Isbister – River Lot 64,

This lot was owned in 1870, by inheritance, by one of Red River's most famous intellectuals, Alexander Kennedy Isbister, the founder of the University of Manitoba's Isbister scholarships and donor of its first library.

Mary, the daughter of Alexander Kennedy and his Cree wife, Aggathas, married Thomas Isbister, an Orkney post master for the HBC. Sometime before 1835, Thomas had settled his family along the Red River near "the Rapids church" (St Andrews).

When Alex was 14, his father was gored to death by a bull at Norway House. Alexander Kennedy Isbister was sent, like his uncles, the sons of Alexander Kennedy, to be educated in Orkney. At age 18, he returned to the Northwest and served the Hudson Bay Company in the Mackenzie Valley for three years.

Alex Isbister left the HBC to upgrade his education in the Red River settlement and, thereafter, went to Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh where he earned an M.A. He rose quickly in British academic circles, writing articles on the Arctic for magazines and publishing text books for schoolchildren and for teachers.

By 1851, Isbister was the headmaster of the prestigious East Islington School. He became a member of the College of Perceptors which set the standards for education throughout the British Isles. He wrote twenty-one educational books in his lifetime. Not satisfied, he earned an L.L.B. and was a barrister of London, England

When his uncle, Captain William Kennedy, came to London with a petition from the people of Red River in 1857, it was Alex Isbister who presented the petition to Parliament and attempted to break the HBC's monopoly in Rupertsland.

Sir George Simpson, the Governor of the HBC, used all of his powers to thwart the Isbister-Kennedy campaign. He even seems to have hired witnesses to give false testimony on the Company's behalf. Though the HBC's charter was extended, more conditions were added. These contributed to the eventual sale of Rupertsland to Canada years later.

When asked by the parliamentary committee about his attachment to his former home at Red River, though he has lived so long in London, Alexander answered that he thought of his homeland "every day".

When he died in 1883, Isbister left a library of almost 5000 books and the equivalent of \$83,000 to the newly established University of Manitoba. The fund was used to institute the Isbister scholarships. The scholarship was given annually to students on the basis of merit, not connection, gender, race or creed. This academic prize has helped launch the careers of many Metis and native youth due to its egalitarian criteria.

Alexander Isbister served as an example for other donors to the university of the power of altruism and love of one's Manitoba homeland.

For more information on this Memorable Manitoban, go to mhs.mb.ca or redriverancestry.ca..