

Knotts – River Lot 48 (1870)

John Knotts was a rarity in St Andrews - an indigenous farmer who owned this lot in 1870. He had worked for the HBC at Moose factory on James Bay. His Metis wife, Marie, was the daughter of Henniman (Henry) Hay, an Orkney carpenter working for the HBC.

John must have been an extraordinary character or must have rendered incredible service to the HBC to have overcome the prejudices of the 19th century HBC officers so as to qualify for a River Lot at Red River. It was something almost no other aboriginal received!

It was also something extraordinarily difficult to claim! It meant that wife and small children had to cross a thousand miles of wilderness by snowshoe, toboggan, canoe and York boat. It meant hunting and fishing for food, coping with the wildlife such as wolves, bears and insects to reach a forested piece of land where the skills that mattered were farming techniques that no person native to James Bay had ever seen demonstrated.

Perhaps, John was one of the adult students at Reverend Cockran's Farming School at Lot 61. Donald Gunn had been hired as an instructor in 1837. The school was part of Cockran's plan to bring Christianity to the population of St Andrews. By teaching the recent HBC settlers and their offspring the best farming and livestock-raising methods, Cockran hoped to develop a farming community that would sustain itself through its production and learn the "Christian" values that made for civilized life.

Donald Gunn had been an HBC labourer and then had made the transition to become a successful farmer. He was an able instructor who didn't mind getting himself dirty as he demonstrated the proper ways to do farming. He continued at the school, teaching literacy skills as well as agricultural techniques to Metis, Scottish and Orkney settlers of the region. In 1853, he retired and helped his son run the water-powered mill at what is now Lockport (for more information, visit the site of the mill next to the Half Moon Drive-in restaurant at Lockport).

It is likely that John Knotts became a part time or seasonal labourer for the HBC at Lower Fort Garry, earning just enough to pay off his debts at the Company's store. As a Cree from James Bay, he had little family connection to the Saulteaux in the area and was not bound by kinship to Peguis' band at St Peters.

John's Knott's son, Alexander had married the daughter of William Linklater, another prominent HBC retiree. Alexander also lived on Lot 48. Alexander applied for scrip to receive the equivalent of 160 acres of land or its cash value (\$160). Scrip was supposed to be an entitlement paid out to Metis residents of Manitoba as a condition of joining confederation (part of the Manitoba Act of 1870). The allocation of scrip lands took years and was subject to much graft and fraud on the part of land speculators. The lands granted were often not the lands that the Metis landholders had lived on for generations.

This may have been the case for Lot 48. Alexander's claim was accepted in 1876 and was paid out in 1878. Alexander and his family seem to have moved to Grand Marais, an aboriginal fishing and hunting community on the east shore of Lake Winnipeg. Once there, Alexander became a pillar of the community. His children married in the area. He donated land for the establishment of St Jude's Anglican Church and cemetery. His mother, Marie, was one of the first burials. (What became of John is unknown) It is a mystery as to how the family land came into the possession of the land speculator, J C Schultz, but one can guess!

John Christian Schultz never lived on Lot 48, nor on any of the other St Andrews lots that he acquired between 1870 and 1882.

Schultz, claimed to be a doctor, though he never graduated from medical school. He earned his wealth by land speculation. He bought land - either in the path of predicted railroads on the east or west banks of the Red River and paid low amounts and hoped to sell for high prices once the railway brought new settlers in from Ontario.

He bought Lot 48 when rumours suggested the mainline of the CPR would run along the west side of the Red River from Selkirk to Winnipeg. He bought 5 lots on the east side along the anticipated path of the rail line from St Boniface to East Selkirk. He bought land wherever he found a willing seller and a low price. Scrip lands were cheap and could be had for pennies an acre.

Dr Schultz had come to Red River to seek his fortune in 1859. He had repeated run-ins with the law, the HBC and even his business partners. In 1865, he became the publisher of the *Nor'wester* and broadcast his views opposing the HBC and favouring annexation to the new country of Canada. As a land speculator, he could see the vast wealth he could obtain from buying up the small holdings of the Metis farmers and selling them to the new settlers that were bound to arrive from Canada.

As early as 1868, he was complicit in encouraging fellow new arrivals from Canada to buy property in areas where the projected transcontinental railway would be located.

In 1869-70, he plotted with his "Canadian" party to overthrow Louis Riel's provisional Government. When his counter-rebellion failed, he fled Manitoba with the help of St Andrews resident, Joseph Monkman. Once he got to Ontario, he raised the hue and cry against Riel over the execution of Thomas Scott.

In the fall of 1870, he took advantage of the chaos following the arrival of Wolseley's troops and the collapse of the Riel provisional government to sow the seeds of division and dissent among the people of Red River. The volunteer militias from Canada ran roughshod over the Metis settlers of Manitoba in a "Reign of Terror" for which no soldier was ever punished.

He later used the confusion over the scrip issue to buy large numbers of River Lots from unsuspecting Metis farmers. His lots in St Andrews were but a fraction of his holdings in 1870's and 80's.

Schultz managed to parlay his holdings into both wealth and political power as he was elected to the Parliament of Canada twice, was appointed Senator and eventually Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba. He was, however, not a nice or an honest man. When he died in 1896, the highly respected Colin Inkster said, upon seeing his complimentary epitaph: "it is a pity we knew him."