

James Cunningham, M.L.A. (1821-1915)

A Hudson's Bay Scottish Half-Breed born at Île-à-la-Crosse, the son of Patrick Cunningham, the postmaster at Churchill Factory and Nancy Bruce. James married Sarah Ross the daughter of Alexander Ross and his wife Sally, the "Princess of the Okanogan." They moved to Kildonan, then to Headingley and Poplar Point. After Sarah's death he remarried to Letitia Pritchard (b. 1826), the daughter of John Pritchard and Catherine McGillivray. She was the widow of Hugh Matheson. James and Sarah had 13 children. James and Letitia had two children. Patrick Cunningham died in 1826 and two years later the family moved to Red River. For a number of years James lived at Headingley and also at Poplar Point. James was elected to the first Manitoba legislature in December 1870 to represent the riding of Headingley. He died on April 27, 1915 at Somerset.



The following interview June 12, 1909 in the North Battleford Newspaper:

OLD DAYS IN THE WEST

Jas. Cunningham, who was visiting his son in South Battleford, granted our reporter an interview during this week. Although ninety years of age and the only surviving member of a family of seven he is still in possession of all his faculties and chatted freely about his experiences traveling from ocean to ocean.

Mr. Cunningham's father was in the employ of the Hudson Bay Co., and as his work was more particularly connected with establishing new posts, he seldom remained in one place for more than two years. It was while superintending the rebuilding of Fort Severn; which had been destroyed by

fire, that his father met his death by drowning. His widow, with her young family, then moved to Winnipeg. Mr. Cunningham was born at Ile La Crosse and with three other members of his family was baptized at York Factory by the Rev. David Jones, the first Church of England missionary and the founder of St. John's Parish. He was educated at St. John's College and afterwards tilled a farm in Red River. While in the north he saw the different fur bearing animals as they roamed their native haunts and also the place were the wavies (a white goose) hatch in the north beyond the abode of man. On a quacking bog which has the resemblance of a mass of black jelly and upon which it would be impossible to step the wavies make their nest and hatch their young. During the season when the young are growing preparatory to flight it is impossible to obtain sleep for the noise of the incessant honking. He also spoke of seeing the polar bear carry their cubs on their back and going down to devour the whales left on the shore by the tide. In speaking of life in the far north he said that the diet in those days consisted mostly of fish, fowl and moose meat with bread for breakfast on Sunday morning.

During his early manhood he had hunted buffalo in the Pembina Mountains and had succeeded with others in killing enough for the supply of green meat as it was termed. While chatting of Winnipeg in the early days with the farms along the Red River he said that he visited there a short time ago and tried to find some spot on the Ross Estate dear to his younger days but he found the he was getting lost among the houses and streets and so returned home. He, like other pioneers, regrets that the doings of those early days had not been written down and thus provide a history of the opening up of the "Last West."

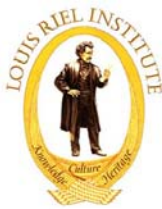
The following obituary appeared in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 27, 1915:

WAS MEMBER OF FIRST LEGISLATURE

James Cunningham, whose name probably stood at the head of the list of western Canadian old-timers, died yesterday at the residence of his daughter, Mrs. Henrietta Clouston, Sommerset, Man. Mr. Cunningham's age is officially given as 95 years old, but there is a doubt on this point among his relatives, some of whom believe he had pass the 100 year mark. The body is to be brought to Winnipeg today and the funeral will be held at 4:10 from the Union depot to Kildonan cemetery.

Mr. Cunningham was born at Fort Churchill, Hudson's Bay, Isle a La Crosse, 1819, baptized at Ft. Churchill in 1822. When he was three years old the family removed to Severn, where his father Patrick Cunningham of the Hudson's Bay company's service, a north of Ireland man. Parish of Calrea, Sligo, Ireland died. October 15, 1831 Two years later, the survivors removed to the Red River, or Selkirk settlement and took up their residence in Kildonan for a number of years. After the great flood of 1852 they moved in 1853 to Headingly. For some ten or twelve years they resided there, then went to Poplar Point for a time. Some years later he was again at Headingly, and after that again at Poplar Point until a couple of years ago when he came to make his home in Winnipeg at 253 Austin Street, where he resided until the death of his wife about three months ago.

Mr. Cunningham was a member of the first legislature of Manitoba, which held it s first session in 1870. He was twice married, his first wife being Sarah, daughter of Alexander Ross, a gentleman prominent in connection with the early history of this country. His second wife was Mrs. Hugh Matheson, Letitia Pritchard His children are Mrs. A. Clouston, of Somerset, Man; Rev. Alexander H. Cunningham at one time Methodist missionary to the Indians at Island Lake, Lake Winnipeg district, Keewatin; James W. Cunningham, Birch Hill, Sask.; G. Cunningham, residing at Poplar Point, Man., Adam Cunningham at Battleford, Sask., and Mrs. Rev. T. Beveridge.



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