

# MARY McLEOD

## MAIN MESSAGES

- The life of Mary McLeod reflected some of the many changes First Nations people experienced from the gold rush on.
- She and her husband, Simon McLeod, found a good balance between living off the land and working in the new economy.
- After settling at Moosehide, she taught bush skills to a generation of children.
- Grandma McLeod is fondly remembered as a teacher and storyteller.



Mary McLeod. *Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Coll.*

*Sometimes I think stars are people. When I was little the stars were all thick and bright. Now they are dull like people who drink. Very few stars anymore these times. That means people are dying.*

– Mary McLeod, 1974

*[People] should just think about how God cares for us. Some place berries grow everywhere themselves. Salmon in the river. Think how much water to drink; people should just think about that.*

– Mary McLeod, quoted in undated article by Bishop Ferris

*When I was little ... I used to go trapping after, go trapping with Grandma McLeod all the way down to Fort Reliance, there's cat trail there, we use that, we walk down and she get some furs and we bring it back, we get back around dark. Dark time.*

– Peggy Kormendy, 2002

*Grandma McLeod used to tell us a lot of stories. She used to take us out and teach us how to trap, how to snare rabbit and, you know, just picnic stuff for fun. For fun she'd take us out for tea, have tea and bannock and bring along dried fish or dried meat or whatever we had. Whatever season, it could be springtime or fall. She used to take us berry picking. The whole village used to go berry picking. Up back, we go up Moosehide Creek and find berries on the hill.*

– Angie Joseph Rear, 1993

*Mary McLeod, she used to take us school kids down to Clear Creek; we used to slide on the grass there; all the kids just slide along like that. And brought our own cups, big white ones ... then she teach us to set snares, stuff like that, bring us back to school.*

– John Semple, 1993

 **THE STORY** 

Mary McLeod is remembered as a hard worker, a woman skilled in living on the land, a teacher of traditional ways and a gifted storyteller. It is appropriate that she be the one to tell the story of her own life. The following account is taken from a longer transcript of an interview that Mrs. McLeod did with Julie Cruikshank in 1974. This is followed by recollections of Grandma McLeod by former Moosehide children and some other biographical information.

### **Mary McLeod tells of her Life**

*I was born at Eagle, Alaska, about 1893.*

*Like my mother, I am Wolf.*

*My father is William from Tetlin, Tanacross people.*

*My mother is Lucy from Tetlin, Fairbanks way.*

*My parents died when I was little and I was raised by my people at Eagle.*

*I went to school in Eagle for a few years. They had it in a house. From the Indian village it's a three mile walk – three miles to school and three miles home.*

*I was married when I'm eighteen. My people decide who we marry.*

*My husband is from Dawson way, from Moosehide people.*

*He told me about the gold rush up in Dawson.*

*We lived near Forty Mile, later for nine years at wood camp at Eight Mile Creek, near Moosehide. Then later we came to Moosehide.*

*Grandpa Henry stay with me and my husband after married, down at Fortymile. Sometime he stay by himself in his own place, some- time he stay with us. He die in my hands. One time he told me at Cold Creek – “See that star? When that star blows out I will die”. It happen that way. That star blew out like a candle.*

*In the old days steamers ran every day down the river. Really expensive. They had to pay wood, captain, cook, deckhands. Steamers all used wood. The woodman got people to cut wood. Then they haul that wood up to town of Dawson and load on steamers.*

*Lots of wood camps, up rivers, up creeks.*

*Little Dave told my husband to look after woodcamp at Eight Mile Creek, below Moosehide. It was maybe 1940s. We were there nine years. Lots of good berries there – blueberries, raspberries, cranberries, highbush berries, black currants. We have fish trap just up creek from wood camp. Lots of moose, caribou near there.*

*Bill Lopaschuk lived near and visited. No other people lived right there, but I'm busy all the time. Never lonely. Another family David Taylor came one year but his family got sick. So they burned down the house and had to leave. People visit in summer, police, other people. We stayed there year around. Just the two of us, no kids with us. Kids were in Carcross school then – four kids, two boys and two girls. Nobody came home - then in summer. We never see them while they're in school. Kids stay year round, year round in Carcross.*

*Clifford, my adopted child went to school in Dawson. We applied to have him home one time. If they refuse me I would send him to Eagle. But they say nothing so we take him.*

*The first time I make moccasins I do it on my own. One man tease me, “Make me moccasins.” He tease me, thinks I can't. I do it anyway to surprise him. He sure is pleased. Even when I'm a child I got sense to look after myself.*

*Everything I try myself, watch people, copy, do pretty good. I clean skin, make babiche, make moccasins, set snare, everything.*

*When I was a kid, there's trade show in Dawson. I never went by myself. These days are not like early days. Early days kids go to church with parents. These days, church empty, sometimes three people.*

*In the early days we learn from our grandmothers. They tell story and we listen all the time. Now we try to teach kids. We talk to them about what is right. We remember what our people say. Now kids get too much movies, T.V., all kinds of things. Don't learn language, don't learn things. Try to be Whiteman. This is no good.*

## Grandma McLeod

Moosehide children of the 1930s and 1940s have fond memories of Grandma McLeod. She took children on frequent expeditions up Moosehide hill to go berry picking or downriver to Clear Creek to learn to set snares. She taught the children to trap small animals such as rabbit, squirrel, marten, rabbit and lynx. Best of all, the work was always broken up by picnics of tea, bannock and dried meat or fish.

She was a Hän speaker, the “Eagle version,” and spoke both Hän and English when telling her stories to the children of Moosehide. She told them stories of how to behave in the bush, talking to animals, stories of her own experiences, and early stories of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in and when the world began.

Grandma McLeod is also remembered as someone to go to in times of trouble. Doris Roberts (Adair) remembered how Mary McLeod sensed the threatening presence of a “bushman” during a berry picking expedition and hustled the children home. She always seemed to be there for the children when they had wounds or worries.

### Summing Up a Life

Mary McLeod was a devout Anglican and her faith helped her through many hard times. After being orphaned at an early age, she lived with a number of families in Eagle – some of whom treated her badly. One year her caretaker family did not have any winter moccasins for her. Mary made doll moccasins from scraps and sold them to the local store to earn enough to buy a pair of duffle boots. At one point she was working in a café. When someone complained of child labour to the marshal, the marshal ended up taking her into his family for a time and wouldn’t even let her do dishes.

Mary’s husband Simon was born in 1883. During their years at Forty Mile, the McLeods did a lot of fishing. Mrs. McLeod told of how her husband spent \$200 to buy a fish wheel from “Old Man Fox” in Dawson City. They also netted salmon and sold most of their catch in Eagle,

Alaska. Mary McLeod was an independent and self-sufficient woman. She loved to hunt and trap, and even enjoyed chopping firewood. When she travelled in the bush, she brought only a rifle and light camping gear, expecting to find her own meals on the land.

The McLeods had four children and one adopted child. Their names were: Mason, Martha, Alice (Titus), [not known] and Clifford. Martha died as a teenager and another child died at an early age.

Simon McLeod died in 1966 and Mrs. McLeod passed on in 1987. They are both buried in the Dawson Hillside Cemetery. Many of her grandchildren and great grandchildren still live in the Dawson area. Mary McLeod Road, which goes up the Dawson Dome, was named after this respected elder in the late 1990s.



### RELATED STORIES



- Women and Children



### WAYS TO TELL THE STORY



- Talk about Mary McLeod’s role as a teacher, the bush skills she taught Moosehide children that they were unable to learn in school.
- Talk a little about the McLeods’ life at Eightmile, the kind of work they would have been doing and the importance of wood camps in the sternwheeler era.
- Talk about the role of elders as storytellers and the types of stories they told, maybe share a few examples.
- Talk about the critical role of elders in the late twentieth century as “keepers of culture.”



## OTHER RESOURCES

### Oral Histories

#### Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in

*Life on the River Oral History Project:*

- Doris Roberts (Adair) interview transcript, recorded by Rachel Olson & Georgette McLeod, July & Sept. 1999.
- Julia Morberg, July 1999, recorded by Myste Anderson.
- Angie Joseph-Rear, 2 March 2000, recorded by Myste Anderson.

#### Yukon Archives. Julie Cruikshank Coll., 82/220; MSS 044

1974 Transcripts of interviews conducted by Julie Cruikshank with female elders including Mary McLeod. Mrs. McLeod is also mentioned in the Patricia Lindgren and Vicki Johnson interviews.

#### Yukon Archives. Skookum Jim Hall Friendship Centre Potlatch Society Coll. 81/18, COR 008

1977 Includes 15 audio tape cassettes, a booklet of the transcripts and a 2-page letter that was in the booklet. Recorded interviews of First Nation people describing the symbolic and cultural importance of the traditional potlatch ceremony. Lee Wilkie and Audrey Brown conducted the interviews in 1977. While the interviews focused on the potlatch system, people shared a variety of stories, songs, legends and personal memories. Includes taped interview and transcript with Mary McLeod. Restriction: Can only be used with permission of Skookum Jim Friendship Society.

#### Yukon College, Dawson Campus.

1994 *Moosehide (Édhä Dädhëchan K ek'èt) An Oral History.* Prepared by the Developmental Studies students of the Dawson Campus (Tr'odek Hatr'unotan Zho) of Yukon College.

### Photographs

- Group portrait, R-L: Chief Isaac, Eliza Isaac, Mary McLeod, Simon McLeod, Old Jonas' wife and child, Old Jonas, Ellen Wood, ca. 1920. *Dawson City Museum, Isaac Family Collection, PH990-77-3.*
- Funeral at Moosehide for Simon and Mary McLeod's (8<sup>th</sup> from left behind fence) last baby, n.d. YA 5779/ *Kates Coll.*
- Mary McLeod, Bishop Henry Marsh and Mrs. Marsh at a home in Dawson, n.d. YA 5783 / *Kates Coll.*

### Publications

From: *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 6: Subarctic* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1981), p. 512. Photo captioned: Mary McLeod and her granddaughter, who is wearing a dentalium and bead necklace. Photograph by Catharine McClellan, Dawson, 1966.

#### Ferris, Ron

n.d. "The Bishop's Journal: Remembering a Life of Trials," newsclipping from Dawson City Museum

#### Klee, Ruth

1975 "Grandma McLeod of Dawson City," in *Yukon Indian News*, August, 1975.

#### McClellan, Catherine et al

1987 *Part of the Land, Part of the Water.* Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre. (Includes a 1966 photo of Mrs. McLeod on p. 295; pp. 293-295 is transcript of story by MM about a bushman.)

\*Note: The *Moosehide Oral History* includes a nice photo of Simon and Mary in a large garden on p. 81. Have not been able to track down the source.





R-L: "Chief Isaac, his wife Eliza, Mary McLeod, and her husband Simon, Old Jonas's wife and child, Old Jonas and Mrs. Jonathan Wood (Ellen)." *DCM/PH990-77-3*