

Thomas McKay, M.L.A. (1849-1924)

By Amanda Rozyk

Thomas was born on June 4, 1849 at Fort Pelly, the son of William McKay II (born 1819 in the Red River Settlement) and Mary Cook (born at Cumberland House). He married Kate McBeth. He and his wife both signed the 1876 Treaty 6 at Fort Carlton as witnesses. Thomas was born into a long line of Hudson's Bay Company employees. His branch of the McKay's had been involved with the company as far back as the eighteenth century. Thomas' great-grandfather, John McKay, was a native Scot who entered the services of the Hudson's Bay Company and came to Canada around 1790.

Thomas became a leading citizen of Prince Albert. He was the brother-in-law of Hudson's Bay Company factor Lawrence Clarke. Thomas owned a farm and a mill and became the first mayor of Prince Albert in 1886. He was a member of the North West Territories Legislative Assembly from 1891 to 1894 and from 1898 to 1904.

Thomas McKay was sent to the St. John's school at Winnipeg for his early education. He began working for the Hudson's Bay Company when he was fifteen years old. Thomas held the position of clerk for the company until 1873. At that time he married Catherine McBeth, who he would eventually have ten children with. Catherine was born at Fort Good Hope on the Mackenzie River. Her father, Adam McBeth, was part of Lord Selkirk's original settlement. Adam had come to Rupert's Land with his parents when he was six years old.

After their marriage, the McKay's moved to the Prince Albert district (1873) where Thomas began a prosperous independent career by engaging in milling, freighting and farming. He later became involved in the events leading up to the Northwest Resistance. On March 21, 1885, Thomas and Hillyard Mitchell went from fort Carlton to meet with Riel at Batoche to request that he not take up arms. During the beginning of the resistance at Duck Lake, Thomas was the first of forty men from Prince Albert to volunteer to aid the Northwest Mounted Police stationed at Carlton under Major Crozier. On joining Major Crozier, he offered to go as an envoy of peace to consult with the Half-Breeds at Duck Lake. He was seized as a traitor by Louis Riel while at their camp, however his strong personality and negotiating ability enabled him to return to Carlton.

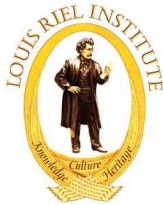
Thomas was a plainsman and scout who spoke both Cree and Saulteaux. On one occasion, he was sent as a scout with messages from Major Crozier to Colonel Irvine. He was later sent with sixteen men and eight sleighs under Sergeant Stewart to secure and transport the ammunition from Duck Lake back to Carlton. This event led to the first battle of the 1885 Resistance, fortunately Thomas succeeded in withdrawing from danger.

After the Resistance, Thomas was appointed to a commission of three to inquire into the conditions and losses brought about by the war, and to arbitrate matters for the government. It was later his distinction to become the first mayor of the town of Prince Albert in 1886. Thomas served twelve years representing his constituency in the

Northwest Territories Assembly, retiring when the Territories received provincial autonomy. He remained active in the political arena as the president of the Prince Albert Agricultural Association (the Lorne Agricultural Society), and the president of the Local Grain Growers' Association. Thomas eventually retired and spent the remainder of his days on the homestead he had established forty years earlier.

Reference

Black, Norman F. *History of Saskatchewan and The North West Territories*. Regina: Saskatchewan historical Co., 1913: 317-320.



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