## A TRIEUTE TO REV. JOHN BLACK

The following article, written by Betty Jean Williamson under the title "A Tribute to Rev. John Black", was judged first prize in the University of Winnipeg Alumni Association Centennial Essay Contest held in 1971 as part of the University's 100th Birthday Party. We reprint this article for the enjoyment of *Bulletin* readers in this Centennial Year of the City of Winnipeg.



Old Kildonan

Have you been to old Kildonan Seen the Red, with gentle sweep Guard the little, rude God's acre Where the early settlers sleep?

Then you too may share the glory Of that epic, great and true; How these pioneers of empire Broke the Western trail for you.

Laid in fuith, the broad foundations Of this lund, so free and wide That it offers homes and plenty To a boundless human tide;

You may tread with pride and wonder, O'er this ever sacred sod, Where the little band of crofters Claimed the great, new West for God.

- The Rev. John Mackay

Yes, I have been to Old Kildonan. There amid the whispering trees stands the little church, built in 1854, with a stone fence in front. There, too, sleep many of the brave pioneers, and there a simple granite shaft pays tribute to the founder of Presbyterianism in the west.



Rev. John Black

I stood by the grave of my great-greatgrandfather, Rev. John Black, and time rolled away, for there in the churchyard, I could not hear the noise of the city. The birds sang, and a light breeze murmured a benediction, but there was no other sound.

The great metropolis, might not have been

there..., it was not there, only a rolling carpet of September prairie. And on the carpet, a young man on horseback, riding with a group of officials, soldiers and half-treets. 10

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John Black paused in nis ride, reflecting on circumstances that had brought him, a minister consecrated only a month earlier in Toronto, to this seemingly desolate land in the year 1851. He had travelled by steamer to Buffalo and from there to Detroit, then by train to Elgin. He had experienced a miserable stage ride to Galena, during which the coach overturned several times, but on the steamer to SL Paul he had looked forward eagerly to the day when he would be escorted to his first church.

However, at St. Paul he found that the Red River party had returned to Fort Garry without him. This worried him at first, and his natural reaction was a desire to turn around and go back to Toronto, but he thought and prayed for a while, and set about finding some way to get to Fort Garry.

He found that the Governor of Minnesota and his official party were travelling to Pembina to make a treaty with the Chippewa Indians. John obtained permission to travel with them, and bought the necessary equipment.

In the time it took to travel, John found himself reviewing how he had been seemingly chosen for this mission. When he was twentythree his family had sailed from Scotland to farm in New York State. After three years of study in the States, John went to Toronto to enter in the first Theological Course in Knox College. His fluency in French had been a major factor in his appointment as a missionary among the French in Quebec, and later, when the Selkirk Settlers begged the Toronto Synod for a minister of their faith, John was again the choice, since he was not bound to any one church.

Although the Settlers really wanted someone who could speak Gaelic, and despite John's misgivings, he was pressured by the Toronto Synod until he agreed to go for a year, anyway.

On his arrival at Red River, John was welcomed into the home of Alexander Ross, the "Scottish Chief" and his family. They became like his own family to him. In fact he was warmly welcomed by the entire Settlement.

In 1851 that Settlement had the appearance of a prosperous village of comfortable houses,

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Lany barns, cultivated fields and stacks of hay in the narrow long-lots stretching back from the rivers. There were herds of cattle and horses, flocks of sheep and poultry, and the fields were filled with busy harvesters.

But there was more than just an appearance or an impression to the story of the Red River settlement. It had grown from a fur-trading post with a few farms scattered along the river, to a farming community. Schools, churches and homes, some of them fine stone buildings, had replaced log cabins. The settlement had recovered from famines, grasshopper plagues and a flood that had almost wiped it out, and now another dream had come true for the Scots, who at last had a minister of their faith.

On the twenty-eighth of September, John held his first service in the Kildonan manse. Over two hundred people, dressed in their Sunday best, arrived on foot, in carts or on horseback, to hear his message.

For his text John chose Ephesians 3:8 "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." He spoke with eloquence and inspiration; he spoke from the heart. Then he made some important announcements: during the coming weeks he would examine prospective members, and there would also be an election of elders, after which they would hold their first Communion. In the meantime, there would be a ten o'clock service, followed by Sunday School, and at three o'clock, an afternoon service. On Wednesdays there would be lectures and prayers.

There were also some unforeseen problems. As a Presbyterian minister, he needed the permission of the Governor and Council of Assiniboia to marry, baptize or bury the members of his faith. This he considered a grave injustice, and took his case to Major Coldwell at Fort Garry. Permission was granted.

December brought snow to the ground, and more members to John's flock. Now they came in sleighs and harness bells rang out in the frosty air. There were ninety-six scholars in the Sabbath School, thirty-six of them in John's class.

December the fourteenth was the date of the first Communion service; a date of many "tirsts'. It was the Reverend John Black's first performance of the service, the first time for the newly-appointed elders to officiate and the first time for many who sat at the table to participate. Two of the communicants were eighty-seven and ninety-nine years old, but there were only forty-four communicants out of nis congregation of three hundred, and this worried John.

Cardboard tokens had been prepared as re-

minders of the historic event. These were printed on one side: "This do in remembrance of me", and on the other side: "Used at the first Communion of the Presbyterian Church, Red River Settlement, Ruperts' Land, Sab. Dec. 14. Minister, Rev. J. Black; Elders, A. Ross, J. Fraser, F. Munro, D. Matheson, J. Sutherland."

Though the snow fell heavily on the settlement in January, John was always busy. He helped the young lads of the Settlement with their studies, and went about on snowshoes, visiting and making friends among all faiths, for he prayed for and helped all he could the other Missions, in the true ecumenical spirit.

"Spirits" were, however, to become a different issue when provided with a different connotation. When John Rae, who had arrived at the Lower Fort from his Arctic search for Sir John Franklin, was feted like a hero at both Forts, at parties where wine flowed freely, John was indignant and upset.

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He couldn't get over the liberal use of wine even in the homes of the Presbyterians. Christmas and New Year's were just past, and he had seen Indians, half-breeds and soldiers staggering drunkenly about the roadsides. He was horrified...

When John was upset about something, it was not long until his flock heard about it. He preached a sermon denouncing drinking and dancing with such fire and eloquence that no doubt the people saw quite clearly the fiery Perdition for which they were bound unless they repented of their evil ways.

John had no ear for those who advocated moderation rather than total abstinence. He argued that although they might be able to drink in moderation, some child might be influenced by them, and someday do evil under the influence of drink. He reminded them of Christ's words: "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

February brought John further cause to speak out against the evils caused by overdrinking. Jane Heckenberg was tried for the murder of her daughter's child. The supposed father was a young half-breed given to wild living. The daughter went out one night to have her child and the mother found them, took the child (believed to be still breathing) and buried it in the snow, after wrapping it in a piece of buffalo hide.

The baby was found dead by a neighbour, and Mrs. Heckenberg was tried and sentenced to death, the sentence was later commuted to two years in prison.

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The dea of a helpless baby murdered brought thundering denuncations from Rev. Black's pulpit. He deemed everyone guilty in the eyes of God as long as the evils that led to such sin were tolerated.

As a preacher, John was impressive. The old men were carried back to the days of services counducted by their own ministers at home, and the young men were inspired by sermons that came from the heart and soul, and touched the heart and soul. Whatever criticisms anyone made of his sermons, it certainly could never be said that his preaching was dull!

Meanwhile, Jonn had written a letter to Toronto requesting that another minister be sent out as soon as possible. I cannot say what prompted this, but it must be remembered that he had agreed to stay for only a year, and perhaps his heart was not really at Red River. That was soon to change, because of Henrietta Ross. John often went to the house of Alexand Ross to lead them in the evening devotions, and one particular evening it occurred to him that his eyes sought for her first. She gave him a quick glance that disturbed him as no woman's had before. She was an enigma to him: so quiet at times, yet with an inner radiance and sweetness... John checked this train of thought and rebuked himself sternly as he joined Alexander.

Henrietta's thoughts wandered, too. She was a proud girl, for her father was the Scottish Chief to whom the Scots turned just as naturally as the French and Metis across the river turned to Louis Riel. She was also the daughter of a woman whose father was a great Indian Chief. Alexander never let her forget that, nor how beautiful his Princess was when he married her. The bond between mother and daughter was strong; it would be in many ways a sad day when Henrietta married.



The girl had had many suitors, and the only one she had favoured, John Gunn, was dropping hints that when he got his own farm, he wanted a wife to share it with him. She was fond of him, but since John Black's coming, Henrietta had been troubled. It was too bad he was going to stay only a year, for she rad been charmed by his sober glance, eloquent preaching and his courtesy to her as to a sister.

She was also worried. He knew she was not of pure blood, so perhaps he did not think it titting to give her more than a brother's love. She was proud of her parents, and if John's thoughts were these, she would lorce herseif to an indifference towards him. She was like other girls; she wanted a home and a family, and she would make a good wife for John Gunn even if her love was not wholehearted. But in her heart she knew she would not marry him as long as the minister remained at Red River.

John was planning to leave when summer came, and there was an early spring that year that seemed to torecast his early departure. His thoughts were centered on his return to the East, where he would visit his elderly parents and then go to Toronto to prepare himself for a large church in a thriving community.

Alexander Ross tried to get him to change his mind. He knew that John's talents deserved earger follow ag, but he hered to see the good work started by john being left, for Alexander was convinced no one but John could capably continue. He suggested that a second parish might provide the extra work and stimulus John craved, and he again and again stressed the importance of John's work at Red River, and how much they all would miss him. Alexander did not know how much Henrietta would miss the minister, too!

But John, although honoured and flattered by the Chief's wise and kind words, felt he must return to Toronto. It might be the last time he saw his parents, and he had called for the best possible replacement; possibly even a man who spoke Gaelic. No, the young man was going east. Or so he thought.

It began innocently enough, as warm spring winds melted the winter's snow, but it became apparent that excess water was the result. The Upper Red River flooded, and fear of an impending flood spread as quickly as the water.

The ice at Fort Garry broke up in early April and was pushed forward into a six foot high jam against the solid ice ahead, forming an effective dam for the winter run-off from the west and south.

On the 25th, the ice was still running and the water was still rising. The old men talked of the flood of 1826 and urged farmers to store their grain high up in lofts. The young scoffed at such thinking. By the next day, the ice was running freely and the water level dropped ten feet. The Settlement heaved a collective sigh of relief.

Three days later, the sigh became a gasp of fear as the water rose once more. On May 7th the river overflowed its banks and began to cover the flat prairie land. At Upper French Settlement, where the banks were lower, houses and barns swept into the current.

By Sunday, the ninth of May, the waters were lapping at the Settlement. John could sense the uneasiness and inattentiveness of his congregation, and cut his sermon short about halfway through, sending the people home and promising to help in whatever ways he could. He tried to save some of the smaller church equipment by fastening it to the rafters, and then burried to the schoolhouse to do the same with the books, maps and slates.

By morning it was apparent that the Settlement would have to be evacuated. John and Alex Matheson went from house to house to keep down panic as families began to retreat to higher ground. It must have been very disturbing to stand by the "shore" and watch furniture, carts, small cabins and hay wagons floating downstream, some with cats, dogs and hens clinging to them. Later that day they rescued a group of people literally marooned on a knoll, leading them through knee-deep water to safety. Travelling by day, camping by night, they reached Little Stony Mountain on Thursday.

Former cattle pastures were now sailing grounds for canoes, dug-outs and York boats. Water was an agent of merciless destruction on all sides, wrecking houses, barns, fields, fences and bridges. Stacks of hay and piles of wheat were swept away. Some of the livestock drowned, others swam and wided they way to safety.

Some Scottish families fled to Birds Hill, on the east side of the Red River; pensioners on the Assiniboine went to Headingly. Alexander Ross took his family to White Horse Plains, where they were taken into the homes of his two daughters and their families.

On Sunday, John preached from a rock at Little Stony Mountain. In the atternoon he and Alex Matheson paddled to Birds Hill. The normal width of the river was a hundred and fifty yards — it was now Nine Miles across!

John was depressed by the destruction and desolation he had seen during the past week: men standing bewilderedly about in groups, silently mourning the destruction of twenty-six years of labour — houses and farms built and made prosperous since the disastrous flood of 1826.

The children, as children will, began to find it a bit of an adventure, but the adults were often despondent. They had tried to hold on to their faith through famine, grasshopper plagues, warring of the Nor'Westers, and a flood even worse than this one, but such trials were severe. John gave them words of reassurance and encouragement, and gradually their spirits were raised.

They began to watch the receding water with increasing impatience, eager to get back to their homes, clean up, rebuild and get the spring planting done. But they kept referring to John's impending departure with sadness were they to lose their minister, as well as all they had worked for in the past years?

John had been drawn to the people by the common bond of the shared disaster, and he felt he could not leave. No, he would stay for another year, although in the back of his mind, personal ambition still waited. The decision to remain was, he felt, a personal sacrifice.

To Henrietta, the change in plan was welcome news. Another year to dream...and the flood that had prolonged the building of the church would also retard the building of John Gunn's house and mill. Another year to dream...

So the Settlement recovered, rebuilt, planted

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its crops, and tried to act as if nothing had ever happened. The foundation was laid for the church — fifty-six feet long and thirty-one feet wide.

After the crops were planted and their damaged houses were repaired, the men added a new verandah to the manse, so that sixty more people could take part in the Sunday services in comfort, with the door and front windows of the manse open.

The second Communion was held on July eleventh, with sixty-four members seated around the sacred table. It was a first communion for twenty-three of them, and that afternoon there were one hundred and seven at John's Sabbath School.

One month later, the settlers gathered to watch the laying of the cornerstone of Kildonan Kirk, at Frog Plains. A large sealed bottle went into the cornerstone, containing a silver shilling, a sixpence, and a copper farthing; a brief history of the settlement; the names of Rev. John Black and his elders: Alexander Ross, Alexander Polson, James Fraser, George Munroe, John Sutherland and Donald Matheson; and the name of the mason, Duncan McCrae.

There were the names of Major Coldwell, Governor of the Red River Colony and Eden Colville, Governor of Rupert's Land; the population of the settlement, 5,391; money in circulation, £5000; year of the second flood, 1852. Also included were the names of Rev. John Bonar of Glasgow, the Convenor of the Free Church of Canada, and Rev. Robert Burns, D.D., of Knox College, Toronto, and his letter of March 15, 1852. There was a copy of the June Issue of the Free Church Record, and of course the name of Queen Victoria of England. There was also a brief account of the Presbyterians' struggle to get a church of their own faith established in Red River, and a copy of the call from them to Rev. John Black.

Everyone urged John to make the kirk his life work, but he was still bothered by his ambition to attain more knowledge for himself. Near the end of November, he received a written call to Kildonan Church, signed by eighty members, but he made no decision, asking the people to give him more time to think.

Over the winter the people tried to make him feel their devotion. It is widely known that "in spring a young man's fancy likely turns to thoughts of love", and when spring came John found yet another tie binding him to Kildonan. He saw it in the eyes that met his, in the flush that crept over her cheeks, in the huskiness of her voice. It was apparent that Henrietta loved him, yet he did nothing. It would not be right to accept this love and then go away and perhaps never return.

So he threw himself harder than ever into his work, but on the fifth of June, the day before his departure, he took Alexander Ross aside and inquired as to whether Henrietta had been formally spoken for. With a start, Alexander realized what should have been clear to him all along - Henrietta was in love with the minister!

No, she had not been formally spoken for... John assured him that if he .eturned in the fall, he would speak to Alex again, and then to Henrietta. Thus John Black left for Toronto, leaving a heart-broken Henrietta, who would not be consoled until her father told her what John had said, how he would return to Red River even if it was just for her. The tears disappeared like magic.

John's stay in Ontario was pleasant; he was glad to see his parents and he also raise £150 for his Kildonan church, whether he was to return to it himself or not. He visited Dr. Burns, who had not succeeded in finding anyone to replace John. He had some letters to show the minister, too. There was one from the elders, begging Dr. Burns to send John back, and a letter from Sir George Simpson to the effect that the Hudson's Bay Company would give John £150 annually in addition to his salary if he returned to his mission at Red River.

John was deeply moved. It was not a question of money, but he felt at last that perhaps it was not God's will that he should stay in Toronto and complete his education. He set out for home on the twenty-first of September, with his parting words to Dr. Burns an earnest entreaty to find a replacement for him the next year.

It was a long and danger-filled journey, every bit as uncompromising as his first trip to the Settlement. He missed connections at St. Paul and was forced to make other plans. At times during the weeks that followed, he felt like turning back, but he persevered and arrived at Alexander Ross' home late on the night of November fifteenth.

John received a joyous welcome from his people, who had almost given up hope of his return. There was one person, anyway, who was not happy at the minister's return, and that was John Gunn. He had proposed to Henrietta in June and had received a tactful refusal in August. He felt a deep regret tinged with bitterness, and although he acted as a gentleman should when John Black called, and gave up his claim to Henrietta's affection, he refused to be friends with the minister, Henrietta, or her father.

A few days later John got up nerve enough to propose to Henrietta, and of course she accented. They decided to set the wedding date for December the twenty-first, hoping that in the meantime John Gunn would not try to cause trouble.

John Gunn was still angry. He roused some of the people, so that they declared they would never enter Rev. Black's church again. He went a step further. In a show of bravado, he tried to get married on the same day, but after being refused three times, public sympathy was no longer with him.

Although weddings were usually very gala affairs at Red River, John's was somewhat quieter. After all, he was the minister. No wine or liquor was used at the dinner party.

The church was opened in January -a dream come true, despite all setbacks. John kept busy. For four hours a day, four days a week, he studied Greek, Hebrew, Philosophical Theology, and Bible interpretation. The other two days he devoted to his sermons: writing, reviewing, revising. This schedule was often interrupted by visits to the sick and by deaths.

Mid-April brought a typhus epidemic to Red River. Hundreds of children were ill and there was hardly a home that escaped the disease. The two doctors worked around the clock, inoculating those who were not sick and trying to save the lives of the others. Despite their efforts, adults as well as children died.

John prayed that even in this time of death he might bring the people to knowledge of God's love and mercy. One man's conversion awakened new determination in the people to live for Christ.

Alexander Ross had already given up moderate drinking, and he decided to give up excessive smoking. This decision upset the whole routine of the household, but much to the relief of the family, this noble self-denial lasted only eleven days.

In June, John expected to hear if the Presbyterian Synod had found anyone to replace him, but he received no word.

Fall ushered in a whooping-cough epidemic, in which scarcely a house in the entire Settlement escaped without a death. This was followed by a typhus and influenza epidemic. John buried several of his congregation and then came down with 'tlu himself. His school was closed, fewer people came to Sabbath School, and church attendance, too, dwindled.

Cold winds blew in November but there was no snow. A prairie fire galloped hungrily from Fort Garry to the Stone Fort, forcing the people to plough guards to keep it from their homes. Seventeen horses put out to graze for the winter were burned to death, but there was little damage other than that.

William Ross had received a letter from Dr.

Burns saying that James Nisbet might be sent to Kildonan in the spring to relieve John. The people hoped that Mr. Nisbet would not be persuaded to come, and even John felt a strange indecision. Many things drew him to Toronto, yet he had a strong attachment for the people at Red River. However, if Dr. Burns got a man to replace him, John could hardly refuse to return, after all the letters he had sent begging to be replaced. Walter all .

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Henrietta was worried, too. How would she, with her mixed blood, "fit in" among the fashionable, accomplished ladies of the East? And how could she act the part as the wife of such a distinguished minister? Doubts nagged at her, but she knew that if he went, she would certainly go with him.

Christmas came and went, and once again John saw the devil of drink at work during the festivities. He was determined to start a Temperance Society.

January the eleventh was the birthday of John and Henrietta's first child, a son, christened William Ross. The baby's arrival was greeted with joy by John's flock, who brought many gifts. Now, they hoped, their minister would not be leaving them.

So his work went on. Alexander Ross, the Scottish Chief, died at the age of seventy-four, leaving John as the man of the Ross families, an added burden on top of his duties as a minister.

By 1862 there had been changes made – economic changes, a larger church membership, and a family too: Willie, Sarah Margaret, Sandy, James, and in December another baby. Not only that, but James Nisbet's long-promised arrival at last took place, and the two ministers became involved in a movement to start up a Presbyterian Indian Mission, as well as work to get new churches and new schools built.

The baby was born - another son whom they named Robert Burns, and John was busier than ever, for the two ministers had four stations to minister to between them.

Fifteen months passed. Henrietta was expecting another child in August but tragedy struck the happy household. Baby Robert choked to death on a handful of coffee beans. He was their first loss, but, sadly, he was not to be the last.

John continued to work for an Indian Mission in the West. The birth of Donald McClellan Black brought much-needed sunshine into their lives, but winter brought the usual outbreak of sickness: typhus, dysentry, scarlet fever and measles. The coming of spring at last meant the end of disease and deaths, at least for a time.

The Nisbet School was opened on July 12th, and John had more plans for himself and Nisbet. The church and school at Headingly must be completed; the new church at Little Britain built, and also a manse there. And any day now they expected the go-ahead from the Synod to start that Presbyterian Indian Mission.

November and December were months of sickness throughout the Settlement, and Sandy and Donald died within three weeks of each other. It was a severe blow. But the Mission was at last to be a reality, and Nisbet left to be in charge, when summer came. He was replaced by Alex Matheson, but the Mathesons experienced ill-health and returned to Ontario as soon as an opportunity presented itself. Rev. William Fletcher was sent to replace him.

Two more children came to the Black family, Henry (Harry) and Annie Isabella. Then there were the awesome and tragic days of the Riel uprising, which finally ended in peace. A daughter, Henrietta, was born in 1871, a year after Manitoba's incorporation into Confederation.

It was a busy year. John was made chaplain of the first St. Andrew's Society in the Settlement. He began the first Manitoba College in a temporary building while the two-storey college building was being built next to the manse. Rev. George Bryce came from Toronto to head the college and John taught classes in Greek and Latin. He became Moderator of the Presbytery of Manitoba formed at Kildonan on October fourth, 1871, to look after the affairs of nine preaching stations – an increase of eight in the past twenty years.

On September 18, 1872, he received a third call to be the inducted minister of Kildonan kirk, signed by 84 members and 52 adherents. He accepted the call, renouncing, as he did so, all hopes of going back East to a life of books. Here was where he belonged, here among his people of Kildonan.

His beloved Henrietta was ill, and she died in the spring, on March 11th. John went to the

WINNIPEG "FIRSTS" WANTED



The Winnipeg Centennial Celebrations volunteer historical sub-committee is soliciting articles of approximately 300 words in length on Winnipeg "Firsts".

The material gathered by volunteer writers for this committee is to be submitted for publication in the various daily and weekly newspapers throughout the city's Centennial year. According to one member of the committee, the subject matter supplied thus far has been excellent but "many, many more fascinating items, are likely to be found in basements and scrapbooks throughout the city." The committee is also requesting where possible that photographs be supplied to support article submissions.

The present list drawn up by the committee of Winnipeg "firsts" includes subjects such as Mail System, Store, Church, Opera Group, Theatre Group, Judge, Blacksmith, Art Gallery, Library, Law Firm, Military Force and Paved Sidewalk.

Members of the Alumni can obtain further information on this project from the Public Relations office, telephone (786-7811, ext. 330 and 591, or Miss D. Warren, Chairman of the Historical Committee, telephone 452-6227.

1873 Synod, trying to keep Manitoba College at Kildonan, but it was to be moved to Winnipeg the following year, despite his arguments. However, by the time of its eventual removal to Winnipeg, John had married Laurenda Bannatyne. (June 9, 1974). 「日本にに、日本に、ための人気を有見いた」になったので

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James Nisbet brought his dying wife back to Kildonan, fell ill himself, and died just eleven days after she did.

It seemed to John that time had passed by so quickly; there had been so many changes since 1851. Missions had become churches; Manitoba College; the growing city of Winnipeg with sidewalks, streetlamps, and a railway. There had been personal rewards too: an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity conferred upon him by Queen's University of Toronto, in 1876, and an opportunity to become Moderator of the Presbyterian Church. Modesty and poor health forced him to decline to allow his name to stand.

He finally resigned in December of 1881 after putting it off as long as he possibly could. He grew weaker after Christmas but was strengthened in spirit by his faith, and by the knowledge that his work was finished. The future lay in the hands of others, to whom he left it, without regret. He died on February 11th, 1882, as Saturday became Sunday, and was laid to rest beside Henrietta and his three sons.

I turned quietly away from the cemetery. Beyond lay the great city my ancestors had helped to build, and I wondered what they would think if they could see it today. But then I put away my whimsy and prepared to leave.

I imagine that, with the coming of Spring, birds will sing and the breeze will whisper its "Amen" once more, in that place so full of memories and rich in the history of early Manitoba, that "ever-sacred sod, Where the little band of crofters claimed the great, new West for God."