

Jemima Ann McKenzie Ross Coldwell. (1825-1912)

Jemima Ross was one of the Metis “first ladies” of Upper Fort Garry and the Red River Settlement. Jemima McKenzie was the daughter of Chief Factor Roderick McKenzie, of the Hudson's Bay Company, and his wife Sarah Sutherland, the daughter of chief Factor James Sutherland, Metis. Jemima was first married to William Ross¹. William was appointed assistant sheriff and governor of the jail in 1851, to succeed his father, and in 1853 William was sworn in as councillor of Assiniboia.

William Ross and Jemima McKenzie had the following children;

- Sarah Ann, born January 19, 1846 at Kildonan, died 1865.
- Jane Mary, born November 23, 1847 at Kildonan, died in 1849.
- William Roderick, born December 3, 1849 at Kildonan, he married Jemima Matheson.
- Alexander, born January 2, 1852 at St. John's, died in 1872.
- Margaret, born April 8, 1854 at St. John's, married Walter John Thurlow James.
- Jemima, born June 30, 1856, died January 5, 1865.

After William Ross died Jemima became the wife of William Coldwell the clerk of Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia. Her sister-in-law Henrietta Ross was married to Reverend John Black. Her sister-in-law Mary Ross married the Presbyterian minister George Flett (English-Metis).

In 1875 Jemima Ross married William Coldwell, a Journalist and co-founder in 1859 of the *Nor'Wester*, the first newspaper in the Red River Settlement. She continued to live in the house, renamed Brookbank, until her death in 1912.

William was born on November 18, 1834, in London, England, William Coldwell came to Canada in 1854, after apprenticing as a typesetter and proof-reader for a Dublin newspaper. He worked as a parliamentary reporter for the *Toronto Leader* to 1859, then travelled to Red River in company with William Buckingham — previously a parliamentary reporter with the *Toronto Globe*. The two, described as “practical printers ... able to do their own work, and do it well,” had decided to publish the Rupert's Land's first newspaper, the *Nor'-Wester*.

Coldwell readily integrated into the settlement. In the pages of the *Nor'-Wester* he attested that the people of Red River, though personally strangers, are already friends – who, forgetting those differences which in most other countries are the sources of jealousy, mistrust, and contention – the differences of position, origin, religion, and language – have cordially united in their good wishes for our success. Buckingham, however, left Red River the next year. His position as partner in the publishing enterprise was filled by James Ross (Metis).

¹ In the historical records Jemima McKenzie Ross is often confused with William Ross's sister, Jemima Ross who was born in 1837.

Coldwell left the paper in 1864 and took Jemima Ross Coldwell and their family to settle in Toronto where James and his family were living. Ross house was probably rented or simply maintained by the remaining family members.

In 1869, the Coldwells returned to their Red River home which they called "Brookbank" because of its proximity to Brown's Creek. Their land was east of present day Rorie Street. Jemima Street in Winnipeg (now Elgin) bears witness to the impact of the Jemima McKenzie Ross Coldwell on the development of that area.

Coldwell edited the new paper, *The Manitoban*, which was a small, political paper which represented the original inhabitants of Red River rather than the newer elements. After that, he spent ten years as a parliamentary reporter for the Free Press.

The couple's children were:

- Amy Sarah, born November 9, 1861. She died on January 15, 1866 in Toronto.
- Mary Isabel, born December 10, 1863.
- George Alex, born June 20, 1865.

Family Metis Scrip claims:

RG15 Interior Series D-II-8-a, Volume 1323, Reel C-14932

Scrip affidavit for Ross, Jemima; born: Jan, 1825; father Roderick McKenzie (White); mother; Sarah McKenzie (English-Metis); claim no: 1720; scrip no: 10622; date of Issue: Sept 20, 1876; amount: \$160.

Scrip affidavit for Coldwell, William; concerning the claims of his children; Name: Mary Coldwell; born: 10 December 1863; father: William Coldwell; mother: Jemima Coldwell; Name: George Coldwell; born: 1 July 1865.

Rg15 Interior Series D-II-8-a, volume 1323, Reel C-14932

Scrip affidavit for Ross, Margaret; born: 8 April 1854: father: William Ross; mother: Jemima McKenzie.

Rg15 Interior, Series D-II-8-a, Volume 1323 Reel C-14932

Scrip affidavit for Ross, Alexander: born Jan 2 1852; died; Dec 1873; Father: William Ross(deceased); mother: Jemima MCKENZIE; heirs: William R. Ross, his brother, Marguerite Ross, his sister , and Jemima Ross, His mother.



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