

Archdeacon John Alexander McKay. (1838-1923)

John was born August 14, 1838 at Moose Factory, Ontario. He was the son of William McKay and Mary Bunn. His father was in charge of the Hudson's Bay post and was the brother of John Richards McKay. Early on, John was influenced by the Anglican clergy and went into the priesthood. He was ordained in the Anglican Church at Winnipeg in 1862.¹ He was married to Margaret Drever and they had four daughters. His first posting was to the mission at The Pas. In 1864, he was transferred to Stanley Mission in Northern Saskatchewan. He excelled in his activities there and under his guidance the community cultivated wheat and garden produce and raised cattle as well. While at Stanley Mission he began his work as a scholar, printing translations of the scriptures on a small printing press. He was later known as the most able Cree scholar in Canada, the author of a Cree dictionary and several other books and translations.

He was at Stanley Mission until 1879 when he was posted to North Battleford. He was also appointed Cree tutor and Professor at Emmanuel College in Prince Albert when it was founded in 1879. Mr. McKay was made Archdeacon of Saskatchewan in 1884. From 1886 to 1887, he served as an Indian Agent at Battleford, then returned to Emmanuel College. He was appointed superintendent of Indian Missions for the Anglican Church in 1900.

The present location of the townsite of La Ronge owes its situation to Archdeacon Mackay, who in planning for the building of the first La Ronge school bought a saw mill with a government grant and set it up on the present townsite of La Ronge, which was at that time some distance from the reservation. Here with access to lumber and employment the Indians gradually moved from the reservation to the site of the school that was being built. His death took place on November 28, 1923 and the funeral was held from St. George's Church, Battleford before being forwarded to St. Mary's cemetery, Prince Albert for burial. At the funeral service the sermon was preached by the Reverend Edward Ahenakew who spoke as follows: "The name of Archdeacon Mackay will be placed in history beside those who once shone as stars in the Church, Bishop Bompas, McKay of Uganda, David Livingstone and many others. He has placed the Cree Bible in the hands of the Indians, also the Prayer Book, the Hymn Book and others. He gave us all these. He gave us himself, he gave us his life. By day and by night, in Winter and in Summer, in the forest of the North and the more open spaces of the South, he travelled from one reservation to another guiding and encouraging his men, preaching Jesus Christ the Crucified to the Crees and incidentally co-operating with the Indian department in the work of education. Saskatchewan is dotted with evidences of the great effectiveness of his

¹ John McKay was early influenced by the Wesleyan Methodist Mission. He is reported to have been baptized by a missionary of that church, and when he was about 17 years old went to Fort George to assist the Reverend E. A. Watkins, an Anglican minister. The Reverend John Horden was also a factor in his life and McKay went in 1857 to Moose Factory to take training as catechist under Horden. By 1860 the senior McKay had retired and went to live at the Red River Settlement, where he was joined by his son John who then began to read for ordination under the guidance of Bishop Anderson. He was ordained deacon at St. Paul's Church on May 29, 1861 and as a priest the following year at St. John's Cathedral, Winnipeg. After he had spent a year at St. Andrew's Parish, he then went to the mission at The Pas in 1862.

service for his Lord among the Indian men. These are a monument to his work. The church has lost one of her most interesting and useful sons, the pioneer West one of it's stabilizing elements, the Church one of her most faithful and Christ-like servants, and the Indians their truest earthly friend, champion and counsellor.”²



L to r.; Canon Clarke, The Late Ven. Archdeacon Mackay, Canon Matheson

Reference:

Agnes Ruest, *A Pictorial History of the Metis and Non-Status Indians in Saskatchewan*, Regina: Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 1976: 28.



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² W. F. Payton, Archdeacon Emeritus “An Historical Sketch of the Diocese of Saskatchewan of the Anglican Church of Canada.” Prince Albert: The Anglican Diocese of Saskatchewan, 1974.