

Charles Thomas Isham. (1755-1814)

Isham was born in 1754 or 1755 at York Factory, the son of Hudson's Bay Company chief factor James Isham and his Cree wife. He was sent to England for his education and while there his father died. In 1763 the London committee asked that Charles be sent home, subsequently, on May 7, 1766, he was given a seven-year apprenticeship contract and assigned to Severn House. In 1773, he contracted for a further five years at £10 a year. His inland career began with a posting to The Pas in 1774. In 1775-76, he served under Mathew Cocking at Cumberland House. In 1776, he was sent down into buffalo country, but his goods were expended by early winter and he was forced to winter at the Eagle Hills Post. In 1781, he was struck with smallpox but as with most Metis, he survived. Through the 1780s he continued employment as a labourer, canoeman and interpreter at £15 to £20 per year. In 1789, he contracted as Inland Trader and Supervisor of Canoes at Swan River and between 1790 and 1795, was master at Swan River, Marlborough House, Somerset House, and from 1797 to 1799 at Jack River House (near Norway House). In 1812 he served as interpreter for Miles Macdonell at the Selkirk Settlers colony at Red River, then served as far west as Fort Edmonton. His highest salary was £80 per year. Isham never became more than a minor officer with the Company but he was the first Metis to rise this far. He died in England in 1814. His estate came to £1800 in three per cent annuities, the bulk of which was left to his four children, Thomas, Mary, Jane and James.

Reference

Brown, Jennifer. "Charles Thomas Isham." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. V (1801-1820). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983: 450-451.



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