

Dr. William Cameron McKay, (1824-1893)

“Billy” McKay was born at Fort George, the son of famous trapper and guide Thomas McKay and his wife, Timmee T’lkul Tchinouk the daughter of Tshinouk (Chinook) chief Concomly. He was also the grandson of Alexander McKay¹ who died on the *Tonquin* when it sank off the west coast. Billy lived in childhood at Vancouver, and was taught by his grandfather, Dr. McLaughlin.

Billy’s first wife was Catherine who died on May 30, 1848, followed, seven months later by the death of their son Thomas Archibald McKay on October 25, 1848 at Fort Vancouver. Billy then married Margaret Campbell² on October 3, 1856. She was the daughter of a Chief Factor of the North West Company, Collin Campbell, and a sister in law of James Sinclair who was famous for leading a group of Red River Metis to the lower Columbia in 1841. After his grandfather died his grandmother, Margaret Wadine McKay remarried to Dr. John McLoughlin known as “the father of Oregon.” Billy’s father sent him, along with brothers, John and Alexander, to be educated in the eastern United States in 1838. He first attended Fairfield and Wilbraham, Massachusetts, and then completed his medical studies at Geneva, New York and Willowby, Ohio. At 19 he was too young to receive his diploma but was granted a licence to practice medicine. In May of 1843, via the annual Hudson’s Bay express that came through Manitoba from Montreal. He subsequently worked as operator of a frontier trading post, a government agent in treaty negotiations with several Northwest Indian tribes and then as a commanding officer of the Warm Springs Indian Scouts during the American Army’s campaign against the Paiutes in 1886 and 1887. He was then assigned as a government physician attached to Indian Agencies (Warm Springs, Kalamath and finally the Umatilla Reservation). He died on the Umatilla Reserve of a heart attack on January 2, 1893. Dr. McKay was a Tshinuk speaker and at the Commemoration of the first Columbia River Centennial at Astoria on May 10 and 11, 1892, he addressed the celebrants in the Tshisuk language on May 11th. A portion of the address is given below:

Nesica olman tilicoms, eleap chaco quapa oco[a]k [I]lihi
Our older people first arrived at this place
Thalsca wawa quapa nesica
They’ve asked us to come here to Astoria
Kupa ukkuk naika ilim
To that which is my own place
Po[o]s nesica m[o]mook yo[]tilth quapa nesica tomtom
So that we may make merry (for we make glad our heart)
Yaqua con[]we tilcom thlasca lowlow
Here all the people are gathered
Thlasa chaco yaqua. Quapa Chinook thlasca. Mamook sk[]kum yoatolth...
Here at Chinook they’re having a really fine time...

¹ Alexander McKay, a Scott, and well versed in the fur trade, came to Oregon in 1811, with his son Thomas, as a partner of Astor in the Pacific Fur Company, and lost his life a few weeks later in the killing of the *Tonquin's* crew by the Indians of Vancouver Island. His widow afterwards married Dr. McLaughlin, Chief Factor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, at Vancouver.

² Margaret was born on January 8, 1833

*Ancate 100 tacomonoc cool eecht ship yacha chaco quapa ocoac chock
Long ago, 100 years [ago], a certain ship came to this river
Yaqua quapa Chinook Ilihi
Here at Chinook country
Yacha mash yacha checimimin quapa [yacha] meatwhiot*



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