Monkman, Alexander. (1870-1941)

Alexander Monkman, was born on March 29, 1870 at Manitoba House, the son of Henry Monkman[1] (b. 1834) and Nancy Whitford, the daughter of Peter Whitford and Christiana Spence. Alexander married Anne Louise Tate, the daughter of Philip Tate and Ann Fraser on July 15, 1900 in Edmonton, Alberta. They had the following children:

- Fletcher, born September 29, 1901 at Lesser Slave Lake.
- Elise Jane, born January 12, 1903 at Edmonton.
- Philip Henry, born 1904 at Lake Saskatoon, Alberta.
- Christine, born 1906 at Lake Saskatoon, Alberta.
- George Stanley, born 1908 at Hay Meadow.

Alex Monkman at one time lived in Montana, where he became known as a broncobuster and rodeo-rider. He headed north during the 1898 gold rush until he turned back between Dunvegan and Fort St. John. At Peace River he met two free trading and transportation entrepreneurs, Bredin and Cornwall who hired him to drive dog-teams through the Grande Prairie country carrying freight and furs. In July of 1899 the partners decided to build a post at Grande Prairie. Monkman was to select a site, which he did at Lake Saskatoon, a few miles from Grande Prairie. This place was then the crossing of two well-worn Indian trails, where Beaver and Cree Indians had permanent summer camps, and traditional places for ritual meetings and tribal reunions. Here Monkman became the first non - Hudson's Bay Company trader in the region. In 1898 Monkman and Louis Calliou grew the first grain in that area.

By the early 1900s Monkman held property of his own near Flying Shot Lake and received he various grains from the government, who was trying to stimulate agricultural production in the area by handing out seeds to settlers for free. In 1906 Alexander started a ranch at Bear Lake and in 1910 opened a homestead at nearby Cutbank Lake.

In 1922, while looking for tungsten in the Rocky Mountains, Monkman discovered a pass that would later be named in his honour. At that time the grain farmers in his region were facing problems in transporting their harvest to the seaport at Vancouver. The grain had to be transported by rail through Peace River, Edmonton and Calgary, a 1700-mile trip. Monkman's route cut 1000 miles off the total distance travelled, however the Yellowhead Pass was selected for a transport line through the mountains, even though engineers suggested that Monkman's Pass was easier to traverse.

By 1936, high freight costs had taken their toll on the farmers, and Monkman suggested that the farmers build a highway through the Monkman Pass themselves to reduce freight costs. Thus a fundraising effort took place for the "M.P.H." (Monkman Pass Highway) and by 1937 the construction had passed the Alberta-B.C. border and reached Kinuseo Falls. However, the war brought an end to Monkman's career and the highway project ended in 1939 and he died on September 26, 1941 back at Grande Prairie. His legacy now lives on in British

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[1] Henry Monkman was the son of James Monkman (b.c. 1807) and Marguerite Richard. Marguerite was the daughter of Francois Richard Sr. born 1783 and Marguerite Saulteaux, he died 1871 at St. Laurent, Manitoba. The Richards were on of the first families living at Saulteaux Village on the Assiniboine River where Father Belcourt built his first church in 1832..

Columbia's Monkman Provincial Park and Monkman Falls.

Scrip:
Monkman, Alexander; address: South Branch, Pakan; born: 29 March, 1870 at Manitoba House; father: Henry Monkman (Métis); mother: Nancy Whitford (Métis); scrip for $240.00; claim no. 1014.

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