

WHERE DID THE SHERANS GO ?

Submitted by Alex Johnston - A.G.S. #1719

The first two babies of whom we have certain knowledge to be born in what is now the City of Lethbridge, Alberta were Charles Sheran, who was born on February 4, 1880 and William Sheran, who was born in November of 1882. Both were born at the Coal Banks, a location now included in West Lethbridge.

The father of these two boys was Nicholas Sheran, an Irish-American adventurer, who began to quarry coal for sale to the North-West Mounted Police in October of 1874. The mother of the two boys was Sheran's common-law wife, Awatoyskew or White-tailed Deer Woman (also known as Mary Brown), a Peigan woman who had been raised by the Bloods.

Nicholas Sheran drowned on May 26, 1882 at Kipp's Crossing on the Old Man River. To give the children a chance at an education, Mary Brown turned them over to Nicholas' sister, Marcella McFarland, who then sent them to the Catholic Mission School in St. Albert, Alberta where they remained until about 1898 or 1899.

The boys were baptized on May 18, 1884 at the Coal Banks by Father Leonard Van Tighem OMI. Charles Sheran was later confirmed by Bishop Vital Grandin of the St. Albert Parish on January 1, 1891. William Sheran, however, did not appear on parish confirmation lists, at least through 1898.

The two boys were involved in a celebrated court case in 1897-98, designed to determine who should receive the Nicholas Sheran estate - his two natural sons or his sister, Ellen, who was then residing in New York City. The boys were judged to be illegitimate, hence, the estate was awarded to Ellen Sheran.

In 1900, Charles and William Sheran both gave their address as Macleod, Alberta. Both applied for land script under the North-West Halfbreed Claims Commission; Charles on July 31, 1900 (Claim #1505) and William on October 12, 1900 (Claim #2695). Neither seems to have settled on land they could have obtained for their land script. And there all trace of the Sheran boys vanishes. A contemporary news report states that most of the halfbreeds claiming script at Macleod were from Montana.

Interestingly enough, two half-brothers still live on the Blood Indian Reserve at Standoff. They are William White Feathers and Mark Old Shoes, both respected medicine men and tribal elders. Neither has any knowledge of the fate of their Metis half-brothers, although William White Feathers suggested they likely went to Washington and Mark Old Shoes thought they may have gone to Browning, Montana. Exhaustive enquiries in both areas have failed to turn up families with the same name.

Any information would be appreciated by Alex Johnston, Box 974, Lethbridge, AB T1J 4A2. Phone 403-320-3957 (bus.) or 403-327-3191 (home).

