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THE STEINHAUER BROTHERS-- TWO FIRST NATION CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

In the summer of 1879 Egerton and Robert Steinhauer arrived in Cobourg, a small port on Lake Ontario, with a population of about 5,000, located immediately east of Toronto. The two brothers, Egerton, then twenty-one years old, and Robert, nineteen, came from White Fish Lake, a Cree farming community 200 kilometres northeast of Fort Edmonton in the distant North West Territories. These two sons of Rev. Henry B. Steinhauer, the first First Nations Christian minister in what would later become Alberta, travelled over 3,000 kilometres to attend Cobourg Collegiate Institute, in preparation for their future entry into Victoria University.¹ These strong, self-reliant young Christians planned, after graduation from university, to return as Methodist missionaries to the North West. Although Egerton had to go back before entering Victoria, Robert completed his studies, becoming the first First Nations person in what is now Alberta and Saskatchewan, to obtain a university degree. Despite discouragements the brothers, both devoted Cree missionaries, persevered at their mission stations, and remained constant in their Christian faith.

The relative abundance of written material on the Steinhauer brothers makes them quite unique. Apart from perhaps the writings by, and about, Louis Riel, few personal written records of Native people born in Western Canada in the mid-nineteenth century exist. Full biographies of Crowfoot, the important Blackfoot chief; Red Crow, the Blood warrior chief; and Big Bear, the famous Cree leader, have been written²; but not from materials written by them. Thanks to documentation on their prominent missionary father, the brothers' own writings, church and government records, and the oral memories of descendants and relatives, the Steinhauer brothers'

¹ "One Generation Passeth...", New Outlook, April 20, 1932. They rode to Winnipeg, and then travelled to Cobourg, probably by train, via St. Paul, Minnesota.

² Hugh A. Dempsey has written classic biographies of all three: Crowfoot (1972), Red Crow (1980), and Big Bear (1984).

life stories can be told.

Egerton's and Robert's father, one of the Methodists' early Ojibwa converts, attended Upper Canada Academy in the late 1830s, the predecessor of Victoria University. Rev. Henry B. Steinhauer had named his middle son, Egerton Ryerson, after the college's founder and first principal. The veteran Native minister, who had come to the North West in 1840, prayed in the 1870s that Egerton and Robert would help him in his work. The realistic Rev. Steinhauer recognized the necessity of mission workers who knew the Natives' nature and habits, and way of life. Non-Native missionaries, he felt, worked under a great handicap in the North West. As he wrote in the Methodist Missionary Society Annual Report of 1874-75: "A foreigner, either as a Missionary or otherwise, will never take so well with the natives of this country, let him be ever so good and kind to them; there is always a distrust on the part of a native to the foreigner, from the fact that the native has been so long downtrodden by the white man."³

As a young boy in Ontario the future Rev. Steinhauer lived at the Methodist mission station of Grape Island, near Belleville, at the eastern end of Lake Ontario. He attended the school established by the Rev. William Case, the Methodist missionary superintendent, until he left for further schooling in a Methodist academy in the United States. In the spring of 1829 Case took the young boy and half-a-dozen other young native converts on a Methodist mission fundraising tour of the Eastern United States. The young boy of twelve from Lake Simcoe attracted attention for his remarkably musical voice. On the condition that the young First Nations boy take their family name, a Philadelphia friend of the Methodists' Indian mission work offered to pay for his education. While in Philadelphia John Neagle, a well-known American artist painted Shawahanelezhih's portrait, who thereafter took his sponsor's last name: Steinhauer.⁴

³ p. xxi

⁴ Donald B. Smith, Sacred Feathers. The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) and the Mississauga Indians (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 115.

Thanks to William Case, and the funds provided by the Steinhauer family, the boy received an excellent classical education at Cazenovia Seminary in New York State, and later at Upper Canada Academy in Cobourg. For several years afterwards Henry taught in Indian mission schools in Upper Canada, as Ontario was then known: first, at the Credit River west of Toronto; and then at Alderville on Rice Lake northeast of Toronto, where the Grape Island people relocated in the late 1830s. Henry left as a Methodist church worker to Rupert's Land and the North West in 1840. The loyal convert served as a teacher, interpreter, and missionary at Rainy River, in what is now Northwestern Ontario; and then at Norway House, and Oxford House, in present-day Manitoba. In 1855 he left to establish first permanent settlement of First Nations people in what is now Alberta and Saskatchewan.

In the North West Henry met his Cree wife, Jessie Joyful Mamanuwartum, at Norway House, just north of Lake Winnipeg, where he served as a Methodist teacher and interpreter, until his posting to the more northerly mission of Oxford House. Shortly after his ordination as a Methodist minister in 1855 the Steinhauers moved to the Lac La Biche area to begin a new Methodist mission among the Woods and Plains Cree. In 1857 he began the White Fish Lake mission which he located in the wooded parklands north of the Saskatchewan River, just beyond the reach of Blackfoot raiders, but close to the northern border of the prairie, and the still abundant buffalo herds. The settlement immediately south of Lac La Biche prospered, and soon had a satellite community at neighbouring Good Fish Lake.

Throughout his adult life Henry Bird Steinhauer believed in the need for the First Nations to adjust to the way of life of the Non-Native settlers. He recognized that Canadian settlement would soon follow in the North West, and transform the majority Native population into a minority, just as had occurred in southern Ontario. Henry Steinhauer belonged to a generation of

Ojibwa-speakers in southern Ontario in the late 1820s, and 1830s, who believed that by embracing Methodism and a settled agricultural way of life the First Nations could survive, and prosper, in the midst of the growing settler community. The First Nations must learn the Victorian virtues of punctuality, sobriety, and individual property rights. All his life Henry Steinhauer remained deeply committed to his Methodist beliefs, and the need to Europeanize the First Nations.

As a young boy at Lake Simcoe, before he lived at a Methodist mission, Henry Steinhauer had known the old, traditional way. Once, he recalled for Benjamin Slight, a Methodist minister, how his grandfather used to call the family together, “at certain seasons of the year, previous to his feasts which he had annually made to the four gods of the four winds... to impart unto them the knowledge he had...”⁵ As Isaac Mabindisa, his biographer, wrote: “Steinhauer is a very interesting historical subject because he was socialized to think and act like a Western Christian gentleman after he had spent his early youth in a traditional Ojibwa culture.”⁶

At White Fish Lake Henry and Jessie Joyful Steinhauer raised a large family of seven girls and five boys. At home they encouraged amongst their children a strong sense of spirituality, a belief in a higher power. Every morning and evening the Steinhauers held family devotions. Elizabeth Barrett, an Ontario school teacher who taught at White Fish for two years in the mid-1870s, wrote in the Missionary Notices of the Methodist Church in April 1876: “Mr. Steinhauer’s is, indeed, an amiable and God-fearing family. I never saw more dutiful and respectful sons and daughters.”⁷

⁵ Henry B. Steinhauer, quoted in Benjamin Slight, Indian Researches (Montreal: J.E.L. Miller, 1844), pp. 88-89.

⁶ Isaac Kholisile Mabindisa, “The Praying Man: The Life and Times of Henry Bird Steinhauer” (Ph.D. thesis, Department of Educational Foundations, University of Alberta, 1984), p. 5. This valuable thesis is the best guide to the life of Rev. Henry Steinhauer.

⁷ p. 118. Biographical detail on her appears in Donald B. Smith, “Elizabeth Barrett”, Alberta History, 46,4 (Autumn 1998):19-21.

Education was vital to the Ojibwa minister and his Cree wife. By learning to read the First Nations could master the doctrines of the Methodist church, as well as acquire the skills to survive in a future Canadian-dominated society. With great difficulty Henry Steinhauer obtained teachers on a short-term basis for the White Fish school. Years later Egerton recalled his early school days: "Sometimes I had the pleasure of going on a buffalo hunt with my parents, who accompanied the band on their annual hunt, the school teacher going as well, and holding school in the open air when circumstances permitted".⁸

One of the most gifted, and well-trained teachers was Elizabeth Barrett. Upon arriving at White Fish Lake she made a promise to the Steinhauers, which Henry repeated in his letter in the Annual Report of the Methodist Missionary Society, 1874/75: "Miss Barrett tells me that she can train these two boys so that they can enter any high school or college in Canada."⁹ Under her guidance Egerton advanced fast enough for him to take over as the White Fish teacher, after Miss Barrett's departure in 1877.¹⁰ Egerton taught at the White Fish school until he and Robert left for Ontario in the spring of 1879.¹¹ Although the school lacked sufficient equipment and books Egerton taught reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, geography and spelling.¹²

The last year that Elizabeth Barrett had been with them, 1876, the White Fish and Good Fish Lake Cree made an important decision, they signed Treaty Six at Fort Pitt. Their chief, Pagan, a close friend of Henry Steinhauer, and a loyal Methodist himself, did so on the understanding that one huge reserve, a homeland, would be created for many of the Plains and Woods Cree bands immediately north of the North Saskatchewan. Despite the apparent promise the large territory,

⁸ E.R. Steinhauer, "Letter, dated Fisher River, Man., May 1903", Missionary Bulletin, 1 (1903/04), p. 251

⁹ p. xxii.

¹⁰ Methodist Missionary Society Annual Report, 1877/78, p.xvi.

¹¹ Henry B. Steinhauer, "Letter dated White Fish Lake, January 16, 1879", Christian Guardian, April 2, 1879

¹² Mabindisa, "Steinhauer", p. 454.

which Pakan wished the Cree to administer themselves, was not forthcoming.¹³ Henry Steinhauer had backed him fully on this issue¹⁴. Then, came another disappointment, the federal government ignored the clause inserted in Treaty Six promising assistance in the event of a general famine. By the late 1870s the Plains buffalo continued their sharp decline, but little help was forthcoming from the federal government, caught in the financial pressures of trying to build a transcontinental railway.

1879, the year the Steinhauer brothers departed for Cobourg, proved the crisis point for the Plains Indians. While both the First Nations, and Metis, had realized the sharp decline in the numbers of buffalo, they had not foreseen their disappearance in 1879 from the Canadian prairies. Faced with starvation thousands of Plains Indians from the Treaties Six and Seven areas crossed the border into Montana in search of the last great herds. The year the Steinhauer brothers travelled to Ontario, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald himself reported that the Blackfoot and Plains Cree in southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan remaining on the Canadian side of the border: "... were reduced to such extremities that they eat mice, their dogs, and even their buffalo skins, and they greedily devoured meat raw when given to them."¹⁵ At White Fish Lake, and neighbouring Good Fish Lake, however, the small Methodist Cree communities led by Henry Steinhauer, and Chief Pakan, supported themselves. The Cree farmers lived in houses, reared domestic animals, and could still hunt and fish around their community.

From 1879 to 1883 the brothers prepared for their university entrance at the Collegiate Institute. The Victoria College campus had just expanded the year before they arrived in Cobourg, In May 1878, Faraday Hall, named after the famous English scientist, and devoted to science, became the

¹³ Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, Prairie Fire. The 1885 North-West Rebellion (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984), p. 57, On the "large reserve" see also: Mabindisa, "Steinhauer", pp. 513- 538, see particularly, pp. 531-532.

¹⁴ Mabindisa, "Steinhauer", p. 537; see also, footnote 80 on p. 558.

¹⁵ Sir John A. Macdonald quoted in Canada, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, 1879, p. 12; quoted in Mabindisa, "Steinhauer", p. 562, footnote 147.

college's second building. Faraday Hall contained a museum which included a well-preserved Egyptian sarcophagus, a female mummy¹⁶; and a revered object from Alberta, a 145 kilogram iron stone from Iron Creek, a tributary of the Battle River, about 150 kilometres southeast of Fort Edmonton. The Cree and the Blackfoot venerated the meteorite as a sacred object, until the Methodist missionary George McDougall simply took it. He carted it away to his mission at Victoria (now Pakan), about 250 kilometres north of Iron Creek. Eventually he shipped the meteorite east to Ontario. It was given to Victoria University in Cobourg.¹⁷

Both Egerton and Robert matriculated in 1883. Two years earlier their father had been able to visit his two sons while on a tour of Ontario to raise money for the Methodist missions in the North West. A photo of the proud father, and his two sons, was taken.

To support their studies the brothers worked in the summers, to supplement the little assistance their parents could provide. But by 1883 the Steinhauers could no longer afford to keep both of them at school; moreover, a teacher was desperately needed at Good Fish Lake. Reluctantly Egerton agreed to come home, and become his father's assistant.¹⁸ His responsibilities greatly increased in 1884, the year of his father's death. During the troubles of 1885 he worked very hard, with Pakan (James Seenum), and James Youmans, the Non-Native missionary teacher at White Fish Lake, to keep the White Fish and Good Fish Lake Cree out of the struggle. Pakan's support led the Methodist church to invite him; together with the loyal Chief Samson of the Battle River (Hobbema) Cree; and Jonas Benjamin, a Stoney from Morley, west of Calgary, to visit Ontario in the late summer and early fall of 1886.

¹⁶ "Educational Institutions of Canada", The Canadian Methodist Magazine, December 1878, p. 485.

¹⁷ Allen Ronaghan, "The Iron Creek Meteorite", Alberta Historical Review, 21,3 (Summer 1973): 10-12.

¹⁸ Biographical details on Egerton's life appear in his letter dated May 1903, in the Missionary Bulletin, 1 (1903/04), p. 251. See also, Mabindisa, "Steinhauer", p. 459.

After the North West Rebellion of 1885 independently Egerton continued his theological training, leading to his ordination in 1889. Robert's older brother had a good sense of humour. Although he never graduated from Victoria, he would always claim that he, like his younger brother, was also a B.A. Robert might be a Bachelor of Arts, but he was, "Born Again"¹⁹.

From the mid-1880s to his death in 1932 Egerton served in several Methodist mission stations. He worked at Morley with the Stoney (Nakota) from 1885 to 1894, at Fisher River in Manitoba with the Woods Cree from 1894 to 1907, at Hobbema (Battle River) with the Plains Cree from 1907 to 1911, Morley again from 1911 to 1919, amongst the Ojibwa (Chippewa) at Saugeen on Lake Huron in Ontario from 1919 to 1924, and at New Credit in Ontario with the Mississauga (Ojibwa) from 1924 to 1926.²⁰ Energetic he truly was. Fred Stevens, the school teacher at Fisher River in the mid-1890s, later recalled, that in winter Egerton made trips by dog-train across Lake Winnipeg, even travelling as far as Norway House, 300 kilometres away at the northern end of the lake.²¹

Egerton married Toronto-born Elizabeth Helliwell, a Methodist church worker and teacher at Morley Indian Day School, the year of his ordination, 1889²². With Elizabeth's help he performed a multitude of tasks, several of which are indicated in his letter of September 3, 1906, from Fisher River. He indicated "ministering to the daily wants of the people" was no light work, for "Reserve work too means visiting the sick, providing food, and dispensing medicine as

¹⁹ Egerton Steinhauer quoted in Arthur W. Barner, "Two Appreciations of the Late Egerton Steinhauer", The New Outlook, May 4, 1932.

²⁰ His missionary postings appear in Rev. George H. Cornish, Cyclopaedia of Methodism in Canada, vol. 2 (Toronto: Methodist Book and Publishing House, 1903), p.278; and those (after 1900) on his service record, in the biographical file on Egerton Ryerson Steinhauer, United Church Archives, Toronto.

²¹ Rev. Frederick Stevens, "Autobiography", typescript, p. 5. Fredrick G. Stevens Personal Papers, Box 1, file 21, United Church Archives,

²² T. Ferrier, "In Memoriam. Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Steinhauer", The New Outlook, February 20, 1929

they may need it.”²³ Egerton and Elizabeth had one son, Wesley, who completed the fourth of the five years of a medical degree at the University of Toronto, shortly after his return from service in the Canadian Army Medical Corps in World War One.²⁴

After his wife’s death in 1928 Egerton joined his brother at Saddle Lake where he assisted with the mission, until his own death in 1932. Robert’s diary entry explains Egerton’s death in this way: “This sudden demise must have been caused by his putting too strong an effort in trying to bring his hearers [to] see what Christian life is.”²⁵ As Egerton himself wrote over twenty years earlier from his mission station at Battle River (Hobbema): “I have tried to do my duty as a poor humble tool in God’s vineyard, ever since I entered the work.”²⁶

The year Egerton returned to White Fish Lake, 1883, Robert entered Victoria. In sports the tall 6’ Cree²⁷ excelled as a football player and runner. He was also as a gifted singer, with a deep bass voice. Very popular amongst his fellow students he was elected by them, “Senior Stick”, or class president, at the end of third year in 1886.²⁸ That August and September he accompanied the Rev. John McDougall and three Methodist Indians from the North West, the Cree chiefs Pakan and Samson, and the Stoney Jonas-- all of whom had been loyal to the Canadian government in the North West Rebellion of 1885-- on a tour of Ontario towns and cities, as well

²³ Egerton Steinhauer, Letter dated September 3, 1906, Missionary Bulletin, 3 (1905/06), p. 819.

²⁴ “News of Our Student Soldiers”, Varsity (University of Toronto), December 6, 1916. His name also appears in the 1917/1918 University of Toronto directory (p. 48) as being in fourth year. For reasons that cannot now be determined he did not enter fifth year (the final year in the program at the time). Information supplied by Harold Averill, Assistant University Archivist, August 24, 1999.

²⁵ Robert B. Steinhauer Diary for 1927-1936, entry for April 1, 1932, Account Book and Diary of Rev. Robert B. Steinhauer 1902-1937, microfilm M-211, Glenbow Archives. (Hereafter cited as DIARY--GLENBOW)

²⁶ E.R. Steinhauer to Rev. Alexander Sutherland, dated Battle River Mission [Hobbema], February 3, 1909, Methodist Missionary Society Correspondence, 78.092C, Box 7, file 139, United Church Archives, Toronto.

²⁷ Robert Steinhauer’s height was recalled for me by Herb Steinhauer, Edmonton, January 5, 1995; and Ed Erasmus, Vilna, Alberta, April 12, 1996.

²⁸ Information on Robert’s years at Victoria are contained in references in: “Robert Steinhauer”, Acta Victoriana, 10,7 (1886/87), pp. 17-18; Rev. H.T.F, “An Indian Graduate”, Missionary Outlook, July 1906, pp. 155-156; Margaret Stewart, “Indian Receives D.D. Degree, Onward, October 10, 1937; C.B. Sissons, A History of Victoria University (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952), p 32.

as Montreal.²⁹ At one of the Toronto meetings Robert sang the hymn, “Tell it Again”, before the prime minister of Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald. Chief Pakan joined Robert in singing it in Cree.³⁰

Although the prime minister did not realize it, he had before him, in Robert Steinhauer, one of his most articulate First Nations critics. That very spring the Cree undergraduate had written an article for Acta Victoriana, the college magazine. In “The Indian Question” he underlined the Western First Nations’ disappointments. “Ever since the treaties were signed, there has been much discontent, and complaints made by him [the Indian]. He asks those who have taken the ownership of his country to give him his rights, at least the fulfilment of the promises made to him.” They had wanted assistance, but, in the place of competent government intermediaries, they received Indian agents, selected, “because they happen to be friends and right-hand supporters of the Government in power; men whose knowledge of what they were intended to teach was so limited that they were rejected in some places.” Ottawa had placed “low and unprincipled characters”³¹ in authority over them.

Like Egerton, Robert Steinhauer worked to see First Nations people gain sufficient resources to regain their self-reliance and initiative. Within a decade of graduation Robert took steps to secure his own personal independence. He “enfranchised” in 1896. By giving up his position as a ward of the Crown under the Indian Act of 1876, as revised in 1886, section 86,³² he became a citizen with the same civil rights and liberties enjoyed by all of Her Majesty’s subjects. As an ordained Christian minister, and as a university graduate, Robert simply had to petition the

²⁹The college magazine, Acta Victoriana, 10,1 (1886/87), p. 15, mentions that during the visit “Bob” visited: “... most of the important towns and cities between Montreal and Sarnia. He was well received everywhere, but no place more heartily than in Cobourg, where he is best known. He delighted the people with his singing and speaking.”

³⁰“Missionary Meeting”, Toronto Mail, September 8, 1886.

³¹ R.B. Steinhauer, “The Indian Question”, Acta Victoriana, 9,6 (March 1886), pp. 5-6.

³² Saddle Lake. Enfranchisement. Rev. R.B. Steinhauer and Rev. E.R. Steinhauer, R.G. 10, vol. 7215, Interum Box 93, file 8118-2. National Archives of Canada

Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. It was assumed that by earning a degree, or serving as a Christian minister, lawyer or doctor, the First Nations person had demonstrated their acceptance of the values of the dominant society-- as well as their ability to function within it. Without a university degree, or position as a Christian minister, doctor or lawyer, the probationary period was three years under the Act of 1886. The resistance to assimilation was so great, only approximately 250 Indians enfranchised between 1857 when the enfranchisement policy was first enacted, and 1920.³³ Egerton Steinhauer enfranchised, but not until 1926.³⁴

For Robert there were immediate advantages. Thanks to the fact that he had become a citizen he^{for instance,} would not have to tolerate the colonial attitudes of the Indian Agents. His great nephew, Ralph Steinhauer, later recalled that around 1930 the Saddle Lake Indian Agent talked to First Nations people through a wicket. "If the agent didn't like the discussion or if he thought it went on too long, he shut the wicket down in the face of the speaker".³⁵ As a full citizen, a voter, Indian agents could not act like that with Robert Steinhauer.

Over half-a-century Robert lived with wife and family at numerous Methodist missions across Alberta. Shortly after his return from Cobourg he married Charlotte Pruden, a Native woman whose father had worked for the Hudson's Bay Company at Lac La Biche.³⁶ They had a family of six daughters and four boys. Robert served at Saddle Lake-- forty kilometres or so to the south from White Fish Lake-- from 1887 to 1890, White Fish Lake from 1890 to 1893, the Red Deer Industrial School in 1894, Morley from 1895 to 1903, White Fish Lake from 1903 to 1911,

³³ John L. Tobias, "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada's Indian Policy", in As Long as the Sun Shines and Water Flows. A Reader in Canadian Native Studies, ed. Ian A.L. Getty and Antoine S. Lussier (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), p.49.
³⁴ Saddle Lake. Enfranchisement. Rev. R.B. Steinhauer and Rev. E.R. Steinhauer, R.G. 19, vol. 7215, Interum Box 93, file 8118-2. National Archives of Canada.
³⁵ Ralph Steinhauer is the source of this information, reported in Mary B. Mark, "A Man for the Times", Heritage Magazine, July-August 1974, p. 2.
³⁶ "Link with Early Edmonton, Mrs. R.B. Steinhauer Dies", Edmonton Journal January 14, 1953

Hobbema (Battle River) from 1911 to 1919, and at Saddle Lake (where he would try several times to retire, unsuccessfully, as his services were so badly needed) from 1919 to his death in 1941.³⁷

These were terrible years for the First Nations in Western Canada. From 1901 to 1921 the population of Alberta rose from 73,000 to nearly 600,000³⁸. Half-a-million Newcomers migrated to what is now the province of Alberta. At the same time that the Non-Native numbers soared the First Nations plummeted. Each year hundreds of babies died from measles, influenza, scarlet fever. The tuberculosis rate reached epic proportions.³⁹ Robert Steinhauer served at Hobbema in 1918, the year that the deadly world-wide Spanish flu epidemic carried off 90 of the four Hobbema reserves' 850 people.⁴⁰ In one generation the First Nations population of Alberta fell by two-thirds, from about 18,000 in the 1870s to less than 6,000 by the 1920s.⁴¹ (Only in the 1930s did numbers slowly begin to increase).

Overnight a new society arose, one which had little understanding or respect for the First Nations. Even many of the well-educated shared these prejudices. In the first History of the Province of Alberta (1912), for instance, author Dr. Archibald Oswald MacRae, principal of Calgary's Western Canada College, assessed Native character in this way: "The Red Man of the West has always been a difficult individual, he does not care to work, to beg he is not ashamed. In consequence he tends to become shiftless and vagrant."⁴²

³⁷ Robert Steinhauer's missionary postings (before 1900) appear in Rev. George H. Cornish, Cyclopaedia of Methodism in Canada, vol. 2 (Toronto: Methodist Book and Publishing House, 1903), p. 278; for his postings after 1900, see: his service record in the biographical file for Robert Bird Steinhauer, United Church Archives, Toronto.

³⁸ M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley, eds. Historical Statistics of Canada (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1965), p. 14. See: Series A2-14. Population of Canada, by province, census dates, 1851 to 1961.

³⁹ Robert Steinhauer, Letter dated Edmonton, June 11, 1906, Missionary Bulletin, 3(1905/06), p. 839; also Robert Steinhauer, letter dated White Fish Lake, April 30, 1908, Missionary Bulletin, 5 (1907/08), p. 207.

⁴⁰ P. E. Breton, o.m.i., Hobbema. Une florissante mission indienne de l'Ouest(Edmonton: Editions de l'Ermitage, 1962), p. 35.

⁴¹ Hugh A. Dempsey, "Role of Native Cultures in Western History: An Alberta Focus", in John W. Friesen, ed. The Cultural Maze. Complex Questions on Native Destiny in Western Canada(Calgary: Detselig, 1991), p. 43.

⁴² Archibald Oswald MacRae, History of the Province of Alberta (n.p.p.: The Western Canada History Co., 1912), p. 430.

Senior officials in both government and the Methodist church accepted these views. At the highest level of the federal government Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, endorsed the theory of First Nations inferiority. In July 1904, he stated in the House of Commons: "I have no hesitation in saying-- we may as well be frank-- that the Indian cannot go out from school, making his own way and compete with the white man... He has not the physical, mental or moral get-up to enable him to compete. He cannot do it."⁴³ As for Alexander Sutherland, the superintendent of the Methodists' Canadian missions, he declared that same year in an article in the Methodist magazine, The Missionary Outlook: "that we have not produced many Indian teachers or preachers is true, but this is owing chiefly to the lack of educational facilities. Besides, it is better as a rule that Indians should be under the care of white men."⁴⁴ Despite the fact that Robert was the only Methodist missionary in the Manitoba and North-West Conference at the turn of the century with a B.A.,⁴⁵ he never became the Conference's Superintendent of Methodist Indian Missions. No First Nations person did.

At the turn of the century the churches viewed residential schools as the most effective institutions for assimilating the First Nations children, hence Robert, as a missionary, became involved. He taught, in fact, at the Red Deer Industrial School, 1893/1894, the first year that it was in operation.⁴⁶ The school's results were mixed that first year. In 1894, his own nephew, Henry G. Steinhauer, the sixteen-year old son of his oldest brother Sam, deserted, and returned

⁴³ Clifford Sifton, Debates, 1904, cols. 6946-56, 18 July 1904; see also 1903, cols. 7260-61, 23 July 1903; quoted in D.J. Hall, "Clifford Sifton and Canadian Indian Administration 1896-1905", Prairie Forum, 2,2 (1977), reprinted in Ian A.L. Getty and Antoine S. Lussier, eds. As Long as the Sun Shines and Water Flows. A Reader in Canadian Native Studies (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), p. 126.

⁴⁴ Alexander Sutherland, "The Indian Problem", The Missionary Outlook, June and July 1904, footnote on p. 126; cited in James Ernest Nix, "John Maclean's Mission to the Blood Indians 1880-1889", M.A. thesis, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, 1977, p. 228.

⁴⁵ See, for example, the list provided in the Annual Report of the Methodist Missionary Society, 1903/04, p. lix.

⁴⁶ Uta Hildamarie Fox, "The Failure of the Red Deer Industrial School" (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1993), p. 42.

to White Fish Lake. In contrast, that same year, another nephew, James, the eleven-year old son of his second oldest brother Arthur, thrived at the school and stayed another six years, leaving as a skilled carpenter and fervent Methodist.⁴⁷ When he died in 1969 James's obituary notice prepared by relatives and friends read: "James Steinhauer, like his grandfather and his minister uncles, loved his Bible and spent much time studying and interpreting it for himself".⁴⁸

Robert remained of two minds about Indian boarding schools. On the one hand they gave a number of First Nations students the only chance they had for an education. On the other hand, as a graduate of Cobourg Collegiate Institute and Victoria University, he knew how inferior these schools actually were. Briefly, around 1908, he urged a boycott of the Red Deer school.⁴⁹ Only the reforms introduced by the new principal, the Rev. Arthur Barner, whom Robert came to respect, led him to support the school.⁵⁰

What was the the Cree minister's own solution? He mentioned it in 1903 during a mission fund raising tour of Ontario. The Toronto Globe quoted him as stating, "that existing methods of educating the Indians were not productive of the best results." He continued: "If the Indian boys and girls were taken into Christian homes and given the same chance as other children who are brought into Canada, and given the opportunity of studying at the public schools, and afterwards allowed to homestead land, they would stand shoulder to shoulder with any class of people in the country."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Red Deer Industrial School Admission and Discharge 1893-1916, United Church/ Alberta and Northwest Conference 79.268/162, Provincial Archives of Alberta. My thanks to Uta Fox for pointing out this source.

⁴⁸ "In Memoriam. James Arthur Steinhauer 1882-1969. Remembered with Love by Relatives and Friends", p.2.

⁴⁹ Arthur Barner to Alexander Sutherland, dated Red Deer, December 19, 1908, Sutherland papers, Prairie Provinces, Red Deer Industrial Institute, 1908, Box 7, file 133, Acc. 78.0926. United Church Archives, Toronto. See also the letter of Arthur Barner to Alexander Sutherland, dated Red Deer, February 26, 1910, Box 7, file 135.

⁵⁰ Fox, "Red Deer", p.90. In 1911 Robert and Charlotte Steinhauer named their newly-born youngest son, Arthur Barner Steinhauer, in honour of their friend.

⁵¹ Robert Steinhauer quoted in, "Voices from Mission Fields", Toronto Globe, January 19, 1903; reprinted in the Christian Guardian, January 21, 1903, p. 29.

Of Robert's family only Gussie, his eldest daughter, spent more than four years at the Red Deer Industrial School. She attended from the age of nine to eighteen. Although it imposed a great financial burden, Robert and Charlotte, immediately after Gussie's discharge in 1913, sent her to Alberta College, the Methodist college in Edmonton, where she took a business course. Their oldest son, Harry, attended Red Deer for four years, from age ten to fourteen; then too, upon his discharge in 1914, he went to Alberta College. Their daughter Caroline was at Red Deer for three years, from eleven to fourteen, until her discharge, in 1914. Robert and Charlotte then sent her to a public school in Edmonton. Daughter Mary attended Red Deer for only one year, from age eleven to twelve, then, too, on her discharge in 1914 was off to public school in Edmonton,⁵² Their youngest daughter, Ruby, born in 1911, and youngest son Barner, born in 1913, never had to attend residential school at all. Robert arranged with the Rev. Sellar, a former Methodist Indian missionary, and his wife, for Ruby and Barner to stay with them in Edmonton and attend public school. there.⁵³

Robert, as a Methodist (after church union in 1925, as a United Church) missionary had to escort students from the Saddle Lake reserve to the residential school,⁵⁴ which moved after World War One from Red Deer to Edmonton. Robert had been present at the school's opening in 1924. He had translated into Cree the frank statement of Charles Stewart, Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, that it was "the white man's duty" to educate the First Nations, "to help them to be assimilated..."⁵⁵ Perhaps, in the hope that things had improved at the new school, he sent his adopted son Larry. But when, in 1931, fourteen-year old Larry ran

⁵² Red Deer Industrial School Admission and Discharge 1893-1916. All the children's birth dates appear in a list in Robert's diary, on page 162 in the ledger book, microfilm copy, DIARY--GLENBOW.

⁵³ Interview with Ruby Erasmus, Vilna, Alberta, Ocxtober 20, 1996

⁵⁴ See the diary entries of August 16, 1927; and August 14, 1928, DIARY--GLENBOW. For a summary of the limitations of Alberta Indian Residential Schools in the mid-twentieth century, see Linda R. Bull, "Indian Residential Schooling: The Native Perspective", Canadian Journal of Native Education, 18 (1991), Supplement, pp. 1-63.

⁵⁵ Charles Stewart, quoted in "Indian Residential School at St. Albert is Formally Opened", Edmonton Journal, October 24, 1924

away, and returned home to Saddle Lake, Robert did not make him return to the school.⁵⁶

At Saddle Lake in the 1920s and 30s Robert faced a continuing challenge from First Nation traditionalists, anxious to hold onto their own old religious beliefs.⁵⁷ The veteran Methodist minister also faced opposition from fellow Christians, the Roman Catholics. As he himself once wrote: "Romanism as every one knows is never on friendly terms with Protestantism".⁵⁸ Part of the pressure to send children away to the Edmonton school was the existence of a Catholic boarding school at Saddle Lake-- unless Protestant children went away they might end up there. Robert wanted at all costs to avoid this.

The Catholics maintained a formidable offensive in the surrounding area. They began the boarding school at Saddle Lake, and also opened missions at both Saddle Lake and Good Fish Lake. Rev. A. R. Aldridge, a Methodist minister, estimated in 1908, that, the way things were going, "north of the Saskatchewan is going to be largely French Roman Catholic".⁵⁹ In the early twentieth century the Methodists' First Nation mission work declined as a priority⁶⁰. In contrast to the early days in Upper Canada in the late 1820s and 1830s the Methodist First Nation missionary outreach had almost run out of steam. In the early twentieth century the church devoted more and more of its financial resources to Methodist missions elsewhere, particularly in China and Japan.

Robert had great difficulty in obtaining authorization from church offices in Toronto for even

⁵⁶ Interview with Larry Steinhauer, Saddle Lake, Alberta, January 8, 1998

⁵⁷ Interview with Melvin Steinhauer, Saddle Lake, Alberta, January 8, 1998. For a very complete summary of PlainsCree religious beliefs see Verne Dusenberry, The Montana Cree. A Study in Religious Persistence (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. Originally published in 1962).

⁵⁸ Robert Steinhauer, Letter dated White Fish Lake, February 2, 1904, Missionary Bulletin, 1(1903/04), p. 409.

⁵⁹ Rev. A. R. Albridge to Alexander Sutherland, dated Vermilion, Alberta, February 25, 1908, Incoming Sutherland Correspondence, 78.092C, Box 6, file 118. United Church Archives, Toronto.

⁶⁰ Neil Semple, The Lord's Dominion. The History of Canadian Methodism (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), p. 290.

small expenditures. At White Fish and Good Fish Lakes, where he served from 1903 to 1911, the existing manse was poorly built. Rev. Aldridge, in fact, commented on this after a visit in 1906: "Mr. Steinhauer 's family does not seem healthy since he has lived in that house-- he lost a child lately, I hear."⁶¹ Finally, in 1909, to obtain some response from Toronto Robert had to threaten to resign, if permission was denied him to build a new house.⁶²

Just after World War One a new pan-Indian political organization, the League of Indians of Canada, founded in 1918 by Fred Loft, a Mohawk war veteran, obtained Robert's support. The League's main purpose was to persuade the Canadian government to improve the standard of education it offered the First Nations. In 1921, Loft claimed, "scarcely five per cent of the adult population of a vast majority of reservations in Canada is competent to write a coherent intelligible letter".⁶³

The league held its first conference at Ohsweken on the Six Nations Grand River territory in Ontario in December 1918. Subsequent annual meetings were held at Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, in 1919; Elphinstone, Manitoba, in 1920; Thunderchild Reserve, Saskatchewan, in 1921; and Hobbema, Alberta in 1922.⁶⁴ At the League's meeting at Hobbema in 1922, Robert served as the chief interpreter.⁶⁵ His youngest brother, Augustine Steinhauer, was later elected president of the Alberta branch of the League of Indians of Canada in 1931.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Rev. A.R. Aldridge to Alexander Sutherland, dated Breage, Vermilion C.N.R., Alberta, February 27, 1906, Incoming Sutherland Correspondence, 78.092C Box 5, file 125. United Church Archives, Toronto. The Steinhauers lost their son Richard Bazter on January 24, 1906; and another son, Robert Bird, October 2, 1907. Both were not yet one year old. DIARY--GLENBOW.

⁶² Robert Steinhauer to Alexander Sutherland, dated White Fish Lake, February 15, 1909, Incoming Correspondence, 78.092C, Box 6, file 126, United Church Archives, Toronto.

⁶³ Chief (lieut.) F.O. Loft, "The Indian Problem", Women's Century, 9 (November 1921), p. 6.

⁶⁴ Donald B. Smith, "Fred Loft", in Frederick E. Hoxie, ed. Encyclopedia of North American Indians (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), pp. 344-345.

⁶⁵ "League of Indians of Canada Are in Conclave", Edmonton Journal, June 29, 1922.

⁶⁶ Stan Cuthand, "The Native Peoples of the Prairie Provinces in the 1920's and 1930's", in Ian A.L. Getty and Donald B. Smith, eds. One Century Later. Western Canadian Reserve Indians since Treaty 7 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978), p. 33.

More challenges for the First Nations, in addition to health and education, came from the federal government over land. It sought in the early twentieth century to obtain reserve land for Non-Native settlement. Seeing the First Nations' shrinking population the Indian Department encouraged land surrenders. Through the sale of their "idle lands" the Department argued that the communities could improve their living conditions with the revenues obtained. In 1925 a fifth of the Saddle Lake reserve was obtained by the government., which then sold it on Saddle Lake's behalf to Non-Native settlers.⁶⁷ Robert's comments on the land surrender are not recorded.

Throughout his life two of Robert's great joys were music and translation. He bought a piano in Edmonton while stationed at Hobbema.⁶⁸ He loved to translate sacred songs and hymns. Together with Egerton he worked on a Cree hymn book which finally appeared in 1920.⁶⁹ As one of Robert's colleagues wrote, he was a wonderful linguist, "able to read from the English Bible translating into Cree as he proceeds".⁷⁰

One of the veteran First Nations missionary's great delights came in 1937, when he received a letter from Richard Davidson, Principal of Emmanuel College, Victoria University's theology college. The Senate of Victoria University, to mark the college's 100th anniversary, wanted to complete their centenary celebrations by offering him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. "For as your father was one of the first students a hundred years ago you will be one of the first graduates of the new century of Victoria's life."⁷¹ On the evening of April 27th in Toronto the

⁶⁷ Charles Lamoureux, "Saddle Lake Reserve", in Anon. Dreams become Realities. A History of Lafond and Surrounding Area (Edmonton:Co-op Pres Ltd. 1981), p. 145 .

⁶⁸ Interview with Ruby Erasmus, Vilna, Alberta, October 20, 1996.

⁶⁹ Cree HymnBook. Revised and Enlarged by Rev. Robert B. Steinhauer, B.A. and Rev. Egerton R. Steinhauer (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms, 1920).

⁷⁰ Rev. A.R. Aldridge to Alexander Sutherland, dated Breage, Vermilion C.N.R., Febraury 27, 1906, Incoming Sutherland Correspondence, 78.092C Box 5, file 125, United Church Archives, Toronto.

⁷¹ Richard Davidson, dated Emmanuel College, March 4, 1937, Robert Steinhauer Papers, M1174, folder 3. Glenbow Archives, Calgary.

tall seventy-six-year old First Nations missionary received his D.D. from his alma mater, now affiliated with the University of Toronto, and relocated from Cobourg to Toronto. He was the first First Nations person in Canada to obtain an honorary Doctor of Divinity.⁷² An added benefit of his trip was the opportunity to visit both Alderville on Rice Lake where his father had taught school a century earlier, as well as Rama, on Lake Simcoe where Robert found several of his cousins.⁷³

Robert died four years after he obtained his honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. Four hundred First ^Nation parishioners and Non-Native neighbours and friends attended the funeral at Saddle Lake of the beloved First Nations missionary.

Ralph Steinhauer, later to become the first First Nations Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta (1974-1979), recalled his two missionary uncles in a talk to the Historical Society of Alberta at Edmonton in 1955. Fortunately it was recorded by Alberta historian Hugh Dempsey⁷⁴. He first spoke of his uncle Egerton, whom he had known him in the early 1930s, after Egerton moved to Saddle Lake to help Robert at the mission. Ralph, then in his mid-twenties, recalled that Egerton, then in his early seventies, once himself a great athlete, encouraged athletics among the young people. Often he would tell them: "Never let yourself think that you are not as good as the white man". Whenever he could, Egerton also challenged them about education: "... if your people don't perk up and follow the white man's way in business, you'll find yourselves left out in the cold! Can't you become doctors, lawyers or businessmen? You are just afraid that you can't compete with the white man." Egerton, as did Robert, sought equality with, and respect from, the dominant society.

⁷² "Indian Cleric is Applauded", Globe and Mail, April 28, 1937

⁷³ Norman and Sarah Marsden to Robert B. Steinhauer, dated Roseneath, April 21, 1939, Robert Steinhauer papers, Mill74. Glenbow Archives (mention of the Alderville visit); "Indian Visitor from West Visits Relatives at Rama", Orillia Packet and Times, May 6, 1937

⁷⁴ My sincere thanks to Hugh Dempsey for sharing this text with me.

Both uncles saw no contradiction in the fact that they were both Cree and Christian. They had two loyalties. Egerton, the devoted Methodist, or rather (after 1925) United Church missionary, admitted to Ralph that there was an amazing similarity between the teachings of the Christian missionaries and Native beliefs. He did not dismiss Native spiritual concepts as superstition. Speaking of the Sun Dance he told his great-nephew: "There was a bit of torture there, but it was no worse than training for the commandos. They also had the ceremonial dances. There was a good deal of paganism, whooping and hollering but you know, I'm still an Indian. Actually, I can't say too much against it. There were some great prayers said-- heartfelt and sincere. The Sun Dance was a form of worship".

Shortly after Ralph Steinhauer's appointment as Alberta's Lieutenant-Governor writer Madeline Freeman interviewed him for the United Church publication, Mandate (January 1975)⁷⁵. In the article he recalled his great-uncle Robert, who had been a very important influence on him in his youth. The depth of Robert's ^{Christian} religious commitment is apparent in the story Ralph Steinhauer chose to tell.

The "Grand Old Man of the Reserve" was a thunderous preacher. When he was in the pulpit, his "arms, hands, feet and head all going like mad as he made the points in his sermon". Once Ralph missed Sunday service, held back by impassable roads,. Not wishing to kill his exhausted horses by driving them home in time to make the Sunday service, he proceeded leisurely. He only reached the settlement well past eleven. As Ralph passed by the church he saw Uncle Robert through the window giving one of his impassioned sermons. The minister looked up, and as he recognized Ralph driving by, "stopped in mid-flight, arms outstretched, not saying a word until I drove the team out of sight". Two days later he stormed over to Ralph's home. He was

⁷⁵ Madeline Freeman, "The Steinhauer Legacy", Mandate, January 1975, pp. 3-4.

angry.

“Which would have been the greater sin, Uncle Robert”, Ralph protested, “to miss church, or to kill a poor dumb beast by trying to get home Saturday night?”

“Bad planning,” replied Uncle Robert, “you don’t need to starve your family or kill your horses. You just need to plan better and keep the Lord’s day in mind!”

The Steinhauer brothers followed closely in their father’s footsteps. They lived in a more difficult period for Native people, however, one of domination by the Non-Native majority. During their ministries Native culture in Canada could not be retained and pursued within the dominant Non-Native culture and society. Cultural pluralism only became acceptable in Canada in 1970s and 1980s. The great achievement for First Nations people-- official recognition of Aboriginal Rights in the new Canadian constitution of 1982-- has contributed to a host of advances in the law for Aboriginal people.

One of the great fighters for Aboriginal Rights was Eugene Steinhauer of Saddle Lake, a great-nephew of Egerton and Robert Steinhauer, a great-grandson of Henry B. Steinhauer. As President of the Indian Association of Alberta in the early 1980s he led delegations of First Nation leaders to London, England, demanding that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and their rights be recognized in a new constitution.⁷⁶ Henry B. Steinhauer, and his descendants, have made extraordinary contributions to Alberta.

⁷⁶ “Obituary. Eugene Steinhauer. Native helped to enshrine treaty rights”, Globe and Mail, September 15, 1995

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