



“THIS HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY ASSEMBLY”

The McLeods, an Anglo-Dakota Family in Early Minnesota

JANE LAMM CARROLL

Martin McLeod, arriving on the Upper Minnesota River in April 1837, described a gathering at the Lac qui Parle mission for the Dakota Indians as a collection of “half-breeds, Indians, Canadians and a few whites.”¹ Although he himself was Canadian, it is clear that McLeod placed himself in the “white” category, viewing his own Anglo-Protestant identity as distinct from that of the Catholic French Canadians. Later that year, Peter Garrioch, another Anglo-American from Canada, described a Sunday service at the same mission.

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His congregation, consisting of Yankies, French, Scotch, Irish, Half-breeds and Sioux Indians, amounted to something about 40 persons. That *was* a mixture! I believe, though, we were pretty much all of one blood after all—according to the Scriptures. This higgledy-piggledy assembly put me strongly in

mind of that Scotch dish called, I think, Hotch-Potch. The Doctor’s services were conducted throughout in the French and Indian languages, for the united benefit of the respective parties. The morning service was concluded with a prayer, offered in the Sioux language.²



FACING PAGE: Trader Martin McLeod. ABOVE: Dakota tipis surround the frame home (back, right) of John H. Stevens near the Falls of St. Anthony in 1854, when the “higgledy-piggledy” era was nearing its end.

In November 1837 Garrioch, having missed the last steamboat traveling down the Mississippi before ice closed in, agreed to teach school over the winter to the many children living in the settlements surrounding Fort Snelling. On December 1, Garrioch recorded this assessment of his students in his journal:

Opened my school on the heterogeneous system. The whole number of brats that attended . . . amounted to thirty. This number was composed of English, French, Swiss, Swedes, Crees, Chippewas, Sioux and Negro extraction. Such a composition, and such a group of geniuses, I never saw before. May it never be my privilege to meet with another.³

Although both McLeod and Garrioch expressed astonishment at their initial encounters with the culturally heterogeneous society that was Minnesota in 1837, their reactions to this multicultural environment would shortly prove quite different. Garrioch was openly contemptuous of the “higgledy-piggledy” and “hotch-potch” nature of the population. His dismay at a society of various races and cultures, and especially his displeasure at the mixing of what were considered inferior races (Indians and blacks) with those of European heritage, was typical of most Anglo-Americans (Americans of British or European descent) of his time. Garrioch characterized the Indians as “uncultivated,” “barbarous,” “wild,” and “rude.” Thus, his discomfort when confronted with a society where cultural heterogeneity was the rule and Indians and Euro-Indians outnumbered whites. As soon as the ice broke on the Mississippi in the spring of 1838, Garrioch fled downriver, leaving behind the society he found so distasteful (although he must not have found it so terribly awful, as he returned to visit in 1840 and 1844).⁴

Being of “commanding presence, cultured intellect . . . dignified, eloquent, persuasive and charming,” McLeod came to be well respected by the white settlers in the region.

Martin McLeod, in contrast, stayed put. Having already garnered a position in the fur trade and met the woman who would become his wife, he swiftly adapted to Minnesota’s multicultural community and would very soon establish his own Anglo-Dakota family. McLeod

quickly became a contributing and influential member of the “heterogeneous system” that Garrioch had disparaged. McLeod would remain in Minnesota for the rest of his life.⁵

In fact, it was McLeod who had persuaded Garrioch to teach school during his winter layover. A college-educated Scots-Canadian, McLeod had left his Montreal clerkship in 1836 to venture west. He met his wife-to-be, Mary Elizabeth Ortley, in 1837 on his harrowing journey from Canada to Fort Snelling via the Red River Colony at Pembina and the Minnesota River. (He nearly froze to death and lost two companions on the way.) In the final stages of that trip downriver, McLeod negotiated with a Dakota woman for the use of her canoes. That woman was the widow of Henry K. Ortley, a trader of Scots descent who had come to the region in the early 1820s, abandoned his Minnesota family to open a grocery store in St. Louis, and died there in 1836. The widow and her family, including 13-year-old Mary Elizabeth, accompanied McLeod and his remaining traveling companion downriver to Fort Snelling.⁶

Upon his arrival at the fort, McLeod became an employee of Benjamin Baker, a trader whose house was located just north of the outpost at the settlement known as Camp Coldwater. Over the next 20 years, McLeod would prove to be one of the most influential traders for the American Fur Company among the Dakota of the Upper Minnesota River, where he manned posts at Lac qui Parle, Big Stone Lake, and Traverse des Sioux. Later described by his friend John H. Stevens as being of “commanding presence, cultured intellect . . . dignified, eloquent, persuasive and charming,” McLeod came to be well respected by the white settlers in the region. Elected in 1849 to the first of four consecutive terms in the Minnesota territorial legislature, and serving once as its president, he most notably authored the first legislation to establish public schools in the new territory. McLeod would later serve as Hennepin County commissioner and chairman of the town of Bloomington. Although a fairly successful trader and generally admired, he apparently battled alcoholism for much of his life, an addiction that got him into trouble at times with colleagues and neighbors and may have contributed to his death at the age of 47.⁷

During the winter of 1837–38 McLeod and Garrioch lived with trader Baker, his Anglo-Ojibwe wife, and their



"Immigrant Party of Swedes" from Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion, 1851

Massive European and American immigration rapidly overwhelmed what had been a society dominated by Indians and Euro-Indians.

five children and seven foster Euro-Indian children. Neighbors in the Coldwater settlement included about seven other families, among them the Quinns, another large Anglo-Ojibwe household. More children for Garrioch's school came from families living on the banks of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers near the fort. This was an era when Indians, Anglo-Indians, and French-Indians dominated the region's population. Historian Bruce White estimates that as late as 1850 only about 16 percent of the population was non-Indian, while people of Euro-Indian heritage accounted for at least 37 percent—and perhaps as much as 57 percent—of the total.⁸

This multifaceted society was the product of both the fur trade, which had been in place for about 200

years in the Great Lakes region, and the later advent of British and then American frontier forts to which army officers, Indian agents, and soldiers were posted. As Martin McLeod would do, the French, British, and American traders frequently formed close economic, social, and cultural bonds with the Indian people with whom they interacted, worked, and lived. They often cemented their relationships through marriages to Indian or Euro-Indian women according to Indian customs (*a la facon du pays*; in the fashion of the country). Officers, soldiers, and government officials also followed this practice, although most of their unions were short-lived. Many people of mixed heritage moved freely among various communities, living with Indians, mixed bloods, or whites according to the circumstances.⁹

Massive European and American immigration to Minnesota, beginning in the mid-1850s, rapidly overwhelmed what had been a society dominated by Indians and Euro-Indians. The population changed dramatically between 1855 and 1857 as the number of non-Indian residents in the territory rose from 40,000 to 150,00.¹⁰

Since the “winners” in the wake of any significant social or cultural shift write the history, it is not surprising that nineteenth-century Anglo-American historians virtually ignored the existence of an earlier society that comprised both Europeans and Indians and engendered a variety of Euro-Indian lifestyles. Instead, they interpreted the American past as a steady march toward the imposition of “civilization,” which they defined as the establishment of Anglo-American culture. Historians reflected the general mindset of the dominant culture, which was becoming increasingly influenced by notions of racial superiority. According to White, nineteenth-century historians described settlement and civilization as

the accomplishments of white people, even if other groups might live an orderly, cultured existence. From this point of view, the history of settlement of the Minnesota region, as described by post-territorial historians, was essentially the story of how Minnesota came to be white.¹¹

The Dakota War of 1862, coming on the heels of the massive immigration of the late 1850s, also significantly affected perceptions of Minnesota’s past. The public response to the war was characterized by a virulent hatred of—and concomitant backlash against—all Indians, Anglo-Indians, and French-Indians in the region, regardless of their involvement in the conflict.¹² According to historian Annette Atkins, the Dakota War created a Minnesota historiography that offered a simple story of Indians against whites, thus denying the state’s multicultural history.

The memory of 1862, the removal of the Dakota, and the legacy of separation that it spawned have been read backwards to construct a false historical memory of pre-1862. This two-sided view has prolonged the separation and even hatred. It has also erased the experiences of whites and Indians who didn’t fit the dichotomy and those of mixed-blood people entirely.¹³

Thus the 1850s, followed by the Dakota War of 1862, marked a major period of transition in the social history of Minnesota. In the wake of the war, most Dakota and many French-Dakota and Anglo-Dakota people were exiled west. Public hostility toward all Indians rendered those who stayed, and the many who eventually returned, socially invisible. Consequently, Indians and Euro-Indian

people were relegated, with the exception of their roles in the 1862 conflict, to relative insignificance in the state’s history.¹⁴

Telling the stories of Euro-Indian families like the McLeods, therefore, is essential to recreating a more accurate and complete history of Minnesota’s complex cultural past. These stories should be told not because families such as the McLeods were atypical, but because they were *typical* of Minnesota society in the first half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the McLeods themselves experienced the dramatic social shift of the 1850s and 1860s; the children, coming of age in those decades, would see the society of their childhood disappear by the time they were young adults.

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In 1851 Martin McLeod wrote a letter to his mother in Canada from his home at Oak Grove on the north bank of the Minnesota River, several miles west of Fort Snelling. Fortunately for historians, it appears that this letter was never mailed. Now part of his collected papers at the Minnesota Historical Society, it provides a window into McLeod’s thoughts and family life. In it, the trader told his mother:

You will no doubt be much astonished that I never mentioned this in any of my letters—The truth is I was apprehensive that you would all suppose that I had entirely abandoned Canada—and might forget friends there—having formed new ties and certainly very strong attachments in this distant land.¹⁵

What McLeod had failed to report to his family in Canada during the 14 years he had been in Minnesota was that he had married an Anglo-Dakota woman, Mary Elizabeth Ortley, *a la facon du pays*, and they had had five children: Walter Scott, born in 1841; John, born in June 1843 (died, July 1843); Mary Elizabeth, 1844; Janet (Janette), 1848, and Isabella (or Isabelle), born in 1851.¹⁶

FACING PAGE: *McLeod’s unmailed 1851 letter, on which he scribbled unrelated notes*

until I could write by your hands
to you are welcome to know that
to my of my hands: to take —

I really hope the baggage before
will reach you in safety they were
taken by an English artist who
travels here at St. Paul. and is
considered a capital artist

My Love to Mrs. L.

L. O'Connell

Canadian West.

Council Chamber

St. Paul. Minnesota

Legislative Council Chamber

St. Paul. Minnesota

February 20. 1851.

Legislative Council Chamber

St. Paul. Minnesota

February 1851.

L. R. Kennedy

Laquei Falls.

Yrs. in Affection

Yrs. in Affection

Yrs. in Affection

L. R. Kennedy

Feb., 1851 2000

Send to old Chief

(Large Kettle (Large Kettle)

1 Keg Powder

Lead

Blat Powder 20.

2-Sacks Potatoes

25 lbs. Flour

1-2 Tea

My dear

My dear Mother.

I will be surprised when
you receive this, from my
continued silence on the subject
perhaps. It is so - Indeed
it was always my intention
to ~~write~~ ^{write} you until
I could give you a more
you - and perhaps you in person -
what I allude to is that I
have this day ~~from~~ ^{not} got to
married I have been so for
years. but ^{you} send you a daughter
perhaps of her grand daughter -
The child is Mary Elizabeth - after
her mother and my dear daughter
the ~~name~~ ^{name} is Mary Elizabeth

Although McLeod claimed that he had not revealed the existence of his marriage and family lest his parents presume that he had forsaken Canada (which, indeed, he had), his omission probably had more to do with his wife's Dakota heritage and the fact that their marriage was sanctioned neither by the church nor American law. Unlike McLeod himself, his parents and siblings were enthusiastic and pious evangelical Congregationalists; indeed, their religious fervor, as much as Mary Elizabeth's Dakota heritage, may explain his many years of silence regarding his Minnesota family. He was likely loath to admit to his strictly religious family that he had been living in sin with a woman for 13 years.¹⁷ It is probably also true that, at least in the first years of his marriage, McLeod, like most of the fur traders who took so-called "country wives," had not anticipated a lengthy attachment either to Mary Elizabeth or to Minnesota. Perhaps establishing his family in a substantial home in Oak Grove was a final signal to McLeod himself that he was, indeed, permanently committed to his Minnesota life—and therefore it was time to reveal his Anglo-Dakota family to his Canadian family.

He spoke glowingly of his children and their potential, as if to nullify any presumed prejudice about their mixed heritage and their prospects.

In his 1851 letter, McLeod also revealed that his wife was of "delicate health" and a devoted mother. He referred to an enclosed daguerreotype photo of his two oldest daughters: Mary Elizabeth, named for his wife, and Janet, his "favorite child," named after his mother and sister. Although McLeod never explicitly mentioned his wife's Dakota heritage, it was there between the lines. He wrote of his attachment to his family in a somewhat defensive way, as if to justify his ties to them, and he spoke glowingly of his children and their potential, as if to nullify any presumed prejudice about their mixed heritage and their prospects. Sending the daguerreotype would also have been significant; presumably the picture would say what McLeod himself did not put precisely into words.

McLeod also took pains to make clear to his mother that his family was neither living among nor in the mode of the Indians.

My family do not live with me when I am in the Indian country, which is only about half of the year, but in a cot-



Janet (Janette) McLeod, here a young woman, was only three when her father first mentioned a photograph of her.

tage on the Minnesota River not far from where it joins the Mississippi. Here the children have the advantage of a school at a Protestant mission station. I intend to send Walter to a higher school at a distance soon where he will not hear the Indians, as he speaks their language as well as English and a little French.¹⁸

This picture of his family living away from "the Indian country" was somewhat disingenuous. During the 1840s, Mary Elizabeth and their children were often with McLeod on the Upper Minnesota River, where he traded with the central and western Minnesota bands of Dakota, including his wife's kin. In fact, daughter Mary had been born at Big Stone Lake in 1844 and Janet at Lac qui Parle in 1848. It was not until 1849 that the family settled permanently at Oak Grove; before that, they alternated between living near the mouth of the St. Peter's (Minnesota) River and living at several trading posts, most frequently Lac qui Parle and Traverse des Sioux on the Upper Minnesota. Sometimes his family accompanied him upriver, sometimes they stayed behind.¹⁹

Furthermore, Oak Grove, situated along Old Shakopee Road—the main Indian trail and, later, stagecoach route from Fort Snelling to Shakopee's village and up the Minnesota River valley—was in the thick of the cultural diversity of early Minnesota society. There, Chief Cloudman had moved his Mdewakanton Dakota band in the early 1840s after abandoning their farming village near

lakes Calhoun and Harriet. Gideon Pond, who with his brother Samuel had ministered to Cloudman's band at Lake Harriet, built a new mission on the bluff overlooking the Minnesota River in 1843. At Oak Grove the Ponds and their wives raised two large families and operated a mission school—the Protestant station McLeod described to his mother—attended by Dakota and Euro-Indian children.²⁰



Missionary Samuel W. Pond, who eventually settled at Oak Grove

Not far away, several Mdewakanton villages were strung along the Minnesota River, ranging east from Chief Shakopee's to Mendota at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. Closest to Oak Grove were the villages of Pinisha (Good Road) and Karbonka on the north bank of the Minnesota River and Black Dog's village across the river. The McLeods' Oak Grove neighbors also included the Anglo-Ojibwe Quinns, who in 1837 had lived near Martin McLeod at Camp Coldwater. Thus, although McLeod may have wanted his mother to think that his children spent most of their time in Anglo-American society, in reality they were immersed in a predominantly Indian and Euro-Indian world.²¹

McLeod was very strongly attached to his wife and children; unlike some traders who formed ties with more than one Indian woman over the course of their years in the Indian country, he remained with Mary Elizabeth from their Dakota marriage sometime

in 1837 or 1838 until his death in 1860. According to early settler John Stevens, the "handsome" 13-year-old girl and the 24-year-old trader had formed an immediate and mutual attraction. McLeod himself has been described as "strong armed and strong hearted . . . intelligent, quick-witted, sagacious . . . well educated, well informed and even accomplished." In addition to these many admirable characteristics, a photograph of him as a young man confirms his good looks. Given all these positive attributes, one can understand why a young girl would find McLeod appealing.²²

Mary Elizabeth's mother, abandoned by her Anglo husband and eventually widowed, likely viewed this mutual attraction favorably, as it would presumably lead to a more permanent attachment with a man who could help her and her children. A trader who entered into a relationship with an Indian woman was expected to support not only his wife, but also his wife's family. Although most Dakota marriages were arranged to the satisfaction of a bride's parents, the parents usually consulted their daughters and rarely forced them to wed.²³

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The Ortley family was apparently in need of financial aid. Upon hearing of Henry Ortley's death, Lawrence Taliaferro, the United States Indian agent at Fort Snelling, had given Mary Elizabeth, her younger brother, Henry Frederick, and their mother some money while waiting to hear from Ortley's brother if support were forthcoming. Taliaferro never recorded receiving any response, which meant that the widow and her children had to rely completely on their Dakota relatives.²⁴



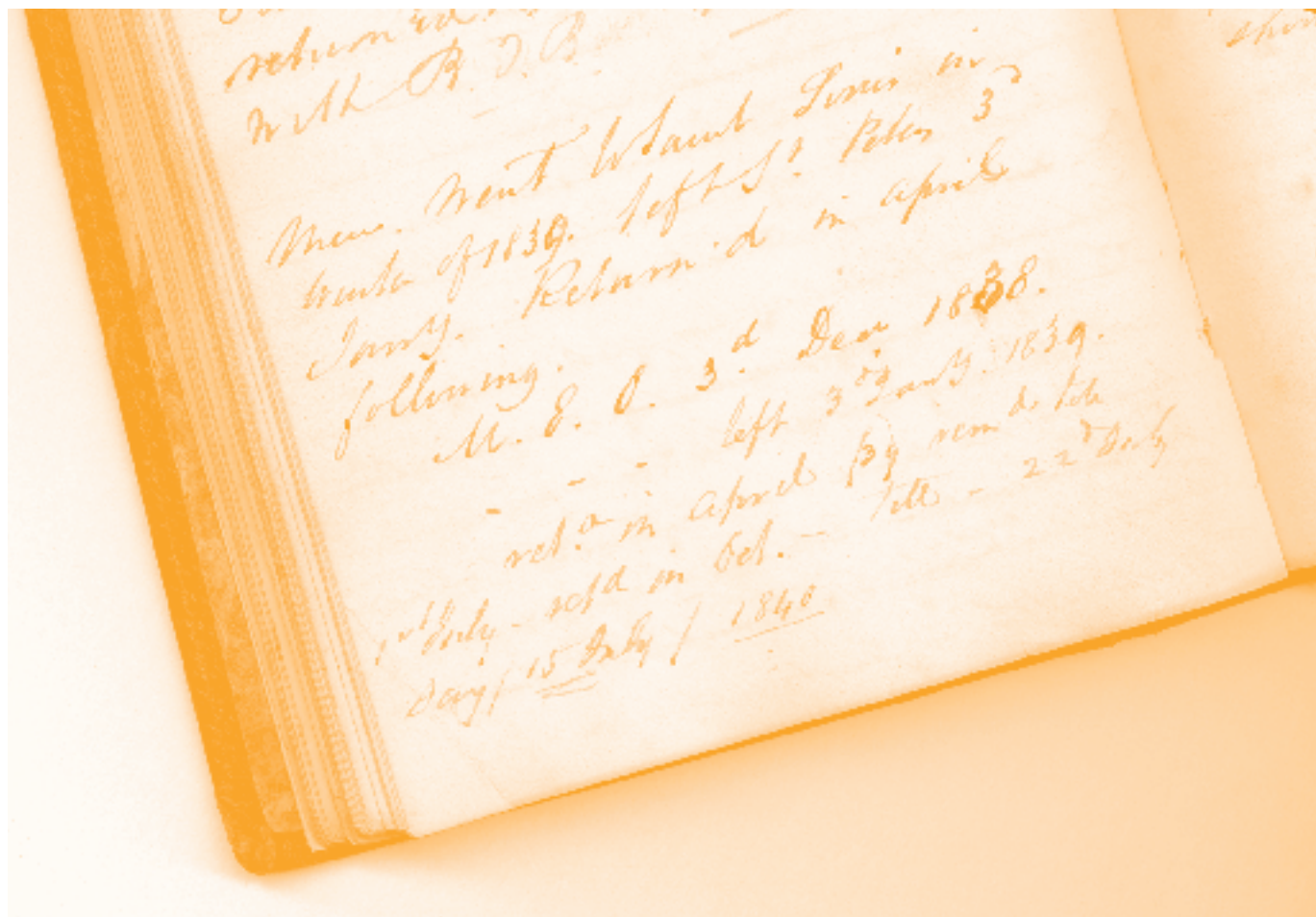
Early settler and chronicler John H. Stevens, 1892, at age 72. Stevens's memories of his friend Martin McLeod help tell the family's story.

It is possible that Mary Elizabeth's mother, while approving of the match, required McLeod to wait some time before entering into a Dakota marriage, given her daughter's young age when the couple met. However, it is difficult to ascertain from the evidence when, precisely, McLeod and Mary Elizabeth became man and wife *a la facon du pays*.

Although John Stevens claimed that McLeod and Mary Elizabeth married immediately upon their arrival together at Fort Snelling in 1837, McLeod's diary makes no mention of it. In fact, the only reference McLeod ever made to Mary Elizabeth in his journal was the cryptic entry: "M. E. O. 3d Dec., 1838," with no accompanying explanation. The date could have indicated the entry into or the finalization of the Dakota courtship and marriage process, which required the groom to provide gifts as a payment for his bride before families gave their final consent. This process generally lasted from a few days to, at most, a few weeks.²⁵

However, there is ample evidence that McLeod's close relationship with Mary Elizabeth and her family, in which he assumed the responsibilities of a Dakota marriage, was well established by December 1838 and may well have been in place in 1837. A little more than a year after first meeting Martin McLeod, 14-year-old Mary Elizabeth and her 11-year-old brother Henry Frederick appear on Agent Taliaferro's August 1838 list of half-blood and quarter-blood claimants under the 1837 Dakota treaty. While Henry was listed as living in Cloud-man's village at Lake Calhoun, Mary Elizabeth was at St. Peter's, a generic name that referred collectively to the settlements around Fort Snelling. Thus, it appears likely that Mary Elizabeth was living with McLeod by the summer of 1838 and perhaps earlier. Furthermore, in September 1838 Taliaferro named McLeod legal guardian of Mary Elizabeth and her brother, as well as trustee of the money due to them under the 1837 treaty. So, by that time it was generally understood that McLeod would take

Mysterious notation in McLeod's journal, the only reference therein to his wife, Mary Elizabeth Ortley





Lawrence Taliaferro, Indian agent at Fort Snelling

responsibility for Mary Elizabeth and her family, a duty that was expected of traders who took native wives.²⁶

Could the December 3 notation in McLeod's journal have marked something other than the beginning or end of the Dakota marriage process? Perhaps it was a record of the marriage's actual consummation. If so, this might be why McLeod provided no explanation; he was not likely to explicitly record such a private event for posterity. But the couple's first child, Walter Scott, was not conceived until the summer of 1840, three years after Stevens claimed that Mary Elizabeth and Martin had married, and about 20 months after the notation in McLeod's journal. Perhaps the cryptic entry indicates that the trader was unable to acknowledge, even to himself, the validity of his Dakota marriage.

McLeod would have been acutely aware that his marriage violated not only Anglo-American social convention but also an ethical standard shared by Anglo and Dakota societies.

McLeod appears to have felt some compunction about Mary Elizabeth's young age at the time of Walter's birth, which suggests he probably had also been uncomfortable with marrying a girl of 14. In his 1851 letter to his mother, McLeod noted that Mary Elizabeth was "only 17" when their first child was born. He added that he thought her delicate health was the consequence of having a child at such a young age.

Among the Indians of the Great Lakes region, menstruation, which usually occurred between the ages of 13 and 15, marked the availability of girls for marriage. Nevertheless, Dakota and Anglo-Dakota women of that era in Minnesota generally did not marry younger than 16 (and this was younger than most Anglo-American woman, who mainly married between the ages of 20 and 25). Nancy McClure, an Anglo-Dakota girl who wed at the age of 16 in 1851, recalled that she was too young to marry but had been pressured by her lover. Ironically but perhaps revealingly, she also remembered that Martin McLeod, who had been a friend of her father and had known her since infancy, had scolded her for marrying so young.²⁷

McLeod—college educated, relatively sophisticated and, by all accounts, an honorable man from a respectable and strictly religious family—would have been acutely aware that his marriage violated not only Anglo-American social convention but also an ethical standard shared by Anglo and Dakota societies: girls under age 16 were too young to wed. It is possible that McLeod's discomfort with Mary Elizabeth's immaturity caused him to delay consummating the marriage even after they had lived together for some time; or perhaps he did so at her request.

In the end, the December 3 notation remains a mystery, but it obviously meant something important to McLeod, as it is the only place that his journal directly references Mary Elizabeth. As the preponderance of evidence suggests that the formalities of their Dakota marriage had been long concluded by December 1838, one can only speculate as to the significance of December 3 in McLeod's eyes.

As for his revealing but unmailed letter to his mother, McLeod may have been prompted to write after receiving correspondence from several of his siblings. These letters discuss visiting him and possibly even settling in Minnesota, as he had encouraged his brothers and sisters to do. Perhaps when it became clear that none of them would actually arrive in 1851, McLeod decided that he was not ready, after all, to reveal the existence of his wife and children.²⁸

The likelihood that his siblings would eventually come to Minnesota, however, may have played a part in convincing him to marry Mary Elizabeth in the eyes of the church and American law in September 1851. Their neighbor Gideon Pond performed the ceremony



Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, moved from its original location to what became Old Shakopee Road and Penn Avenue, Bloomington

at Oak Grove Presbyterian Church. More likely, though, it was Mary Elizabeth herself who prompted the church marriage, for she had become a member of the Ponds' congregation, while McLeod had not. Although he subscribed to the general principles of Protestantism, McLeod had always been skeptical and even derisive of the evangelical Christianity produced by the Second Great Awakening, the massive revivalist movement that swept Protestant churches in the United States and Canada in the 1830s and 1840s. He had not experienced the requisite individual conversion to be "born again," nor did he desire to.²⁹

Although McLeod's siblings began arriving in Minnesota in 1852, he still delayed conveying news of his family to his parents. By that fall, his younger brother George was living at Martin's trading post at Traverse des Sioux on the Upper Minnesota River. Although George knew

With a wife, four children, and four siblings now in Minnesota, McLeod shouldered the role of *pater familias*.

of Mary Elizabeth and the children by the time he arrived, the rest of the McLeod family did not. Presumably Martin had asked George not to share the news. McLeod must have decided that he wanted to tell his family himself, for in January 1854 he traveled home to Montreal for the first time since his departure in 1836. Back in Minnesota later that year, he received letters from Canada that included loving references to Mary Elizabeth and the children. From the warm tone of these letters, it appears that McLeod's long reticence regarding his Anglo-Dakota family had been unwarranted.³⁰

Soon after his visit to Canada, all but one of McLeod's remaining siblings emigrated to Minnesota. During the summer of 1854, his youngest brother, John, became Martin's clerk at Lac qui Parle and Traverse des Sioux. That same summer another brother, Norman, visited with his family with a view to future settlement. The next spring, his sister Elizabeth McLeod Mattice arrived with her family to settle permanently.

With a wife, four children, and four siblings now in Minnesota, McLeod shouldered the role of *pater familias*. In addition, an 1856 census of Euro-Indians in Minnesota listed two orphaned sisters, Emily and Susan Welch, as living in the McLeod household at Oak Grove. Emily and Susan remained with the McLeods until their deaths in 1861 and 1862.³¹

Of his children, McLeod had proudly written in 1851:

I am and have every cause as well as natural right to be much attached to my children who are promising and a source of happiness to me. Janet is the most fascinating and affectionate child I ever knew. . . . Our eldest, Walter

Scott, is now a lad of nine years . . . There is yet another who bids fair to surpass both her sisters, an infant of a year whose name is Isabella after a very dear friend of former times in Montreal whom I shall *never see again*.³²

McLeod clearly wanted to ensure that his children would receive a good education. In the spring of 1852, the school at Oak Grove was closed due to the terminal illness of Gideon Pond's wife, Sarah. Consequently, McLeod arranged to send his two oldest children, Walter (age 10) and Mary (8), to board at the home of his friend John Stevens, in what would become Minneapolis, and receive instruction from Mrs. Stevens. McLeod told Stevens:

Walter is tractable and I know will be obedient. Mrs. Stevens will have no great difficulty with him—but Mary is a little maiden wild and I cannot predict any result. That she has a good intellect I know—superior to Walter's, but it is entirely under [developed]. . . . I have left instructions here to send Walter and Mary to your place in about two weeks. They will have some clothing with them, but not all that Mrs. S. may think sufficient for their comfort or respectable appearance—Mrs. McLeod

The McLeod house as it looked in about 1900



is very anxious about them, but as she is in very ill health, I have directed her to leave much undone. You will please therefore procure anything at your store that the children may need to make them comfortable and appear respectable.³³

Walter and Mary lived with the Stevenses on and off during 1852 and 1853, after which they returned to Oak Grove. During those years the children were frequently homesick, and McLeod both traveled to see them himself and arranged for them to visit home. By 1854 Mary was back at Oak Grove, boarding and attending school at the Pond mission, and Walter was probably a day student there as well. Then, in 1858 McLeod hired a young woman from Minneapolis to act as a tutor or governess for his three daughters, who were 14, 10, and 7 years old.³⁴



The Stevens house, about 1855, shortly after the McLeod children returned to Oak Grove

In the last several years of his life, Martin McLeod was burdened by debt and ill health. In 1858 he finally sold out of the Indian trading business at a loss. Fortunately, he had invested heavily in real estate in the Bloomington area (the city that grew to encompass Oak Grove) in addition to building his own home and farming there. All of this enabled his family to live relatively comfortably despite his virtual bankruptcy resulting from the Panic of 1857, a national economic crisis that ruined many Americans. Shortly before the panic, McLeod had sunk a great deal of money, much of it borrowed, into land to the west in Glencoe (present-day

McLeod County), a site that he and John Stevens had worked together to develop. The panic and subsequent recession made it virtually impossible to sell that land, and McLeod was saddled with heavy debts that he was unable to repay, in addition to those he had incurred in his last years as a trader.³⁵

To make matters worse, McLeod was trying to support several of his siblings who depended upon him either for employment or direct financial aid. In 1858 George wrote Martin several times to ask for help for their sister Elizabeth's family, barely eking out a living as farmers on the Upper Minnesota River. George and his wife, also struggling as farmers, did not have the means to help. In addition, after 1858, John, who had worked as Martin's trading clerk, was without work and looked to his brother to find him another position. McLeod's elderly parents in Montreal also counted on his occasional financial gifts.³⁶

In late December 1858, the 45-year-old McLeod wrote to John at Traverse des Sioux from his home in Oak Grove, promising to try to find him a new position, expressing despair about his own financial situation, and complaining of illness.

I am almost disheartened about my own affairs—have borrowed and have continued to borrow . . . debt is hanging over me like the Sword of Damocles. No property can be sold for money now. I only hope for the spring. . . . We have all been sick—Walter and the girls with bad colds. I have not been well myself . . . from my chronic rheumatism of old and a spinal affliction. I expect it will finish me yet in a hurry.³⁷

Less than a year later, John, the much-loved youngest brother of the family, died unexpectedly at the age of 25. This must have been a blow to Martin, who was 21 years older and had taken a particular interest in his brother's education. The two had become close. John's death likely exacerbated McLeod's alcoholism and accelerated the onset of his death in January 1860.³⁸

A man upon whom many depended, Martin McLeod died despondent and virtually bankrupt at the age of 47. Luckily for his family, he had been able to retain ownership of his Oak Grove farm and house, which sustained his survivors. Mary Elizabeth was 35 years old when her husband died, and their children ranged in age from 9 to 18. She lived 11 years longer and was buried next to Martin in the Oak Grove cemetery.³⁹

The McLeod children grew into adulthood at Oak Grove, coming of age in the late 1850s and 1860s, just as the diverse Euro-Indian society in which they had been raised was rapidly disappearing. Only one—Janet, her father’s “most fascinating and affectionate child”—ever married. Walter Scott McLeod, the oldest child and only son, was 18 years old when his father died. He inherited the family homestead and became a successful farmer. In addition, from 1884 to 1888 Walter was commissioned by the United States Indian Office to be an interpreter, disbursing agent, census taker, and teaching farmer for the Minnesota Dakota.⁴⁰



Walter S. McLeod

During the 1870s and early 1880s many Dakota, Anglo-Dakota, and French-Dakota people, exiled after the 1862 war, returned from the Santee Reservation in Nebraska and settled at or near their former homes. Their economic existence was precarious, and Walter’s job was part of the government’s attempt to make the Mdewakanton into self-supporting farmers. Most of the returnees did not own land but squatted on the property of friends, relatives, or others who did not object to their presence. Many of the Indians who owned land did not have enough acreage or equipment to farm successfully. Congress had responded to requests for aid by appropriating \$60,000 between 1884 and 1890 (and another \$20,000 between 1895 and 1899) to purchase land and agricultural implements and provide direct cash payments for basic necessities, such as clothing. In 1887,

Walter purchased 340 acres for the Mdewakanton Dakota at Prairie Island, Prior Lake, and Birch Coulee. He also taught farming and helped them build frame or log houses to replace their tipis. Walter himself continued to farm at Oak Grove, where he also held town offices and engaged in real estate until his death in 1916.⁴¹

Mary, the oldest daughter, lived with Walter until 1879. That year she moved to the home of her 31-year-old sister Janet, who had just married Rene Baillif, a widower and the oldest son of immigrants from Normandy who had settled in the area in the 1850s. Rene had inherited his parents’ farm and business, the Halfway House, an inn on the stagecoach route between Fort Snelling and Shakopee that later became the nucleus of Bloomington. To these he added a store, saloon, and sorghum press. Rene and Janet had four sons, three of whom lived to adulthood, and Mary helped raise her nephews. She lived in the Baillif home until her death in 1934, outliving both Rene and Janet, who died in 1919 and 1920, respectively. Mary was the last of the McLeod children to die, and her funeral was held at the Oak Grove Church, where her parents had married 83 years earlier.⁴²

Little is known of Isabella, the baby of the family. In 1919, when she donated her father’s journals to the Minnesota Historical Society, she was 68 years old and living in South Minneapolis. She died in 1932 after a prolonged illness and was buried next to her parents.⁴³

Janet McLeod Baillif, her husband Rene, and her older sister Mary McLeod (left to right)



It is, perhaps, telling that most of the McLeod children did not marry, unlike the previous generation of mixed-blood children born in the late 1820s and 1830s. Quite likely, the McLeods' opportunities of finding marriage partners whom they considered suitable or who found them suitable had been significantly reduced as a result of the population shifts of the 1850s and 1860s. Just 15 or 20 years earlier, Euro-Indians living in the settlements surrounding Fort Snelling and along the Minnesota River had married Indians, French-Indians, Anglo-Indians, or Euro-Americans, but the McLeod children did not have the same wide array of options, at least within the vicinity of their Oak Grove home. In addition, the cultural prejudices of Anglo-Americans and immigrants toward Indians—as well as the virulent hostility after the 1862 Dakota War—probably reduced the

likelihood that Anglo-Indians like the McLeods would find marriage partners in the non-Indian population. The only McLeod child to marry, 31-year-old Janet, was older than average for a first-time bride when she wed a widower, a neighbor whom she had known since childhood.

In 1850 the McLeods had lived in a society comprised mainly of Indians and Euro-Indians like themselves, but by 1863 they found themselves in the minority. Their family story is a testament to the existence of a heterogeneous society that was rapidly overwhelmed in the mid-nineteenth century, subsequently obscured by historians and, consequently, is largely unknown today. It is essential to recapture their story, and the stories of their contemporaries, in order to reconstitute a more complete and accurate portrayal of Minnesota's complex, multicultural past. □

Notes

1. Martin McLeod, Diary, vol. 2, Apr. 9, 1837, Martin McLeod Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).

2. Peter Garrioch, Diary, July 9, 1837, Peter Garrioch Diaries, microfilm, MHS.

3. Quoted in George H. Gunn, "Peter Garrioch at St. Peter's," *Minnesota History* 20 (June 1939): 127.

4. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Garrioch, Diary, July 9, 1837; Gunn, "Garrioch at St. Peter's," 128.

5. Helen White and Bruce White, *Fort Snelling in 1838: An Ethnographic and Historical Study* (St. Paul: Turnstone Historical Research, 1998), 147–65.

6. Indian agent Lawrence Taliaferro, who licensed traders in the Indian country, first mentioned Ortley in his journal on Jan. 14, 1826; Lawrence Taliaferro Papers, MHS. See also Philander Prescott, "Reminiscences," 98, Philander Prescott Reminiscences and Related Papers, MHS. McLeod recounts his journey to Minnesota from Canada in volume 2 of his diaries, McLeod papers.

The name of Mary Elizabeth's mother is elusive. Missionary Stephen R. Riggs refers to Tawaquidute as the grandmother of the Ortley boys (Mary Elizabeth's nephews), but Riggs could have meant the boys' maternal grandmother rather than Ortley's widow; Riggs to Martin McLeod, Feb. 22, 1858, McLeod papers.

7. William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1956), 1: 256–57; Isaac Atwater and J. H. Stevens, ed., *History of Minneapolis and Hennepin County* (New Jersey: Munsell, 1895), 2: 1207–08, 1268–69; Martin

McLeod to Henry Hastings Sibley, Oct. 2, 1848, Henry H. Sibley Papers, microfilm reel 5, MHS. According to historian Alan Woolworth, McLeod's neighbor Gideon Pond reported that he had died of cirrhosis of the liver. McLeod's father also suffered from alcoholism; see McLeod siblings' correspondence, McLeod papers.

8. Bruce M. White, "The Power of Whiteness, Or The Life and Times of Joseph Rollette Jr.," in *Making Minnesota Territory: 1849–1858*, ed. Anne R. Kaplan and Marilyn Ziebarth (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1998), 182–83.

9. On the nature of fur trade society in the Great Lakes and Canada see, for example, Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980); Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980); Jacqueline Peterson, "The People In Between: Indian-White Marriage and the Genesis of a Métis Culture in the Great Lakes Region, 1680–1830" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1981); Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind* (1984; repr., St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1997).

10. White, "Power of Whiteness," 183–87.

11. White, "Power of Whiteness," 180.

12. Roy Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 124–25.

13. Annette Atkins, "The Dakota War: One Mixed-Blood Family's Experience," unpublished manuscript obtained from author, Jan. 2005, p. 1–2.

14. French-Dakota and French-Ojibwe

families have received the bulk of the scanty attention paid to Euro-Indian families in Minnesota. Although the Ojibwe were not removed as a result of the Dakota War, their rights, too, were ignored; see, for example, Jane Lamm Carroll, "Dams and Damages: The Ojibway, the United States and the Mississippi Headwaters Dams," *Minnesota History* 50 (Spring 1990): 2–15.

15. Martin McLeod to My Dear Mother (Janet McLeod), Feb. 1851, McLeod papers. McLeod scribbled unrelated notes on the margins of this letter. From subsequent events, it seems unlikely that a similar letter was sent instead.

16. McLeod, Diary, vol. 2, undated list facing p. 70, McLeod papers.

17. The religious fervor of McLeod's siblings and parents is obvious in their letters to him during the 1840s and 1850s. One younger brother, Norman, was a Congregational minister; McLeod papers.

18. McLeod to My Dear Mother, Feb. 1851. The Pond mission at Oak Grove was not far east of the McLeod home on the river at what is now Lyndale Avenue South; Judith A. Hendricks, ed., *Bloomington on the Minnesota* (Bloomington Bicentennial Committee, 1976), 35. McLeod never sent Walter any farther than Minneapolis.

19. Correspondence and diaries, McLeod papers. In his diary, McLeod recalls wintering at the Upper Minnesota posts and spending summers near Fort Snelling, although he went upriver some summers as well.

20. Samuel W. Pond, *Two Volunteer Missionaries Among the Dakotas* (Boston: Congregational Sunday School Publishing,

1893), 37–184; Hendricks, ed., *Bloomington on the Minnesota*, 15.

21. Samuel W. Pond, “The Dakotas or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834,” *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* (St. Paul, 1908), 12:321; Harriet Duerre, “A Creek Runs Through It: Nine Mile Creek in Bloomington,” *Hennepin History* (Spring 2003): 6–7; John Crompton, historian, Gideon Pond House, Bloomington; Hendricks, ed., *Bloomington on the Minnesota*, 27, 34–35.

22. Atwater and Stevens, *History of . . . Hennepin County*, 2: 1208; Return I. Holcombe, comp., *Minnesota in Three Centuries, 1655–1908* (Mankato: Publishing Society of Minnesota, 1908), 2: 101.

23. These relationships and expectations are fully documented in Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*; John S. Wozniak, *Contact, Negotiation and Conflict: An Ethnohistory of the Eastern Dakota, 1819–1839* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), 16–20; S. Pond, “Dakotas or Sioux,” 453–56.

24. Taliaferro, *Journal*, May 14, 1836, Taliaferro papers.

25. Atwater and Stevens, *History of . . . Hennepin County*, 2: 1208; Wozniak, *Contact, Negotiation and Conflict*, 16–25; S. Pond, “Dakotas or Sioux,” 453–56.

26. For the list of claimants, see Taliaferro, *Journal*, Aug. 16, 17, 1838; for trustees for child claimants, Sept. 19, 23, 1838—Taliaferro papers.

27. Peterson, “People In Between,” 62; Jane Lamm Carroll, “Who Was Jane Lamont?” *Anglo-Dakota Daughters in Early Minnesota*, *Minnesota History* 59 (Spring 2005): 184–96; Nancy McClure, “The Story of Nancy McClure,” *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* (St. Paul, 1894), 6: 439–60, especially 442, 446; William L. Bean, comp., “Eastman, Cloud Man, Many Lightnings: An Anglo-Dakota Family” (family reunion booklet, 1989), copy in MHS. Most northern Anglo-American woman of the era married in their early to mid-twenties, Southerners, by age 20; Michael Goldberg, “Breaking New Ground,” in *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*, ed. Nancy Cott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 185.

28. George McLeod to Martin McLeod, Sept. 26, 1850, Feb. 3, 1851, Aug. 12, 1851; Norman McLeod to Martin McLeod, Sept. 26, 1850; Margaret McLeod to Martin McLeod, Mar. 14, 1851; John McLeod Sr. to Martin McLeod, June 25, 1851—McLeod papers.

29. Church Record, p. 156, First Presbyterian Church, Minneapolis, Parish Record Books, MHS.

McLeod sneered at attempts by various missionaries, including Gideon Pond, to “save” his soul. See his diary, vol. 2, particularly Apr. 22, 1837, and Gideon Pond to Martin McLeod, Apr. 1837, both in McLeod papers; Gideon Pond, *Diary*, Feb. 10, 1856, Pond Family Papers, MHS. Although McLeod never joined Oak Grove Church, in 1855 he donated four acres of land and money for a new church and cemetery where he, Mary Elizabeth, and their four adult children would be buried. Hendricks, ed., *Bloomington on the Minnesota*, 34–35. On the Second Great Awakening, see Jacqueline Jones et al., *Created Equal: A Social and Political History of the United States* (New York: Longman, 2002), 384–86.

30. Here and below, George McLeod to Martin McLeod, Sept. 30, 1852; Martin McLeod to John McLeod Sr., Dec. 16, 1853; Elizabeth McLeod Mattice to Martin McLeod, Apr. 15, Nov. 12, 1854; John McLeod Sr. to Martin McLeod, Feb. 21, 1853, July 18, 1854—all McLeod papers. McLeod’s youngest sister, Margaret, married and remained in Canada.

31. Kermit Frye, *The Old Bloomington Cemetery* (Roseville, MN: Park Genealogical Books, 1999), 36.

32. McLeod to My Dear Mother, Feb. 1851, McLeod papers.

33. Martin McLeod to John H. Stevens, Mar. 11, 1852, John H. Stevens Papers, MHS.

34. Martin McLeod to John H. Stevens, June 5, July 18, 1852, Feb. 11, Mar. 3, 1853, Stevens papers; Gideon Pond, *Diary*, Jan. 1855, showing receipt of payment for Mary’s board and tuition, Pond papers; Martin McLeod to John McLeod, Dec. 28, 1858, McLeod papers.

35. Charles J. Ritchey, “Martin McLeod and the Minnesota Valley,” *Minnesota History* 10 (Dec. 1929): 397–400.

36. John McLeod to Martin McLeod, Apr. 11, 23, 1858; John McLeod Sr. to Martin McLeod, Oct. 13, 1851; Norman McLeod to Martin McLeod, Mar. 14, 1851; Martin McLeod to John McLeod, Dec. 28, 1858—all McLeod papers.

37. Martin McLeod to John McLeod, Dec. 28, 1858, McLeod papers. This letter was either a copy or was never sent, for it was not addressed.

38. Frye, *Old Bloomington Cemetery*, 34. John died on Oct. 31, 1859. The family’s pride and love for him is apparent in nu-



Minnesota’s state seal, a graphic representation of the end of the McLeod children’s world

merous letters in the McLeod papers. Martin McLeod died of a sudden illness, but nowhere could I find a specific description of it. William S. Chapman claimed that McLeod was in good health and spirits the day before the attack from which he never recovered; John H. Stevens, *Personal Recollections of Minnesota and Its People* (Minneapolis, 1890), 428.

39. Hendricks, ed., *Bloomington on the Minnesota*, 35, 79.

40. Atwater and Stevens, *History of . . . Hennepin County*, 2: 1269.

41. These settlements were the basis for the Dakota reservations of today. A special census in 1883 showed 237 Dakota living in small enclaves scattered across southern and eastern Minnesota. Oak Grove from 1870 to 1891 had between eight and 20 Dakota residents—including some named Ortle—enough for the Ponds to hold Sunday school and church services in the Dakota language. Atwater and Stevens, *History of . . . Hennepin County*, 2: 1269–70; Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 273–96; Roy W. Meyer, “The Prairie Island Community: A Remnant of Minnesota Sioux,” *Minnesota History* 37 (Sept. 1961): 271–82; Carolyn Ruth Anderson, “Dakota Identity in Minnesota, 1820–1995” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1997), 208–36; Jeff Williamson, “The Dakota Indian Settlement at the Gideon Pond Farm, 1870–1891,” Gideon Pond House, 2005; Frye, *Old Bloomington Cemetery*, 36.

42. Hendricks, ed., *Bloomington on the Minnesota*, 44, 49, 52, 76, 80; Duerre, “Creek Runs Through It,” 7–8; Frye, *Old Bloomington Cemetery*, 34, 36; *Minneapolis Journal*, Dec. 7, 1934, p. 7.

43. Frye, *Old Bloomington Cemetery*, 36. See also typed note tucked into McLeod, *Diary*, vol. 1, McLeod papers.

The photos on p. 218, 224, 228, and 231 are courtesy the Bloomington Historical Society. All other images, including the letter and diary from the Martin McLeod Papers (photographed by Eric Mortenson/MHS), are in MHS collections.



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