

Joseph Cook: Metis Catechist (b. 1792)

Joseph Cook was born at York Factory, the son of Chief Factor William Hemmings Cook and his Cree wife, Kahnawpawama. He entered the employ of HBC in about 1801 as an apprentice at York Factory. He was then posted to Cumberland House, Saskatchewan where he worked as a trader, and writer. Cook married Catherine Sinclair, the daughter of HBC Factor William Sinclair and Margaret Nahovway. Three of their thirteen children became clergymen:

- Rev. Thomas Cook (b. 1819), married Catherine McKenzie then Anne Bruce,
- Rev. James Cook (b. 1836), married Mary Matilda Bruce, and
- Rev. Edward Cook (b. 1847), married Mary Ballenden, then Mary Humphryville.

After twenty years with HBC Joseph Cook retired to Red River. By 1846, he had 15 years in as a schoolteacher, clerk and interpreter for the Church Missionary Society at Red River. He worked with Reverend William Cockran and Reverend John Smithhurst. He earned only £50 per year whereas the European catechists received £100 for doing less work. Commenting on the pay disparity he said: “I suppose they will say, (it is) because I am only half an Englishman. This is very true, but my good Sir, I can eat as good a plum pudding as any Englishman.”

Reference

Denise M. Fuchs, “Native Sons of Rupert’s Land 1760 to 1860s,” Winnipeg: Ph.D. thesis, University of Manitoba, 2000: 79-81.



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