

## **Jane Klyne McDonald**

By George and Terry Goulet

As the fur trade expanded westward across the North American continent, “country wives” played a momentous role in its progress and in the aid and comfort they brought to their fur-trading husbands. In the early part of the 1800s this was particularly evident west of the Rocky Mountains where they made unique contributions to the development of British Columbia from fur trading outposts to colony and eventually to provincial status.

A notable Métis country wife in this area was Jane Klyne who entered into a country marriage in 1825 with Archibald McDonald, a Scottish born fur-trading officer of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC).



Jane Klyne McDonald (Library and Archives Canada)

Jane’s father Michel Klyne was of Dutch-Canadian ancestry. A former voyageur with the North West Company (NWC), Michel was eventually appointed to the position of Postmaster at Jasper House by the HBC. This was the highest position that a servant, who was not an officer, could attain in the HBC. Michel married Suzanne la France, a Métis woman, in accordance with the custom of the Indian Country.

Jane Klyne was born on August 23, 1810 at Jasper House, an HBC post in the Athabasca District in what is today the Province of Alberta. As a child Jane and her sisters accompanied their parents on various trips that their father Michel took in performance of his duties in the fur trade.

Francis Ermatinger, a trader with the HBC, recounted in one of his letters a trip that he took with the Klyne family from Edmonton House to Jasper House. He noted that the group, including young Jane, rode horses and traveled by canoe and on foot in order to reach their destination.

As with other Métis girls, Jane acquired the art of making moccasins and netting thongs to make snowshoes. As she grew older she also assisted her parents in looking after her younger siblings.

Jane made her first acquaintance with her future husband Archibald McDonald when she was a teenager. They met when her father Michel took his family with him west of the Rocky Mountains on one of his Company trips. This encounter probably occurred at the Boat Encampment located at the junction of the Columbia and Canoe Rivers.

In time they fell in love and were soon fondly referring to each other as Jenny and Archy. The 15 year old Métis girl married her handsome fur trader in September, 1825 *à la façon du pays*. Archy was then some twenty years older than Jenny. She was Archy's second country wife. He had previously been married *à la façon du pays* in the Oregon Country in 1823 to Princess Raven, one of the daughters of the powerful and famed Chinook Chief Concomly. Princess Raven died about one year after her country marriage to Archibald McDonald. She and Archy had one son Ranald who was born on the 34<sup>th</sup> birthday of his father on February 3, 1824.

Archibald McDonald was born at Leechkentium, Scotland on February 3, 1790. His father was Angus McDonald and his mother was Mary Rankin. Although he studied some medicine, likely at the University of Edinburgh, he did not become a physician. As a young man he acted as a clerk and recruiting agent in Scotland for Thomas Douglas, Fifth Earl of Selkirk. Lord Selkirk was then the largest shareholder in the HBC. In 1811 the HBC had granted Selkirk a huge tract of land in Rupert's Land equaling about 116,000 square miles in what now is known as southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and the northern parts of North Dakota and Minnesota.

Selkirk wished to establish an agricultural colony and people it with poor Scottish and Irish immigrants and their families. The HBC was then undergoing financial difficulties. The Company had stopped issuing dividends and the price of its shares had significantly dropped. In setting up the Settlement Selkirk was prompted by his ambitious mercantile nature, the corporate designs of the HBC to expand its trade in the Indian Country in opposition to the NWC, and perhaps by humanitarian concerns. Because of the close connections between Selkirk and the HBC, his altruistic motives may have been somewhat tenuous. According to Glyndwr Williams in an article in *The Beaver* magazine: "... the first recruits for Red River signed for service with the Company .... The distinction between colony and Company was a fine one."

The overlapping interest of the Selkirk Settlement with that of the HBC is also manifested in the appointment of Miles Macdonell as the first Governor of the Settlement. Not only was he personally selected by Selkirk for this position, Miles Macdonell was also given a commission by the HBC. It was in 1812 that Lord Selkirk recruited the 22 year old Archibald McDonald to find settlers for the Red River Settlement. The following year Archy left Stromness as second-in-command of over 90 immigrants to the Red River Settlement. They wintered near Fort Churchill and finally arrived at Red River in the summer of 1814.

The establishment of Selkirk's colony and the arbitrary dictates proclaimed by Governor Miles Macdonell angered the NWC and the Métis of this area. The Métis saw these matters as a threat imposed by foreign intruders to their economic well-being and their traditional way of life. The NWC viewed it as a scheme by the HBC, controlled by Selkirk and his brother-in-law Andrew Colville, to do serious damage to the NWC's fur-trading operations. The animosities that developed led to an unpremeditated outbreak of hostilities in 1816 in which the recently appointed Governor Robert Semple of the Selkirk Colony and 20 of his men were killed by the Métis. Subsequently W. B. Coltman was appointed as a Royal Commissioner to investigate this

Battle of Seven Oaks that occurred in the Colony. Coltman reported that “next to certainty” the first shot was fired by Semple’s men. This occurrence (together with Selkirk’s death in 1820) was a factor that led to the merger of the NWC with the HBC in 1821 under the continuing name of the HBC.

In 1820, Archibald McDonald became a clerk with the HBC. After a short time at Île-à-la-Crosse (in what is now Saskatchewan) he was posted to Fort George (formerly Fort Astoria) in the Oregon Country. Five years later in 1825 Jane Klyne became the country wife of Archibald McDonald. The following year Governor George Simpson of the HBC placed Archy in charge of the Thompson’s River District at Fort Kamloops in New Caledonia. A few weeks after giving birth to her first child Angus at Fort Okanagan on August 1, 1826, Jenny arrived at Fort Kamloops. Another son Archibald Jr. was born at Fort Kamloops on February 3, 1828. Later that year McDonald made a trip with Governor George Simpson from Norway House to west of the Rocky Mountains. They traveled in the same boat down the Fraser River to Fort Langley where they arrived on October 11, 1828. Their guide was the experienced Alexis L’Esperance then stationed at Norway House but prior to that he had been employed by the HBC in the Columbia District. According to the author Dennis F. Johnson, L’Esperance became a “legendary guide” with the HBC. L’Esperance is the great great grandfather of George Goulet, one of the authors of this chapter.

Governor Simpson appointed McDonald to the position of Chief Trader and transferred him from Thompson’s River to take charge of Fort Langley. It was Simpson’s intent that McDonald would make Fort Langley self-sufficient and he expected that there would be “Cultivation and the rearing of Cattle” at that location. The diminutive James Murray Yale, who was to be McDonald’s second-in-command at Fort Langley, had also accompanied Simpson and McDonald on their trip down the Fraser River. At the time of Archie’s appointment, Jane and the children were then at Fort Vancouver. They did not arrive at Fort Langley until the following summer of 1829. Her husband’s position of command and her taking up residence at the Fort meant that she was now the “Leading Lady of Fort Langley”. Jane became the Mistress of Fort Langley and a role model for the country wives at that Fort.

McDonald has left a vivid description of the Fort as it then was. In *Peace River: A Canoe Voyage from Hudson’s Bay to the Pacific*, McDonald wrote in his Journal that the Fort was 135 feet by 120 feet, had two good bastions and was surrounded by a gallery four feet wide. There was a building with three compartments to house the servants and a small log house of two compartments for the gentlemen. There were also two other houses, one of which had two square rooms with a fireplace in each, and an adjoining kitchen made of slab.

Fort Langley had been built in 1827 under the leadership of James McMillan by, among others, Métis servants of the HBC. Today Fort Langley is designated as a Canadian National Historic Site. One of the plaques on the wall of the Visitor Centre at the Fort reads in part:

In 1827, a group of twenty-five men – British, Hawaiian, French Canadian, **Métis** and Iroquois – were sent by the Hudson’s Bay Company to establish Fort Langley..... within a year relationships were established through the marriage of the fort’s men to local Stólo women. [Emphasis added.]

Jane Klyne’s husband Archy was a resourceful and intelligent steward of the Fort. He also maintained informative journals in which he gave accounts of the Natives, rivers, climate, soil, births of children and other matters. Under his shrewd leadership, good relations were established with the Native tribes in the area. As a consequence Fort Langley soon played a significant role

in the development of the Pacific Slope and the Fraser River, Puget Sound and Vancouver Island. With the depletion of fur-bearing animals in the area, Fort Langley's function was being diversified from that of furs to provisions. Fish, farm produce, cranberries, and lumber became the focus of activities. The farm operations at Fort Langley were expanded to 2,000 bushels of potatoes, double its prior output. After witnessing the large number of salmon being brought to the Fort by the Natives to trade for buttons and other trinkets, the potential for exporting fish from the Fort was recognized. In this respect a large scale processing system for curing salmon was implemented, and a qualified cooper to make barrels for shipping the salmon was brought to Fort Langley from Fort Vancouver.

A storehouse and cooperage were erected at the Fort and in due course thousands of tons of preserved salmon as well as other goods were shipped out of Fort Langley to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), Alaska and other locations such as California. On January 15, 1831 McDonald wrote to John McLeod of the growing fishery trade; "Our salmon, for all the contempt entertained for everything outside of the routine of beaver at York Factory, is close up to 300 barrels."

This period of time also saw the embryonic beginnings of the lumber industry in British Columbia including the active participation of the Métis HBC employees. Staves were made out of felled trees and barrels were manufactured from them in the cooperage building. Thousands of cedar shingles and many planks were also produced.

It was into this busy work atmosphere that Jane Klyne McDonald and their children came to Fort Langley. At that time their children were Angus, Archibald Jr. and Jane's stepson Ranald. In *Peace River: A Canoe Voyage from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific* there is a description given of a dwelling house described by Archy in his journal as:

.... a good dwelling house, with an excellent cellar and a spacious garret, a couple of well finished chimneys are up, and the whole inside now ready for wainscoting and partitioning, four large windows in front, one in each end, and one with a corresponding door in the back.

In her book Jean Murray Cole states that this was the "Big House" intended for the Chief Trader and his family. This home had a kitchen and bake oven in which Jane would have utilized her cooking skills. All was in readiness when Jane arrived at Fort Langley in the summer of 1829.

Jane had come from modest origins and grew up with little education. Archy was determined that not only his children but also Jenny should be taught to read and write. He personally tutored them at Fort Langley and later at Fort Colvile.

Edward Ermatinger had served with the HBC west of the Rocky Mountains for a number of years before retiring to St. Thomas, Upper Canada. After his retirement many of his former HBC cohorts carried on an active correspondence with him. This correspondence provides an insight into many of the personal experiences of the bourgeois fur traders and of the activities of the HBC west of the mountains during this time period. Archy, for some reason, usually addressed Ermatinger as "Sir" in his correspondence. On the other hand John Work, another HBC officer, addressed him as "Ned". On February 20, 1831 Archy wrote from Fort Langley to Ermatinger stating: "Now two words about Jenny and the Boys .... She brought her third son [Alexander] to this world on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Octr. last & that she is become an excellent Scollar [sic]."

Even though she was busy with her young family, Jenny continued with her pursuit of learning. Archy wrote to his friend John McLeod on January 15, 1832 about his efforts to teach

his family: “What I regret most is the condition of the Boys – for there is nothing like early education – however I keep them at it Mother and all. My Chinook [Ranald] now reads pretty well and has commenced cyphering [an archaic word for arithmetic].”

Jane gave birth to her fourth son, Allan, at Fort Langley on May 19, 1832. The following year Archy wrote about her and his children: “... so that with herself and Toole at the head of the class I am in a fair way of having a thriving school.” Toole was the nickname for Jane’s stepson Ranald. In that same letter, McDonald added that his duties would: “... put an end to this agreeable and interesting pastime.” He indicated that in order to further their education he would soon send his older boys to an academy that had recently opened in the Red River Settlement.

Jane’s tenure as mistress of Fort Langley was to end in 1833. During her time there she had brought with her to the Fort and its community the Métis heritage and culture that she had grown up with in the Athabasca area.

In anticipation of a trip to Great Britain in 1884, Archy first went to Fort Vancouver. Prior to his overseas trip he was sent in May 1833 to the Puget Sound area to select a site for Fort Nisqually. It was to this area that the Red River Expedition (consisting of mostly Métis immigrants and led by James Sinclair) was sent by the HBC in 1841.

Before he left for Scotland and England, Archy arranged for Jane and their four sons to stay with her parents at their Jasper House home. En route there, Jane gave birth to her only daughter Maryanne at Rocky Mountain House (in present day Alberta) on February 3, 1834. She was now the mother of six Métis children including her stepson Ranald.

Later that year Jane and the children traveled to the Red River Settlement to enroll the older boys in school there. It is likely that her parents accompanied them on this journey, since that same summer her father Michel Klyne relocated to the Red River Settlement on his retirement from the HBC.

At Red River Jane and the children lived with the Anglican priest Reverend William Cockran and his wife Ann. The older boys were enrolled in the Red River Academy. Another Anglican missionary Reverend David Jones and his wife Mary had opened the Academy in 1832. While staying with the Cockrans, Jane made a decision to formally join the Episcopalian faith of her husband Archy. Reverend Cockran christened Jane, their four sons, their daughter and her stepson Ranald on November 2, 1834.

On his return from his European journey in June 1835, Archy met up with Jenny and his offspring at Red River. While there, Jenny and Archy decided to formalize their country marriage by undergoing a religious ceremony. Reverend Cockran performed the service on June 9, 1835.

Archy wrote to Edward Ermatinger on April 1, 1836. After first referring to the insanity of Trader John Tod’s English wife Eliza, Archy drolly added of his own wedding: “thought the safest & least bothersome course for me to pursue was to close in with the old woman tout de bon.” In view of his faithful ten year marriage to Jenny and their many children, he wittily added that in the presence of the HBC Council (which had just completed a meeting at Red River): “Archy and Jenny were joined in holy wedlock .... [and] of course declared at full liberty to live together as man & wife & to increase & multiply as to them might seem fit.” In that same letter Archy revealed that he had finished “an American Sledge [sled]”, and that: “... in company with my wife & little Children have enjoyed myself with last winter to my hearts content.”

His return from Great Britain also witnessed a new assignment for him. He was appointed the head of Fort Colville in the Oregon Country. He and Jenny made a heartfelt decision to leave the five older children (aged five to eleven) in the Red River Settlement to carry on with their schooling. This meant that they would likely not see their parents for upwards of five years

As events unfolded, when Jane's stepson Ranald was fifteen year's old he went to St. Thomas to work for Edward Ermatinger as a bank apprentice for a short time. Later as an adult, Ranald proved to be an interesting character in his own right. Wanting to see Japan, he arranged to be marooned there. He spent a year in Japan teaching English before he was unceremoniously evicted.

In the fall of 1835, Archy and Jenny arrived at Fort Colvile. This Fort had substantial farm and livestock operations. It was also the center for the construction of bateaux. These boats were essential for river freighting along the HBC fur-brigade transportation system west of the Rocky Mountains. Jenny once again became the leading lady and role model for the women of a thriving fort. In addition to the male servants of the HBC, there were dozens of women and children then living there. Jane had staff to help her with her many duties at this Fort. This was helpful since she and Archy entertained visitors, guests, and traveling HBC officials on a regular basis. She took a lead role in providing hospitality to them.

The height of Jane's generosity and openheartedness and that of her husband occurred at Fort Colvile. When the missionaries Cushing Eells and Elkanah Walker and their wives and a young baby Cyrus Walker arrived in the Oregon Country in 1838, the dwellings that they were to occupy were in a sad state of disrepair. Jane and Archy invited them to reside in their home at Fort Colvile until the home for the missionaries could be made fit to live in. On September 17, 1838 Reverend Walker wrote in his journal: "Received a cordial welcome from Mr. McDonald and lady." They referred to Jane as "a jewel .... of rare excellence", and her children as "living testimony to her maternal efficiency". In *Exile in the Wilderness* by Jean Murray Cole, Jane is quoted as writing to Rev. Walker and his wife Mary: "Although I have more attendants than you have, still they leave me quite enough to do."

Due to Archy's increased duties at Fort Colvile, it became necessary for Jane to assume the education of their younger children that were with them. Within a few years, her role had changed from that of a student to that of a teacher. This was a tribute to her innate intelligence and her ability to learn quickly.

In an article by Cole in the 1972 Summer issue of *The Beaver* magazine there is a quote by George Allan, an accountant employed at Fort Vancouver. He is quoted concerning Fort Colvile and the sociability of Jane and Archy:

.... nothing I have yet seen in the Indian country can equal the beauty of its situation....  
When seated at table with Mr. and Mrs. McDonald and their family, one cannot help thinking himself once more at home enjoying a tête-à-tête in some domestic circle.

In dining with his wife and children, Archy differed from the usual practice of HBC officers having dinner only with other officials of the fort and not with their families. When officials and guests visited the Fort, Jane would supervise the meals and sit down to eat and chat with their guests.

In the summer of 1841 Governor George Simpson of the HBC was traveling in the Oregon Country on a leg of his journey around the world. Before the Governor reached Fort Colvile, Archy and some of his men rode a distance from the Fort to meet Simpson and his party. Archy brought a delectable and nutritious meal to them. Undoubtedly Jane would have played a significant part in the arrangement and preparation of this festive banquet that was prepared for Simpson and his entourage.

In his *Narrative of a Journey Around the World*, Simpson wrote about this meal:

Just fancy, at the base of the Rocky Mountains, a roasted turkey, a sucking [sic] pig, new bread, fresh butter, eggs, ale, &c.; and then contrast all these dainties with short allowance

of pemmican and water. No wonder that some of our party ate more than was good for them.

Obviously this was an eloquent tribute to Jenny's culinary talents and organizational skills.

Archy was very proud of Jenny's domestic and culinary abilities. On January 25, 1837 he wrote to Edward Ermatinger about Jane: "At Colvile, the wife & myself are in excellent practice - her Butter, Cheese, Ham, & Bacon would shine in any ordinary market...." In this letter he also referred to Frank (Edward's brother) staying with him and Jenny at Fort Colvile in December 1836. Before Christmas, Frank left the Fort, but at the Spokane Forks he became ice bound. He and his men returned to Fort Colvile. Obviously they arrived in time for a sumptuous Christmas dinner with the McDonald family and their guests since Archy stated in his letter that they came back again: "... just in time for the Roast Beef & plum pudding.... After doing ourselves & about five & thirty men all the justice .... of good things at Colvile .... he & party again left...." After the banquet with Governor Simpson in 1841, McDonald was expecting the arrival of James Sinclair and the Red River Expedition of Métis immigrants to the Oregon Country. One of them was Jane's brother Joseph Klyne. The Expedition did not arrive at Fort Colvile until the autumn of 1841 as they had taken a different route than expected and also encountered delays. Some months later in March 1842 in his letter to Edward Ermatinger, Archy wrote about the Red River Expedition: "Another memorable event is the migration this way of some of the Red River Settlers under the conduct of Mr. James Sinclair."

The HBC's Red River Expedition was led by the Métis James Sinclair. Its intent was to create a larger population of British subjects in the disputed Oregon Country with a view to enhancing HBC and British claims to the area.

Notwithstanding her Métis blood, Jane was generally accepted by clergy wives in the region. This differed from the disdainful attitudes of missionary wives at Fort Vancouver (in what is now the State of Washington) and Fort Victoria. Although their husbands were HBC Chief Factors, two other prominent Métis women (Marguerite Wadin McKay McLoughlin and Amelia Connolly Douglas) experienced racial discrimination from the spouses of other missionaries.

In 1838 the Columbia Maternal Association was formed by several wives of the clergy in the area of Fort Colvile. It was a Christian organization of women established for prayer, conversation, to help the members in their maternal duties, and for other activities. Jane was welcomed by these women as a member of this Association.

Jane and Archy lived at Fort Colvile from 1835 to 1844. In that period they heeded Reverend Cockran's words at Red River "to increase and multiply as to them might seem fit". To their great joy, six additional Métis children were born to them during their time at the Fort.

They also experienced trials and sorrows. Their son John died shortly after his birth in April 1836. Their next son, born the following year, was also named John. Twins named Donald and James arrived on July 23, 1839 and Samuel saw the light of day on September 28, 1841. Joseph was born in the autumn of 1843 while they were still mourning the death of their first child Angus who had died earlier that year.

Archy was appointed to the coveted position of Chief Factor in 1842. However, he was now 52 years old and tiring of the fur trade life in the Indian Country. He retired from active duty with the HBC in 1844. In September of that year Archy, the again pregnant Jenny and their children that were with them (three others were still away at school) left Fort Colvile with the intention of retiring in Montreal.

The family crossed the Rocky Mountains, intending to winter at Edmonton House. While en route a son Benjamin was born in November, two months after their departure from Fort Colvile.

In 1845 misfortune struck Edmonton House while the McDonalds were there. In May of that year scarlet fever took the lives of three of their children – two year old Joseph and the twins Donald and James, who were not yet six years old.

These deaths were very difficult for the family. Jane had always been so proud of her twins. In his March 30, 1842 letter to Edward Ermatinger, Archy had referred to “my whole brood of ten” and stated of the twins “... the mother to a thread keeps them in the Same kind of garb.” The McDonalds reached Montreal later that year. Their last child, also named Angus, was born there on November 27, 1846. The family did not remain long in Montreal.

In 1847 Archy purchased a farm near St. Andrews East on the Ottawa River in Canada West (formerly Upper Canada and now Ontario). Although she and her children were Métis, Jane had no trouble fitting into “white society” in their new community.

The Métis blood in Jane’s veins was also strong in that of her brothers George and Adam. They were living in the Red River Settlement at the time of the Red River Resistance of 1869-70. In the initial stages they backed the notorious Dr. John Schultz and opposed the Louis Riel supporters. At one point Riel even had George Klyne arrested for a brief time.

Shortly afterwards in January 1870, George Klyne was elected as one of the French (not English) delegates to the Convention of Forty. This Convention, consisting of 20 English-speaking and 20 French-speaking representatives, was formed to discuss the admission of Red River into the Canadian Confederation. It resulted in the formation of a Provisional Government with Louis Riel elected as its President.

After they settled in Canada West, Jane and Archy led a quiet and a happy life. On January 15, 1853 Archy suddenly passed away. He was then just short of his 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

The country marriage made west of the Rocky Mountains over a quarter of a century earlier between a young Métis woman and an aspiring Scottish fur trader had come to an end. Professor W. L. Morton in the introduction to *Exile in the Wilderness* wrote of Jane and Archy’s marriage: “The family ties were close and enduring, and the marriage an exemplar of fur trade marriages.”

The widowed Jenny lived out the remainder of her life in Canada West in a quiet manner. At some point Jenny, her children and her stepson Ranald commenced spelling their surname “MacDonald” rather than McDonald. In writing to Edward Ermatinger on November 14, 1856 seeking a position for her 19 year old son John, the widowed Jane signed her name “Jane, Klyne, MacDonald”. Her letter contained well-structured sentences, a fine vocabulary and no spelling errors other than “their” instead of “there”. Her clear handwriting is easier to read than Archy’s script. This letter provides tangible proof of Archy’s teaching skills many years earlier and Jane’s ability as a bright and intelligent student.

Jenny died on December 15, 1879. As a wife and mother she represented the role of a country wife in an exemplary fashion. Her death brought to an end the life of this remarkable Métis woman, who has left her mark on the history of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest.

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