

Donald McKay: Metis Soldier and Scout. (1836-c.1902).

Donald was born on April 19, 1836 in eastern Oregon, the son of Thomas McKay and grandson of Alexander McKay, both of whom reached Oregon in 1811 with Astor's Pacific Fur Company (Alexander was killed by Indians at Vancouver). Donald's mother was a Cayuse Indian, Thomas's second wife (the first was from the Chinook Nation). Donald was a government scout for many years, rendering valuable service.



Donald McKay near Tule Lake, 1873

In 1864 Donald commanded a company of Warm Springs Indians against the Bannocks, Shoshones and other tribes, and he frequently was interpreter between Klamaths, the Warm Springs and the whites. McKay saw his most extensive service in the Modoc campaign, again leading Warm Springs scouts and himself served as a scout, guide and interpreter, being one of the principals in the capture of Captain Jack in 1873. He learned during his career to speak fluent English, French and several Indian languages. Because of the renown which came to him through his Modoc War service he took Warm Springs scouts east in 1874 and gave exhibitions for two years before the company disbanded. Donald then joined Texas Jack Omohundro's 1876 show and went to Europe. In all he remained in show business for eight years, being an expert rifle shot, roper and rider. On his return he married a Warm Springs woman who died shortly after the birth of a daughter. About 1888 he promoted medicine show productions, a hallowed American tradition by then, specializing in "Donald McKay's Great Indian Worm Eradicator" for \$5 a bottle.

Donald McKay and his family settled on the Umatilla Indian Reservation in 1892, home to his Cayuse relatives. There McKay worked as a translator for the local Indian agency. In 1899, he died at his home at the Umatilla Agency near Pendleton, after breaking a hip which failed to mend.



Donald McKay, in 1873 during the Modoc War.



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