

# EXILE IN THE WILDERNESS

By Jean Murray Cole

Toronto: Burns & Mac Eachern, 1979

268 pp. \$19.95

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*Exile in the Wilderness* is a biography of Archibald McDonald. He was one of the apparently unnumerable MacDonalds, McDonalds and Macdonalds of the countless Scots who were involved in the Selkirk projects and fur trade of the 19th century British North America. I do not know enough about his contemporaries to be able to rank him precisely. He spent most of his career in middle management positions with the Hudson's Bay Company; however, he does not rate even a mention in Douglas Mackey's history, *The Honourable Company*. Certainly Archibald McDonald was not as significant a figure as George Simpson, but in the final analysis perhaps he deserves more prominent mention than someone such as Miles Macdonell. Noted historian W.L. Morton, in the foreword to the book, describes him as one of the "more gifted" of the "gentlemen" (the Chief Traders and Chief Factors) of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Professor Morton also states that the book is a "notable addition to the literature of the fur trade . . . [which] is . . . surprisingly extensive, but . . . short on biography and autobiography". From the standpoint of Manitoba, and given my limited ken, the book adds to those such as J.M. Gray's *Lord Selkirk of Red River*, Alexander Ross' *Red River Settlement*, and Roy St. George Stubbs' *Four Recorders of Rupertsland*.

Archibald McDonald was born in 1790 in Glencoe, Scotland. He was employed by Lord Selkirk to recruit and lead the group of settlers whom Selkirk sent to Red River in 1813. It was these poor souls who were put ashore at Churchill instead of their original destination, York Factory. They wintered at Churchill Creek and then trekked to York Factory in the spring of 1814 under the guidance of young Archy McDonald. As W.L. Morton observes in the foreword, this book gives the first full story of that miserable winter at Churchill and the long walk to York Factory. McDonald stayed in the employ of Lord Selkirk until the end, when in 1820 he joined the Hudson's Bay Company as an accountant. The rest of his working life he spent west of the Rockies at places such as Fort George, Kamloops, and Fort Colville, eventually rising to become a Chief Factor. The theme of the book is how this educated, humane, gregarious person coped with a life of isolation mostly in the company of people who might be described, in a word, as "uncouth". McDonald managed magnificently, for he was a precursor of the Victorian gentleman, the talented amateur in a wide range of fields.

This biography of McDonald by Jean Cole is engrossing and very readable. I enthusiastically recommend it. When the wilderness feats of people like McDonald are well told they are captivating.

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The book includes a postscript on McDonald's wife and nine children, a fairly extensive bibliography, notes to each of the chapters unobtrusively placed at the end of the book, and an index. As well, the front end paper contains a map of the Red River and Athabasca District, 1813-20, and the back end paper contains a map of the Columbia District, 1821-44.

My only disappointment with the book is the photographs. There are four pages of glossy black and whites. Suffice it to say that I would have enjoyed a few more pictures of the people in McDonald's life, sacrificing if necessary three or four of the Paul Kane paintings.