ROSSVILLE MISSION PRESS

Press, Prints and Translators

In outline the romantic story of the invention of the Cree syllabic script by the Rev. James Evans and the beginning of printing at Rossville Mission in Rupert's land has often been told. To the bibliographer most accounts are not completely satisfactory because of vagueness with regard to what was printed and when. Furthermore, there has been the question of who was responsible for translating the whole of the Bible into the Cree syllabic script. The article that follows reviews the literature relating to the Rossville Press with a view to throwing new light on some of the problems.

A. EVANS' DIRECTORSHIP

The Rev. James Evans' invention of the Cree syllabic characters was an act of genius. These characters had their origin in the missionary's earlier studies of the Ojibway language which was also of the Algonquin linguistic family. In 1836 he had invented an Ojibway syllabic alphabet, but the scheme had been rejected by the Canadian Bible Society in Toronto.¹

At Norway House in 1840, realizing the problem of evangelizing among scattered nomadic Indian bands, he turned to the printed word as the most efficacious means of propagating the Christian faith. The script he gave the Cree was no doubt an adaptation of his earlier Ojibway alphabet. Critics of the Cree syllabic script, mainly other missionaries, pointed out that while the Cree language was composed largely of syllables there were separate consonantal sounds, and that these sounds could not be indicated with any preciseness by the script.² However, the critics had to acknowledge the effectiveness of the scheme as evinced by the ease with which Indians without any schooling could learn to read.

The Cree syllabary was first printed on

1. Nathaniel Burwash, "The Gift to a Nation of a Written Language," Trans. Roy. Soc. Can., ser. 3, V (1911), Section II, 6. Quoted from letter, Evans to Rev. Joseph Stinson, June 11th, 1841.

2. Names, and particularly Old Testament names, were difficult to write in the script. Even the common name George could only be indicated as "Chouch" in Cree script. See letter from Rev. E.A. Watkins to the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, July 10, 1853.

October 15th, 1841, for Evans' journal states "Last night I finished the alphabet plate, and to-day printed a few sheets."³ He used a variety of triangles, angles, arcs and pothooks (at first ten in number, but later reduced to nine) each with four positions - up, down, left and right - to depict the thirty-six open vowel sounds which largely constitute the musical language of the Cree. Thus, an acute angle in four positions was used to represent "pay, pe, po, pah" respectively. In addition to these symbols, Evans used a number of accent-like marks to indicate consonants used as terminals. The use of each of the nine symbols in four positions gave the syllabary a mnemonic quality which helps to explain its success.

In its early form the syllabary⁴ repeated each symbol in each position twice, once as a solid line, and once as a broken line, to indicate a short and long vowel sound respectively; later a dot over any syllable indicated a long vowel. Since most products of the Rossville Mission Press have long since disappeared it is impossible to trace the changes in the syllabary; it would appear, however, to have become fixed by the 1850's.

Having invented a written language for the Cree, the missionary's next problem was to construct type and a press. Evans' efforts are well set out in his journal:⁵ September 28th, 1840: "For a fortnight I have been endeavouring to cast type to print the Cree language, but every attempt hitherto made has failed. I have no proper materials, neither type metal nor any other thing requisite. I hope, however, to conquer the difficulties, and to begin printing the Cree language in a few days or months at the furthest". September 30th: "I cut types in lead of two characters, and I took moulds in clay, chalk, putty, sand, and tried some

3. Burwash, op. cit., p. 9.

4. The Rev. Egerton R. Young writing in the Canadian Methodist Magazine for November, 1882 (as cited in J.C. Pilling, Bibliography of the Algonquin Languages, p.186) said, "I regret to be unable to reproduce in facsimile this syllabary in its earliest form as used by Mr. Evans or his contemporaries." In 1954 the Bibliographical Society of Canada, as No. 4 of its Facsimile Series, reprinted Evans' twenty-page hymn book of 1841 on the cover of which is the syllabary in what was probably its earliest form.

5. Egerton R. Young, The Apostle of the North; Rev. James Evans (New York, etc.: Revell, c.1899), pp. 203-207.

other fruitless experiments". October 13th: "I cast a plate of hardened lead, polished it and commenced cutting the Cree alphabet, making a sort of stereotype plate". October 15th: "Last night I finished the alphabet plate, and to-day printed a few sheets". November 11th: "My types answer well... I have got excellent type, considering the country and materials; they make at least a tolerably good impression. The letter or character I cut in finely polished oak. I filed out of one side of a inch square iron bar the square body of the type; and after placing the bar with the notch over the letter, I applied another polished bar to the face of the mould, and poured in the lead, after it had been repeatedly melted in order to harden it. These required a little dressing on the face and filing to the uniform square and length, but they answer well."

The Rev. Egerton R. Young, in charge of Rossville Mission some twenty years after Evans, was undoubtedly quoting local tradition when describing the materials used by Evans for his type and press.⁶ The type came from the thin sheets of lead which lined the tea chests shipped in by the Hudson's Bay Company. Young said that after carving models of syllabic characters Evans made casts of them in soft clay and poured into these casts the melted lead. Chimney soot mixed with sturgeon oil provided the first ink. His press was the jackscrew generally used by the traders for packing furs into bales for shipment. Such was the primitive type and press from which the first Rupert's Land imprints were taken.

Tradition would have it that James Evans did his first printing not on paper, but on birch bark. The Rev. John Maclean in his biography of Evans states that his brother, Dr. Ephraim Evans, in 1889 had in his possession some old books made of birch bark and others printed on paper.⁷ There is good reason to believe that the reference is to the three copies of the 1841 hymn book now in the possession of Victoria University, Toronto. Miss Martha Ray, in her introduction to the Facsimile Edition of this hymn book, states that the copies at Victoria are printed on coarse paper; the paper stock used for one copy, however, is more primitive than the other two, so that its appearance could give the impression of birch bark. She suggests that the whole birch bark story may stem from the condition

6. Ibid., pp.188-189.

7. John Maclean, James Evans, Inventor of the Syllabic System of the Cree Language (Toronto: Briggs, c. 1890), p. 167.

of this one copy.⁸

In support of the birch bark as the first printing material was its availability. Since many of the products of the mission press evidently were single pages or sheets on which was printed a hymn or a prayer, birch bark would be as serviceable as paper; indeed, it might be more durable than a single sheet of paper. Bound into a volume birch bark might not be as satisfactory. In support of the theory that only paper was used at Rossville is the small page-size of the 1841 hymn book, which, if typical of this press, would suggest that the quantity of paper involved in the press's output was not great.

In drawing up a calendar of Rossville imprints completeness will probably never be attained because of the destruction of James Evans' papers⁹ and because very few imprints have survived. "Long ago these first crude little volumes disappeared; but they served their purpose well, and were a joy and benediction to many."¹⁰

Imprint No. 1: Cree Syllabary (October 15th, 1840)

A few copies were printed on that date for the school, but in all probability more copies were run off in succeeding weeks. The syllabary was printed from the stereotype plate Evans had carved. Later imprints were printed with movable type.

Imprint No. 2: Hymn: Jesus My All to Heaven is Gone
(November 11th, 1840)

"I have to-day struck off three hundred copies of the first three verses, making a small page."¹¹

Imprint No. 3: Hymn: Behold the Saviour of Mankind
(November 17th, 1840)

Two hundred and fifty copies were printed.

8. Bibliographical Society of Canada, Facsimile Series, No. 4.

9. Maclean, op. cit., p. 167. Evans' brother informed Maclean that the missionary had burned nearly all his manuscripts before leaving Rossville in 1846.

10. Young, op. cit., p. 192.

11. Ibid., Chaps. 15-16. Quotations from Evans' journal used under Imprint Nos. 1-6 are from this volume.

Imprint No. 4: Hymn: Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow
(December 3, 1840)

In the same entry Evans says, "I have now printed about two thousand pages of hymns, etc., and on my return from my winter tour by God's blessing I shall print the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, Commandments, and the first chapter of St. Matthew's gospel; not forgetting the rules of our society."

Imprint No. 5: Lord's Prayer (late February, 1841)

On the winter tour to which Evans referred above, he spent four days at Beaver Creek House. His journal for February 6th reads in part: "We experienced great kindness from Mr. and Mrs. McKay. He is an excellent Cree speaker, and kindly furnished me with a translation of the Lord's Prayer." It is probably a safe assumption that this prayer was the next imprint off the press.

Imprint No. 6: Cree Syllabic Hymn Book
(before June 11th, 1841) 16p.

"I have made a fount of Indian type, press and everything necessary and besides making nearly four months voyage have printed about 5,000 pages in the Muskego language, among other things a small volume of hymns which is bound, a hundred copies of 16 pages each."12 No copies of this volume are extant.

Imprint No. 7: Hymns: Swampy Indians; Their Speech
Fish River, 1841. 20 p. 12 1/2 cm.

Three copies of this imprint are in the possession of Victoria University, Toronto. While the text is identical in all copies, there are differences in paper, binding, and cover. The only other copy located is listed in the printed catalogue of the Newberry Library's Ayer Collection of Americana. The copy is described as being bound in an elk skin wrapper, with the syllabary on the front and back cover, and with each sign repeated.

This hymn book, as stated earlier, was reprinted by the Bibliographical Society of Canada as No. 4 of its Facsimile Series in 1954.

What other imprints came off this first crude press? Perhaps in the next few months Evans completed his ambition to print the Creed, Ten Commandments, and the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.

Rossville Mission was supplied with a hand

12. Burwash, op. cit., p. 10.

press from England in the autumn of 1842. Dr. Ephraim Evans in a letter set out the events leading to the forwarding of a press to Rossville: "I was in England, in 1841, when a set of his homemade types was received by the Wesleyan Missionary Society, and took some part with them in obtaining permission from the Directors of the Hudson's Bay Company to have a font cast, and, with a press, sent out to Norway House, pledges being given that they would be used only for our mission work. Their arrival was cause of great joy and thanksgiving to God."¹³

Letitia Hargrave, wife of the factor at York Factory, in a letter dated September 20th, 1842, has this to say about Evans who had been awaiting the arrival of the annual supply ship "... when he returns to Norway House he is to begin a printing press, which he seems to have no doubts about being able to construct & then he is to publish at a great rate".¹⁴ This reference would suggest that the printing press had arrived and was shortly to be put into operation.

In addition to the syllabic type, a fount of Roman type was supplied to the printers at Rossville. The shipment included paper for printing. According to Young, the Wesleyan Missionary Society donated £500 for the purpose of erecting a proper building for printing activities.¹⁵

By the following year Evans had gathered around him an able group of teachers and translators. John Sinclair was the son of a fur trader and a Cree mother. Henry B. Steinhauer¹⁶ was a full-blooded Ojibway, well-educated in Ontario. Both men were to give many years of devoted service to the missionary cause. At Rossville they were engaged for several years in teaching and translating. According to their later claims they were responsible for translating the Bible into Cree syllabics. The work of translating was done in the years from 1843 to 1850, while the two were at Rossville.

13. Pilling, op. cit., p. 189. Letter from Dr. Evans to the Rev. John Carroll as published in the Canadian Methodist Magazine for October, 1882.

14. Letitia Hargrave, Letters (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1947), p. 120.

15. Young, op. cit., p. 194.

16. For a biography see Maclean's Henry B. Steinhauer; His Work among the Cree Indians of the Western Plains of Canada (Toronto, 19__).

The other members of the translating team were the Rev. William Mason and his bride of 1843, Sophia Thomas, the half-Cree daughter of Governor Thomas. The Masons were later to see the Bible through the press in England.

What was printed in the years after the press from England was obtained may never be known. Young states that "For years catechisms, hymn-books, and large portions of the Word of God were printed at Norway House".¹⁷ And again "A catechism was also printed, and was well received and studied by young and old."¹⁸

The Rev. David Anderson, Bishop of Rupert's Land, writing on August 22nd, 1849, just after his arrival in the country, said "The Wesleyans too have been instruments of good... They have prayers (partly those of our own liturgy) and catechisms in circulation among the Indians."¹⁹

Imprint No. 8: Catechism (probably before 1846, certainly before 1849)

This is the catechism referred to in the preceding paragraph.²⁰

B. MASON'S DIRECTORSHIP, 1846-1854

The Rev. William Mason succeeded James Evans in 1846 as superintendent of Wesleyan Methodist Missions in Rupert's Land.

Imprint No. 9: National Anthem (July, 1848)

These sheets were the first of two job printings done by the Rossville Press for the Rev. John Smithurst, Church Missionary Society clergyman, in charge of the Indian settlement on the lower Red River.

17. Pilling, op. cit., p. 186. Quotes an article by the Rev. E.R. Young appearing in the Canadian Methodist Magazine of November, 1882.

18. Young, op. cit., p. 194.

19. Church Missionary Society. Records and Correspondence. Microfilm copy, hereafter cited C.M.S.

20. While no copies of this catechism are available for study, a catechism published in London in 1865 may have been a revised edition: The Wesleyan First Catechism Translated into the Language of the Cree Indians, Hudson's Bay Territory.²³ p. A copy is listed in the British Museum Catalogue.

Mr. Smithurst wanted the copies for his school. The anthem was in all probability printed in English.²¹ Smithurst was at Norway House to perform the marriage of the Rev. James Hunter of Cumberland Station (The Pas) to Jane Ross, daughter of the factor in charge of Norway House. The Hunters were later very active in translating portions of the Scripture and other religious works which appeared in the Roman alphabet and were published in England.

Imprint No. 10: English-Cree-Ojibway Word Book,
by Rev. J. Smithurst (August 1848)

"Its object is to aid the Indians in acquiring the English language. It contains a list of most of the nouns, verbs, pronouns, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions in common use. Each page is divided into three columns; the first containing the English, the second Cree, and the third Saulteaux. I think it will be found useful."²²

Smithurst wrote with reference to the printing of this booklet that: "It was my intention to have sent to England this summer a small book to be printed for the use of our schools. Mr. Mason, the Wesleyan missionary at Norway House, has undertaken to get it printed for me on their press, so that a whole year will be saved..." The author expected to receive the copies of his booklet by October.

Imprint No. 11: The Gospel according to St. John
in the Cree Language of Hudson Bay.
1851. 54 unnumbered leaves. No
title page.

Pilling lists this copy in the British and Foreign Bible Society's library. The copy bears a manuscript note by Elijah Hoole (a prominent Methodist clergyman) dated London, November 23, 1852, which says "This book was executed 1851, by the Rev. W. Mason."²³

From York Factory, where he had awaited the arrival of the annual supply ship, Mr. Mason on August 13, 1852, wrote a covering letter with a copy of the Gospel sent to the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society.

"Dear Sir: I take the liberty of forwarding to your address for acceptance

21. C.M.S. Letter from Smithurst to Secretary, August 1, 1848.

22. Ibid.

23. Pilling, op. cit., p. 338.

a copy of St. John's Gospel, translated into Cree, and printed in the Indian character at the Wesleyan Mission Press, Rossville.

The typographical part is not quite so good as I could wish, owing to the want of an ink ball.

But the translation has been pronounced good by some of the most competent judges to whose inspection it has been submitted. The desire of the Indians for the word of God in their own language and in the syllabic characters which they soon learn to read is very great, and I sincerely hope and earnestly pray that the entire New Testament may as soon as possible be put in their hands. It is the best preservation against errors both in doctrine and practice, and yields the richest sources of consolation to immortal souls.

You will excuse the liberty I have taken in presenting to you one of our first efforts in diffusing Gospel light by means of the press amongst the poor scattered tribes of North America for whose spiritual welfare I know you feel an earnest solicitude."²⁴

Pilling attributes the translation of St. John to Mr. Mason, but it will be noticed that in his letter he does not make such a claim, unless the statement that the translation has been pronounced good can be interpreted as pride in his own achievement.

Two more editions of the Gospel of St. John were printed on the mission press, the first of which would appear also to have been printed while Mason was still in charge of Rossville.

Imprint No. 12: The Gospel according to St. John
1853? 53 unnumbered leaves.
No title page.

This is not the same printing as Imprint No. 11, since the first page contains ten verses whereas the earlier edition has seven verses and part of the

24. C.M.S. All quotations from Mason's letters and journals which follow are from this source. The Church Missionary Society records contain much information about the translating done by other missionaries of the Society into Cree and other Indian tongues.

eighth. The copy in the British and Foreign Bible Society examined by Pilling had the manuscript note: "To be printed in England. A dot to be placed over the broad characters to denote the long vowel sound. W. Mason, Hudson's Bay York Factory, Sept. 11th, 1856."

In the library of the Archives of British Columbia is a fifty-two page edition of St. John in Cree syllabic, printed at Rossville. The date 1857 has been assigned to this volume by the cataloguers, but since Hurlburt in his printings gave the date and press in a colophon in Roman, this copy must have been an earlier printing.

The possibility exists that slight differences in pagination of copies of a Rossville title does not indicate a separate edition but rather that the binding was done at different times. Thus Mason's journal, while he was stationed at York under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society, contains references to stitching and binding copies of the Rossville press imprints. These had been received and stored as loose sheets. On October 7, 1856, he speaks of binding eleven copies of St. John's Gospel, "the last of 1000 copies I printed a few years ago. They were kindly sent to me by the Rev. T. Hurlburt."

Imprint No. 13: Hymn Book 1852?
 11 sheets of 8 leaves each. No
 pagination. No title page. A
 collection of 96 hymns in Cree
 syllabic. Translated by Mrs.
 Jane Hunter, Rev. H.B. Steinhauer,
 and Peter Erasmus.

This imprint is listed in the British Museum Catalogue which notes that its contents agree very nearly with those of "A Cree Hymn Book, for Use of the Christian Indians in the Missions of the Wesleyan Missionary Society of Northwest America. London, 1865." The latter also contained 96 hymns. Pilling states that he personally had a copy which he had received from the Rev. John McDougall. In a letter of transmission McDougall stated: "The translators of this book were Mrs. Hunter,²⁴ the Rev. H.B. Steinhauer, and Peter Erasmus, a native interpreter."

24. Mrs. Hunter is better known for her hymn book Nikumooowina, which was in the Roman alphabet. According to Pilling the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge declined to print Nikumooowina because it contained some hymns by Moody and Sankey. This would suggest an affiliation with the Methodist hymn book described above.

Copies of this hymn book, or of another edition, remained in print until 1857 according to Mason's journal. On October 17, 1856, Mason wrote: "This morning we finish cutting the last of our hymn books. As these are the only remaining copies, and as there is no probability of obtaining more in this country etc." The following year one of the Rev. Thomas Hurlburt's last acts before leaving Rossville to return to Canada was to dispatch to Mason a box of books which included copies of the hymn book.

In 1854 the English Wesleyan Missionary Society withdrew from Rupert's Land, turning the responsibility of its missions over to the Canadian Wesleyan Methodist Church. In consequence of this change Mr. Mason resigned from the church, but as he wished to remain in mission work he rejoined the Church of England and was assigned to York Factory. Here he remained for many years except for a furlough in England. With his successor at Rossville he maintained cordial relations, and often received books from that press.

Prior to the change of supervision from the English to the Canadian Wesleyan Methodist church, there were rumours that the Methodists would withdraw entirely. The Bishop of Rupert's Land hoped that he might negotiate for Rossville Mission, or at least for the press whose value he appreciated. He proposed that, if it were acquired by the Church Missionary Society, a capable young printer should be sent from England to operate the press.

G. HURLBURT'S DIRECTORSHIP, 1854-1857

The Rev. Thomas Hurlburt was an outstanding linguist with an aptitude for grasping the intricacies of Indian languages. He took over his new duties as superintendent of Methodist missions in the summer of 1854.

The new director of Rossville Mission, writing at an undetermined date in 1854 or 1855, described the press he took over: "Printing office in disorder; have examined 10,000 syllabic characters and struck off the Ten Commandments. I send you a copy. I can now print Chippewa, Cree and English - all the books we want, when I get paper and ink."25

The supply ship of 1854 brought the press a consignment of paper. Mr. Mason wrote from York on September 12th, 1854: "The British & Foreign Bible Society has kindly sent out 25 reams of paper to my

25. J.E. Sanderson, The First Century of Methodism in Canada (Toronto: Briggs, 1910), II, 109.

address for the express purpose of printing another edition of St. John's Gospel, and other portions of God's word I may have prepared in the syllabic character; 15 reams for 1000 of St. John, and 10 for any other portion of the word of God. The paper still remains here, but considering the grant was made to me in my former capacity (a Wesleyan minister) I, of course, handed it over with the other property belonging to that Society to the Rev. Mr. Ryerson, and I hope they will carry on the printing of God's word in the syllabic character for the reason expressed above - that the poor Indian fur hunter may be enlightened with the light of life and Gospel truth more abundantly and extensively diffused."

Imprint No. 14: Ten Commandments. 1855

Confirmation that the Commandments were Hurlburt's first printing comes from Mason's journal for February 12, 1856: "The Commandments were kindly sent to me by Mr. T. Hurlburt of Rossville and are his first attempt at printing."

Imprint No. 15: Gospel of St. John in the Cree Language. Colophon: Rossville Mission Press, 1857. 75 p. No title page. Text in syllabic characters; colophon in Roman alphabet.

Pilling located a copy of this volume in the British and Foreign Bible Society's library.

Imprint No. 16: Epistles in the Cree Language Colophon: Rossville Mission Press, 1857. 40 p. No title page. Text in syllabic characters; colophon in Roman alphabet.

The Epistles were Ephesians, James, II Peter, and I John. Pilling, who located this title also in the British and Foreign Bible Society's library, attributes the translation to Mason. The latter, in his journal for July 9th, 1857, speaks of receiving from Rossville, along with 50 hymn books and 100 St. John's Gospels, 100 copies of the "four epistles which he [Hurlburt] had printed last winter". In my opinion, if Mason had done the translating he would have made reference to it; yet during 1856 Mason's journal refers to Mrs. Mason at work translating I John and James. The July 9th journal entry tells of Hurlburt's return to Canada. Hurlburt sent the box of books to Mason, but the Indian boatmen left the box on the beach at Rossville. The books, which were in sheets, arrived two weeks later.

The two imprints above were probably printed on the 25 reams of paper supplied in 1854 by the Bible society. With the Rev. Thomas Hurlburt's departure from Rossville, the mission press fell into disuse.

D. POSTSCRIPT

Although no further religious publications were run off this mission press, the story of Evans' invention of syllabic script and of printing in the Cree language does not properly end until the appearance of the Cree Bible in 1861. In the autumn of 1858 the Rev. Wm. Mason and his wife Sophia took ship for England where they were to complete the translating and editing of manuscripts in their possession, and to supervise through the press the printing of the Bible in Cree syllabic script.

Before discussing the controversy over who translated the Bible into Cree, it is interesting to read two letters by Mason relative to the syllabic script. The first letter, dated September 12, 1854, was addressed to the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, and reads in part:

"Before I conclude it will perhaps be advisable for me to say a few words regarding the printing of books in the syllabic character... I do think that for grammatical and phylogical purposes the Roman characters are decidedly the best. I have been confirmed in this opinion since reading the Church Missionary Intelligencer for March, 1853. The roots of the Cree words are closed, and not open syllables, and many words require double consonants to pronounce them correctly. In writing or printing with the syllabic characters, you are often obliged to rob one syllable of a consonant and give it to the following vowel to which it does not belong. And it is utterly impossible to spell proper names by them. My translation of the New Testament is underlined with Roman letters to assist me in making out what characters were intended to express...

The Revd Thomas Hurlburt whose extensive knowledge of Indian deserves notice, regrets that the syllabic system was ever adopted, and thinks they are very defective & inefficient, and should be permitted to fall into disuse. I cannot go so far as this, for the sake of

those Indians who have not the opportunity of being taught at the mission stations..." [The writer then gives support to Archdeacon Hunter's system of translating using the Roman alphabet.]

A year later on September 20, 1855, Mason again writes to the same correspondent. He has been to Severn where he has met Indians who have taught themselves to read the syllabic script.

"There [at Severn] without ever seeing a missionary teacher they have made the greatest proficiency in reading & writing the syllabic characters, and I can assure you that my mind was very much distressed when I was not able to comply with their request this summer for books in those characters. It is truly astonishing how extensively these characters are used, with what ease the Indian becomes master of their sounds, and how well adapted they are both in his circumstances & his language ... Thus hundreds of poor wandering Indians by the means of these characters are able to read God's word, who would otherwise be left under the darkness & ignorance of heathenism...

... It is my firm belief that the present generation will never read any other than the syllabic characters... I am daily solicited for books in the syllabic characters and I do feel very sorry that I cannot supply their wants. . . . The rapid and astonishing progress of the Gospel in these parts I attribute almost entirely to God's word, printed in their own characters."

From this time forward Mason was converted to the superiority of syllabic script as the system of writing most suitable for bringing the message of the Scriptures to the Indians. In his journals he frequently complains of a lack of books to give Indians and in his letters he urged the translation and printing of religious teachings in Cree syllabic.

In 1858 the Masons went to England to supervise the printing of the Bible. When the New Testament appeared in London in 1859, and the whole Bible in 1861, the title pages bore only one name as translator, that of "William Mason, minister". According to Methodist tradition the two native missionaries had translated the Bible into Cree; John Sinclair, the Old Testament

to Esther and the New Testament to the end of the Acts of the Apostles, and Henry B. Steinhauer from Job to Malachi and from Acts to Revelations. Methodist missionaries Young and Maclean in their writings were critical of Mason for not acknowledging the assistance of his collaborators at Rossville. Mason's journal for October to December, 1855, contains references to translating the prophets Hosea, Joel and Amos; the following July and October Mrs. Mason translated St. Mark, First Epistle of James, and James. However, tradition is probably correct in attributing the first or preliminary translation of most or all of the Bible to Sinclair and Steinhauer. Mason, in writing to Pilling on December 30, 1886, claimed little more than that "the final revision was the joint work of myself and my wife, Sophia Mason."

Those who were most critical of Mason allowing his name to stand alone on the title page probably did not appreciate what was involved in editing the manuscript for the printer, and in proof-reading the galley sheets as these came off the press. No doubt there would be inconsistencies in grammar and style in the first draft translation. In the possession of the University of Alberta Library is a copy of Joseph Howse's Grammar of the Cree Language, the 1844 edition, which has been interleaved with note paper and rebound. In this volume Cree words and phrases have been transliterated into syllabic in a neat hand with a fine pen. On the title page is the name Wm. Mason. This volume was used by the Masons while translating.

The contribution of Mrs. Mason to the translation of the Bible into Cree is not generally known:

"... Her perfect command and knowledge of the Indian language was invaluable. She entered most willingly into the grand design of giving them the whole of God's revealed will, especially after seeing and hearing the blessed results which followed the dissemination of St. John's Gospel, the first portion of God's word ever printed in Rupert's Land. Most people deem the cares of a family quite enough to employ the time of a female; but the labours of Sophia, notwithstanding her feeble and delicate constitution, were augmented by the Indian day school, visits to the Indian tents, and daily translations, besides having to attend to the wants of a large family. She had nine children .

... That work translating the Bible had been slowly advancing under her careful superintendence since 1846. The most

competent and best informed Indians had been from time to time consulted: no means within reach were left unemployed. While the husband, the schoolmaster, the interpreter,²⁶ and others, laboured by day, Sophia would perhaps be engaged in her household affairs or attending to the children, or drawing designs for the Indian females to work upon their muslins, in which she greatly excelled, and in this way conferred upon them considerable temporal benefits, and then at the close of the day all would be revised by her... Her sanction would decide generally any difficulty with respect to the most correct rendering of the passage into Cree.

In England in 1859 a severe cold at Holloway rendered necessary her removal to a milder part of London (Brompton), where her health improved; and there she laboured night and day to finish the final revision of the Old Testament, having completed the New in 1859...²⁷ She would be labouring at the desk until pain in the side compelled her to rise, she would walk up and down the room until it had subsided, and then sit down to her work again."²⁸

Sophia Mason died in London in October, 1861, just after the Old Testament came off the press. The whole Bible was now available to the Indians in Cree syllabic script.

Bruce Peel.

26. H.B. Steinhauer and John Sinclair.

27. The first consignment of New Testaments went down with the supply ship "Kitty" which was "nipt in the ice" of Hudson's Strait.

28. Church Missionary Gleaner. New Series, XI (1861), 135-140. Contains death notice of Mrs. Mason.