

ROBERT BIRD STEINHAUER

(1861-1941)

(B.A. Victoria 1887)



In his final year at Victoria College, 1886/87 Robert Bird Steinhauer, was elected "Senior Stick" (he is shown with it here), or president of his year, by his class at Victoria College - which five years later moved from ~~Calgary~~ ^{Cobourg} to its present location on the University of Toronto campus.

Ironically, Clifford Sifton (B.A. Victoria, 1880), missed this honour seven years earlier! Later he would state (as Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs): "Indians did not have the physical, mental or moral get-up to compete with whites on equal terms" (Olive Dickason, Canada's First Nations, p. 334). Yet he didn't make "Senior Stick", his class did not select him as their president - Robert B. Steinhauer, the son of an Ojibwa father and a Cree mother, from the North West Territories (present day Alberta) did!

Robert B. Steinhauer, taken by C. Lawes, Cobourg. 1886/87

Senior Stick at Victoria College

United Church Archives, Toronto/91.161P/1003

Source: Donald Smith
Dept. of History
Univ. of Calgary, Calgary, AB
1998 Cobourg Public Library

Indian Receives D.D. Degree

By MARGARET STEWART

ON Tuesday evening, April 27th, Victoria University, Toronto, gave the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity to Rev. Robert Bird Steinbauer, B.A., who graduated from the same institution fifty years ago. He has spent the intervening years as a faithful and painstaking missionary among his own people in the Province of Alberta, honoured by them and held in high esteem by his fellow ministers in The United Church of Canada.

In conferring this degree in its centenary year, Victoria University acknowledged the bond that has existed between this particular Indian family and the University during the past one hundred years.

When Egerton Ryerson went to London in an endeavour to secure a Royal Charter for the founding of an educational institution under the Methodist Church in Upper Canada, one of his most compelling arguments was that that Church accepted its responsibility for the welfare of the Indian people.

At that time teaching in the school at Credit River was an Indian youth whom William Case, the missionary, had brought into the Church and sent to the Grape Island school to be educated. There his expenses were borne by an American whom Mr. Case had interested. The lad took his benefactor's name and became known as Henry Steinbauer.

When at last the Upper Canada Academy opened its doors, this man decided that his protégé deserved a better education and the Indian youth was one of the first students.

Henry Steinbauer rapidly made a name for himself, becoming extremely proficient in languages. Upon graduation he went with James Evans into the West, then newly opened, settling at Norway House. Later, after a trip to England with Ryerson, he went farther West into what is now Alberta, establishing a mission in 1860 at Whitefish Lake, where he died in 1884, after a lifetime of active service among the Indians.

Henry Steinbauer's two sons, Egerton and Robert, were sent East by their father to Cobourg, and Robert entered Victoria University with the class of 1887. He was an excellent student, a splendid athlete, more than usually gifted in song and very popular with his fellow students, so much so that in his final year he was elected to the office of Senior Stick, the highest honour the student body can give.

Father and son throughout the century were associated with two men whose names will always be honoured in The United Church of Canada, two men who achieved distinction and fame through a deep devotion to duty, to the Church and to the Indians of the Canadian North West. These men were James Evans and John McDougall.

It was James Evans who invented the Cree Syllabic writing, made type from the lead contained in the Hudson's Bay tea chest, and with the splendid help of Henry Steinbauer published the Bible and a hymn book. It was Henry who translated the Gospel of St. John which was printed at Norway House and which proved a great blessing to many.

Son of George McDougall, famous Western missionary who perished in a blizzard on the plains, John McDougall was in charge of the Indian Mission at Morley when Robert B. Steinbauer served with him. Beloved by



Doctor Robert B. Steinbauer

the Cross throughout the whole territory John McDougall acted as their mentor and guide in all transactions with the Dominion Government.

Robert Bird Steinbauer came down to Toronto to receive his new degree, from his home at Battle River where he went in 1911 and where he has remained since his superannuation in 1930, although he has continued to play an active part since then in the work of the Mission. He was presented to the Convocation by Rev. Dr. Jesse H. Arnup who was particularly happy in the rôle. He stressed the fact that in giving the degree to Robert Steinbauer, Victoria University was honouring the past and recognizing present worth. "We present him as a recipient of honour from his Alma Mater for historic reasons and for his own worth as a man, a Christian missionary and a minister of The United Church of Canada."