

Edward McKay. (b. 1824)

Edward McKay and his wife, Caroline Cook, established a trading post and farm on Battle Creek in the Cypress Hills on May 19, 1872. He was the interpreter for the adhesion to Treaty 6 at Fort Walsh on July 2, 1879. The family also hunted for buffalo and traded for robes with the Peigan, Nez Percé, and Crow in the Sweet Grass Hills and with the Cree, Assiniboine and Metis at Cypress Hills. When the North West Mounted Police arrived they became contractors for buffalo meat and small traders with the newly established Fort Walsh. Edward was also the mail carrier from fort Walsh to Fort Benton. Two of their daughters married NWMP officers: Jamima married John Henry Bray, and Emma married Peter O'Hare.

Edward McKay was born on May 11, 1824, the son of John Richards McKay and Harriet Ballenden. In 1845 he married Caroline Cook, the daughter of Joseph Cook Sr. and Catherine Sinclair. His father John Richards McKay (1792-1877) was born at Albany Factory on August 10, 1792, the son of John McKay Sr., a Scottish fur trader and Mary Favel a Metis. He was educated in England before joining the HBC in 1808. He worked initially at Brandon House under his father then at Pembina River, and at Qu'Appelle House where he supervised its' reconstruction.

Sometime in 1816, at Brandon House John married Harriet Ballenden, the daughter of Chief Factor John Ballenden. They were married "according to the custom of the country" and later, on January 21, 1821 they were officially married by Reverend John West the Company's chaplain. They had eleven children.

McKay subsequently worked at Fort Hebrida in the Swan River district. John lost his job as a result of the 1821 amalgamation of the NWC and HBC, briefly opened a school at Red River, went back into the fur trade on the upper Missouri, then was rehired by HBC in 1831. He took charge of Fort Ellice in the summer of 1833 and was clerk then postmaster until 1843. His dismissal by the company in 1843 is somewhat of a mystery; however, he was rehired in 1846 as postmaster at Partridge Crop (Fairford), then from 1848 to 1854, he served at Shoal River. He retired in 1859. The Cree and Saulteaux of the Upper Red River and Swan River districts referred to McKay as *Ma-ak-gy-gan-naise* or "The Bear Skin," a symbol of their respect for him. This nickname was handed down to his sons and grandsons. He was renowned for his skill with the sword and gun and was an excellent horseman. He reportedly had Indian boys shoot blunt arrows in his direction and he would practice deflecting them with his sword.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage & History Research
Louis Riel Institute

