

Sophia Thomas (Mason). (1805-1861)

Sophie Thomas was born circa 1805 at Red River, the third daughter of Dr Thomas Thomas and his Cree wife Sarah. Her older sister Mary Ann was married to George Bird, the son of James Curtis Bird. Her younger sister Elizabeth married Joseph Bird, George's brother. Her father was a HBC chief factor and governor of the Northern Department. She was baptized on November 10, 1822 at St. John's, Red River.

When Dr Thomas died in 1828 he left each of his six daughters £1,000 in 3 per cent consolidated Bank of England annuities. Sophia had the benefit of a good upbringing, first in the home of the Reverend David Thomas Jones, in whose trust she had been placed by her father, and, after Jones' death, in the home of the Reverend William Cockran. She received her education at the Red River Academy. In 1843, an offer made to her to be a governess in the ladies' section of the academy. She declined in order to marry, the Reverend William Mason, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary, on August 10, 1843 at St. John's.

The couple were first posted at the Rossville mission, at Norway House in 1843. This became their home for 11 years. At that time Rossville mission was in the charge of the Reverend James Evans, the inventor of the syllabic system of writing the Cree language. In the summer of 1845 Evans left with his family because of ill health. It thus fell to William Mason to propagate the Gospel among the Indians by means of the printed word.

Sophia Mason's ability to speak Cree was of great assistance to her husband. Sophia, helped out at the Indian day school, made visits to the Indian homes, as well as attending to the needs of their large family, in spite of rather fragile health.

In 1854 Mason left the Methodist Church, joined the Church of England. They then moved to York Factory. Four years later the Masons sailed to England to superintend the printing of the New Testament in Cree syllabics; when this was completed in 1859, they remained to see the Old Testament through the press.

Shortly after her arrival in England in 1858 Sophia suffered a severe attack of pleurisy, and she continued to have pulmonary afflictions. Her translating was frequently interrupted by seizures of pain. In July 1861, she gave birth to her ninth child. She continued her work on the last of the Old Testament books and three months later was dead.

Reference

Bruce Peel, "Sophia Thomas." In *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. IX (1861-1870). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976.



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