

Son of Sir Simpson

The previous two articles in this series have recounted the life of Sir George Simpson, AKA “The Little Emperor” who governed the fur trade for the Hudson’s Bay Company for nearly 40 years. Sir George Simpson commanded the establishment of Hudson’s Bay Company Fort Colvile in 1825. He passed through the area 2 more times during his life. His son, George Stewart Simpson, was a Clerk at Fort Colvile briefly in 1847-1848. From the time of his birth in 1827 to his death in 1894, George Stewart represents an irony in Hudson’s Bay practices. His mother, Margaret Taylor, was Métis and had been the companion of Sir George Simpson for many years. She was the sister of Thomas Taylor who was Sir George Simpson’s personal servant from 1822 to 1830. She bore him two sons, George Stewart, and John McKenzie. Sir George Simpson abandoned Margaret Taylor after marrying his own cousin, Frances Ramsey Simpson in 1830.



*George Stewart Simpson and Family Image D-04338
courtesy of the Royal BC Museum*

Maybe “abandoned” is not the right word. After Sir George married Frances, he left the welfare of Margaret to Mr. Dugald MacTavish. A year later Margaret married Louis Amable Hogue, a mason at Lower Fort Garry near Winnipeg and changed her name to Marguerite Hogue. They eventually had 9 children together. She lived out her life on the shores of the Assiniboine River in Winnipeg on property which would eventually become the Happyland amusement park. Sir George avoided meeting with Margaret when visiting the Red River settlement. He henceforth strongly advocated that Hudson’s Bay gentlemen marry British wives. But he did not abandon his sons to the Hogue family.

The irony is that although Sir George Simpson cut off relations with Margaret Taylor, he arranged the upbringing of his two sons by her at HBC forts and they eventually held management positions in the Hudson’s Bay company itself. The built-in prejudice seems to be not so much about mixed blood as about treating women more like possessions than people. For example, Margaret’s father, George Taylor, a sea captain for the company, left his wife, Jane, a Cree woman, and their 9 children in Rupert’s

Land while he went back to England. This was not just a fur trade practice. One of Sir George’s descendants relates that an ancestor named Mackenzie had over 30 children by 3 different women. Note also that many native chiefs had multiple wives. Looking at another example, we find that James Douglas, Chief Factor at Fort Vancouver, was faithful to and supportive of his mixed blood wife, Amelia Connolly Douglas. He was also critical of the local native practice of holding slaves.

As to how George Stewart did under the remote parenting style of his father, there were ups and downs. Sir George left his son George Stewart in the care of John McLoughlin, Chief Factor at Fort

Vancouver, and his native wife Marguerite Waddens when George Stewart was 8. In 1838, according to Reverend Herbert Beaver, young Simpson had arrived decently clothed but two years later, he was running about "in appearance like a beggar's child, and at one time suffered so much from sores, brought on entirely by the neglect of Chief Factor McLoughlin's wife, under whose charge he was placed". The sores were attributed to young Simpson's job of beating furs in the fur house which often led to flea bites and perhaps other parasites.

Three years later, in 1841, Sir George Simpson again came to Fort Vancouver. This time he took his son with him to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) where he worked for 4 years under the direction of an alcoholic man who taught him to drink. Young George must have gotten into trouble in the islands because in 1847, then stationed at Fort Connah near Flathead Montana, young George wrote a letter to his father apologizing for his previous behavior and assuring him that there would be no further problems.

In that same year, 1847, George Stewart, now 20 years old, was given a good report by John Lee Lewes, then Chief Factor at HBC Fort Colvile. Simpson left Fort Colvile soon after that and arrived at Fort Langley on the Fraser River near Vancouver BC. 1847 was also the year that a measles epidemic sprang from contact with the disease by natives who went to Sutter's Fort on the Sacramento River with Peu-Peu-Mox-Mox, a Walla Walla Native chief. The devastating effects of measles on natives around Walla Walla, led to an uprising at the Waiilatpu mission near HBC Fort Nez Percés in December 1847. Dr. Marcus Whitman, his wife Narcissa, and 9 other Americans were massacred by the Cayuse Indians at Waiilatpu. Wives of Americans killed in the uprising were distributed among native chief's wives. They would probably have been killed except for the adept intervention of Peter Skene Ogden and the Hudson's Bay Company.

Langley was a better place to be than the lower Columbia in the following year though things calmed down by late 1848. At Langley, George Simpson was joined occasionally by his brother John McKenzie Simpson, also a son of Margaret Taylor. Both were spirited young men and their habits did not go unnoticed by James Douglas, then Chief Factor at the newer Fort Victoria on Vancouver Island who dissuaded them from marrying native wives and soon took George Stewart back to Victoria in 1850. Douglas reported that "He is very attentive, smart and active, and a good pen man". Douglas had Simpson working in the sales shop. But Simpson was also observed helping put an end to a drunken revelry by smashing in the head of the illicit barrel of spirits with an axe.

Simpson worked for Douglas at Fort Victoria from 1850 to 1857. His duties occasionally took him to Langley. Where he married Isabella Yale, daughter of Chief Trader James Murray Yale in a double wedding with Isabella's sister, Aurelia, who married John D. Manson at the same ceremony. The celebration included a canoe ride on the Fraser River with, Douglas, Ogden and other dignitaries in attendance.

Soon after that George Stewart Simpson's story becomes less impressive. James Douglas reported to Sir George Simpson that although very competent, his son was "not perfectly regular". George Stewart was sent to the Peace River region and returned to Victoria in 1860 where he retired from the HBC at the age of 33. He lived another 34 years but did not inherit his Father-In-Law's estate. It went to Isabella's Sister, Aurelia and her husband, although George Stewart did live there with his family.

These stories often end with an aura of mystery. It is best not to judge the characters from a distance.

(I am very grateful to Nancy Marguerite Anderson, Tom Holloway, and Simpson's descendant David Walter Yale Simpson for their research and oversight of this article.)