

Robert Rankin: A Genealogical Narrative

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There were several waves of families who are known to be North Bay's Pioneers. Robert Rankin was one of the later pioneers to come to North Bay. He arrived in North Bay in 1887 several years after the Railway had come through, an event which dramatically increased the importance of the town of North Bay. Downtown North Bay was starting to take shape and several prominent families had already made their mark on the town's history. Eventually, Robert Rankin would come to be a well respected and hard working individual who not only established a well known and long standing grocery store, but also influenced many aspects of the growing town. In his years in North Bay, he would serve as Reeve, Mayor, and Councillor; he would head committees, participate in social and sporting events, and become a well known well respected and loved character of North Bay.

Before North Bay and Family:

Robert Rankin was born in Scotland in 1866. His family moved to the United States of America at the age of 2, and would move back to Scotland eight years later after his mother's death. Two years later he was left the head of his family at the age of twelve after his father died. He was the oldest of five children with four younger sisters. Robert Rankin was then able to come to Canada through a minister by the name of Reverend William Quarter with a group of orphaned boys.¹ His obituary mentions he left behind a sister Mrs. Harry Gregory of Brantford. It is unclear whether his sisters came to Canada with him, or whether they came at a later date.

In Canada Robert Rankin was placed with a family on a farm near Orangeville. The head of this family was Mr. Murdoch McKenzie. Robert Rankin appeared in the 1881 census with this family, however his relationship to the head of the household was not listed. With Murdock

1 The North Bay Nugget. "Outstanding N. Bay Pioneer Laid to Rest", July 2, 1952 vol. XCIII No. 281 page 3

McKenzie's son William McKenzie, Robert came to North Bay in 1887.

As an orphaned child there is a lot of information that is unknown about Robert Rankin. For instance, his parents names are not listed on his marriage certificate or on cemetery records. A lot of sources that could potentially list this information have not yet been released, for instance his death record has not been found. This sort of problem is not easily overcome and will, for now, have to remain a missing piece of the puzzle.

tree)

Shortly after moving to North Bay. Robert Rankin married the oldest daughter of the McKenzie family, Elizabeth. They were married in Mattawa on November 30, 1888 just one year after moving to North Bay. Their Marriage record was very uninformative leaving many questions that cannot be answered. For instance, it is unclear why they were married in Mattawa and not North Bay, and why their marriage record leaves so many spaces blank. The record does not list Robert or Elizabeth's parents names, it also does not list their ages, their profession, religious denomination, or their places of birth. The witnesses named were: #1 Walter J. King and #2 Rob H. Swallowell, both residing in Mattawa; their relation to Robert and Elizabeth is also left a mystery. They were married by Reverend Bliss.

By 1891 Robert and Elizabeth had established themselves in North Bay. The census record lists them as married, Robert 25 years of age and Elizabeth 29. Their religion was not stated in their marriage record, but they are listed as 'C. Presbyterian' on the 1891 census. At this time they did not have any children. Robert's occupation is formally listed as a 'butcher'. It shows the Rankins were well established.

Altogether the Rankins would have four children; Robert, William, Jean and Kenneth.

Their first born child was Robert George Rankin. Robert George was born on August 26, 1892.² Unfortunately, Robert George Rankin did not appear on the 1901 census so he must have passed away some time before then (no official records have been found regarding his death). William Rankin was born on June 13, 1895.³ William Robert Rankin would eventually marry Tena M. Christilaw on August 20, 1919.⁴ William Robert Rankin passed away in 1978 and is buried next to Tena, (who lived from 1897-1957) in Terrace Lawn Cemetery.⁵ Third born was Jean Margaret Rankin on February 26, 1897.⁶ She died in 1987 and is buried in Terrace Lawn Cemetery.⁷ Kenneth McKenzie Rankin was their last born child on October 18, 1902⁸. He died on November 14, 1966 and is buried with Vera G. who died on January 7, 1985.⁹

In 1901 Robert Rankin appears to have been doing very well for himself. He was 33 years old, married with two children. His occupation at this time was a 'Grocery Merchant' and he earned \$1,000 that year.¹⁰ By 1911 Robert Rankin headed a family consisting of 5, and he was able to have a domestic worker, Isabella Saya living with the Rankin family. On this census Robert is a 'Merchant', and all of his children are in school for 10 months out of the year,

2 Birth Registration, no. 019538, Nipissing County, District North Bay. Accessed on September 28, 2006 through www.ancestry.ca website.

3 Birth Registration, no. 023150, Nipissing County, District North Bay. Accessed on September 28, 2006 through www.ancestry.ca website.

4 Marriage Registration, no. 008106, Nipissing County, District North Bay, accessed on October 2, 2006 through www.ancestry.ca website.

5 Gravestone accessed through: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~murrayp/nipissin/northbay/terrace/block2/rankin8.jpg>

6 Birth Registration, no. 029330, Nipissing County, District North Bay. Accessed on September 28, 2006 through www.ancestry.ca website.

7 Gravestone accessed through: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~murrayp/nipissin/northbay/terrace/block2/rankin5.jpg>

8 Birth Registration, no. 029774, Nipissing County, District North Bay. Accessed on September 28, 2007 through www.ancestry.ca website

9 Grave Stone accessed through: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~murrayp/nipissin/northbay/terrace/block2/rankin10.jpg>.

10 1901 Census- Nominal Index of the Living. Ontario, District no. 92, Subdistrict t-1, polling sub-division 3 in Town of North Bay. Page 4 lines 44-47. accessed through: <http://www.automatedgenealogy.com/census>

and they can all speak, read and write English.¹¹

Robert Rankin and North Bay

Rankin's Grocery

Upon arrival in North Bay Robert Rankin set up his grocery store in 1888. He conducted this business until his retirement in 1926 when his sons Kenneth and William took over.

According to W.P.K. Kennedy it is the third oldest mercantile business in the city of North Bay.¹² Located on Main Street, Rankin's store grew to be well known and very important to the early residents of North Bay. From 1916-1917 Rankin's store was located on 34-36 Oke St. E. with a phone in Vernon's Directory. Having a phone at this time is an indication that his store was doing at least reasonably well. Eventually Rankin's Grocery was located on 35 Main Street E. It was located beside where the Evolution Night Club is located now (see appendix #2 for images) and was an integral part of downtown. Rankin's store was mentioned briefly on several occasions in the Nugget, however, neither a history of the store, nor a formal write up about the store has yet been found received. An early newspaper in North Bay mentioned Rankin on Friday April 18, 1897: "Rankin keeps the leading flour and feed store, and sells keewatin flour."¹³ During the year that Rankin was mayor of North Bay his store was also mentioned in a similar fashion. The Cobalt Daily Nugget said that "The Whyte Packing Co. North Bay has secured a large consignment of choice potatoes, which Mr. Rankin will be obliged to sacrifice on account of lack of room. Here's a chance to secure your seed potatoes."¹⁴

11 1911 Census. Schedule 1. Ontario, district no. 99, S. District no. East, Enumeration no. 56 in North Bay Town. Page no. 23. accessed through: <http://www.automatedgenealogy.com/census>

12 W.K.P. Kennedy, 133

13 NBT April 8, 1897, page 3

14 The Cobalt Daily Nugget. Friday June 4, 1909, pg 3, column 4 'North Bay', Vol. 1 No. 111

Civic Government

Robert Rankin was first elected to council in the Ferguson Ward in 1894. He was elected into this position again in 1895 ; in 1896 he was elected as Reeve a position he filled until 1898. In 1903 R. Wallace resigned as councillor and was replaced by Robert Rankin. Rankin does not appear in council again until 1909 where he was elected mayor and filled this position until 1910.¹⁵ A photo survives of this 1909 council which features a young Robert Rankin as Mayor (appendix #3). In 1913, 1914, 1917, 1923 and 1938 Robert Rankin was on the board of health. He was a council member again in 1922.¹⁶ In 1929 he was on the town planning commission. In 1930 and 1934 he was on the Old Age Pension Board. Mr. Rankin served the town of North Bay and eventually the city of North Bay . As an early Reeve, Robert Rankin saw many changes including the introduction of sidewalks, the changing of street names and the growth of an ever changing Main Street. From a young business owner to an older pioneer Mr. Rankin not only saw the growth of a forest settlement into a booming town and later city, but he helped to ensure that this growth happened smoothly. Mr. Rankin should be, and is, commemorated for his work.

St. Andrew's Church

In his obituary Robert Rankin was said to be an active member of St. Andrew's Church.

His obituary states that :

“Hundreds of relatives and friends crowded the church which Mr. Rankin saw rise from the blueprints in his capacity of chairman of the building committee. Last year he attended the ceremony of the turning of the first and for the new church hall. And in March as Senior trustee, accepted the keys to the new structure”¹⁷

15 W.K.P Kennedy pages 26-41

16 W.K.P. Kennedy page 53

17 “Outstanding N. Bay Pioneer Robert Rankin Laid to Rest”. The Nugget, July 2, 1952 vol. XCIII No. 281 page 3

St. Andrews church has a long history in North Bay beginning in 1884 . In 1885 John Ferguson donated a building site and in 1902 Robert Rankin was on the building committee in charge of overseeing the building process. In their 100 year history, Robert Rankin's involvement is outlined:

It was on January 29., 1902, the managers were instructed to confer with an architect and see about a site for a new church building. Three months later the lot at the rear of the old church was secured for \$400. But decision to go ahead with the building was not finally made until September, 1903 when the “Dick” property adjoining to the north was secured at the price of \$2,000. A “building committee” was then appointed consisting of Messers A.G. Browning, R. Rankin, T.Wallace, F.S. Harrison, J.B. McDougall, Dr. J.B. Carruthers, D. Melville, H. Hughes, G. Reid. Wm. McKenzie, and J.G. Cormack. Mr. Cormack was the first chairman but had not the privilege of completing his work as death intervened. Dr. Carruthers succeeded him and again the angel of death cast a gloom over the congregation. Mr. Robt. Rankin then took charge and under his competent supervision the building was duly completed.¹⁸

The dedication ceremony was held in May of 1905 when the keys were handed to Robert Rankin. This was a great moment not only for Robert Rankin, but also for the community at large. This moment was also noted in St. Andrews 100 year history:

In May 1905 the dedication service was held... It stated that the total cost of the new church was \$21,648.92 and that \$10,026.77 of this amount had been paid. Mr. E.W. Ross, the trustee received the key to the building which was handed over by Mr. Rankin.¹⁹

Eventually Robert Rankin and several others would become honorary members of St. Andrews United Church. Robert Rankin's children are also mentioned throughout the history showcasing their religious dedication. Elizabeth Rankin is also described as being “Active in the affairs of

18 Lorna Ryan, Frank Stymiest et al. “St Andrews United Church: The First Hundred Years.” Page 9

19 Ibid, 9

St. Andrew's United Church” in her obituary.²⁰ It is clear that the Rankin family, headed by Robert had a profound impact on the history of St. Andrews United Church.

Social Involvement

Both Robert and Elizabeth were active in the social events and committees within North Bay community. Some of the many organizations that Robert was involved in were the Mission Order, the Sons of Scotland, the Odd Fellows, and Canadian Order of foresters. He was also involved with the Children's Aid Society and the Chamber of Commerce. Elizabeth was a life member of the Women's Missionary Society.²¹

Upon arrival in North Bay Robert Rankin did not waste any time, and within the first few years of living there had helped establish many of the organizations that would become integral parts of North Bay history for many years. The Sons of Scotland Kintail Camp No. 21 received it's charter on December 15, 1890 and Robert , along with his brother in law William McKenzie, were listed as charter members.²² The North Bay Board of Trade was formed on October 19, 1894 and Robert Rankin was a charter member.²³ . The Children's Aid society was reorganized on November 29, 1907; Robert Rankin was the chair of the management board in 1920.²⁴ He was also involved in the Mission Order. During Old Home week in 1925 Robert Rankin was on the Old Timers Committee.²⁵ These organizations all have long histories and became embedded in North Bay society, North Bay also has a long history in sports. Mr. Rankin was no stranger to these circles and took an active role throughout his years in several

20 Funeral announcements. “Mrs. Robert Rankin”, July 2, 1947 pg 13

21 The North Bay Nugget. Funeral Announcements. Friday July 2, 1947 page 13.

22 W.K.P. Kennedy, pg 220

23 W.K.P. Kennedy, pg 94

24 W.K.P. Kennedy, pg 96

25 W.K.P. Kennedy, pg 14

sporting endeavors. In 1909 the town of North Bay set up a baseball league and Robert Rankin was elected as an officer on a committee that was responsible for arranging the schedule and outlining the rules and regulations. This committee was set up on Monday June 7, 1909.²⁶ As the baseball season progressed, the coverage by the Cobalt Daily Nugget gives great insight to Robert Rankin's personality. On Friday June 18, 1909 the Nugget informed readers about the opening game saying that:

The town baseball league opened auspiciously Wednesday evening with the game between the Methodist Church and the high school. A large crowd of spectators saw a first class brand of amateur ball. The band turned out and furnished music for the opening game while Mayor Rankin entered the box and put in shoots and out-shoots, curves and dizzy drops over the plate to aid.²⁷

This small mention shows more than just a name on a piece of paper, it brings the character of Robert Rankin alive. We can see that he was not only involved in the towns affairs, but that he enjoyed himself and wanted others to enjoy themselves as well. The town baseball league was evidently a very important feature at the time as the Cobalt Daily Nugget keeps up with the scores and the gossip of the games for the next couple of weeks.

The race track was another past time of Mr. Rankin. Robert was one of the enthusiasts in early North Bay who used the race track that was located where Scollard Hall now stands. In 1894 a contest was arranged at Amelia Park where Rankin's Black Mare was the winner.²⁸ On July 16, 1909 Robert Rankin along with others were elected as officers in charge of a similar event.²⁹

26 The Cobalt Daily Nugget, 'North Bay', Monday June 7, 1909 pg 6, column 2, Vol. 1 No. 113

27 The Cobalt Daily Nugget, 'North Bay', Friday June 18, 1909 pg 2, column 2, Vol. 1 No. 123

28 W.K.P. Kennedy, pg 254-5

29 The Cobalt Daily Nugget, "North Bay", Friday July 16, 1909. Pg 7 Column 2, Vol. 1 No. 147

Property

On October 24, 1910 Robert Rankin purchased land from Michael L. Cahill for the amount of 3,250.00. This property was Lot Number 210, 27 Worthington St. E.³⁰ (appendix #4). According to Mr. Rankin's will he eventually owned a summer house on Gorman Street.

Rankin's Grocery appears in Vernon's directory in 1916 with the address of 34-36 Oak St. E. In 1917 the address is 35 Main St. E. Both the Rankin residence and Rankin's store had phones, which was quite significant. Their home phone was phone 88 and their work phone was phone 11.³¹ (*In 1902 when the Bell Telephone Company made their second attempt at establishing themselves there were 30 subscribers to a 50- line switchboard. Robert Rankin was one of those early subscribers.*³²)

Deaths and Legacy

Robert Rankin left behind a legacy that is quite impressive. At a very young age he came to North Bay and quickly made his mark. In his obituary (for full details see appendix #5) he is described as “A man who helped guide North Bay's progress from a wilderness village to a city of almost 20,000 population.”³³ He died in his summer home on Gorman Street on June 29, 1952. Complaining in previous weeks of feeling “tired” he laid down for a nap and never woke up. He was also described as being “Remarkably active and alert for his years, he had attended hockey games at the arena last winter and could recite with ease incidents that occurred 70 years

30 Land Registry record. North Bay. Plan 10. Lot 210. instrument number G 1243618.

31 Vernon's Directory 1916-1923.

32 W.K.P. Kennedy, pg 181

33 The North Bay Nugget, “Outstanding N. Bay Pioneer Robert Rankin Laid to Rest” pg 3, Wednesday July 2, 1952. Vol XCIII No. 281.

ago.”³⁴ He is buried in Terrace Lawn Cemetery (appendix #6) beside his wife Elizabeth Rankin. In his will he left his property to his sons William and Kenneth. He also left \$100 to each of his five grandchildren. Robert Rankin left everything else to his daughter Jean Margaret Rankin.

Elizabeth McKenzie was born in Vaughn Township on August 15, 1861.³⁵ She Married Robert Rankin in 1888 and spent the rest of her life in North Bay. Elizabeth Rankin died on May 31, 1947 of congestive heart failure at the age of 85. and was buried on June 2, 1947 in Union Cemetery but was moved to Terrace Lawn Cemetery to be buried with her husband. (appendix #7) In her will she left everything to her daughter Jean Margaret Rankin. Most of Elizabeth and Robert's children were buried in the same plot. (see appendix #8 for images)

Robert Rankin was not the first pioneer to establish himself in North Bay, and he was not the last; his legacy however, is as unique as his personality. An orphaned boy from Scotland he made his way in life and his hard work proved him to be an individual worthy of the title reeve, Mayor, and councillor, Father, husband and 'Outstanding Pioneer'. He left behind a city much larger than the small town he saw in 1887, and legacy that would not be forgotten.

34 ibid

35 1901 Census- Nominal Index of the Living. Ontario, District no. 92, Subdistrict t-1, poling sub-division 3 in Town of North Bay. Page 4 lines 44-47. accessed through: <http://www.automatedgenealogy.com/census>