

Thomas McKay. (1796-1849)

Thomas McKay was a Metis fur trader who worked mainly for the Pacific Fur Company (PFC), the North West Company (NWC), and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). He was a fur brigade leader and explorer in the Columbia District and later became a United States citizen and an early settler of the Oregon Territory. Thomas was born ca. 1796 in Indian Country, Oregon Territory, and died in 1849 at Scappoose Plains, Oregon Territory. Thomas was the son of Alexander McKay and Marguerite Wadin, the Metis daughter of a Cree woman and Jean Etienne Wadin, a Swiss fur trader.

Thomas first married Timmee T'Ikul Tchinouk ca. 1824 in Oregon Territory. She was born ca. 1800 in Indian Settlement, Oregon Territory. Thomas and Timmee Tchinouk had the following children:

- Joseph McKay, b. ca. 1820, Washington.
- Margaret McKay, b. ca. 1823, at an area called, Marion.
- Dr. William Cameron McKay, b. March 18, 1824, Fort George, Oregon; d. 05 July 1895, Weston, Umatilla, Oregon.¹
- John T. McKay, b. ca. 1824, Washington.
- Alexander McKay, b. ca. 1825, French Prairie, Willamette Valley, Oregon Territory.

Thomas then married She-Who-Rides-Like-The-Wind (Umatilla) ca. 1834. She was born in 1820 in Northeastern, Oregon. He then married Isabella Montour in 1838. She was born ca. 1818 in Oregon Territory.

In 1811 Thomas McKay accompanied his father on the Tonquin to the mouth of the Columbia River, where the Pacific Fur Company's had built Fort Astoria was built.

Thomas, was about 15 years old when his father Alexander McKay was killed in late 1811 at Clayoquot Sound during the Tonquin incident at Vancouver Island. In 1813, Fort Astoria and all other Pacific Fur Company assets were sold to the North West Company. They promptly renamed Astoria as Fort George. Thomas McKay, like a number of other Astorians, joined the NWC at that time.

¹ Dr. William McKay, during his boyhood, was raised in the household of his grandfather, Dr. John McLoughlin, who was governor of the territory occupied by the Hudson's Bay Company, and was stationed at Vancouver. Here he first received instruction from two Yankee teachers, John Bant of Massachusetts and Solomon H. Smith of New Hampshire, the first school-teachers in Oregon. His father then sent him with Missionary Jason Lee in 1838 to go east for school. On reaching the East, he entered Fairfield College, Herkimer county, New York. His two brothers, John and Alexander were placed in a Methodist training school at Wilberham, Massachusetts. There he studied in medicine, for five years, and then, returned with another expedition of the Hudson's Bay Company, starting from Montreal in 1843.

Between 1815 and 1819 Thomas was at Red River and fought on the side of the North West Company and the Métis people against the Hudson's Bay Company. McKay, along with Cuthbert Grant fought at the 1816 Battle of Seven Oaks. By 1819 he was back on the Columbia. McKay had led a party of nine men sent by John Duncan Campbell from Cumberland House to reinforce Cuthbert Grant in the Qu'Appelle Valley. McKay was one of the leaders when the Metis sacked Peter Fiddler's Brandon House. McKay was described as one of the best shots in the country and very cool and resolute among the Indians.

By 1824 Thomas was working for his stepfather John McLoughlin who was appointed as Chief Factor of the Columbia Department HBC. McLoughlin who had married Thomas' mother, Marguerite Wadin in 1811, the widow of Alexander McKay, moved in 1824 to Fort George (Astoria) and then, once it was built, moved to Fort Vancouver, the new headquarters of the HBC. In 1811 McLoughlin had married Marguerite Wadin, widow of Alexander MacKay and mother of Thomas McKay. Thus in 1824 Thomas's mother and stepfather moved across the continent to where Thomas was living.

From 1826 to 1828 McKay took part in the Snake Country brigades under Peter Skene Ogden. In 1829 Thomas McKay took part in Alexander McLeod's expedition to California. McLeod's party went as far south as the San Joaquin River in what became an annual trapping expedition to California, named the Southern Party. The route from Fort Vancouver to the lower Sacramento River became known as the Siskiyou Trail. In 1834, McKay lead a brigade to the Snake Country, reaching into the far southeast of what is now Idaho, to establish fort Hall. Thomas McKay's party was described as consisting of 17 Half Breeds and Candiens and 13 Nez Perce, Chinook and Cayuse Indians. McKay raised and led a company of militia which saw active service during the Cayuse War of 1848.

In 1836 McKay led a HBC Southern Party brigade to the Pit River region of California. In 1840-41 McKay and Michel Laframboise were brigade leaders of the Southern Party to California.

In 1832 McKay put in charge of an HBC farm at Scappoose. Within a year he had moved to and settled at Champoeg, Oregon He is thought to have retired from the HBC at this time, although he continued to work for the company off and on for many years. In 1840 he drove more than 3,600 sheep and 661 cattle from California to Fort Nisqually for the HBC.



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