Francis Heron  aka Herren, Herron, Heron

In the Pacific Northwest by 1829

By Chalk Courchane

He was born in Donegal, County Donegal, Ireland in 1794. He married twice first Josephte Boucher Clarke and Isabella Chalifoux.

Francis Heron served at a number of Hudson Bay Company posts:

Francis Heron  1794-1840

"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, 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. McLoughlin, Chief Factor of the Columbia District. It was evidently denied. He continued at Colville during 1831 and 1832, and in the latter year attended the Meeting of Council at York Factory and was given charge, from Fort Edmonton to Fort Colville, of the recruits sent out for the Columbia River District, with [Francois] Annance and Francis Ermatinger as his aids. He left Fort Colville in 1833 for Fort Vancouver and later for Fort Nisqually, where he succeeded Archibald McDonald, on June 27, 1833.” Washington Historical Quarterly, Vol.11, No.1, Jan.1920, pp 29-30.

Francis Ermatinger “was under the command of Chief Trader Francis Heron at Fort Colville, who took John Warren Dease’s place in 1829. Since Heron and Dr. McLoughlin did not like each other, he and Heron were destined not to either. Although they despised each other they avoided coming to blows.” Men of Courage, Francis Ermatinger, page 64, Chalk Courchane.

In a letter Ermatinger wrote:

Flatheads 24th March 1832

“My Dear Edward,

Upon the return of the Express last fall I received your several communications, and felt pleasure from their contents. I trust your expectations may be realized and you may depend upon my readiness to continue to aid you as far as my poor means will permit. Your letter by the Columbia Ship, Capt. Kipling (you know him, I believe, and went to London together) I got also, but did not write you then, though I was urged to do so by the Doctor, with whom I passed the summer and experienced his kindness as usual, but when he ordered me off to Colvile in Sept. he merely gave me a few hours notice and I was then so much troubled in body and mind, that I had neither time nor inclination to write. I had been confined a month to my bed, from a fall from my horse, which injured my leg and it was long after before I could go without crutches. But at present, thank God, I am well, and have overcome my limping. When I left the sea, it was understood that Colvile was to be my winter quarters, and upon these arrangements operations were commenced, but Mr. Heron who came here, as the good things of the past decreed, felt alarmed at the prospect and ordered me up for the remainder of the season [to the Flatheads]. He is altogether a mean fellow, and he does not go out as expected by the express, I shall refuse to serve under him. His private conduct has been in unison with his public and he may deem himself lucky that the effects of his lust are known only in his own department.” Men of Courage, Francis Ermatinger, page 64, Chalk Courchane.

“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. It further appears that during this time Mr. Heron became a victim of strong drink, frequently keeping his own room in solitary drinking.” Washington Historical Quarterly, Vol.11, No.1, Jan.1920, pp 29-30.

Steve Anderson posted in Descendents of Fort Nisqually Employees Association Thursday, 27 June 1833. Fort Journal: Traded 19 skins from the Cowlitz Portage Indians. Mr. Chief Trader Francis Heron arrived from the Columbia River to assume the charge at this establishment. Tolmie Journal: “At noon, Chief Trader Francis Heron arrived, followed by a
large squad of Cowlitz Portage Indians - all mounted. He is to assume the charge here. He met Mr. Archibald McDonald at the Cowlitz and brought me from that Gentleman the following epistle: “Sir, This will be handed you by Mr. Chief Trader Francis Heron, who of course will relieve you of your charge at Nisqually, and as your professional attendance was the primary object of your being detained there, solely on my responsibility and contrary to your instructions from Mr. Chief Factor McLoughlin, I have to acquaint you that, if you remain beyond that time you conceive your patient fairly in the way of recovery, it will be on Mr. Chief Trader Francis Heron’s authority.” Typically: Weather – hot and sultry, warm to fair/fine, or cloudy with occasional heavy showers; men at construction & fences, harrowing and cutting/planting potatoes, sowing and/or weeding barley, turnips & Indian corn, wheat growing, women hoeing & weeding in garden, hauling firewood, cutting hay, shifting sheep parks, processing sheep (washing and shearing), boiling tobacco water, packing wool, butchering cattle & branding calves, Indians in search of roots & berries..” Steve Anderson

“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. 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.

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 Mt. 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.

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."

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 Athabaska and later as succeeding Mr. McGillwary at Fort Chipiwayan[Chipewyan]. 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.

Heron's death is reported in a letter of Archibald McDonald. 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 Heron a son, was born. After Francis Heron's
departure for England in 1835 the mother and son moved to the Willamette Valley.” Washington Historical Quarterly, Vol.11, No.1, Jan.1920, pp 29-30. Francis Heron is said to have returned to Ireland and died there.

The “half-breed girl William S. Lewis speaks of was Josephte Boucher Clarke (abt. 1817-1879) the daughter of John Clarke, a Chief Factor in the HBC and Josephte (Green Blanket) Kanhopitsa. Josephte was known as “Tsuck-a-ti-lax” in Colville Agency records. Josephte was born in Montana (1870 US Census for Oregon) and baptized October 30, 1838 at Foot of the Lakes, British Columbia, Canada.

She was baptized by F.N. Blanchet, S.J. but he made a mistake in her parenthood; as you will notice in the following passage: “This 30 October, 1838, we priest undersigned have baptized Josephte aged 21 years, daughter born of the natural marriage of Josephte (sic) Boucher, free man, and of Josephte woman of the country. Godmother Catherine Russie. Godfather Andree Chalifoux who have not known how to sign. F.N. Blanchet, priest.” Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest, Vancouver I & II, Warner & Munnick, French Prairie Press, 1972, pages 13 & 14.

"Men occasionally took wives despite the orders of their superiors, and sometimes they deserted their families under the cruelest circumstances. One case of abandonment that shocked even veteran traders occurred on the Columbia River in 1835. Chief Trader Francis Heron, an occasional visitor to Fort Vancouver, left Fort Colvile to go east on furlough, never to return. An employee described the scene as the express boat pulled away upstream” “On the beach stood his young halfbreed wife and babe in her arms both weeping ... The brute was as unconcerned at the parting ... as if he was only taking a few hours excursion.” At least one of his peers refused to speak to "old bloat” Heron forever afterward." “The Women of Fort Vancouver, John A. Hussey, page 270, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Fall 1991.

That babe was their son, George Heron, who was born at Fort Nisqually (Oregon Territory) in 1834 and baptized October 17, 1838 at Fort of the Lakes, Oregon Territory. He married Adelaide Barnabe, the daughter of Joseph Barnaby and Elizabeth (Isabelle) Boucher. He later married 3 more times:

1. Matilda

2. Genevieve "Jeaneva" Beauvais the daughter of Peter Louis Beauvais and Madaline Quilquolumeam. She died about 1876.

3. Martina (1847/49 – 1918) the daughter of Soo-Mauk-Keen.

In his lifetime he was a government interpreter; freighter; farmer (timothy hay and cattle); and packer.

George Heron died November 7, 1918 at Inchelium, Ferry County, Washington of pneumonia. He was blind at the time.

Josephte remarried to a good man, John (The McKy Rouge) McKay (1818-1888), an HBC Postmaster and had lots of children. John McKay joined HBC in June of 1829, "It would seem
that he sailed to the Pacific Coast and by 31 May 1831, he had 2 years of service" (He was postmaster at Fort of the Lakes when the priests passed through on their way to the Willamette in 1838--" CATHOLIC CHURCH RECORDS OF THE PNW, Harriet Munnick). He was called "The McKy Rouge" (The Red McKay) because of his flaming red hair and beard. He served in the Colville area 1837-1844 and retired in 1847, settling in Oregon in 1848. Josephte Boucher Clarke and John McKay are buried in the Catholic cemetery at Woodburn, Oregon.

"John was mauled by a bear in his later years. Josephine McKay took care of him until his death. Then she married Charles Jeaudoin...." - Patricia Jo Kerns She died May 14, 1879 in Woodburn, Marion County, Oregon.

“Francis Heron, evidently possessed many sterling and likeable qualities. Capt. N.J. Wyeth, in his journal at Fort Colville, March 12, 1833, mentions him as one of the chief-traders of the Hudson's Bay Company, to whom he was under lasting obligation.” William S. Lewis, "Washington Historical Quarterly"; Vol.11; #1; Jan 1920; "Francis Heron, Fur Trader: Other Herons"; pp.29-34.

“Heron’s second wife, Isabella Chalifoux was born about 1799 or 1805/15 and the daughter of Joseph Chalifoux (HBC man) and a Metis woman.” Heather Gervais (2006). She married Francis Heron on July 16th, 1835.

Clarence Kipling Collection shows:
  “Name:
  Chalifoux, Isabella
  Spouse:
  Heron, Francis
  Date of Marriage:
  1834-07-16
  Parish:
  St.John's Anglican Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba
  Priest:
  David Jones
  Witnesses:
  William Cockran, John Macallum”

They had four children: Francis, Jane Mary (she married the Hon. Donald Murray), Edward and Jemima. When Heron returned to Ireland many believe she joined him for a while then came back to Canada. She was possibly photographed from painting done in Ireland. Charles Denney's papers indicate that she died in 1886 in the Red River Settlements.

Glenbow Archives has this photograph that may be Isabbela Chalifoux Heron:
More on George Heron:

"George Herron himself said he had been born at Fort Nisqually in 1834, son of Francis Heron. "My mother's name was Clarke." Even though she preferred to be called Boucher after her step-father, Jean B. Boucher. George claimed to have been employed by the U.S. Government as interpreter for many years and spokesman for the tribes in Washington. He had also farmed in the Willamette Valley and had run a pack train between Ft. Colville and The Dalles. Dr. McLoughlin called him bluntly, in his youth, "a blackguard...who does not know his prayers." During his French Prairie years he had a daughter Felicite by Adelaide Barnabe. His sort of 1st cousin, meaning their mothers were 1/2 sisters. Later he married an un-named Indian woman, by whom he had a number of children. After his wife's death in 1876, he married "Martine, Indian." George was still living in 1915, keen memory, although blind, and able to dictate the story of his life, perhaps somewhat embellished."

Act taken at Fort of the Lakes:
"George Harren (Heron)
This 17 October, 1838, we priest undersigned have baptized George, aged 4 years and a half, natural child of Francis Harren (sic) Chief Factor, and of Josephte Boucher. Godfather Etienne Fortier who has not known how to sign. Mod. Demers, priest miss."

“Francis Heron, Fur Trader: Other Herons" by William S. Lewis  "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, being the son of Frank (Francis) and Josette (Boucher) 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 1838 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 natives 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 so 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 great value in assisting to keep the Indians from going on the warpath. 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 LaFleur, on the Columbia 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.

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In politics, Mr. Heron is a stanch 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 Canada 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. Ignatius 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 willow 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 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 and at least two above it. As many as six good trails converged here, leading to different parts of the country."
'Squalie' (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 prefectly. 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 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 mediciner' 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."

From Notebooks: 1878-1880 of Ned Chambreau: Notes for Generall O.O. Howard, compiled by Dennis Chambreau, "Trip Four Spokane-Colville, page 28:

"Written at Colville March 18 [1879] at George Herr4en. He is a half-breed who was born here. He speaks Okanagon and Pend Oreille and five other Indian tongues. He is about 42. When a person speaks good Pend Oreille he can speak all the rest. It is the most perfect Indian tongue this side of the Rocky Mountains. He is the man who interpreted the new testament and part of the old and a good many prayers to Father Jordan in 1875. They then sent it away and it came back in nice bound books. He tells me also that at Easter there is about 1200 Indians come to the mission where I was at today to receive the holy sacrament. George Herron has had trouble with the fathers because of the treatment of the Indians. He lost his space as interpreter. They have little children at the school. He says they are paid from the government to take care of the children and they strive them. They make them gather old dead stock and it is cooked for them. They go almost naked. The fathers make the Indians contribute to the very extent of their means, but they themselves live very high. The priests have 8 farms. They beg from the Indians every conceivable thing and say it is for God, but the same things are paid back to them when they work for the fathers on the farms."

From PETITION FOR THE SALE OF LAND BY ORIGINAL ALLOTTEES:

"Allottee: George Herron   No.: H-208   Agency: Colville  April 26, 1918

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs:
I hereby make application for the sale of all of my allotment, described as SE 1/4 SE 1/2 & Lot 8, Sec. 17, 37 N., R. 33 E.W.M. 79.65

My reasons for making application for the sale of the above-described land are:

I am 88 years old, I am totally blind and have been blind for past seventeen years. My wife leads me around and feeds me, and I am so crippled up with rheumatism that I can not walk except with the assistance of my wife and
by using a cane. I acted for the Government in 1855-6 in the Indian wars, made peace with the Indians, the Okanogan Indians, and I am physically helpless, and I want to have money enough to buy what I and my wife need to live on and not have to depend upon the kindness and charity of others, and have to borrow money at times to buy grub with, as I do not, and also I have to get credit with the store keepers."

Other sources: CATHOLIC CHURCH RECORDS OF THE PNW; Munnick; MANTLE OF ELIAS; L. Nichols; Archives of the Diocese of Portland; research of Carolyn Carroll; "Letters of Dr. John McLoughlin Written at Ft. Vancouver 1829-1832".