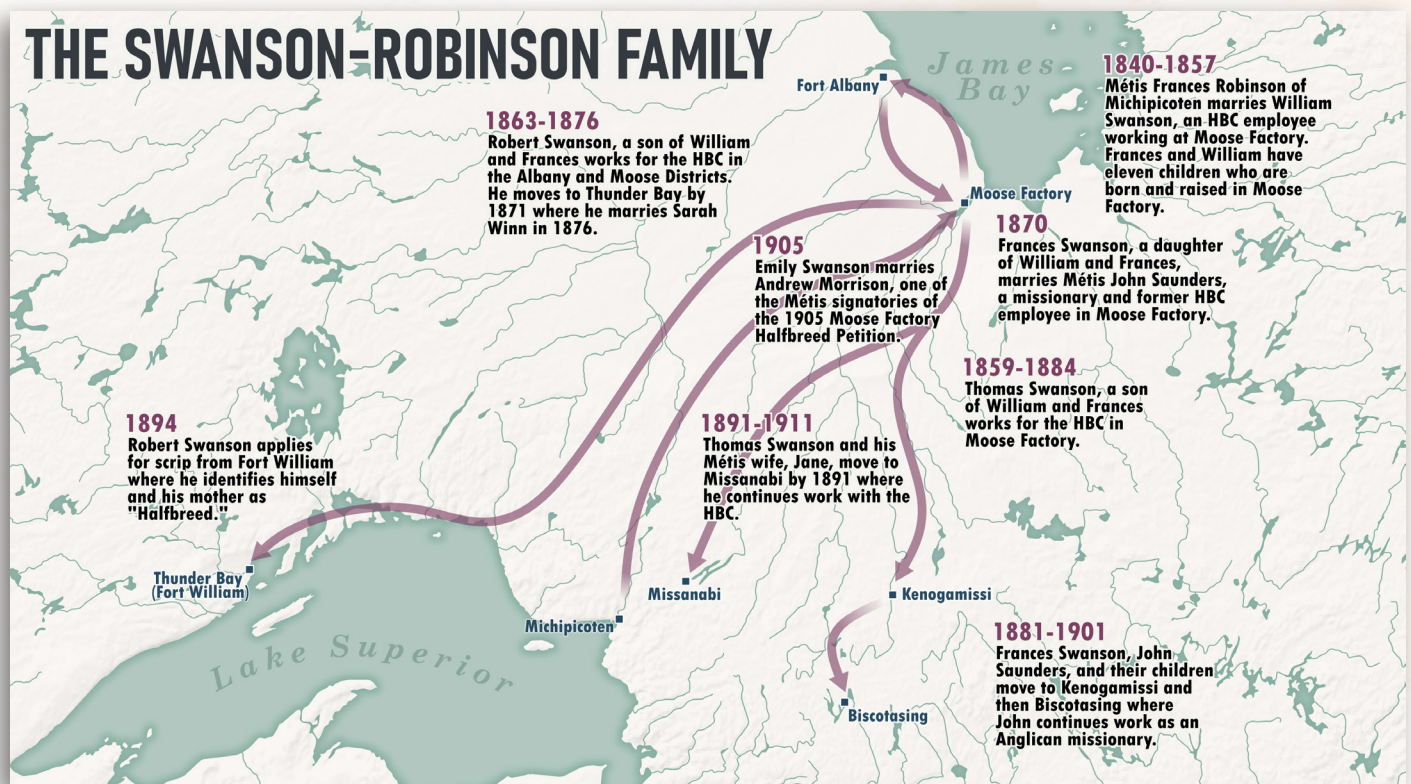


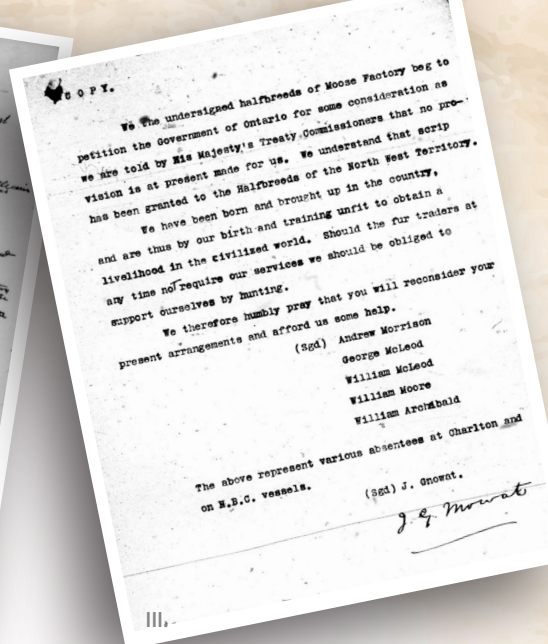
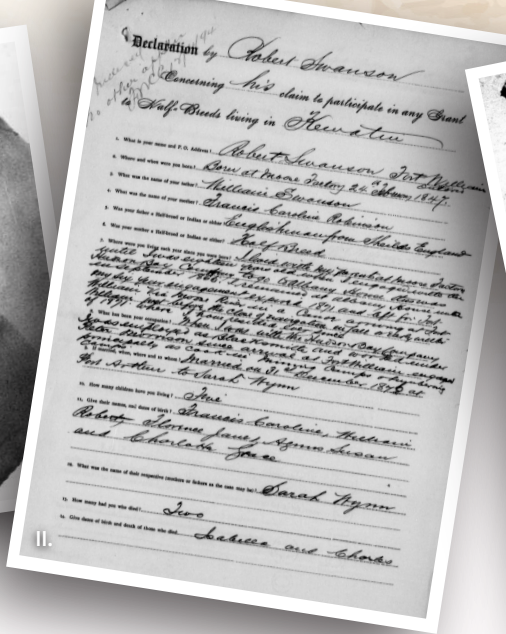
FL3032 The Swanson-Robinson Family



Frances Robinson already had some experience in the fur trade world when she married William Swanson in Moose Factory in 1840, having moved there from Michipicoten some time before. William had worked in the Moose District since he came to the HBC from England in 1812. Frances was the ideal partner for a long-time HBC servant—as an Métis woman, she helped William bridge the gap between European and Indigenous cultures, a necessity for fur traders at this time.

Growing up in Moose Factory, the Métis population—including many of Frances and William's 11 children—filled key roles in the region's fur trade economy. Métis men were directly involved with the HBC as clerks, labourers, guides, or interpreters, while Métis and Cree women were often unofficially employed in provisioning and supporting life around the fort. Their knowledge of the land was essential for not only the fort's survival, but also the continuation of the fur trade in the region.

The Swanson-Robinson family travelled between and worked at various posts across Northern Ontario. Six of William's sons followed in his footsteps and joined the HBC across west central North America (i.e., the Métis Homeland). George worked in the Rupert's River and Eastmain districts. Albert also worked in Eastmain, as a cooper, before moving back to Moose Factory to take up carpentry. Richard was also at Moose, working as a blacksmith; while Robert was a blacksmith in the Albany River District. In 1864 and 1895, Albert and Thomas worked alongside Métis like James King and William McLeod at Moose Factory, building houses. No doubt, they and their brothers worked with other Métis wherever they were posted. By 1891, Thomas moved to Missanabie, a new HBC post built along the recently completed Canadian Pacific rail line.



William and Frances's daughters did not move around like their brothers; instead, they played an important role in maintaining the family's connections with other Métis in the Abitibi community. Frances Caroline married John Saunders, a Métis man, in Moose Factory and eventually moved to Mattagami and Biscotasing, where John worked as a clergyman. Her sister Jane married fellow Métis William Ferris, an HBC carpenter and boat builder, and raised their family between Moose Factory, and Albany. Emily Swanson married Andrew Morrison, one of the Métis signatories of the 1905 Moose Factory Halfbreed Petition. As a Métis family and members of the Abitibi Métis community, Emily and Andrew supported the petition to ensure the collective identity and rights of the community were recognized and protected.

When the Canadian government began the process of granting scrip to Métis in exchange for extinguishing their right to land, many in Northern Ontario believed that given their relationship with, and therefore rights to, the lands they were born and raised, should be eligible for scrip like Métis on the prairies, some of whom were close relatives.

Métis in Moose Factory were well aware that their friends and family in the west had been granted scrip. By 1896, at least eight Métis in Fort Albany had submitted scrip applications themselves, including Robert Swanson. Ultimately, scrip claims from Fort Albany were disallowed on the basis that the post was located in Ontario, rather than on the Keewatin side of the provincial/territorial boundary.

On the back of being denied scrip, by the early 1900s the fur trade in northern Ontario was slowing considerably, thanks to decades of overhunting and the demands on resources of the encroaching settler population. In 1902, the HBC relocated its distribution warehouse from Moose Factory to Charlton and laid off several servants. Although some Swanson family members remained in Moose Factory, others ventured south to find work. Some landed in Lake Superior, including Thunder Bay, and others in the Georgian Bay area where many Métis families were drawn to the boom created by the railway and logging industries.

I. "Rev John and Mrs. Sanders, 1897" Credit: Vince Crichton, Chapeau Public Library

II. Scrip, Robert Swanson - LAC, RG 15, vol 703, T-12433

III. Treaty 9 - Petition of Certain Halfbreeds of Moose Factory for Scrip and/or Consideration and Applications to be placed on the paylists; 1905-1910. LAC, RG10, Vol. 3093, File 289, 300, Reel C-9667