

Norman Bethune M.D.: Metis Roots.

Norman Bethune's great grandfather was Angus Bethune (1783-1858) and his Metis wife was Louise McKenzie (1793-1833).¹ Angus joined the North West Company. In 1804-5, and he served at the post on the Whitemud River, near the south end of Lake Manitoba. The following year he was listed as a clerk at Lake Winnipeg. Attached to the brigade of Alexander Henry the younger, in September 1810, Bethune accompanied Henry to Rocky Mountain House (Alta). Late in the fall of 1810 David Thompson arrived at this post and Bethune helped him to set off on his expedition across the Rocky Mountains. As part of the NWC strategy to establish a transpacific trade from the northwest coast, Thompson had been instructed to reach the mouth of the Columbia River ahead of the Pacific Fur Company's party, sent out by ship from New York. Bethune himself figured prominently in the NWC plans for the Pacific, and in 1812 or 1813 he was designated "as the Person to go to China to learn the Business & act as supercargo."

Dr. Bethune's grandfather and namesake, was Norman Bethune, also a physician and medical educator (1822-1892) who was born in Moose Factory. Norman Sr. married Janet Ann Nicholson in 1851. Their son Reverend Malcolm Nicholson Bethune (1857-1932) married Elizabeth Ann Goodwin. They had two children, Janet born 1888 and (Henry) Norman born March 3, 1890 at Gravenhurst, Ontario. Norman died on November 12, 1939, at age 49 at Wupaishan, Shansi, China.

During 1936-1937, Dr. Norman Bethune served as a surgeon with the Spanish government forces in Madrid. This was after a visit to the Soviet Union in 1935 when he joined the Communist Party. During the Spanish Civil War he organized a mobile blood-transfusion service, the first of its kind, to operate on a 1,000 km front. During 1937-1938, he returned to Canada to raise money for the antifascist cause in Spain and soon turned his attention to the war being waged by communist forces against Japanese invaders in China. He left Canada for the last time 1938. From 1938-1939 he was in China, where he served as a surgeon with the 8th Route Army in the Shanxi-Hobei border region, in the War with Japan. There he was an inventive surgeon, teacher and propagandist, and he adopted the cause and the people as his own. His accidental death from septicemia evoked Mao Zedong's essay "In Memory of Norman Bethune" which urged all communists to emulate his spirit of internationalism, his sense of responsibility and his devotion to others. This essay made Bethune's name almost synonymous with Canada in China. Norman Bethune died at Wupaishan, Shansi, China, in November, 1939.

Reference:

Roderick Stewart and Shannon Stewart. *Phoenix: The Life of Norman Bethune*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011.

¹ (Anne) Louisa McKenzie was born at Fort William in 1793, the daughter of Roderick McKenzie (1761-1844) and his Ojibwa wife. Later, within the Bethune family Louisa was called "Miss Green Blanket."



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