



## Fleming Hall

Fort McPherson, NWT

Fort McPherson, NWT is located near the mouth of the Peel River, just upstream from the Mackenzie Delta on the Beaufort Sea. The settlement was originally known as Peel's River House when the Hudson's Bay Company established a trading centre here in 1840. Murdoch McPherson, HBC's Chief Trader in the Mackenzie District, soon lent his name to the post. In 1848, after seasons of frequent flooding, the post was moved 6 km downstream to higher ground on the river's east bank. In the decade following, families of native Teetl'it Gwich'in ("people of the head waters") established a permanent encampment at McPherson, a community also known today as Teetl'it Zheh. Traditionally, these Gwich'in people (named Loucheux by early French missionaries) moved between the Richardson Mountains to the west and the valleys of the Peel and Mackenzie rivers, as seasonal hunting and fishing opportunities arose. They also engaged in trapping to enjoy a trading monopoly with the HBC.

The Mackenzie River (Deh Cho), stretching almost 1,800 km from Great Slave Lake north to the Beaufort Sea, was used by generations of aboriginal peoples for migration and access to hunting grounds. It was the marine highway for the Hudson's Bay Company whose supply boats served the company's many trading posts along its course during the 19th and 20th centuries. Peel's River Post was the distribution centre for the smaller HBC posts in the northern Yukon. Native communities, seasonal and permanent, were established next to these trading posts. Christian missionaries followed suit, with the Anglican Church ultimately dominating the lower Mackenzie and Delta area, the Arctic coast and much of the Yukon interior along the Porcupine and Yukon rivers. Roman Catholic missions flourished in the upper reaches of the Mackenzie River and in the Great Slave Lake area.

In 1860, Oblate Father Henri Grollier was the first to reach Fort McPherson and his evangelizing work in the Mackenzie Valley worried his rival Anglican counterparts in the area. The following year, Anglican missionary William West Kirkby visited McPherson on his journey to the Yukon. Unable to stay long at McPherson, and burdened with a young family, Rev. Kirkby appealed to his sponsor, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), for a more suitable man to carry on missionary work throughout the Mackenzie Delta and northern Yukon areas. Such a person was found in the Rev. Robert McDonald, who arrived in 1862 to establish St. Matthew's Mission (Peel's River Station). McDonald was part native and was fluent in French, Ojibway and Cree and he soon mastered the local Tukudh (Gwich'in) language. He served for more than 40 years, during which time he completed the enormous task of translating the English Bible, Book of Common Prayer and many hymns into the Gwich'in language.

Rev. McDonald used Fort McPherson as a base for his extensive missionary work throughout the Mackenzie and Peel River areas and at the fledgling Anglican missions as far west at Rampart House and Fort Yukon in Russian Alaska. His work soon eclipsed the evangelizing efforts of the itinerant Oblate Fathers, who were further handicapped by the inhospitality of the Hudson's Bay Company. Under McDonald's tenure, St. Matthew's Mission secured a solid following of local Gwich'in and a new mission house and church building were constructed in 1877-78.

The mission day school at McPherson served local Gwich'in children intermittently for many decades, often depending on the availability of Rev. McDonald and his successors who travelled extensively throughout this vast parish. Schooling was interrupted for extended periods due to serious disease outbreaks, which affected pupils, their families and mission staff as well. The 1850s and 1860s were extremely difficult times when Fort McPherson was ravaged by successive epidemics of mumps, smallpox and scarlet fever, inflicted on the community by white traders returning to Peel's River Post from the "outside." Be-



tween 1858 and 1871, the total population of McPherson fell from 337 to 164 and, in the year 1865 alone, the HBC reported more than 1,000 deaths throughout the Mackenzie District. Many deaths were also attributed to tuberculosis, which remained a chronic health problem well into the 20th century.

About 1899, Ottawa began to provide a small annual stipend for the day school principal (missionary) and lay teacher. After 1917, some children were sent far south to the new St. Peter's Indian Residential School at Hay River. However, these Teet'it Gwichin students were "non-treaty" (not entitled to normal treaty benefits) and were admitted on a case by case basis and usually if they were orphans or from destitute families.

The signing of Treaty 11 in 1921, embraced all the Gwich'in and other peoples of the Dene Nation in the western half of the Northwest Territories, north of 60 and up to the Arctic coast. Through the 1920s, Indian Affairs and the territorial government became closely involved in the education of these native children and more were authorized to attend the Hay River School and its successor Anglican school at Aklavik, which opened in 1936. The Mission Day School continued to serve a growing number of local "treaty children"—those likely on the waiting lists for the Hay River and Aklavik schools, and some who were non-native.

In 1946 St. Matthew's Mission constructed a new day school but before it opened Ottawa purchased the school and assumed responsibility for all day schooling in the Territories. Thus began the era of the federal day school in Fort McPherson. This school soon became overcrowded and a large replacement facility was opened in 1952. At Aklavik, a similar federal day school also opened that year and, as a result, the enrolment at All Saints Residential School quickly reached capacity. Some students unable to be accommodated were boarded at a temporary hostel in Fort McPherson, opened in late 1951 and operated by the Anglican Church without government funding. This hostel took in 20 students, all boys.

Ottawa soon recognized the need for a large modern hostel at Fort McPherson. In 1955, plans were announced for an ambitious student residence construction program in several communities throughout the Northwest Territories, including McPherson. The student residences would be built by the government but operated by the Anglican or Roman Catholic churches. In each respective community, native students would attend the existing or planned federal day schools, which would also accommodate Inuit, white and Métis children. At Fort McPherson, a 100-bed hostel opened in the fall of 1958 for school-age children from kindergarten to grade 8. It was named Fleming Hall in honour of the first Anglican Bishop of the Arctic, Archibald Lang Fleming, who served in this capacity 1933-1949. The student body comprised mostly local Gwich'in children (two thirds girls) from the Loucheux Band No. 7. Inuvialuit children from coastal settlements attended the Aklavik residential school and its successor, Stringer Hall, which opened at Inuvik in 1959. Church administration of Fleming Hall ended in 1969 when responsibility was transferred to the Department of Education of the Northwest Territories.

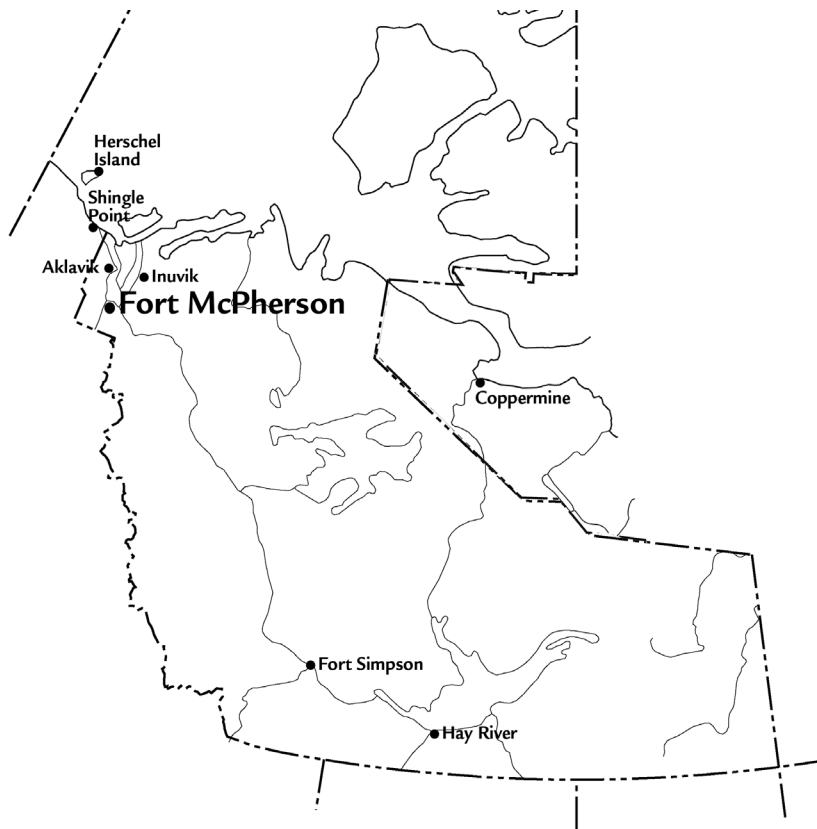
## Milestones

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| 1862       | St. Matthew's Mission and Day School established at Fort McPherson (Peel's River Station).  |
| 1899       | Ottawa provides partial funding for salary of principal (missionary in charge) and lay teacher when day school is operated.   |
| 1921       | Local Teet'it Gwich'in (Loucheux bands) sign treaty 11, assuring government support of residential and day schools for treaty children. Distant Hay River Residential School (opened 1917) and successor Aklavik School (opened 1936) will remain the only boarding schools available to native Anglican children from Fort McPherson and Mackenzie Delta area until the 1950s. |
| 1947       | Federal Government purchases Mission Day School building and assumes responsibility for education of native children.   |
| 1951 Sept. | St. Matthew's Mission opens temporary 20-bed hostel for native boys in remodelled mission house. Operating cost is borne by Church, parents and donations from local community.   |
| 1952       | Large new federal day schools open at Fort McPherson and Aklavik, placing greater demand on local student residences. Dormitories at Aklavik are at capacity, forcing some  |

wait listed students to enrol at day school in McPherson and board at the Anglican Mission Hostel.

1969 April 1 Anglican administration of Fleming Hall is transferred to the Territorial Government.

1958 Aug. 1 Government opens large 100-bed hostel at Fort McPherson for Anglican and other Protestant native children. It is named Fleming Hall in honour of the first Bishop of the Arctic and it is operated by the Indian School Administration of the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC). St. Matthew's Mission Hostel closes.



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