

FRANCIS HERON, FUR TRADER: OTHER HERONS

Francis Heron (the name also appears as Herron), one of the least known of the Hudson's Bay Company's chief traders in the Columbia district, was an Irishman, who entered the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company about 1810 as a clerk. His name appears as Nos. 180, 115 and 118 respectively in the list of employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, in America for the years 1821-1824.

He was promoted to Chief trader in 1828,¹ and was assigned to and stationed at Fort Colville, in 1830. The Minutes of Council for 1830 show that he applied for transfer of furlough for 1831, and that the application was referred to Dr. McLaughlin, Chief Factor of the Columbia District.² It was evidently denied. He continued at Colville during 1831 and 1832, and in the latter year attended the Meeting of Council at York Factory³ and was given charge, from Fort Edmonton to Fort Colville, of the recruits sent out for the Columbia River District, with Annance and Francis Ermatinger as his aids. He left Fort Colville in 1833 for Fort Vancouver and later for Nisqually, where he succeeded Archibald McDonald, on June 27, 1833.⁴

At Fort Nisqually, it appears that he took an interest in the welfare of the Indians and endeavored to instruct them in the Christian religion.⁵ It further appears that during this time Mr. Heron became a victim to strong drink, frequently keeping to his own room in solitary drinking.⁶

He was present at Meeting of Council in the Red River settlement, in June, 1833, and by minutes of that council, granted a furlough for 1835-1836.⁷ By subsequent Minutes of Council, for 1835, the furlough was confirmed, and he went to England. By Minutes of Council in 1835, and 1837, he was granted extensions of furlough until April 25, 1838.⁸

¹ "The Canadian Northwest," in *Publications of the Canadian Archives*, No. 9 (Ottawa, 1914), p. 624.

² *Ibid.*, p. 642.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 651, 673. "Heron, as usual, stuck at Colville."—Archibald McDonald to John McLeod, Fort Langley, February 20, 1833, in *Washington Historical Quarterly*, II, p. 162.

⁴ See "Journal of Occurrences at Nisqually House," in *Washington Historical Quarterly*, VI, p. 189.

⁵ "Sunday 22nd (Dec., 1833) Several Indian families came in as usual to get some religious instruction. ***I have at length succeeded in altering their savage natures so far, that they not only listen with attention to what I tell them but they actually practice it."—*Ibid.*, p. 272; also, *Id.*, VII, pp. 70, 71, 158.

⁶ *Id.*, VII, p. 70.

⁷ *The Canadian Northwest*, p. 673.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 708, 758.

At Meeting of Council, in 1836, the following record appears: "Mr. Chief Trader Heron's intemperate habits having of late become so notorious as to be the subject of general remark among all classes throughout the country, Resolved: That a circular be addressed to the different gentlemen in charge of the district to state in writing what may have come to their knowledge in regard to his habit in that respect, and requiring Mr. Heron to appear at next sitting of council."

Owing to Mr. Heron's absence this hearing was later continued until 1838. No further action appears to have been taken.⁹

Archibald McDonald, writing on January 25, 1837, says:

"I am anxious to close my private correspondence as a very disagreeable task is just imposed on me by order of Council to collect evidence and make out affidavits from our men here in the case of that unhappy man Heron."¹⁰

A clerk, James Heron, probably a brother, was at Fort Alexander in July, 1817, and was with Simpson in 1828. In 1828 Archibald McDonald mentions him as, embarking for the Athabasca and later as succeeding Mr. McGillwary at Fort Chipiwayan. He was assigned to Fort Chipiwayan for 1832-1833 and directed to accompany the boats the next season to Norway House and then to proceed to York Factory. He was retired from the service in 1832.¹¹

Heron's death is reported in a letter of Archibald McDonald.¹² While at Fort Colville, Francis Heron contracted a marriage alliance with a half-breed girl of the Colville tribe, whose father was a white man named Clark. The only white man of that name known to the writer to have been in that section of the country prior to 1820—was the Astor partner, stationed at Spokane House, 1812-1814. At Nisqually, in 1834, George Heron¹² a son, was born. After Francis Heron's departure for England in 1835 the mother and son moved to the Willamette Valley.

Francis Heron, evidently possessed many sterling and likeable qualities. Capt. N. J. Wyeth, in his journal at Fort Colville, March 12, 1833,¹³ mentions him as one of the chief-traders of the Hudson's Bay Company, to whom he was under lasting obligation.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 737, 769.

¹⁰ *Washington Historical Quarterly*, ii, p. 257. Consult, also, Ermatinger, Douglas, and other journals.

¹¹ *Peace River*, pp. 7, 12; E. Ermatinger, "Journal" in *Proceedings Royal Society of Canada*, Vol. 000, p. 97; *Canadian Northwest*, pp. 658, 659, 688.

¹² *Washington Historical Quarterly*, i, p. 78; *id.*, viii, p. 113; *History of North Washington* (Western Historical Publishing Company, Spokane, 1904), p. 459; the date therein given, 1832, is incorrect.

¹³ *Sources of Oregon History*, i, pp. 56, 57.

George Heron, Son of Francis Heron

This venerable native of Washington, during a long and eventful career, was closely connected with many of the leading history making events in the Northwest.

George Heron was born at Fort Nisqually, near Olympia, in 1834,¹⁴ being the son of Frank (Francis) and Josette (Boucher)¹⁵ Heron, natives of Canada and the Colville Country, respectively. The father was the chief factor in the Hudson's Bay Company, mentioned in the title, and traveled about a great deal. The mother was of the Colville Indian tribe, and died in the Willamette Valley in 1878. The father died about 1838¹⁶ when our subject was four years old. He was an only child and after his father's death, went with his mother to the Willamette Valley and lived with the tribes in that section, making frequent trips back to the Colville Country. Mr. Heron was raised in the primitive style of the native Indians, and consequently had very little opportunity for an education. Being endowed with considerable talent and a mental quickness often found in the half-breed children of the fur-traders, he very cleverly picked up French and the various Indian languages which he heard, and soo became quite proficient in all the dialects of the Indians of the Northwest, as well as in English and French.

When very young he started independent action and for seven years farmed on French Prairie in the Willamette Valley, one of the well-known points in the early settlement of the Northwest. About 1859, Mr. Heron moved back to Colville and began operating a pack-train from 'The Dalles to that point, continuing the same for five years. Then he hired to the United States as interpreter and for twenty-five years was in its employ for seventy-five dollars per month. For three years, he was in the employ of the War Department with government troops and following this long service, he again farmed in Stevens County, residing on the Columbia River. About 1878 or 1879, Mr. Heron went to Washington, D. C., with a number of Indian chiefs—Cheans, Moses, Tenasket, Sasaphapine, and Lott—as interpreter in their consultation with the government in reference to the treaty for their lands.

During the Nez Perce War, George Heron was very busy, riding from one tribe to another in the Northwest, being employed by the government in the interest of peace, and his services were of

¹⁴ No mention of the event appears in the *Journal of Occurrences at Nisqually House*.

¹⁵ George Heron states that his mother's name was Clarke. She possibly married Boucher after Clarke left the country.

¹⁶ See statement in *History of North Washington*, page 459, giving the date as 1832, manifestly an error. Some of the biography contained therein is made use of in this article.

great value in assisting to keep the Indians from going on the war-path. He was acknowledged to be one of the best Indian interpreters in the entire Northwest. On one occasion, in the earlier part of "Joseph's War," there was a council of Indians with the government officers at Spokane. The then official interpreter was entirely unable to officiate and Mr. Heron was sent for. After the consultation, he was employed with the officers and soldiers and retained until the war ended. He spent this time in various sections of the country and after the hostilities, returned to Spokane Falls and his family was one of the few then there. A sawmill and store were the only business establishments then at the Falls.

In 1888, George Heron removed to his present home, about five miles north of Republic, where he owned one hundred and sixty acres of timothy land, and where he has about fifty head of cattle, besides other property. He does not attend to his farm personally, but rents it, and during the last few years, has had the great misfortune to be stricken with blindness and has become very feeble, and the writer does not know whether he yet survives.

In 1863, Mr. Heron married an Indian woman and to this union were born five children: John, deceased; Alex, on the Kettle River; Joseph, married to Noah LeFleur, on the Colville River; David, in the Curlew Valley; and Josette, deceased. In 1876, Mr. Heron was called to mourn the death of his wife, and four years later, he married Martina, also an Indian woman.

In politics, Mr. Heron is a staunch Republican and always takes, contrary to the majority of his race, an active interest in public affairs. He and his family are sincere adherents to the Catholic Church. In the early days, George Heron acted as deputy sheriff of Stevens County under John Hofstetter, and owing to his service as interpreter he was associated with some of the leading men of the Northwest. He has a very wide acquaintance and is a well-known and influential man, especially in matters relating to Indian affairs. In character he is a man of integrity and has always been considered a valuable and estimable citizen of his community.

We have the following statements from Mr. Heron himself made to Mr. John Helphrey of Curlew and the writer in December, 1915:—

"I am now 82 years of age, having been born at "Squalie" (Nisqually) in the year 1834. My father was Frank (Francis) Heron, an Irishman, who was in charge of the Colville trading post for the Hudson Bay Company. My mother was a half-breed named Clark. About the time I was a year old my father was called back to Can-

ada and my mother and I stayed on French Prairie in the Willamette and with the Colville tribe near the trading post at Fort Colville.

"I recall passing the mouth of the Little Spokane River on trips to Montana and visiting the fishing grounds at the River's mouth several times a year from the time I was ten years old for probably 40 years. From my earliest recollections, there were no buildings in that vicinity. On the south side of the Spokane River not far from the bank and about a half-mile from the mouth of the Little Spokane the Hudson Bay Company originally built a trading-post; but owing to the difficulty of access, it was abandoned and destroyed and the post moved to Fort Colville where it was in reach of river navigation. I recall the old site of the building; but it was torn down before I visited the place, but the above facts I had from my mother. This building had been a very large one with some smaller ones in the vicinity.

"I knew several men by the name of Finlay. I recall two who were living with women of the Spokane tribe. They were old men then. One moved to the neighborhood of Chewelah afterward. I think some of their descendants are around St. Ingatius Mission in Montana. At a considerably later date than this a Frenchman named Bone built a roadhouse near the mouth of the Little Spokane River. I do not recall any other buildings of note in the vicinity.

"The flat between the two rivers was a great meeting place for Indians—Colville, Spokane, Pend O Reille, Coeur d'Alene, Moses' and Nez Perce tribes. They met and camped here in the greatest friendship. They were not on good terms with the Kootenay and Yakima tribes, and had no intercourse with them. During the summer season there were from a hundred to a thousand Indians camped on the flats by the River catching and drying fish. The principal trap was maintained in the Little Spokane a short distance above the mouth. It was made by setting up piers across the river formed of poles erected in the form of a teepee. Horizontal poles were lashed to these piers and a basket work of willows bound on them. There were two lines of these fences across the River. The upper one was tight; but the lower one had frequent small gates made by lashing sticks to the upper horizontal pole and leaving them loose at the bottom, so the fish could push into the enclosure going up stream; but the current would close the gate after them. The fish came into the trap in countless thousands and were speared by the Indians. They were sufficient for all comers, as long as the

trap was maintained in good order. The trap was torn out by the whites while Mr. Waters was agent.

"The Spokane Indians, after the Wright Campaign, did very little in the way of agriculture. The first revival of gardening or cropping dates from the time Mr. Sims was agent. He distributed seed and persuaded the Indians to do something in that line. Previous to this there were some little gardens around the trading posts; but they belonged to, or were supervised by, the traders. Trails ran up and down the River, and across the country from the three fords near the mouth of the Little Spokane. There was one ford below the mouth and at least two above it. As many as six good trails converged here, leading to different parts of the country.

"'Squalie' (Fort Nisqually) was a Hudson Bay Trading Post on the Sound near Tacoma. My father was in charge of the entire line of trading posts on this side of the mountains, and I was born at that place stated, while my father was on a trip of inspection.

"As to the foundation on the site of Spokane House, I will say that I describe it very imperfectly. I think that there were some cellar holes; but think the Indians used it as a sort of fort and probably dug the holes.

"I never saw or heard of any trading after the Hudson Bay people abandoned the location until in comparatively recent times. The French mail carrier, Bone, who built a road house there possibly did some trading; but as near as I can make out, that was about fifty years ago.

"I was the official interpreter for the Agency for a great many years. I knew nothing of so-called 'painted rocks.' It was a custom when a boy was sick to send him out to paint certain rock as a charm of 'good medicine' for his recovery. I never heard of an Indian battle in the vicinity of old Spokane House; but the Spokane Indians formerly made many hostile excursions against the Kootenai, Yakima, and Blackfoot tribes."

WILLIAM S. LEWIS.