

Keeseekoowenin, (Moses Burns). (1819-1906)

Keeseekoowenin was the son of Metis leader Michael Cardinal and his Orkney wife, Sally Whitford. Keeseekoowenin became chief of the Riding Mountain Band of Indians after his half brother Mekis died during the winter of 1874-75. Moses was known to all as an excellent horseman and a great buffalo hunter.

Keeseekoowenin was born in the Bow River region of what is now Alberta, he moved with his family and band to the Riding Mountain region of present-day Manitoba in 1822. In 1871 the band signed Treaty Two with the federal government, and, as a result, they moved their reserve to a place near Elphinstone in 1875. Keeseekoowenin was regarded by the government as chief. The band had accepted the mission of Presbyterian George Flett, and the chief was baptized as Moses Burns, although a remote branch of the band at Clear Lake remained Catholic. Keeseekoowenin successfully blended Christian values with Native beliefs and traditional rituals. He died near Elphinstone, Manitoba.

Keeseekoowenin's father, Chief Okanase, whose name means "Little Bone," was of the historic fur-trading Cardinals who over several generations worked their way westward from Quebec to the Rockies, usually marrying Native women. As was customary among prominent native men, he had more than one wife. Sons of his Nakota wife included Louis O'Soup, St Paul (perhaps Jean-Baptiste Lolo, also known as St Paul), and Mekis (Eagle); to his Métis wife were born George, John, William, and Antoine Bone. Keeseekoowenin's full brothers were Yellowhead (Wabaso, Blonde) and Baptiste Bone (Baptiste Okanase). At least five of Chief Okanase's sons played significant roles as chiefs on the prairies, and the dynasty of leaders has continued to the present.

Chief Okanase's sister Margaret married Hudson's Bay Company trader George Flett. Soon after Flett's transfer to Fort Garry (Winnipeg) in 1822, Chief Okanase and his band moved from the Bow River to the southwestern slopes of Riding Mountain, Manitoba. Under his leadership, the band lived by hunting, trapping, and trading with the HBC posts of Fort Ellice and Riding Mountain House. When he died about 1870, his son Mekis succeeded him as chief.



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