13.15, U of S. pg 2

7. Smith, "Riel's Secretary", The Beaver, pg. 1y.

8. Jackson Papers, C555/2/13.16, University of Saskatchewan, Special Collections, page 8.

9. Ibid., page 8

10. Ibid., page 11

After the Battle of Batoche, Riel's prisoners were let loose and among them was Jackson Middleton, General of the army, kept Jackson in custody.

Concerned about Jackson's mind, Middleton appointed two physicians to examine him. This consensus was that Jackson was suffering from "Dementia"<sup>11</sup> Also, treatment under confined conditions, was not possible. They suggested he be placed in an asylum for the insane.

In a trial, in Regina, which lasted one-half hour, the jury acquitted Jackson on ground of insanity. During the trial Will's own brother testified against him stating, "from the time he was christened in the Roman Catholic Church he has been insnae."<sup>12</sup>

In November of 1885 Jackson walked away from the insane asylum and made good his escape to the United States.

While in the states Will became a founding member of the International Workers of the World Union. He was well established as an activivist in the Chicago Federation of Labour.<sup>13</sup>

The last forty years of his life seemed spent in organizing various labour union movements throughout Canada and the States. Also an avid reader he acquired a collection of books and periodicals in which someday he wished to establish a library for the North American Indians.<sup>14</sup>

William Henry Jackson died on January 10, 1952.<sup>15</sup> Known to some as Honari Henri Jaxon he died as a nearly forgotten man. A man who had gret influences and dedication to the rights and liberties of the Metis and citizen of the North West died in poverty, ill health and neglect. He was 90 years old.

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11. Ibid. page 5

12. Smith, "Riel's Secretary", The Beaver, pg. 18

13. Jackson Papers, C555/2/13.16, U of S. pg. 29

14. Ibid. page 29

15. Ibid., pg. 29