

FINDING UEL-HBC CONNECTIONS

By Judith Hudson Beattie

It is an honour to speak to the national gathering of the United Empire Loyalists here in Winnipeg. I was connected to the Hudson's Bay Company by working in their archives for 22 years, hence my invitation to speak here. I am also a Loyalist at heart. I had always assumed that the members of my Hudson family were Late Loyalists. They settled in 1799 in Newport, in one of the Loyalist Eastern Townships under the leadership of Edmund Hurd, and in 1820 moved to Philemon Wright's Hull Township, across the river from Ottawa. So it was quite a shock to me when I discovered several soldiers fighting on the Revolutionary side bearing the Hudson name. Perhaps with research I will discover more details linking my family to all of yours.

When I was asked to give this talk it was with some trepidation that I accepted. I made the title open-ended enough that if I found no connection, I would still have a good story to tell about my search that would highlight the fascinating and detailed records held in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. However, I am pleased to report that I have more than enough material to fill my allotted time. In fact, right on the UEL Manitoba website is an excellent article by Michael Payne giving background and analysis of the Loyalist connections to the fur trade, so you can read more there. I won't be repeating his work. Instead, I will be telling stories about some of the men he mentioned.

Since this is the 200th Anniversary of the arrival of the Selkirk settlers and the introduction of European agricultural in Western Canada, I decided to focus my talk on the Loyalist fur trade connection to the Red River Settlement. So I have added a third three-letter connection to the two I already planned: a UEL/HBC connection, but also a Red River Settlement or RRS connection.

Now, as far as the HBC is concerned, there is no doubt that their sympathies lay with the Loyalist cause. Those of you who have taken advantage of the excellent tours in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives and in Lower Fort Garry will be aware of the London Committee who directed all the North American activities well into the twentieth century. In 1776 the Hudson's Bay Company's London Committee thought that it would be their Montreal rivals who would be negatively impacted by the trade restrictions imposed as a



Judith Hudson Beattie Valenzuela in the style of Lady Selkirk

result of the Revolution. In a letter dated 1776 written to Albany in Hudson Bay by the Governor and Committee in London, signed “Your Loving Friends,” (wasn’t business civilized in those days?), they expressed the thought that “the present Dispute between this country and North America” interfered with trade for the “Pedlars” from Montreal. They felt that the war gave them an advantage. But by 1777 they, too, were under threat, and were required to protect their ships with convoys – at least 2 and up to 5 accompanying ships – for the next six years. In spite of those precautions, in 1782 the French allies of the rebels, under La Perouse, had attacked, captured (without a shot being fired), and blown up the impressive stone Fort Prince of Wales at modern-day Churchill, Manitoba. In 1783 the Treaty of Paris ended the conflict, but in 1784 the London Minutes recorded a loss to the Company of £100,543.13.9, to be written off the books – with a real price today of over \$15 million Canadian dollars! It’s easy to see that the Company would share the Loyalists’ negative views of the revolutionary cause.

The connection of anti-revolutionary sentiment with the Red River Settlement began as far back as the War of Independence itself, long before the settlement was established. The founder of the Red River Settlement was Thomas Douglas, the 5th Earl of Selkirk, who in 1811 had been granted 116,000 square miles surrounding present-day Winnipeg. He had a lifelong antagonism to what his father had termed the “unhappy and ill-judged American War” (J.M. Bumsted, *Lord Selkirk: A Life*, p. 15). His negative view is easy to understand when we read a detailed description of the raid by John Paul Jones on the Selkirk estate, St. Mary’s Isle, Scotland, in April 1778. Jones had hoped to capture the 4th Earl, and use him in exchange for prisoners held by the British. When he learned that Lord Selkirk was not there, Jones returned to his ship, but his men continued with the raid, this time looking for booty. They encountered the formidable countess, who acted with great dignity and self-control, inventorying and handing over all the silver, and requesting a receipt. Young Thomas, the future 5th Earl then almost 7, did not witness the encounter, but was deeply affected by it. He wrote in 1813, two years after he was granted the land in Red River: “This was a momentous moment in my life. I was terribly frightened... and when I was but a youth I developed an antipathy for the United States due almost solely to the buccaneering of John Paul”. The silverware was eventually returned and the money that was paid for its sale was divided among Jones’ crew at the suggestion of the 4th Earl, but the animosity lingered (Bumsted p. 18-20).

So we have evidence of an HBC and RRS connection with UEL sentiment, but not with actual Loyalists. I will now try to address that gap.

Two McDonell/Macdonell brothers, John and Miles, were born to John McDonell of Scothouse, who had immigrated to the Mohawk Valley of New York in 1773 with about 600 members of the clan from Glengarry, Scotland. Miles and his father John joined the loyalist forces and young John saw military service after 1788 in a battalion of the militia based near present-day Cornwall, Ontario, where the family had settled (more of him later). Miles Macdonell (c1767-1828), served in the King’s Royal Regiment of New York from 1782-1784, and by 1791 he had taken up farming in Upper Canada. After his wife’s death he was commissioned in the Royal Canadian Volunteer Regiment and rose rapidly until it was disbanded in 1802 and he returned to farming. He made numerous attempts to find a military appointment without success. However, Lord Selkirk had been impressed when he met him on his Osnabruck Township farm in 1804. He found him “very much a gentleman in Manners & sentiments” and “so popular that he could get

work done when nobody else could.” Selkirk recommended him to the HBC London Committee and he was named the first Governor of Assiniboia by on 15 June 1811. He was to accompany an advance group of recruits to Hudson Bay and on to the forks of the Red and Assiniboine. When he arrived at Stornoway in July after delays, he found more than 100 disgruntled men, and further delays did not improve their dispositions. Once they finally arrived at York Factory it was too late to continue and they were forced to winter in log huts several miles up the Nelson River from the fort. There he had to deal with food shortages, quarrelling among the men, and a barely suppressed mutiny. They finally arrived at the Forks on 30 August 1812. On 4 September 1812, Miles Macdonell recorded in his Journal:

“At 12 o’clock today fired our signal gun and hoisted our colours – being the signal agreed on with the N. W. Co. gentlemen that we were ready to begin – they accordingly came across – when the conveyance was read both in English and French in the presence of all our people and several Canadians and Indians.... My commission was likewise read – at the conclusion of which 7 swivels were discharged and 3 cheers given. The gentlemen assembled at my tent and partook of a cold snack and we drank toasts appropriate to the occasion” (published in *MHS Pageant* April 1962, Vol. 7 Number 3 from the Selkirk Papers, available on the MHS website www.mhs.mb.ca/docs).

Without time before winter set in to prepare houses, they went on to Pembina, where the first contingent of actual settlers arrived on 27 October 1812 led by a boat with bagpipes playing and a British flag flying, and greeted by small arms fire. The following years were difficult ones for Macdonell, as more settlers arrived, crops failed, and the conflict with the North West Company intensified. In 1814 Macdonell wrote to Selkirk asking for a replacement as he found himself “unequal to the task of reconciling so many different interests” (Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. VI). He surrendered himself to the North West Company in 1815 in an attempt to spare the settlers, and was taken to Montreal to stand trial. He was never brought to trial, but by then many of the settlers had taken the free passage to Upper Canada offered by the North West Company, and those remaining were forced to escape to Jack River House. He had left the Red River Settlement in disarray.

Several of the loyalist fur traders in the North West Company employ were involved in the campaign to destroy the Red River Settlement. Duncan Cameron (c1764-1848) had immigrated to New York with his parents in 1773 and joined a loyalist regiment in 1780. Soon after he moved to Quebec he entered the fur trade as a clerk and was sent to Lake Nipigon. A Hudson’s Bay Company trader, James Sutherland who established a post at Red Lake in 1790, provides a description of Cameron’s arrival in his Post Journal. “He was drest fit to appear at Court & his men likewise very genteel.” Sutherland provided a meal, and the next night was invited to the North West Company table where he enjoyed “boiled Beef, Pork, Beaver, Portugal split peas made into a fine soop, flat cake, Chocolate, and a very good wine: his Table covered with clean linen with everything suitable thereto as he carries a large Kanteen and two Chests with his Cloaths, when I invite him to dine with me I have not so much as a knife and fork for him or myself and but one plate.” On St. Andrew’s Day (30 November 1790) Sutherland dined with Cameron when he was “drest in his best and had a Cross of blue Silk and Gold Lace and presented another to me.” They shared meals frequently and helped each other with equipment

and men, all the while competing for the Indian fur trade. (HBCA, Archives of Manitoba, B.177/a/1 fos. 11-12, 16)

When, in 1814 with Alexander Macdonell (Greenfield), Cameron took over the Red River Department and confronted the HBC colony of Red River, his behaviour was much less collegial. When one of his men fired a gun at HBC's Peter Fidler and the shot cut the pocket off his coat and grazed his trousers, Cameron used what Fidler described as "sophistical reasons" not to keep him a prisoner, arguing that it had not drawn blood. And Fidler attributes the defection of the settlers in June 1815 to the success of Duncan Cameron's threats and promises. "In March 1816 [Colin] Robertson raided Fort Gibraltar, seizing documents which implicated the North West Company in raids that had been made on the colony and arresting Cameron, who was sent to York Factory [the HBC post on Hudson Bay] and then, after a year's detention, to England.... He returned to Canada in 1820 and retired from the fur trade to Glengarry County with other Nor'Westers" (Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. VII).

Another North West Company fur trader was involved in the 1815 transportation of Selkirk settlers to Upper Canada. Simon Fraser's (1776-1862) (Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. IX) family had gone to New York in 1773 and his father had joined the British forces under General John Burgoyne. He was taken prisoner in 1777 and died about a year later. As the youngest child, Simon Junior was apprenticed to the North West Company in 1792, and is best known for his explorations in the West and the river named for him. In 1814-15 he returned from leave in the east, only to become embroiled in the clash between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, which he described in a declaration to the Earl of Selkirk in 1816 – giving a decidedly North West Company view of the events:

"My Lord

In Spring 1815, I came up from Montreal in company with Mr Alexander McKenzie, and went with him as far as Red River, with a view to convey information to the Gentlemen of the North West Company, that a Treaty of Peace had been made with the United States of America (ending the War of 1812).

When we arrived at Red River, we learned that a number of Settlers there wanted to go to Canada, being disgusted with their situation in that Country. – Captain Miles MacDonell delivered himself up to Mr A. McKenzie, a number of the Colonists came out on the North West Canoes without any solicitation on the part of any of the Gentlemen that I know of. I never saw any violence committed on the settlers of the Hudson's Bay people..... but I often heard the H.B. Company's people burnt and pillaged our property.

Simon Fraser, Fort William, 16th August 1816, To the Earl of Selkirk

(W. Kaye Lamb, *Simon Fraser: Letters & Journals, 1806-1808*, pp. 263-4)

When Robert Semple (1777-1816) arrived to replace Miles Macdonell as the newly appointed governor of Assiniboia in November 1815, it was to a reduced and traumatised colony. Semple was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1777 to a British father and a Massachusetts mother (Anne Greenlaw). The family did not flee northward, but had returned to England to escape the American Revolution. Semple became a merchant and travelled extensively in Europe, Africa

and South America and wrote of his adventures. In 1815 he received his appointment from the HBC London Committee as Governor of Assiniboia, and travelled out with the Sutherland party of settlers. They landed at York Factory in August and arrived in Red River in November. He spent early 1816 touring the neighbouring posts with Colin Robertson, but they had a falling out and Robertson left on 11 June, judging Semple “a proud Englishman rather too conscious of his own abilities.” A week later, in a confrontation between the Métis under Cuthbert Grant and Semple’s party of settlers and HBC men, the Governor and 20 of his party died at Seven Oaks on 19 June 1816. Miles Macdonell was returning to the settlement when he heard of the event and went back to warn Selkirk. They captured Fort William, arrested North West Company partners and took their papers and furs. He returned to Red River with De Meuron soldiers, recapturing Fort Douglas from the North West Company in January 1817, and spent a few months as governor before going to Montreal to stand trial. He never returned again. The Seven Oaks event was the climax to the violence that had marked the contest for the fur trade of the northwest and “became a determining factor in the amalgamation of the two fur companies in 1821.” (Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. V)

One Loyalist had an even closer association with the Hudson’s Bay Company. John Dugald Cameron (c1777-1857) (Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. VIII) was born about 1777 in Sorel, Quebec, where his family had settled while his father fought for the British during the American Revolution. By 1795 he was a clerk in the North West Company, and followed Duncan Cameron first to Nipigon and, in 1811, to the charge of the Lake Winnipeg Department. He had been involved in escorting the settlers to Upper Canada in 1815, but had returned to RRS. On the 1821 merger of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company he continued on, serving as a Chief Factor in various postings. Simpson described him, in one of the few mainly positive assessments to be found in his 1830 Character Book, as: “About 58 Years of Age; Strictly correct in all his conduct and dealings, and possesses much influence over the Natives: speaks Saulteaux well, and is one of our best Indian Traders; but in other respects not a man of business; not well Educated, yet possesses a good deal of general information having read almost every Book that ever came within his reach” (HBCA, AM, A.34/2 p. 2d). In 1835, Simpson wrote from RRS to his friend John George McTavish: “he has been here for a month past, he is a happy fellow, nothing seems to concern him, and an excellent well meaning man he is.” (HBCA, AM, D.4 file of letters) He retired in 1846 and died in 1857.

The story of Miles Macdonell’s brother, John, forms a sad epilogue to the UEL-HBC-RRS connection. John Macdonell was serving with the North West Company from 1793 in the Qu’Appelle valley, and from 1799-1812 he was in charge of the Upper Red River and Athabasca departments. On reaching Fort William in July 1812 he learned that war had broken out with the United States and he became involved in the conflict that is also being commemorated this year, the War of 1812. He settled in Pointe Fortune where he became a leading businessman, working with Philemon Wright in Hull Township where my ancestors had settled in 1820! In 1845 he wrote a pathetic letter to Sir George Simpson enclosing one to the Earl of Selkirk. He reminded the Earl of his father’s promise to grant 50,000 acres to Miles McDonell, his brother, and asked Simpson for free passage to Red River Settlement to take possession of that land. The party was to include himself and his wife (both described as aged and infirm), his sons Fingal and Polafax and the latter’s wife and 2 infants, and his daughter Mrs Reilly with her 2 sons and 2 daughters. Simpson had told him in reply to a previous letter that he was not likely to be granted

permission, so he took pains to explain his situation: “It is on account of the family that I am anxious to join the Red River Settlement for I am aware that I cannot be so well off there as here, I moreover feel assured that my creditors being good lenient men will allow me to spend my few remaining days on these premises; But when I am gone, my poor dependents to a certainty will be turned off; - All my possessions being secured to my creditors” (HBCA, AM, D.5, letter dated 8 August 1845). Simpson did not reply to his letter, and John Macdonell died at Pointe Fortune in 1850, still on his land thanks to his “lenient” creditors.

Although only one of the Loyalists I have described actually worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company, and two were appointed Governor by them, the others had close connections – often confrontational ones! Although the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives has the largest holding of North West Company records, they are mainly administrative records (employee debts and credits, account books, etc.). So most of what we know about the North West Company employees comes from the records of the Hudson’s Bay Company - another HBC connection. The men I chose to highlight were also all connected with the Red River Settlement during the course of their careers.

I can also claim a connection to the Hudson’s Bay Company with my employment history in the Archives – although I was not employed by the Company but by the government. Once I received an inquiry at the archives from the U.S. asking if Daniel Hudson had been an owner of the Hudson’s Bay Company. I was able to reply that “No, the company was named for a body of water, Hudson Bay, which had been named for an explorer, Henry Hudson. However, I was descended from Daniel Hudson, who came to Massachusetts in 1639.” This led to a very fruitful correspondence and exchange of information. I am also wearing a gown that connects me at second hand with the RRS. I based it on the portrait of Lady Selkirk, wife of the founder of the Red River Settlement – and my husband is a fair approximation of Lord Selkirk - if he had lived longer and had been influenced by Chilean fashion!

Now if only I can discover my Loyalist ancestry, I could be that UEL-HBC-RRS connection! I have hopes. An 1884 article about Lancaster, Massachusetts, where my ancestors settled in the 17th century, describes the Loyalist following there. And some Loyalists also fought on the American side: Jennifer Brown, who was in town this week to receive a Professor Emeritus honour, told me that her ancestor had a UEL plaque on one side of his gravestone and one for Sons of the Revolution on the other! And it turns out that another connection was made through her spotting my talk here - we are tenth cousins through a Brigham family connection and possibly others. Thanks for this wonderful opportunity to make so many connections - perhaps some of you are also my distant cousins! I would love to hear from you.

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She has an Honours BA degree in Canadian History from Carleton University and a Master of Arts degree in Canadian History from University of Toronto, with a certificate from the National Archives of Canada and training in Records Management from the Ontario Archives.

Ms. Beattie has been an active member of the Association for Manitoba Archives, the Association for Canadian Archivists, the Eastern Ontario Archivists' Association and the Toronto Area Archivists' Group. She has given many presentations and published on a variety of topics related to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives and the records preserved there, as well as other topics.

A book she co-edited with Helen M. Buss, *Undelivered Letters to Hudson's Bay Company Men on the Northwest Coast of America, 1830-57* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2003), was launched at her retirement from the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in January 2003. She continues research and writing, and volunteers in many areas including with the Manitoba Historical Society.



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