

Rev. George Flett, (1817-1897)

George Flett was born at Moose Lake on the Saskatchewan River, the son of Orkneyman, George Flett Sr. a HBC employee and Margaret (Peggy) Whitford an English Half-Breed. When George Sr. and Peggy retired at Point Douglas on the Red River in 1823 they had five sons. George Jr. was then educated at the parish school. George was an excellent linguist and spoke English, French, Cree and Ojibwa. At Red River, George had formed a relationship with Frances “Fanny” Cook (b. 1822), the daughter of William Hemmings Cook and Mary Cocking. They were married on August 7, 1838 at St. Andrews and a daughter, Letitia, was born to them on August 4th, 1839. Tragically, the seventeen-year-old Frances died in childbirth. Subsequently, on November 26th of 1840 he married Mary Ross the daughter of Alexander and Sarah Ross. Mary had received her education at the Red River Academy. Their daughter Margaret was born on December 5, 1841.

Michael Cardinal’s nephew (Margaret Cardinal Flett’s son) George Flett played an outstanding role in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Son of a prominent Hudson’s Bay Company trader, George worked for a while as an interpreter during Treaty negotiations. He also served in the Provisional Government headed by Louis Riel. For many years he served as minister and farm instructor for Keeseekoowenin Reserve. George Flett was first cousin (his mother, Margaret Whitford, was the sister of Métis leader Michael Cardinal) to prominent Saulteaux-Cree chiefs and treaty signatories like Mekis, Keeseekoowenin and Baptiste Bone of the south-western slopes of the Riding Mountains

For his long service as missionary in Prince Albert, George Flett rightly deserves the title of “Father of Prince Albert.” George Flett was no doubt strongly influenced by two close friends: his brother-in-law, Winnipeg’s first Presbyterian minister, John Black (who married a Metis girl, Flett’s wife’s sister) and Reverend James Tanner (also a Metis), who was the first Presbyterian missionary west of Winnipeg.

After the Red River floods of the 1820s George Sr. took his family (then six sons and one daughter) on a trip (1835) with five other families to scout out better farmland. They travelled south to Pembina, thence on to St. Paul and Chicago by both cart and boat. Eventually they ended up at Sault Ste. Marie but in the spring decided to return to Red River, using the Canadian canoe route. George Jr. established himself as a farmer at White Horse Plains but was also working as a free trader on the plains. In 1853, George Jr. was at St. Joseph, west of Pembina collecting old debts. Flett eventually worked for the HBC and was appointed to Victoria near Edmonton in 1864. In 1866, he agreed to accompany John Black (his brother-in-law) and James Nisbit, as an interpreter, on an expedition to open a Presbyterian Mission in the North Saskatchewan River valley at what is now Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. After one year Flett left Prince Albert because Mary was ill and required medical treatment at Red River. On January 16, 1870 Flett was chosen to be an English delegate on Riel’s provisional government. Because of his work as a layman with the church, the FMC recommended to the Assembly that Flett be appointed as a missionary to the Indians. In 1874 he was thus assigned to the bands around Fort Pelly to the north and as far south as the Okanase band at Riding Mountain.

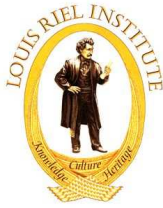
He built his home and mission at Keeseekoowenin near Elphinstone, Manitoba. In 1875, at age 57, the Presbytery of Manitoba ordained Flett “missionary to the Indians.” He was to serve this western part of Manitoba for the next 20 years.

References

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