

William Sinclair II (1794-1868)

William Sinclair II was the son of HBC Chief Factor William Sinclair Sr. and Nahowway aka Margaret, his Metis wife, believed to have been a daughter of Moses Norton. William II married Marie Wadin McKay, the daughter of Alexander McKay and Margaret Wadin on June 21, 1823 at Norway House. They had eight children. Their daughter Mary (b. 1838) married William J. Christie who also became chief factor in the Saskatchewan district.

William joined the HBC in 1808, as an apprentice at Oxford House. In 1817, he was a clerk in the Lesser Slave Lake district. He left for England in 1816 and returned in 1819, then served at Oxford House, Sandy Lake and Island Lake. Sinclair was part of the Bow River expedition of 1822–23 led by Donald McKenzie who was Governor of the Red River Settlement. The trek took them to the forks of the South Saskatchewan and Red Deer rivers. With John Harriot he went south to Cypress Hills and down to the Missouri River.

He began a lengthy service in the Winnipeg River District in 1824, but his advancement was limited by his inability to speak French. William was posted at Rainy Lake 1832-45 and 1848-54. He became chief trader in 1844 and chief factor in 1850. He ran the Saskatchewan District out of Fort Edmonton in 1854. He organized troop transportation between York Factory and Red River on a number of occasions and served from 1851 to 1863 as a member of the Council of the Northern Department. Sinclair was one of the few successful country-born Half Breeds in the HBC to become a commissioned officer. Although he owned property in Red River, he retired to the east, to Brockville, in 1863.



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