

Profile

THE STEINHAUERS, FATHER AND SONS: First Nation Missionaries To First Nations' People by Donald B. Smith¹



In the summer of 1879, Egerton and Robert Steinhauer arrived in Cobourg, a town of nearly 5,000 people just east of Toronto. The two brothers, 21 and 19 respectively, came from White Fish Lake, a Cree farming community 200 kilometres northeast of Fort Edmonton. These two sons of the Rev. Henry B. Steinhauer, the first First Nations Christian minister in what would later become Alberta, travelled over 3,000 kilometres to attend Cobourg Collegiate Institute in preparation for entrance into Victoria University. Strong and self-reliant, they planned, after graduation from university, to go back to the North West as Methodist missionaries. To his great regret Egerton had to return to White Fish Lake before entering Victoria. Robert completed his studies, becoming the first First Nations person in what is now Alberta and Saskatchewan to obtain a university degree.

The existence of written material both by, and about, the Steinhauer brothers makes them very unusual. Apart from perhaps Louis Riel, few personal written records of Native

¹ Editor's Note: A fully-referenced article by Professor Smith, entitled "The Steinhauer Brothers: Education and Self-Reliance", is to be found in *Alberta History*, 50,2 (Spring 2002) pp. 2 - 10.

people born in Western Canada in the mid-19th century exist. Thanks to their own writings, the Steinhauer brothers' life stories can be told, in part, from their own words.

Henry

Egerton and Robert's father, Henry, one of the Canadian Methodists' early converts, started off life with his Ojibwa name Shawahnekezhik. He was a Lake Simcoe Ojibwa who lived at the Methodist mission station of Grape Island, near Belleville, at the eastern end of Lake Ontario. He attended the school established by the Rev. William Case, the Methodist missionary superintendent, and then in 1833 left for one year of study at Cazenovia Seminary, a Methodist academy in New York State. This had been arranged some time earlier, for in the spring of 1829 Case took Shawahnekezhik and half-a-dozen other young Native converts on a fund-raising tour of the Eastern United States. The 12-year-old boy attracted attention for his remarkable musical voice. On condition that he take his name, a Philadelphia supporter of the Methodists' Indian mission work, Henry B. Steinhauer, offered to pay for the boy's schooling.

Thanks to Case, and to the funds provided by the American Steinhauers, Henry received an excellent education at Cazenovia Seminary, and later at Upper Canada Academy in Cobourg (the predecessor of Victoria University). For several years afterward he taught at the Methodist Indian mission school at Credit River, west of Toronto; and then at Alderville on Rice Lake northeast of Toronto, where the Grape Island people relocated in the late 1830s. Henry left in 1840 to go to Rupert's Land and the North West as a Methodist church worker. He served as a teacher, interpreter, and missionary at Rainy River, in what is now northwest Ontario, and then at Norway House, which is located on the northern tip of Lake Winnipeg. There he met his Cree wife, Jessie Joyful Mamanuwartum. He was then posted to the more northerly mission of Oxford House. Shortly after his ordination in 1855, the Steinhauers moved to Lac La Biche in present-day Alberta to establish a new Methodist mission among

the Woods and Plains Cree. In 1857 he began the White Fish Lake settlement, the first First Nations farming community in what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta. It was located in the wooded parklands north of the Saskatchewan River, just beyond the reach of Blackfoot raiders, but close to the northern border of the prairie and the still abundant buffalo herds. The soil was suitable for farming, and the lake was rich with fish. The settlement immediately south of Lac La Biche prospered. As soon as their numbers and needs increased, the White Fish people established a satellite community at neighbouring Good Fish Lake, about 10 kilometers away.

Henry and his wife were convinced of the need for First Nations people to adjust to the non-Native way of life. They recognized that white settlement would soon follow in the North West, and transform the majority Native population into a minority, as had occurred in southern Ontario. Henry belonged to a generation of Ojibwa-speakers in southern Ontario in the late 1820s and 30s, who believed that by embracing Christianity and a settled agricultural way of life the First Nations people could survive and prosper in the midst of the growing settler community. He thought they needed to learn the Victorian virtues of punctuality, sobriety, and individual property rights. All his life Henry remained deeply committed not only to his Christian faith, but also to the need to “Europeanize” the First Nations. As Isaac Mabindisa, his biographer, wrote: “Steinhauer is a very interesting historical subject because he was socialized to think and act like a Western Christian gentleman after he had spent his early youth in a traditional Ojibwa culture.”

At White Fish Lake, the Steinhauers raised a large family of seven girls and five boys. At home they encouraged a strong sense of spirituality, with family devotions being held every morning and evening. Elizabeth Barrett, an Ontario school teacher who taught at White Fish for two years in the mid-1870s, wrote in the April, 1876, issue of *Missionary Notices of the Methodist Church*: “Mr. Steinhauer’s is, indeed, an amiable and

God-fearing family. I never saw more dutiful and respectful sons and daughters.”

The Ojibwa minister and his Cree wife regarded education as vital. By learning to read, the First Nations could master the doctrines of the Methodist church, as well as acquire the skills to survive in a future white-dominated society. With great difficulty Henry obtained teachers on a short-term basis for the White Fish school. Years later Egerton recalled his early school days: “Sometimes I had the pleasure of going on a buffalo hunt with my parents, who accompanied the band on their annual hunt, the school teacher going as well, and holding school in the open air when circumstances permitted.”

One of the most gifted and well-trained teachers was Miss Barrett. In 1886 Chief Pakan of White Fish Lake recalled her two years at White Fish Lake: “We often talk about her in our camps and about the good she did for us. Our children loved her for all the acts of kindness she did for them, and our women looked upon her with affection.”

Upon arriving at White Fish Lake, Elizabeth made a promise which Henry repeated in his letter in the *Annual Report of the Methodist Missionary Society, 1874/75*: “Miss Barrett tells me that she can train these two boys [i.e. Egerton and Robert] so that they can enter any high school or college in Canada.” Under her guidance, Egerton advanced fast enough to take over as the White Fish teacher after her departure in 1877. Egerton taught at the school until he and Robert left for Ontario in the spring of 1879. Although the school lacked sufficient equipment and books, Egerton taught reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, and geography.

The last year that Elizabeth Barrett was with them (1876) the White Fish and Good Fish Lake Cree made an important decision: they signed Treaty Six at Fort Pitt. Chief Pakan, a close friend of Henry, and a loyal Methodist himself, did so on the understanding that one huge reserve, a homeland, would be created for Plains and Woods Cree bands immediately north of the North Saskatchewan. Despite the apparent promise, the large

territory, which Pakan wished the Cree to administer themselves, was not forthcoming. Henry had backed him fully on this issue. Then came another disappointment: the federal government ignored the clause inserted in Treaty Six promising assistance in the event of a general famine. By the late 1870s the Plains buffalo continued their sharp decline, but little help came from the federal government, caught in the financial pressures of trying to build a transcontinental railway.

The year the Steinhauer brothers departed for Cobourg, 1879, proved the crisis point for the Plains Indians. While both the First Nations and Metis had recognized the sharp decline in the numbers of buffalo, they had not foreseen their disappearance. Faced with starvation, thousands of Plains Indians from the Treaties Six and Seven areas crossed the border into Montana in search of the last great herds. The year the Steinhauer brothers travelled to Cobourg, Prime Minister Macdonald reported that the Blackfoot and Plains Cree in southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan remaining on the Canadian side of the border "...were reduced to such extremities that they eat mice, their dogs, and even their buffalo skins, and they greedily devoured meat raw when given to them." Yet at White Fish, where there were good fish lakes, the Methodist Cree communities supported themselves. The Cree farmers lived in well-built houses, reared domestic animals, and could still hunt and fish.

From 1879 to 1883 the brothers prepared at the Collegiate Institute for their university entrance. The Victoria College campus had just expanded the year before they arrived in Cobourg. In May 1878, Faraday Hall, named after the famous English scientist and devoted to science, became the college's second building. The Hall was home to a museum, which included a well-preserved Egyptian sarcophagus, a female mummy. But it also contained a revered object from Alberta, a 145-kilogram iron stone from Iron Creek, a tributary of the Battle River about 150 kilometres southeast of Fort Edmonton. The Cree and the Blackfoot venerated the meteorite as a sacred

object. Without consulting non-Christian First Nations people, Methodist missionary George McDougall carted it away to his mission at Victoria (now Pakan), about 250 kilometres north of Iron Creek. Eventually he shipped it to church officials in Toronto, who later gave it to Victoria University in Cobourg.

Egerton

Both Egerton and Robert matriculated from the Collegiate Institute in 1883. Two years earlier their father visited his two sons while on a tour of Ontario to raise money for the missions in the North West. A photo has survived that shows the proud father and his two sons (see page 45).

To support their studies, the brothers worked in the summers to supplement whatever assistance their parents could provide. But by 1883, the Steinhauers could no longer afford to keep both of them in Cobourg. In addition, a teacher for the school at Good Fish Lake was needed. Egerton, just after he had gained entrance to Victoria, made “the sacrifice of his life”, and agreed to come home. His responsibilities greatly increased in 1884, the year of his father’s death. During the troubles of 1885 he, along with Pakan (James Seenum), and James Youmans, the non-Native missionary teacher at White Fish Lake, worked very hard to keep the White Fish and Good Fish Lake Cree out of the struggle. Pakan’s support led the Methodist church to invite him, together with the loyal Chief Samson of the Battle River (Hobbema) Cree, and Jonas, a Stoney from Morley, west of Calgary, to visit Ontario in the late summer and early fall of 1886.

After the North West Rebellion of 1885, Egerton independently continued his theological training, which led to his ordination in 1889. He had a good sense of humour. Although he never graduated from Victoria, Egerton always maintained that he too had a B.A. Robert might be a Bachelor of Arts, but he was “Born Again”!

From the mid-1880s to his death in 1932, Egerton served in several mission stations. He worked at Morley with the Stoney

(Nakota) from 1885 to 1894, at Fisher River in Manitoba with the Woods Cree from 1894 to 1907, at Hobbema (Battle River) with the Plains Cree from 1907 to 1911, Morley again from 1911 to 1919, amongst the Ojibwa (Chippewa) at Saugeen on Lake Huron from 1919 to 1924, and at New Credit in Ontario with the Mississauga (Ojibwa) from 1924 to 1926. Energetic he truly was. Fred Stevens, the school teacher at Fisher River in the mid-1890s, recalled that in winter Egerton made trips by dog team across Lake Winnipeg, even travelling as far as Norway House, 300 kilometres away at the northern end of the lake.

The year of his ordination (1889) Egerton married Toronto-born Elizabeth Helliwell, a Methodist church worker and teacher at Morley Indian Day School. With her help, he performed a multitude of tasks. In a letter written in 1906 from Fisher River, he mentioned his “ministering to the daily wants of the people”. “Reserve work too means visiting the sick, providing food, and dispensing medicine as they may need it.” Egerton and Elizabeth had one son, Wesley, who completed the fourth year of his five-year medical degree at the University of Toronto, shortly after his return from service in the Canadian Army Medical Corps in World War One.

After his wife’s death in 1928, Egerton lived briefly in Calgary, then joined his brother at Saddle Lake where he assisted with the mission until his own death in 1932. Robert’s diary entry explains Egerton’s passing in this way: “This sudden demise must have been caused by his putting too strong an effort in trying to bring his hearers [to] see what Christian life is.” As Egerton himself wrote over 20 years earlier from his mission station at Battle River (Hobbema): “I have tried to do my duty as a poor humble tool in God’s vineyard, ever since I entered the work.”

Robert

The year Egerton returned to White Fish Lake in 1883, Robert entered Victoria. In sports the tall six-foot Cree excelled as a football player and runner. He was also as a gifted singer,

with a deep bass voice. Very popular amongst his fellow students, they elected him “Senior Stick” at the end of third year in 1886. That August and September he accompanied the Rev. John McDougall and the Cree chiefs Pakan and Samson, and the Stoney Jonas — all of whom had been loyal to the Canadian government in the North West Rebellion of 1885 — on a tour of Ontario towns and cities, as well as Montreal. A reporter in Peterborough summarized Robert’s remarks to the large audience in that city. The Cree university student defended the First Nations: “The Indians,” he said, “have a great respect for God, and do not take His name in vain, as he heard the whites do.” Then, he added that “he was glad he had learned the language of the whites, that he might learn their good qualities, and by God’s help might help in bringing the Indians to a higher knowledge of God.”

At one of the Toronto meetings, Robert sang the hymn “Tell it Again” before Sir John A. Macdonald. Chief Pakan joined Robert in singing it in Cree. Although the prime minister did not realize it, he had before him, in Robert, one of his most articulate First Nations critics. That very spring the Cree undergraduate had written an article for *Acta Victoriana*, the college magazine. In “The Indian Question” he underlined the Western First Nations’ disappointments. “Ever since the treaties were signed, there has been much discontent, and complaints made by him [the Indian]. He asks those who have taken the ownership of his country to give him his rights, at least the fulfillment of the promises made to him.” They had wanted assistance but, in the place of competent government intermediaries, they received Indian agents, selected “because they happen to be friends and right-hand supporters of the Government in power; men whose knowledge of what they were intended to teach was so limited that they were rejected in some places.” Ottawa had placed “low and unprincipled characters” in authority over them.

As did Egerton, Robert worked to see First Nations people regain their self-reliance and initiative. Within a decade of graduation, Robert secured his own personal independence. He

“enfranchised” in 1896. By giving up his position as a ward of the Crown under section 86 of the Indian Act of 1876, as revised in 1886, he became a citizen with the same civil rights and liberties enjoyed by all of Her Majesty’s subjects. As an ordained minister, and as a university graduate, Robert simply had to petition the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. The authorities assumed that by earning a degree, or serving as a Christian minister, as a lawyer or doctor, the First Nations person had demonstrated their acceptance of the values of the dominant society — as well as their ability to function within it. Without a university degree, or position as a Christian minister, doctor or lawyer, the probationary period was three years under the Act of 1886. But few actually applied. In fact resistance to assimilation proved so great, only approximately 250 Indians enfranchised between 1857, when Ottawa enacted the enfranchisement policy, and 1920. Egerton enfranchised, but only in 1926.

In Robert’s case enfranchisement brought several immediate advantages. No longer a ward of the Crown under the Indian Act, he could vote, sign legal contracts, and travel away from the reserve without reporting his absences to the Indian Agent. Now that he had become a citizen he no longer had to tolerate the Agents’ colonial attitudes. His great nephew, Ralph Steinhauer, later recalled that around 1930 the Saddle Lake Indian Agent talked to First Nations people through a wicket. “If the agent didn’t like the discussion or if he thought it went on too long, he shut the wicket down in the face of the speaker.”

Over half-a-century Robert lived with his wife and family at numerous missions across Alberta. Shortly after his return from Cobourg he had married Charlotte Pruden, a woman of Native and English heritage, whose father worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company at Lac La Biche. They had a family of six daughters and four boys. Robert served at Saddle Lake, forty kilometres or so south of White Fish Lake, from 1887 to 1890. After the signing of Treaty Six in 1876 a group of people from White Fish Lake relocated there in search of better farm land. Cree from other neighbouring communities also selected land there. Robert

returned as the missionary to White Fish Lake from 1890 to 1893, served at the Red Deer Industrial School in 1894, at Morley from 1895 to 1903, at White Fish Lake from 1903 to 1911, at Hobbema (Battle River) from 1911 to 1919, and at Saddle Lake, where he would try several times to retire — unsuccessfully, as his services were so badly needed — from 1919 to his death in 1941.

Coping With A New Society

The First Nations in Western Canada faced great problems in the early 20th century. From 1901 to 1921 half-a-million newcomers migrated to what is now the province of Alberta, the population rising from 73,000 to nearly 600,000. At the same time that the non-Native numbers rose those of the First Nations plummeted. Each year hundreds of babies died from measles, influenza, scarlet fever. The tuberculosis rate reached epic proportions. Robert served at Hobbema in 1918, the year that the deadly Spanish flu epidemic carried off 90 of the four Hobbema reserves' 850 people. In one generation the First Nations population of Alberta fell by two-thirds, from about 18,000 in the 1870s to less than 6,000 by the 1920s. (Only in the 1930s did numbers slowly begin to increase.)

Overnight a new society arose, one which had little understanding or respect for the First Nations. Even many of the well-educated shared these prejudices. In the first *History of the Province of Alberta* (1912), for instance, author Dr. Archibald Oswald MacRae, principal of Calgary's Western Canada College, assessed the Native character in this way: "The Red Man of the West has always been a difficult individual, he does not care to work, to beg he is not ashamed. In consequence he tends to become shiftless and vagrant."

Senior officials in both government and the Methodist church accepted these views. At the highest level of the federal government Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, endorsed the theory of First Nations inferiority. In July 1904, he stated in the House of Commons: "I have no hesitation in saying — we may as well be

frank — that the Indian cannot go out from school, making his own way and compete with the white man... He has not the physical, mental or moral get-up to enable him to compete. He cannot do it.” As for Alexander Sutherland, the superintendent of the Methodists’ Canadian missions, he declared that same year in *The Missionary Outlook*: “that we have not produced many Indian teachers or preachers is true, but this is owing chiefly to the lack of educational facilities. Besides, it is better as a rule that Indians should be under the care of white men.” This negative attitude prevented Robert, the only Methodist missionary in the Manitoba and North-West Conference at the turn of the century with a B.A., to advance in the church hierarchy. He never became the Conference’s Superintendent of Methodist Indian Missions. No First Nations person did.

At the turn of the century, the churches viewed residential schools as the most effective institutions for assimilating the First Nations children. Robert himself taught at the Red Deer Industrial School in its first year of operation, 1893/94. The school produced mixed results. In 1894, Robert’s nephew, Henry G. Steinhauer, the 16-year-old son of his oldest brother Sam, deserted, and returned to White Fish Lake. In contrast, that same year, another nephew, James, the 11-year-old son of his second oldest brother, Arthur, thrived at the school and stayed another six years, leaving as a skilled carpenter and fervent Methodist. When he died in 1969, James’s obituary notice prepared by relatives and friends read: “James Steinhauer, like his grandfather and his minister uncles, loved his Bible and spent much time studying and interpreting it for himself.”

Robert remained of two minds about Indian boarding schools. On the one hand they gave a number of First Nations students their only chance for an education. On the other hand, as a graduate of Cobourg Collegiate Institute and Victoria University, he knew how inferior they actually were in contrast with provincial public schools. Briefly, around 1908, he urged a boycott of the Red Deer school. Only the reforms introduced by the new principal, the Rev. Arthur Barner, whom Robert came to

respect, led him to reverse his position, and to support the institution.

What solution did the Cree minister propose? He mentioned it in 1903, during a mission fund-raising tour of Ontario. The Toronto *Globe* quoted him as stating “that existing methods of educating the Indians were not productive of the best results.” Robert continued: “If the Indian boys and girls were taken into Christian homes and given the same chance as other children who are brought into Canada, and given the opportunity of studying at the public schools, and afterwards allowed to homestead land, they would stand shoulder to shoulder with any class of people in the country.”

Of Robert’s family only Gussie, his eldest daughter, spent more than four years at the Red Deer Industrial School. She attended from age 9 to 18. Although it imposed a great financial burden, Robert and Charlotte, immediately after Gussie’s discharge in 1913, sent her to Alberta College, the Methodist college in Edmonton, where she took a business course. Their oldest son, Harry, attended Red Deer for four years, from age 10 to 14; then too, upon his discharge in 1914, he went to Alberta College. Their daughter Caroline was at Red Deer for three years, from 11 to 14, until her discharge in 1914. Robert and Charlotte then sent her to a public school in Edmonton. Daughter Mary attended Red Deer for only one year, from age 11 to 12, and she too, on her discharge in 1914 went to public school in Edmonton. Their youngest daughter, Ruby, born in 1911, and youngest son Barner, born in 1913, never had to attend residential school at all. Robert arranged with the Rev. Sellar, a former Methodist Indian missionary, and his wife, for Ruby and Barner to stay with them in Edmonton and enroll in the public school there.

Robert, as a Methodist (after church union in 1925, as a United Church) missionary, had to escort students from the Saddle Lake reserve to the residential school, which moved after World War One from Red Deer to Edmonton. Robert had interpreted at the school’s opening in 1924. He translated into

Cree the frank statement of Charles Stewart, Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, that it was “the white man’s duty” to educate the First Nations, “to help them to be assimilated...”. Perhaps in the hope that things had improved at the new school, he sent his adopted son Larry. But when, in 1931, 14-year old Larry ran away, and returned home to Saddle Lake, Robert did not make him go back.

At Saddle Lake in the 1920s and 30s, Robert faced a continuing challenge from First Nation traditionalists, anxious to hold onto their own old religious beliefs. The veteran Methodist minister also faced opposition from fellow Christians, the Roman Catholics. As he himself once wrote: “Romanism as every one knows is never on friendly terms with Protestantism.” Much of the pressure to send children away to the Edmonton school arose from the existence of a Catholic boarding school at Saddle Lake — unless Protestant children went away they might end up there. Robert wanted at all costs to avoid this.

The Catholics maintained a formidable competition in the surrounding area. They began the boarding school at Saddle Lake, and also opened missions at both Saddle Lake and Good Fish Lake. The Rev. A. R. Aldridge, a Methodist minister, forecast in 1908, that “north of the Saskatchewan is going to be largely French Roman Catholic”. In the early 20th century the Methodists’ First Nation mission work in Canada declined as a priority, as the church devoted more and more of its financial resources to the rapidly expanding missions in China and Japan.

Robert had great difficulty in obtaining authorization from church offices in Toronto for even small expenditures. At White Fish and Good Fish Lakes, where he served from 1903 to 1911, he lived in a poorly built manse. After a visit there in 1906, Mr Aldridge commented: “Mr. Steinhauer’s family does not seem healthy since he has lived in that house — he lost a child lately, I hear.” Yet, the church refused to grant him permission to build a new house until 1909. They conceded, but only after Robert first threatened to resign unless they approved its construction.

Just after World War One, Robert supported a new pan-Indian political organization, the League of Indians of Canada, founded in 1918 by Fred Loft, a Mohawk war veteran. The League worked to persuade the Canadian government to improve the standard of education it offered the First Nations. In 1921, Loft claimed, “scarcely five per cent of the adult population of a vast majority of reservations in Canada is competent to write a coherent intelligible letter”.

The League held its first conference at Ohsweken on the Six Nations Grand River territory in Ontario in December 1918. Subsequent annual meetings followed at Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, in 1919; Elphinstone, Manitoba, in 1920; Thunderchild Reserve, Saskatchewan, in 1921; and Hobbema, Alberta in 1922. At the League’s meeting at Hobbema in 1922, Robert served as the chief interpreter. His youngest brother, Augustine Steinhauer, was later elected president of the Alberta branch of the League of Indians of Canada in 1931.

Federal government pressure on the First Nations to surrender land increased in the early 20th century. Seeing the First Nations’ shrinking population, the Indian Department encouraged the purchase of their prairie lands for non-Native settlement. With revenues from the sale of their “idle lands” the Department argued communities could improve their living conditions. In 1925 the federal government purchased a fifth of the Saddle Lake reserve, which it then sold on Saddle Lake’s behalf to non-Native settlers. Robert’s comments on the land surrender are not recorded.

Robert greatly enjoyed church music and translation. He bought a piano in Edmonton while stationed at Hobbema. He loved to translate sacred songs and hymns. Together with Egerton he worked on a Cree hymn book which appeared in 1920. Like his father, Robert was a wonderful linguist. As one of Robert’s colleagues wrote, the Cree minister could “read from the English Bible translating into Cree as he proceeds”.

Early in 1937 Robert received an unexpected surprise in a letter from Richard Davidson, Principal of Emmanuel College,

Victoria University's theological college. The Senate of the University, to mark the college's 100th anniversary, wanted to complete their centenary celebrations by offering him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. "For as your father was one of the first students a hundred years ago you will be one of the first graduates of the new century of Victoria's life." On the evening of April 27th in Toronto, the tall 76-year-old First Nations missionary received a D.D. from his alma mater, now affiliated with the University of Toronto, for it had relocated from Cobourg to Toronto. He became the first First Nations person in Canada to obtain an honorary D.D. While in Ontario, he also had an opportunity to visit both Alderville on Rice Lake where his father had taught school a century earlier, as well as Rama. Over a century before, his father had grown up near Rama in the Lake Simcoe area. At Rama Robert discovered several of his cousins.

Robert Steinhauer died four years after he obtained his honorary degree. Four hundred First Nation parishioners and non-Native neighbours and friends attended the funeral at Saddle Lake of their beloved missionary, who had served as an ordained minister for over half-a-century.

Ralph Steinhauer, later to become the first First Nations Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta (1974-1979), recalled his two missionary uncles in a talk to the Historical Society of Alberta at Edmonton in 1955. Fortunately Alberta historian Hugh Dempsey attended and made notes on the address. Ralph first spoke of his uncle Egerton, whom he had known in the early 1930s, after Egerton moved to Saddle Lake to help Robert at the mission. Ralph, then in his mid-20s, recalled that Egerton in his early 70s, once himself a great athlete, encouraged the young people to participate in sports. Often he would tell them: "Never let yourself think that you are not as good as the white man." Egerton also challenged them about education: "... if your people don't perk up and follow the white man's way in business, you'll find yourselves left out in the cold! Can't you become doctors, lawyers or businessmen? You are just afraid that you can't

compete with the white man.” Egerton, as did Robert, sought equality with, and respect from, the dominant society.

Both uncles saw no contradiction in the fact that they were both Cree and Christian. They had two loyalties. Egerton, the devoted Methodist — after 1925 United Church — missionary, admitted to Ralph the amazing similarity between Christian teachings and Native beliefs. He did not dismiss Native spiritual concepts as superstition. Speaking of the Sun Dance he told his great-nephew: “There was a bit of torture there, but it was no worse than training for the commandos. They also had the ceremonial dances. There was a good deal of paganism, whooping and hollering but you know, I’m still an Indian. Actually, I can’t say too much against it. There were some great prayers said — heartfelt and sincere. The Sun Dance was a form of worship.”

Shortly after Ralph’s appointment as Lieutenant-Governor, writer Madeline Freeman interviewed him for the United Church publication, *Mandate* (January 1975). In the article, he reminisced about his great-uncle Robert, who had been a very important influence on him in his youth. The depth of Robert’s Christian commitment surfaces in the story Ralph chose to tell.

The “Grand Old Man of the Reserve” was a thunderous preacher. When in the pulpit he had his “arms, hands, feet and head all going like mad as he made the points in his sermon”. Once Ralph missed Sunday service, held back by impassable roads. Not wishing to kill his exhausted horses by driving them home in time to make the service, he proceeded leisurely. He reached the settlement well past 11. As he passed the church he saw Uncle Robert through the window giving one of his impassioned sermons. Robert recognized Ralph, and “stopped in mid-flight, arms outstretched, not saying a word until I drove the team out of sight”. Later he stormed over to Ralph’s home.

“Which would have been the greater sin, Uncle Robert,” Ralph protested, “to miss church, or to kill a poor dumb beast by trying to get home Saturday night?” “Bad planning,” replied Robert. “You don’t need to starve your family or kill your

horses. You just need to plan better and keep the Lord's day in mind!"

The Steinhauer brothers followed closely in their father's footsteps of seeking accommodation with the newcomers. But Egerton and Robert lived in a more difficult period for Native people in Western Canada than their father had — one of domination by the non-Native majority. During their ministries Native culture in Canada could not be retained and pursued within the dominant non-Native culture and society. Cultural pluralism only became acceptable in Canada in 1970s and 1980s. In 1986 the United Church of Canada itself reversed its former policy of denying traditional Native spirituality by issuing an official apology to Canada's Native Peoples. The apology asked for forgiveness for the injustices of the past.

The great achievement for First Nations people — official recognition of Aboriginal Rights in the new Canadian constitution of 1982 — has contributed to a host of recent advances in the law for Aboriginal people. Among the great fighters for Aboriginal Rights in Canada stands Eugene Steinhauer of Saddle Lake, a great-nephew of Egerton and Robert Steinhauer, a great-grandson of Henry B. Steinhauer. As President of the Indian Association of Alberta in the early 1980s, he led delegations of First Nation leaders to London, England, demanding that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and their rights be recognized in a new constitution. Henry B. Steinhauer and his descendants, both male and female, have made extraordinary contributions to church and society in this country.