

Kennedy – River Lot 63 (1835)

Alexander Kennedy was an Orkneyman who worked his way through the HBC to become a highly valued Chief Factor. He received a huge grant of Land in St Andrews but died in 1832 before he could actually settle there. His wife, an indigenous woman named Aggathas lived upon the property with her children. When she died in the mid-1860's, her son William and his bride, Eleanor Eliza Cripps built the stone mansion, Maple Grove. Later, the Kennedys operated a store on the property.

William was the fifth child of Alexander Kennedy and was born at Cumberland House in 1814. In 1819, Sir John Franklin, arrived at Cumberland House with his party of explorers in October. During the winter months, this “hero of Trafalgar” amused himself by teaching the children at the post their first reading, writing and arithmetic. Kennedy was never to forget this early mentor.

In 1825, he went with his father on the company ship from York Factory across the Atlantic to his father's Orkney homeland. He was sent to school at St. Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay. In 1833, the HBC executor of his father's will refused William Kennedy's request to study medicine. He, instead, offered an apprenticeship in the fur trade.

William served the company for five years in the Ottawa valley (where he learned Canadian French) and served at various posts in what is now northern Quebec and Labrador. He saw the devastating effects of alcohol on the families of the north.

He quit the HBC in 1846 for using alcohol in its trade with the indigenous people. He spent the next four years operating a fishing company on the Great Lakes and lobbying against the continued regime of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Northwest.

By a series of amazing coincidences, he met and convinced Lady Franklin that he should lead an expedition in search of her husband, Sir John Franklin (who had become lost in the Arctic while looking for the Northwest passage). Though he did not find Franklin, he did discover a strait which marked the northernmost tip of the North American Continent. Humbly, he named it the Bellot Strait after his second in command (Lt. Rene Bellot). He returned to Britain with his ship and crew intact (a rarity in those years) in the fall of 1852, a hero!

The next year, Kennedy mounted a second rescue attempt from the west. Unfortunately, his crew was not of his choosing. As he went around the Horn to the Pacific Ocean, the crewmen, fearful for their survival on such an expedition, mutinied. He ended the voyage at Valparaiso, Chile and returned to England.

In 1856, he returned to Canada and to Red River in the winter of 1857. He had traversed the wilderness in record time to establish a rapid all-Canadian route for future postal service from Canada to the Northwest. In Red River, he held public meetings to raise awareness at how the Hudson's Bay Company was stifling the settlements.

Kennedy then went to London with a petition signed by 574 residents of the settlement to request dissolution of the HBC's power and to unite with Canada. While there, he married Eleanor Eliza Cripps (believed to be a kinswoman of Lady Franklin).

Together the couple became missionaries at Anglican missions to the indigenous people on Lake of the Woods and later at Fairford on Lake Manitoba. Both missions failed, largely due to

the interference by the HBC. William and Eleanor came to settle permanently at Red River on his mother's property at Lot 63 in 1861.

In 1866, shortly after his mother's death, he built the Neo-Gothic stone mansion where he lived out the rest of his life. He entered a partnership in a store with his brother, George. Later, he was appointed as a magistrate and a justice of the Peace. During the 1860's and 70's, he was stricken with arthritis and was frequently bedridden.

Though he was largely confined to his house in his later years, William continued to participate in the politics and society of Red River. During the Red River Resistance, he sent a letter to Louis Riel counseling him not to follow the path of violence to attain his goals. At one point, he was instrumental in securing the release of some of Riel's prisoners (Donald Smith and Colonel de la Salaberry).

In 1879, Kennedy was the first presenter to the newly formed Manitoba Historical and Scientific Society. Always the visionary, he not only told of his Arctic explorations, but also of the potential of the far north. He was an early supporter for a railway to Hudson Bay.

When he was unable to work, Eliza supported the family and became one of Manitoba's first female entrepreneurs. She opened a shop selling the latest Paris and London fashions to the women of Red River. She also taught music and French at Miss Davis' School for Young Ladies and played the organ at St Andrews Church for thirty years. She led the movement to start a hospital in Red River. Her cultural refinements gained her the nickname "the Duchess". She held musical afternoons in her salon and entertained the cream of Red River society – including HBC officers, clerics and politicians.

In partnership with his brother, George, William ran a store near his house. In payment for goods, some of the Kennedy's customers offered their "scrip". Scrip was being issued to Metis families as a condition of confederation (enshrined by Louis Riel) in the Manitoba Act of 1870. Officially, the value of scrip was as much as \$160 or 160 acres of land. However, since the entitlement was not specific to the land that the Metis actually lived on, ownership was often contested and the price was devalued. In good faith The Kennedys and other merchants accepted "scrip" for payment and were plunged into debt when the scrip became almost worthless.

When Kennedy died in 1890, he was survived by his wife, his daughter Mary and his son William. Unfortunately, his legacy was debt! Though his wife attempted to pay it all off, Eliza was forced to sell her home and go to live with her son in Virden, Manitoba where she died in 1913.

William and Eliza's daughter, Mary, was an author and a painter who had attended Miss Davis' School for Young Ladies. She marched with the other girls two by two along River Road to church and then to the Rectory for tea with the Rector and his family. She loved fun and mischief: she invited the daughters of other residents to come "scooping" (using a long-handled net to scoop fish out of the creek behind the church during the spawning season) in the spring. One of her lasting memories were the occasions when she was walking home from school and a neighbor lady would call out to her: "Mary, would you like to pop in for some fresh hot buttered bannock?" Mary, a talented artist like her mother, never married. Many of her paintings and sketches are held by the Manitoba Museum and are on display at the Kennedy House.

William Kennedy Jr. was a good scholar and worked in the land titles office at Virden and Brandon, Manitoba. He married late in life so there were no direct descendants of William Kennedy and his wife.

Captain Kennedy and his wife are buried together under a granite boulder along the north wall of their beloved St Andrews church.

In 1908, John Norquay's widow, Elizabeth, came to live at the old house of her uncle William Kennedy. Her son-in-law, John McAllister, had bought the property and continued to own it until 1946. It was the McAllisters who created the fine rock gardens that are such a part of a visit to Kennedy House today!

George Kennedy was born, in 1815, at Cumberland House and accompanied his father and older brother, William, to the Orkneys in 1825. He was schooled at St. Margaret's Hope and returned to North America in the 1830's. For many years he was the proprietor of the store on the river road in St. Andrews not far from Maple Grove (the house that his famous brother built). He was listed in the census of 1870 as living in St. Andrews. He was unmarried. He died in 1896.

Phillip Kennedy was also born at Cumberland House, in 1816, and schooled in the Orkneys. In 1833, he was listed, along with his mother Aggathas, in the Register of Land Grants of the Hudson's Bay Company, as a recipient of property at St. Andrews as part of his father's estate. He married Jessie McKenzie and had twelve children, several of whom died in infancy. A review of the names of the people the children married reveals old Hudson Bay and Red River settlement names such as Inkster, Ross and Pruden. Phillip was a businessman and was a member of the Masonic Order. He died in 1873.

For more information of the Kennedys, please go to: redriverancestry.ca, or the Memorable Manitobans section of the Manitoba Historical Society website: MHS.mb.ca or the "Beyond the Gates of Lower Fort Garry (1981)