

Metis Women at Upper Fort Garry.

In addition to the Metis women who were wives of Hudson's Bay Company Officers there were numerous Metis women on staff at the Governor's House to serve the day to day needs of the HBC officers and men. These women were the cooks, nannies, housekeepers, seamstresses and gardeners of the fort.

Two of these women, Maria Irwin McDougall and Margaret Phillips Kirkness, were employed at "The Big House" of Upper Fort Garry and their stories are still recounted in Metis oral history.

Margaret Phillips Kirkness (b. 1867).

Margaret Kirkness is the great grandmother of Mrs Iris (Walters) Vitt of Selkirk, Manitoba who tells of her great grandmother working in the "Big House" of Upper Fort Garry. The story is also recounted in the writings of her father Frank Walters.

Margaret Phillips was the daughter of William Phillips¹ (b. 1842, Orkney Islands) and Charlotte Lambert (b. 1846) a Metis woman.² The family lived at Fort Ellice. Shortly after their marriage, Charlotte came down the Assiniboine River on a flat boat, the *Alfa*, to Upper Fort Garry and that summer, her husband joined her, making the trip with a horse and cart. There they boarded the *International* (a Red River steamboat), bound for Lower Fort Garry. In 1868, after putting in one year's service at Lower Ft Garry, William left the HBC and resided in St Andrews at Lambert's Point for some 10 years.

On December 4, 1867 Charlotte gave birth to their first child "Maggie" in St Andrews, probably at Lambert's Point where her parents were living at the time). The Walters family recounts that Maggie Phillips, as a child lived on a farm in the district that was known as "Butter Town" (now Rossdale, MB), between the Red River and the "bog" (Oak Hammock Marsh). Maggie, left home as a young girl, to work at the "Big House" at Upper Fort Garry.

Margaret Phillips married Joseph Kirkness (Metis, born 1856 at St. Peter's) on April 26, 1885 in St. Peters Dynevor Church.

Maria Irwin McDougall

¹ In 1863, William Phillips was posted to Norway House and from there to Fort Pelly with Chief Factor, Robert Campbell also from the Orkneys. In 1864 Charlotte Lambert was engaged by Chief Factor Robert Campbell at Fort Pelly as a nanny or 'Nurse Girl' to help care for his baby son, Glen Campbell It was during this time that Charlotte and William Phillips met and fell in love. William was later sent to Fort Ellice. On August 26, 1886, Charlotte Lambert and William Phillips were married at Fort Ellice by the Reverend James Settee.

² Charlotte Lambert was born on September 24, 1846 at Lambert's Point in St Andrews Parish, Red River, the daughter of Margaret Favel and Michel Lambert (1792-1875), a Metis voyageur.

Maria Irwin was the Metis daughter of George Irwin and Colette “Polly“ Fidler.³ On August 28, 1862 at St. Boniface she married Alexander McDougall (Metis). Alexander was the son of Duncan McDougall (the ferry operator at the Forks) and Marguerite McDonald (McDonell). Alexander’s brother Duncan McDougall Jr. married Rosalie Lesperance the daughter of the famous York Boat Brigade leader Alexis Bonami Lesperance. Duncan McDougall Jr. was employed as a saddler for the Hudson’s Bay Company at Upper Fort Garry as was his father before him.

Jim Jerome, a McDougall descendant tells stories from the oral history of Maria McDougall and other family members who were among the many Metis employed at Upper Fort Garry.



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³ Polly (b. 1817 at Brandon) was the Metis daughter of the famous HBC surveyor Peter fiddler and his wife Mary Mackegonne.