



McRae – River Lot 112

The owner of Lot 112 in 1870 was the famous stonemason, Duncan McRae. With the exception possibly of Sir George Simpson, no resident of this area has made a greater mark on the St Andrews landscape than this wily Orkney craftsman.

Hired by the HBC in 1837 to help construct 2 forts along the Red River, Duncan McRae not only fulfilled that contract but went on to produce stone churches, mansions and homes that still stand today.

Though formally working for the HBC for only 5 years, he became the dominant stonemason of the Red River area. As a freelance contractor, he advised and supervised and fitted the stones of so many buildings that he is regarded as the foremost builder of the fur trade era.

He built and oversaw the building of the walls of Upper and Lower Fort Garry, the Kildonan Presbyterian church, the St John's Anglican Cathedral and Rectory, the St Andrews Church and Rectory, Little Britain Presbyterian Church, Captain Kennedy House, Matilda Davis' School for Young Ladies (Twin Oaks), Scott House as well as sundry HBC warehouses and structures here and in faraway locations.

He fell 70ft from a scaffold during the construction of St Andrews Church and was limited in his ability to walk and climb. Though crippled, his skills at dressing rock and harvesting good limestone from the banks of the Red River were not affected. He and his Metis wife, Charlotte Smith, had 11 children.

Duncan's family was one of the first to pioneer the Clandeboye area in the early 1900's.

Through intermarriage, McRae descendants are everywhere in St Andrews and St Clements and indeed in Manitoba. Everywhere they have gone, they have tried to live up to the label that their stonemason ancestor carried so proudly – a community builder.

For more information on Duncan McRae's family, please go to: redriverancestry.ca, or the Memorable Manitobans section of the Manitoba Historical Society website: MHS.mb.ca. A special monograph about McRae was prepared by the Manitoba Historic Resources Branch in 1983.