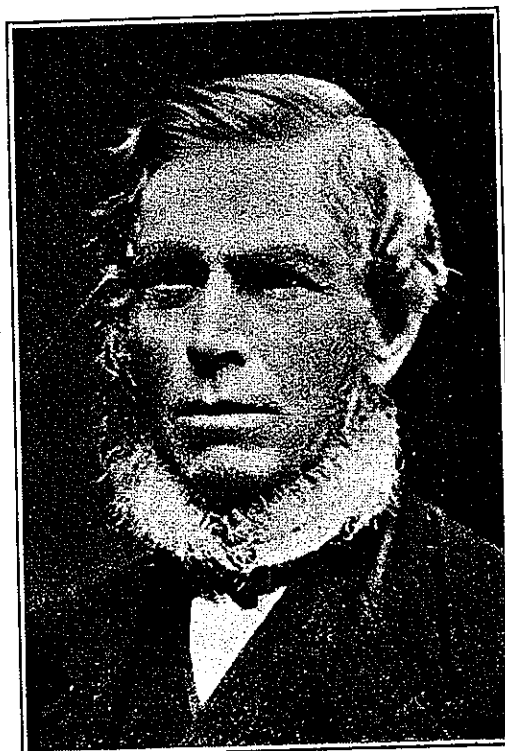


GEORGE McPHILLIPS

George McPhillips, the subject of this sketch, was born in Monaghan, Ireland, a descendant of an ancient Irish family. On a map of Ireland made by Ortelius, a very early map-maker, whose work is noted for its detail, the McPhillips are placed in the barony of Castello, Mayo.

As a youth he became interested in engineering work and engaged as assistant with the engineer who was constructing a system of canals. Later he served his time, five years, with John Fleming, surveyor and estate agent, Monaghan, and received from him in 1839 a certificate of service and qualifications. One survey made during this time was that of Lord Rossmore's beautiful park, which was then and is yet one of the show places of the North of Ireland.



A year or so later Mr. McPhillips came to Canada. His first engineering work was done in the United States on the Erie Canal (then locally known as the Tonawonda Canal) when that waterway was undergoing its first enlargement (1836-1862). Returning to Canada, he taught school for a number of years before qualifying as a Provincial Land Surveyor, which he did in 1848. He became associated with John Stoughton Dennis, who was afterwards appointed Surveyor-General for Canada, and assisted him in 1848 in the first official survey of the town of York, now the city of Toronto.

Mr. McPhillips made the following surveys for the Government of Ontario:—

South boundary of Markham Township, 1850.

Township of Elderslee, 1851.

Township of Culross, 1852, into farm lots.

Township of Luther, 1854.

Subdivision of the townplot of Eugenia in the township of Artemesia into town and park lots and mill sites, 1855. In the letter containing instructions for this work (November, 1854) it was remarked, "There is a great demand for mill sites by those in search of land in the western section of Canada, and it is suggested that such sites be sold only to those who intend to build a mill at once."

Township of Elderslee, 1857, subdivided into farm lots (also estimated land occupied by Saugeen River and Reserve in this township).

In 1862, exploration of portion of Manitoulin Island. Mr. J. S. Dennis had charge of this expedition. He compiled the complete map after the plans and reports of Mr. McPhillips and the other surveyors had been handed in.

1863-1864, subdivision into farm lots of the township of Sheguiandah (Shemandah) on Manitoulin Island.

When the first survey on Manitoulin Island was being made in 1862 some of the Indians were found to be unfriendly. It was said that these had not been consulted in the negotiations connected with the ceding of the island to the government a few months before. Whatever the cause, one of the surveying parties found itself menaced by a number of the tribe who invaded the camp. A messenger was sent to the camp of Mr. McPhillips, who was liked and trusted by all the Indians because of his unfailing justice towards them. He came and the danger was averted.

During 1867, 1868 and 1869 he made right-of-way surveys for the Toronto and Nipissing, and the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railways.

Except for these government and railway surveys he was in private practice in Richmond Hill up to 1865, and from 1865 to 1871 in Seaforth, in County Huron. In 1865 he was made commissioner in B.R. for the united counties of Huron and Bruce, as he did considerable conveyancing in connection with his work.

In 1870, when the Canadian Government, through the Imperial Government, acquired all western Canada from the

Hudson's Bay Company, the making of surveys was necessitated, and these were begun in Manitoba. Mr. McPhillips, together with other surveyors, was commissioned to proceed to that province to do this work. So in June, 1871, he and his party set out for Fort Garry. His instructions were to make a survey of the settlements along both shores of the Assiniboine River. Travelling by the Dawson route, the trip was accomplished in thirty-eight days. From Thunder Bay the miles were traversed by following the lakes and rivers and portaging boats and luggage many weary miles between. His diary makes no mention though of the hardships with which this long journey must have been beset, but it often refers to the blessings of the way; the beauty of the scenery; a dinner of fresh trout on the lake shore, the meal garnished with a dessert of wild strawberries; a kindly halfbreed woman who cooked the day's three meals in return for some flour; the opportunity to ride an oxen-cart the 110 miles from the Post at the N.W. angle to Fort Garry. (A horse had been provided for him, but one of the party had appropriated it for his own use.) One is pleased to read further on that "he was overtaken and relieved of his charger."

With simple briefness the diary passes over dangers and hardships, in one place merely referring to a "fleet of thirty Indian canoes following them down the river until dinner time, but after that fell behind," and in another place saying "the heat and flies prevented the oxen from travelling in the heat of the day," and farther on telling of stopping on the bank of the river, "where the oxen became mired in it so deep that we had to dig them out." But in no place in the journal is mention made of his own discomfort.

On Friday, July 21st, Fort Garry was reached, and here Mr. McPhillips "delivered over to the Lieutenant-Governor, per his secretary, the trunk and subsidy money" which had been entrusted to him. For these he got receipts. This trunk, because of its contents, had been a source of some anxiety; at one stop he and his son Frank "sat up and kept watch over it all night," as the surroundings were not reassuring.

A short time after his arrival in Manitoba Mr. McPhillips acquired some 400 acres on the Assiniboine River, in the parish of St. Charles, and there built his home. Here his family joined him in 1872.

In 1871 Mr. McPhillips made a preliminary survey of the settlements along both sides of the Assiniboine River, compris-

ing the parishes of Headingly, St. Francois Xavier and Baie St. Paul. In 1872 he completed this survey and made a complete survey of the parish of Ste. Anne and a preliminary one of the parish of Lorette. During December of 1872 and January, 1873, he made a survey of the settlement on Rat River, west of Portage la Prairie. The property of Kenneth McKenzie was included in this survey, and while Mr. McPhillips and his party were spending New Year's Day at the home of this hospitable Scotch family an incident (or accident) occurred which one of the party never liked to remember.

Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie had insisted upon the whole party coming to their home to spend the holiday. A bountiful dinner was in the course of preparation; the men were smoking and talking when Mr. McPhillips' son, a youth of seventeen, proceeded to examine the guns hanging in a rack on the wall. These were supposed to be unloaded, but suddenly one went off in his hands. He was holding it upright, so the charge went directly through the ceiling and penetrated the floor above at the precise spot where a tin of gunpowder was stored. With a roar it exploded, lifting part of the thatched roof from the building and showering down mud and sod upon the kitchen table below. The remainder of the roof immediately caught fire. With all speed the men snatched up buckets and ran to the creek for water. When the fire had been extinguished and the confusion had subsided it was found no further damage had been done. Everyone turned in and the roof was repaired and the dinner eaten. Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie saw only the humour of the situation, but the unhappy perpetrator neither then nor afterwards was able to see it in that light.

In 1873-74 surveys of the parishes of Saint Boniface, St. Vital, St. Norbert, and part of Ste. Agathe were made. In all this work, where any settlers were disputing over the overlapping of their property, Mr. McPhillips' tact and kindly sympathy did much to allay the discord and restore friendship among the neighbors.

In 1874-75 he made a re-survey of the parishes of High Bluff, Poplar Point and Portage la Prairie, and also a survey of the wood lots on the south side of the Assiniboine River in the vicinity of High Bluff, Poplar Point and Portage la Prairie.

In 1875-76 he made a survey of the Icelandic Reserves on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg and the villages of Gimli and Riverton.

Mr. McPhillips was interested in all community activities, and was always ready to give his time and service to promote the educational and intellectual life of his home town.

In a report of the meetings of the Richmond Hill Debating Society, 1859-60, his name is mentioned as a speaker, together with those of Mr. Teefy, Mr. A. Law, Rev. A. Law, Rev. Lewis Griffin, Amos Wright, M.P.P.; Rev. James Boyd, Mr. McNaughton and Mr. Edwards. Among other subjects, the relative merits of agriculture and commerce and of free trade and protection were debated. Also, "Whether Man in his Savage State or in a Civilized Condition Enjoys the Greatest Happiness," and "Was it a Good Policy of the English People to Behead Charles I?"

In 1877 Mr. McPhillips began the final survey of the parish of Lorette, but fell ill in July and died July 13th, 1877, at his home in Winnipeg at the age of 70.

On February 12th, 1843, George McPhillips married Margaret Lavin at Thornhill, Ontario, and here they made their home for several years. Their family numbered fourteen, five daughters and nine sons.

William, who followed his father's profession, and who died at the age of 27 at Bic, Quebec, while engaged in engineering work on the Intercolonial Railway under Sir Sanford Fleming, chief engineer.

Francis, who accompanied his father over the Dawson route to Manitoba, and was afterwards associated with his brothers in the firm of McPhillips Bros., surveyors and engineers, Winnipeg. He died in Winnipeg in 1913.

George, who practised surveying in the west and at Windsor, Ontario, for many years, and who died in Winnipeg in the year 1913.

Henry, journalist and writer, who died in Winnipeg in the year 1913.

John, who died at Thornhill at the age of four.

R. C. McPhillips, D. & M.L.S. and C.E., Winnipeg.

Lewis G. McPhillips, K.C., Vancouver, B.C.

A. E. McPhillips, judge of the Court of Appeal, Victoria.

Dr. F. X. McPhillips, surgeon, Vancouver.

Margaret (Mrs. Philip Taschereau), who died in Winnipeg in the year 1893.

Elizabeth (Mrs. G. B. Bemister), Winnipeg.

Miss Catherine McPhillips, Winnipeg.

Alice (Mrs. Henry Brook Bridges), who died in Calgary in the year 1925.

Clara, who died in Winnipeg, 1877, at the age of eight.

Mrs. McPhillips died in Winnipeg, June 29th, 1905.

The associates and contemporaries of George McPhillips held him in high esteem, and many remembered him with affection and regard. Sir Sanford Fleming, at a luncheon given by Captain Tatlow at the Union Club, Victoria, 1907, where he met a son of Mr. McPhillips (A. E. McPhillips, then Attorney-General of British Columbia), recalled the days when he "thought nothing of walking sixteen miles to Richmond Hill and sixteen miles back to pay a friendly call on Mr. McPhillips. He dwelt upon the kindly memories of forty years before, saying, "Your father was a man of integrity, his word was his bond, for he held a promise as sacred."

When in Ireland Mr. McPhillips belonged to the Young Ireland Party, although he was opposed to other than constitutional means of attaining the ideals for which this party was formed. One of his most intimate friends and youthful associates at this time was Charles Gavin Duffy, who later became Premier of Australia, and who was destined to make his mark in Empire service.

During his first years in Canada Mr. McPhillips' politics were those of what was then called a Baldwin-Lafontaine Reformer, and later those of a Conservative. In religion he was a Roman Catholic. He was always deeply interested in the work of the early missionaries in Canada, and with untiring zeal assisted in the upbuilding of the parishes in which he resided.