

## **Spence - River Lot 10 (1835)**

James Spence, an Orkneyman who had worked for the HBC as a cooper, owned this lot in 1835. Spence was the grandfather of John Norquay. When his daughter and son-in-law died suddenly, he and his Metis wife adopted young John and his younger brother, Thomas. It was on Lot 10 that this future Premier of Manitoba was raised and called his home.

His grandparents ensured that John had not only a loving home, but a good education. He was sent to the St John's Academy where he excelled and became a protégé of Bishop Anderson.

The shortage of teachers was so acute in that era, that by the age of 17, John was teaching and became the "master" of Parkdale School. (For more information on Parkdale School, visit the road side park at the south end of River Road.)

After his marriage to Elizabeth Setter, granddaughter of the fur trader Andrew Setter, in 1862, John Norquay farmed at High Bluff. When grasshoppers destroyed his crop, Norquay tried fur trading at White Horse Plains. For a time, he was sheriff of the central judicial district of the province. The couple had eight children: five boys and three girls.

During the Riel Resistance, John opposed Riel initially, but kept out of the conflict. When the first legislature of Manitoba assembled in 1871, John Norquay was elected from the constituency of High Bluff. He was in the government until 1888 and for most of those years he was Premier.

John Norquay was the first citizen born in the province to become Premier. He represented St. Andrews south for most of his time in office. This was due, perhaps, to the influence of his illustrious uncle, by marriage, Captain William Kennedy.

### **John Norquay:**

John Norquay was a proud Metis of grand stature both physically and politically. He was a brilliant and persuasive orator. During his time in office, he engaged in many forward-looking schemes to advance the province. He was in almost constant conflict with Prime Minister John A. Macdonald over federal funding for the new province of Manitoba. He became embroiled in a coal-mining scandal that brought him down in 1888.

He died the following year after attending a summer fair at Marquette at which he danced the Red River Jig with such fervor that his appendix burst. He died in agony days later.

Perhaps the most tragic aspect of Norquay's period in office was that although he was a strong advocate of the rights the Metis had achieved during the Riel Resistance, he oversaw the undermining of those very rights and freedoms. The demographics of Manitoba shifted power away from Manitoba's original settlers and founders to the newly arrived Ontario protestant majority. Norquay presided over legislatures that went from a majority of French and Metis representatives to minority of just one – his own seat in St Andrews South.

Norquay has been the only Premier in the West of indigenous background. This reflects how completely the Metis and native populations have been subsumed by first Ontario and then by later immigrant groups.

John Norquay's father, also named John Norquay, owned 2 River Lots in St Andrews in 1835. Listed on the HBC survey of 1835 as Lots 51 and 52, they were located along the river trail on the west side of the river, about halfway between Lower Fort Garry and the St Andrews Church. The census that year shows that no acres were being cultivated – a bad sign if an acre per person was needed to survive in that era.

Clearly John Norquay Sr. was earning his living from other means, probably as a tripman for the HBC. He had married Elizabeth Spence and had two sons by 1847 when he and his wife both suddenly passed away. Both John Jr. and younger brother, Thomas, were left as orphans until James Spence, the children's grandfather adopted both boys.

By 1870, 3 River Lots were owned by Norquays:

River Lot 181, on the east side of the river a little upstream of Lower Fort Garry owned by Thomas Norquay, brother of John Norquay. River Lots 143, and 144 on the east side were registered to James Norquay, possibly an uncle.

Several years ago, a Norquay descendant was asked to write his memories of the early days, this is what was published in the book "Beyond the Gates of Lower Fort Garry (1981)

John Scott Norquay's reminiscences:

My father was Jacob Truthwaite Norquay. He was born in 1884, the third youngest of twelve children born to Thomas Norquay and Elizabeth Miller. He married Ethel Scott, daughter of William Scott and Josephine Fulsher, in April of 1916. Very soon after the wedding he left England to serve as an infantry captain in World War I.

As I did not arrive until 1921 when he was thirty-eight years old, most of his siblings had already passed away, so I have no memory of them.

I do recall Andrew Thomas Norquay, an older brother, born in 1872, who was an Anglican priest. I was told that he could speak three Indian dialects as he had spent most of his life in the north. He drove an ancient Model-T Ford in which I loved to ride. When it rained, we had to stop and snap on the side curtains to keep the rain out. As we drove down River Road towards Lockport, we had to cross over a very low part where the river was almost level with the road and the other side was a depression which filled with spring run-off. I recall, as a three or four year old, being quite terrified as we rattled downhill and along the road with the water lapping on both sides. "Reverend Thom" died in 1932 at age 60. I was eleven years old at that time.

I also remember Laurence, who was born in 1886 and operated one of the original farm sites at Cloverdale, Manitoba. His brother, William, worked the site next to him and was born in 1879. Laurence was known for his great sense of humour, and he had to be the strongest man I have ever met. The story has been told that he had been attacked by a large dog, and that he had strangled the animal with his bare hands. Sadly, Laurence lost his life in a traffic accident in 1948.

I also knew John, the youngest brother, who worked for the federal government as Agricultural Representative. John also had a great sense of humour, and he and my father had many laughs together. I remember him particularly because he let me drive his car before I was old enough to have a driver's licence.

Jacob ( my father) began his career when he received his teacher's permit at 17 years of age. His first teaching posting was at Clandeboye School. He taught in country schools for most of his life. He moved to Winnipeg in 1938, and was hired to teach at Vermette School, which was seven miles away from his residence in St. Vital. He never owned a car, so he either walked or rode his bike for the full school year. Jacob retired from teaching when he was 80 years old. That occurred when, as a substitute teacher, he had to walk a mile to his assignment on a very cold stormy winter day.

My Norquay grandfather was Thomas, born in 1843. His parents were John Norquay and Isabella Truthwaite. Thomas was a school teacher, farmer, and a member of the Manitoba Legislature when his brother John was premier. He died tragically in 1892 when, during a heavy snow storm, he and his horse-drawn sleigh were struck by a train.

My mother's father, William Scott Jr., was the only grandparent alive when I was born. My maternal grandmother, Josephine Fulsher Scott, did not survive the flu pandemic of 1918.

As a young boy, I enjoyed spending a month each summer at Grandfather Scott's farm. It was one of the original river lots granted to the Selkirk Settlers, so I was able to keep track of the river traffic, which was still considerable in the 1930's. I was always able to see the Keenora passing in front of me. It seemed so large in a relatively small river.

Grandfather Scott's housekeeper, Aunt Bell Henselwood, kept me busy picking gooseberries and digging out all the usual veggies for supper. She, of course, kept a very large garden, as did every good household in those days. That was still time of coal oil lamps and wood-burning cook stoves. Aunt Bell kept me entertained and mystified with her Ouija board. She believed in the paranormal, and had me convinced that a ghost occupied the front bedroom and I could hear it walking up the stairs and across the squeaky wooden floor.

My biggest adventures at Grandfather Scott's farm included riding a beautiful rust-coloured horse named Buster to Nathan Liss's store, most days, to pick up the groceries. At first my legs were too short to reach the stirrups, so I had to anchor my feet in the leather loops to which the stirrup was attached. I recall the first time I rode to the store. At that time, the Gessner family lived in the old stone building that had once been a girl's school (Twin Oaks, Miss Davis's School). They had a dog that liked to come running out to the road barking and nipping at Buster's heels. Buster, of course, took off in a gallop, to my dismay, and we arrived at the store much sooner than planned. I believe I was at the most nine years old at the time. I soon learned to outwit the dog by riding down close to the river and regaining the road once I had passed the house.

I had one really bad scare with Buster. One evening when I had saddled and mounted the horse, my uncle, Clifford Scott, (why, I will never know) delivered a hard whack to Buster's backside with a two-by-four. Buster immediately took the bit in his teeth and galloped down the lane and north on River Road at a speed that Seabiscuit (the famous racehorse) could not have matched. I had totally lost control of him. I am sure that we would have reached Selkirk within five minutes. Fortunately for us, Leon Liss, who happened to be walking up the road at the time, was able to grab Buster's bridle and get him to stop. I have been in Leon's debt ever since.

My great-great-grandparents were Oman and Jean (nee Morwick) Norquay. They were among the founders of Birsay village on the Assiniboine at the Plaine de Cheval Blanc (White Horse Plain), Manitoba. It was called Birsay after the parish in Orkney. The lots there were probably the first thing to be surveyed along the Assiniboine. It was a location where hunting and fishing would provide a backup for agriculture. The settlement lasted only seventeen months. After their crops were destroyed by grasshoppers during the summer of 1819 and an epidemic of measles and whooping cough carried off several children, including one of Jean and Oman's. The Birsay settlement disbanded, but a group moved north of the future site of Lower Fort Garry and established Mapleton. Oman died soon after.

John Norquay was born at St. Andrew's on May 8, 1841, the second son of John and Isabella Norquay. His grandfather was born in the Orkney Islands and had been an employee of the Hudson Bay Fur Trading Company. John married Elizabeth Setter in 1862. She, too, was a descendant of an Orkney Islander. John Norquay received his primary education at St. John's Parochial School, and later transferred to St. John's Academy. Following graduation, he taught at Parkdale School and later farmed at High Bluff.

He was elected by acclamation at High Bluff in the first provincial election held in December of 1870. He was the first Premier of Manitoba who was actually born in the province. He was Premier from 1878 to 1887. At the time of his death, July 5, 1889, he was the only M.L.A who had continuously held his seat in the Legislative Assembly since its inception. He spoke fluently in English, French, Cree, and Saulteaux.

The Department of Education building in Winnipeg was named the "Norquay Building". Also, Norquay, Saskatchewan and Mount Norquay in Banff, Alberta bear his name.

John Norquay's mother was Isobel Truthwaite. Her sister, Jane Truthwaite, was the mother of Elizabeth Anderson who married John McDonald. John Norquay and Elizabeth Anderson were first cousins.

John Norquay's wife was Elizabeth Setter. Her father, George Setter, was a brother to Isabella Setter, wife of Joseph Monkman and mother of Thomas Monkman whose daughter, Isabella Mary, married Donald McDonald.

Isabella Mary Monkman, wife of Donald McDonald, was a first cousin, once removed, to Elizabeth Setter, wife of John Norquay. Donald McDonald was a first cousin, once removed, to John Norquay. Clarence McDonald, son of Donald and Isabella McDonald, was a first cousin, twice removed, to John Norquay. The children of Clarence McDonald are first cousins, thrice removed, to John Norquay.

Note: Isabel Truthwaite (who married John Norquay senior) and Jane Truthwaite (mother of Elizabeth Anderson) were sisters. George and Isabella Setter were brother and sister.