



**50 MAC STREET**

**SEVEN OAKS MUSEUM  
(JOHN & MARY INKSTER HOUSE)**

City of Winnipeg  
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee  
Researcher: M. Peterson  
May 2020

This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the *Historical Resources By-law*, 55/2014 (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

- (a) The structure is the oldest residential structures in the City of Winnipeg still standing on its original foundation, built between 1851 and 1853, and a rare example of the residence of an influential Métis family of that era;
- (b) The building stands as a reminder of the very early development of the area as European and agrarian society replaced the earlier First Nations' and later fur trade culture;
- (c) It was designed and built by the original owner, John Inkster, a Scottish-born mason;
- (d) It is an early and large example of the lap joint or even-tier blockhouse construction method and the site includes a rare Red River Frame log building;
- (e) It is a conspicuous building in its neighbourhood and on the large piece of park land; and
- (f) The building's main façades have suffered little alteration.

## **50 MAC STREET – SEVEN OAKS MUSEUM (JOHN & MARY INKSTER HOUSE)**

The Selkirk Settlers arrived in what became Winnipeg in 1812 and faced the coming winter with a lack of food, little knowledge on how to survive in their new home and strong opposition from fur traders not connected to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). It was a harsh beginning to Western Canada's first European agrarian settlement which took a heavy toll on the settler families for the first years. The family names of many of these settlers have become familiar to all Winnipeggers - Gunn, Bannerman, MacBeth, Polson, Matheson, McKay, McLeod, Sutherland, Ross, Flett and Inkster - and have been used to name streets throughout East and West Kildonan.

The community's benefactor, Lord Selkirk, travelled to the settlement in the summer of 1817 to help put it on firmer ground by officially granting the settlers river lots along the Red River starting from just north of what is today Point Douglas and running north for several miles (Plate 1). Lord Selkirk also promised the settlers, who were mostly Presbyterian and Scottish, schools and a church.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the Inkster family (Plate 2) parallels the transition of Red River settlement into the City of Winnipeg. John Inkster was a native of Scotland's northern Orkney Islands, coming to Rupert's Land as a servant to the HBC in 1821,<sup>2</sup> in 1824 he had quit the Company and was farming with his uncle, James Inkster and by 1827, he was married, cultivating 3.2 hectares of land and owned a house and other property<sup>3</sup> in the Parish of Kildonan as an independent settler. In the early 1830s,<sup>4</sup> John Inkster built his growing family a small, two-room log home on a large piece of property that included Seven Oaks Creek (later Inkster Creek – Plate 3), named for a nearby stand of oak trees. This was also the site of one of Western Canada's seminal events, the June 1816 Battle of Seven

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<sup>1</sup> "Red River Colony," in The Canadian Encyclopedia, online version, Historica Canada, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/red-river-colony/>, no date.

<sup>2</sup> Eleanor MacEwan, "Seven Oaks House Home of John Inkster," paper prepared for the Historic Resources Branch, Province of Manitoba, July 1979, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Information provided by Eric Napier Strong, Curator/Manager, Seven Oaks House Museum/Ross House Museum, May 21, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., April 6, 2021.

Oaks where HBC Governor Robert Semple and 20 of his 28 men were killed in an armed confrontation with Métis leader Cuthbert Grant and his party of approximately 60 men.<sup>5</sup>

In 1835, John Inkster received his own land grant, including part of his uncle's holding and an adjacent lot.<sup>6</sup> In the early 1850s, Inkster moved to build a much larger home to replace the two-room structure he had built in the 1830s (although the first house was reused). After delays due to a major flood, the family moved into their new home in 1853 (Plate 4).<sup>7</sup>

## STYLE

The design of the main house features elements of the Georgian Style that evolved through the simplification of classical, Baroque and Italian Renaissance architecture and was named after the first three King Georges, whose reigns lasted from 1714 to 1820.<sup>8</sup> It produced architecturally simple structures with minimal ornamentation and became the preferred style for the Hudson's Bay Company and its retired employees throughout what would become Western Canada. Symmetrical layout and fenestration, hipped roof, boxy appearance and a formal entranceway are all elements of the style. Another old and excellent example of the style is the Grey Nuns Convent (now St. Boniface Museum), 494 Avenue Taché, built 1845-1851 (Plate 5).

## CONSTRUCTION

Inkster's original 1830s two-room log home was ultimately cut in half, the southern portion became the Post Office/Store and the northern portion incorporated into the larger home as the kitchen. It was built using a construction type common to Manitoba and given a variety of names: Manitoba

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<sup>5</sup> L. Barkwell, "Battle of Seven Oaks," in The Canadian Encyclopedia, online version, Historica Canada, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/seven-oaks-incident>, 2018. One member of the Métis party was killed in the battle.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Napier Strong, op. city, May 21, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> The building, for many years, was addressed as 115 Rupertsland Boulevard but now uses 50 Mac Street as its address.

<sup>8</sup> H. Trachtenberg, "Seven Oaks House," report for Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Historic Resources Branch, 2012, p. 12.

frame, Red River frame, *piece-sur-piece*, *poteaux sur sole*, *poteaux et piece coulissante* and the Hudson's Bay style (Plates 6-8).<sup>9</sup> As some of these names suggest, the building type grew from strong French influences, but actually originated in Denmark and Scandinavia, then found favour in France.<sup>10</sup> The style was introduced to North America by the settlers of New France and brought west with the fur trade.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, it was adopted by the employees of the HBC. It was used to build Fort Douglas, the Selkirk settlers' first fort, and remained popular for homes, churches, stores and outbuildings throughout the area until the 1870s. An increased availability of manufactured materials late in the century made elaborate homes possible and common homes easier to build, log buildings lost their popularity.<sup>12</sup>

The Red River frame building started with a frame of hand-squared logs, often oak, resting on the ground or a foundation. This foundation could be built of any readily available material, which on the prairies often meant a mixture of fieldstones and mortar. Sill logs were placed atop the foundation and vertical members were tenoned at the corners and along the sill. These vertical logs were grooved in order to accept the tapered ends of horizontal logs placed between the uprights.<sup>13</sup> Doors were often set between two minor uprights, windows similarly established or were simply cut out of the wall, with the rough-hewn window frames nailed to the free ends of the logs.

The early 1830s Inkster log house was one-storey in height, the attic level of the Post Office/Store was not original, added at a later date.<sup>14</sup>

For the large house, Inkster floated oak logs down the Assiniboine River from Baie St. Paul to the west in 1851 and began construction. The logs were whipsawn, hewn 17.8 centimetres square and set on top of each other flush at the corners (Plate 9). The corner butt joints were secured with 3.2-

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<sup>9</sup> Jill Wade, "Log Construction at Red River" in Canadian Antiques Collector, November/December 1971, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> The Year Past, 1982 (Winnipeg: City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, 1982), p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> B. Hunter-Eastwood, "Report on the William Brown House," prepared for the Historical Museum of St. James-Assiniboia, Winnipeg, 1988, Vol. II, p. 12; and Jill Wade, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Napier Strong, op. cit., May 21, 2020. The portion of the Post Office/Store building used as the kitchen was converted into a garage in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, restored in the 1960s.

centimetre wooden pegs or “tree nails”.<sup>15</sup> The construction method has been given several names, including lap joint and even-tier blockhouse.<sup>16</sup>

The manufactured articles such as glass and paint and hardware such as locks, hinges and hand-forged nails were imported from England.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately for the family, 1852 saw one of the worst floods in the area’s record history, river water covering the Inkster property 1.2 metres high. Mr. and Mrs. Inkster lived in a tent on the second floor of the unfinished house, the children and livestock were evacuated to Lilyfield, near today’s Stonewall.<sup>18</sup>

Completed in 1853, the entire structure was covered in milled horizontal exterior siding. The foundation of the house is unique – Inkster, a stonemason, laid a stone foundation and a stone-lined cellar held together by the cut and weight of the stones, no mortar was used (Plate 10).<sup>19</sup>

## DESIGN

Resting on its stone foundation, the front of the building faces east towards the Red River and is symmetrically designed, with a central entrance flanked by multi-paned sidelights and top light and large multi-paned window units in rectilinear openings on both floors (Plate 11). The ground floor is protected from the weather by a full-width verandah that also covers the south and west façades. The milled siding covers only the ground floor of this façade and the all of the second storey. The entire building is covered in a hipped roof (with gable dormers on the north and south slopes), originally covered in hand-made cedar shingles.

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<sup>15</sup> Seven Oaks House (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Department of Cultural Affairs and Historical Resources, Historic Resources Branch, 1983), p. 3. Below as Seven Oaks House.

<sup>16</sup> J. Wade, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> F. Hall, “Seven Oaks House Opened as Museum,” Manitoba Pageant, Vol. 4, No. 2, January 1959.

<sup>18</sup> Seven Oaks House, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> H. Trachtenberg, op. cit., p. 14.

The west façade is similar to the main elevation, with only three rectilinear window openings and no entrance (Plate 12).

The north façade is windowless and partially hidden by the kitchen the visible second floor is covered with the wood siding (Plate 13). The south façade, also windowless, includes the porch and wood siding on the second floor (Plate 14).

Nothing interrupts the log walls of the Post Office/Store building beyond an upper level window on its southern façade and two windows in rectilinear openings and a centrally-placed entrance on the front (east) façade (Plates 15 and 16).

The kitchen features two rectilinear window openings on the east façade, one each on the north and west façades and a door on the west façade (Plates 17 and 18).

The building's use as a museum has allowed its exterior to be maintained in a high level of originality, although it appears from photographic evidence that the full-width verandah was removed at one point (Plate 19). It was completely rebuilt in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup>

## **INTERIOR**

Again, because of its use as a museum, much of the interior space has been restored. The nine-room structure includes entrance hall, parlour and dining rooms on the main floor, with bedrooms and bathing areas on the second floor. Examples exist on the ground floor of the original buffalo hair and fur insulation held to the walls by nearly five centimetres of plaster. Wide wood planking covers the floors, basswood panelling covers the ceilings and a simple, U-shaped stairs gives access to the second floor.

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<sup>20</sup> Eric Napier Strong, op. cit., May 21, 2020.

Many interior elements, including sofas, the grandfather clock, grand piano, china cabinet (with china and silverware), and rugs, beds and other furniture and personal belongings are original to the house and the Inkster family (Plates 20-24), some date to the 1850s.<sup>21</sup>

## **INTEGRITY**

The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition for its age and has not suffered extensive exterior alterations.

The kitchen and Post Office/Store portions were carefully restored in the early 2000s. The buildings were placed on new stone foundations and all deteriorated logs were replaced. All work was completed in “period-correct style”.<sup>22</sup>

## **STREETSCAPE**

The Inkster Home is located in a large, park-like setting, with several out buildings and picnic areas (Plates 25 and 26).

## **ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS**

The owner, John Inkster, was responsible for the masonry work on the large house; it is also likely that he worked on the superstructure.

## **PERSON/INSTITUTION**

John Inkster (Plate 27) was born in Orphir (Orkney), Scotland in 1799 (earning him the nickname “Orkney Johnny” and to distinguish him from his cousin, John “Indian Johnny” Inkster).<sup>23</sup> Inkster

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<sup>21</sup> F. Hall, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Eric Napier Strong information, op. cit., May 21, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



came to Canada in the employ of the HBC in 1821, a stonemason by trade.<sup>24</sup> But shortly after arriving, he bought himself out of service and began farming in the Selkirk Settlers' original holdings. He would later become a free trader and merchant, selling imported British and American merchandise and he operated the area's Post Office. Inkster operated a grist mill on his farm and was a Justice of the Peace, Magistrate and member of the Council of Assiniboia (1857-1868). He was an influential Métis leader who, on January 20, 1826, John married a member of another influential Métis family. Mary Sinclair (Plate 28) was the 22-year-old daughter of Nahowway (1769-1863) and William Sinclair (1766-1818) who had been born and raised in Oxford House.

John, who died in 1874 and Mary, who died in 1892, had eleven children; Mary "Marak" (1832-1912) was never married and lived in the house until her death in 1912.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the most well-known of the children was Colin Inkster (1843-1934). Colin (Plate 29) was a member of Manitoba's first Legislative Council in 1871 and its Speaker in 1876. He was a founder of the Winnipeg Board of Trade (1873) and the Manitoba Historical Society (1879). He was appointed High Sheriff of Manitoba, holding the position from 1876-1927. He and his wife, Ann, nee Tait (1852-1925), had five children and raised them in their log home at 1637 Main Street, "Bleak House" built in 1874 on his father's property (Plate 30).<sup>26</sup>

Mary "Marak" Inkster gifted her property and house to the City of Winnipeg in 1912, although it was technically within the Rural Municipality of Kildonan (marking the border between the two entities). Much of the property was transferred to the R.M. over the years and sold to developers. The Inkster House was restored by a Mr. Prinz (also as Prince) who was an area antique collector and was crucial in saving the building and having it converted into a museum, which opened on July

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<sup>24</sup> "Inkster, John (1799-1874)," Manitoba Historical Society website, [www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/inkster\\_j.shtml](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/inkster_j.shtml), 2019; I.M. Spry, "Inkster, John," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, [www.biographi.ca/en/bio/inkster\\_john\\_10E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/inkster_john_10E.html), 2020; and "Inkster, John and Mary," Red River Ancestry website, [www.redriverancestry.ca/INKSTER-JOHN-1799.php](http://www.redriverancestry.ca/INKSTER-JOHN-1799.php), no date.

<sup>25</sup> F. Hall, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Napier Strong information, op. cit., May 21, 2020. In 1973, Colin Inkster's daughter Sybil Inkster donated the house to the City of Winnipeg, which now operates it as a seniors' centre.

2, 1958. In 1972, when Unicity came into effect, the museum and remaining land once again became the City of Winnipeg's property.<sup>27</sup>

## **EVENT**

There is no known significant historical event connected with this building.

## **CONTEXT**

Seven Oaks House is the oldest home remaining in Winnipeg still standing on its original foundation and one of the earliest remaining river lot dwellings and one of the oldest surviving residences in Manitoba. The Post Office/Store building is the oldest building in Winnipeg and one of the oldest in Manitoba.<sup>28</sup>

It is an excellent example of the type of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century residential structure built by a successful local Métis family. Its architecture/design is specifically based on HBC warehouse design and was meant to reflect prosperity and power. The move from the small home into the grander main structure is also a reflection of the Inkster family's rise in status over the years.

The building's protection and maintenance as a museum heightens its importance.

## **LANDMARK**

Seven Oaks House was added to the City of Winnipeg's Historical Buildings and Resources List in March 1997. In June 2017, it was designated a Manitoba Provincial Heritage Site (No. 126) and there are two provincial plaques on the site.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



## APPENDIX I

### *CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report*

Building Address: 50 Mac Street

Building Name: John & Mary Inkster House

Original Use: residence

Current Use: museum

Roll No. (Old): 11000213000 (2130)

R.S.N.: 246683

Municipality: 11

Ward: --

Property or Occupancy Code: 86

Legal Description: 6 Kildonan, Plan 2311, Block C and part Plan 5758

Location: west side between Tait Avenue and Colleen Road

Date of Construction: 1830s and 1851-1853

Storeys: 2 + 1 and partial B

Construction Type: Log, wood siding, surface stone foundation

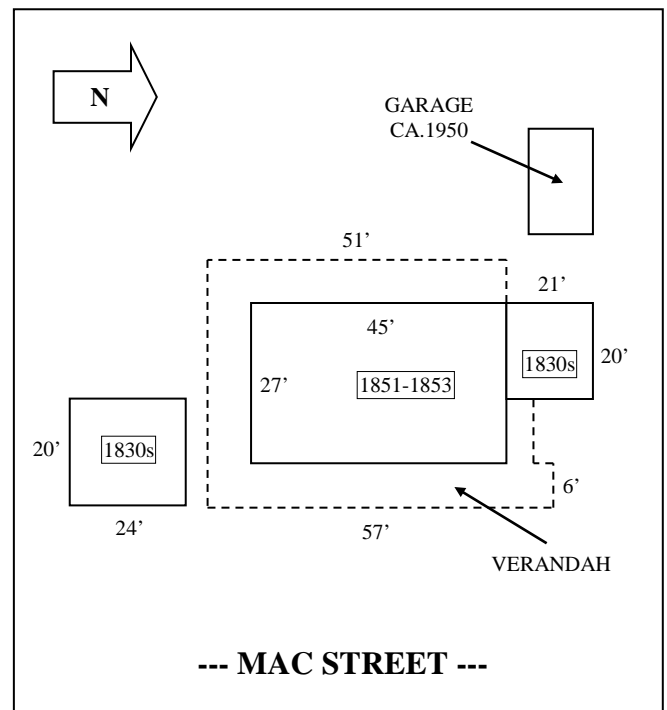
#### **Heritage Status: LIST OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES**

Building Permits (Plans available: [CS] City Storage; [M] Microfilm):

#### **Information:**

- originally 115 Rupertsland Boulevard

- ceilings in house- 1<sup>st</sup>- 9'; 2<sup>nd</sup>- 7'6"



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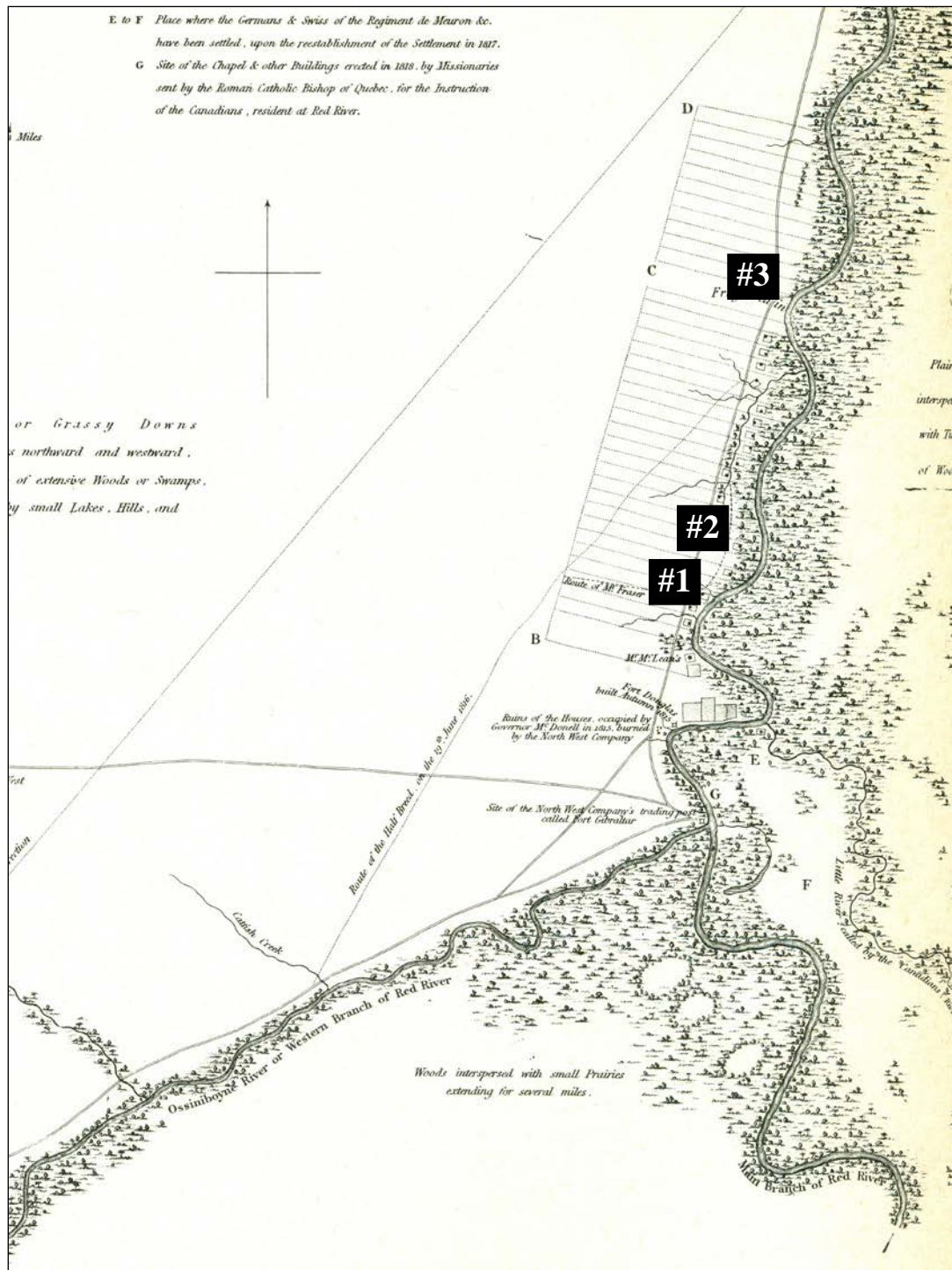


Plate 1 – Aaron Arrowsmith's 1816 map of the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, and the original layout of the river lots granted to the Selkirk Settlers by Lord Selkirk in 1817. Approximate locations of :#1- St. John's Anglican Church; #2- John Inkster House; and #3- Kildonan Presbyterian Church.

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Plate 2 – Members of the John Inkster family, posing on the porch of their house in Kildonan, 1897. (Archives of Manitoba, “Winnipeg- Homes- Inkster, John- 2,” N10590.)

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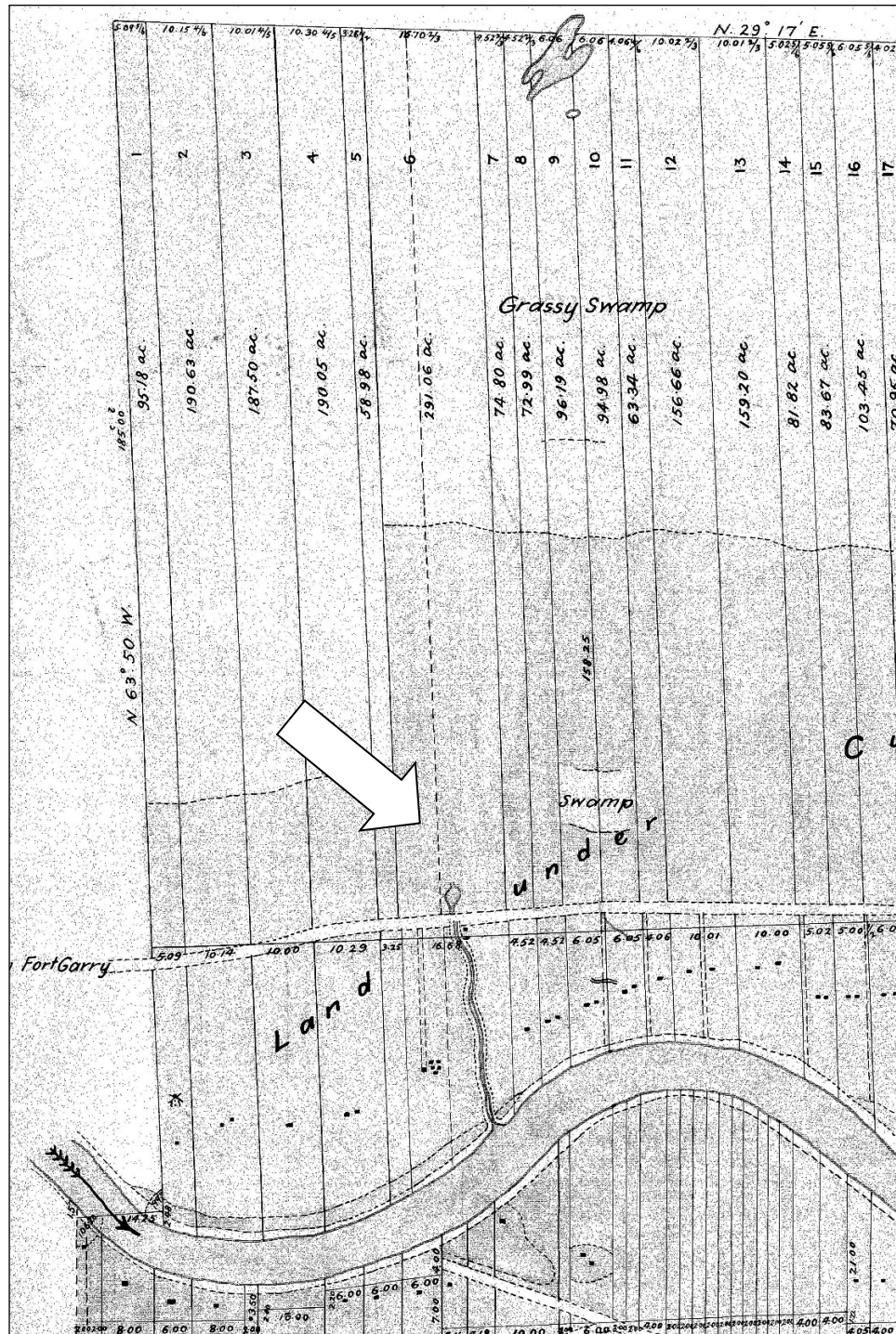


Plate 3 – Portion of the Duncan Sinclair surveyed map, “Plan of River Lots in the Parishes of Kildonan and St. Pauls, Province of Manitoba,” 1873. The Inkster property (Lot 6), at arrow, shows Seven Oaks Creek running through it. The map describes the Inkster property as 291 acres (118 hectares), one of the largest of the area.



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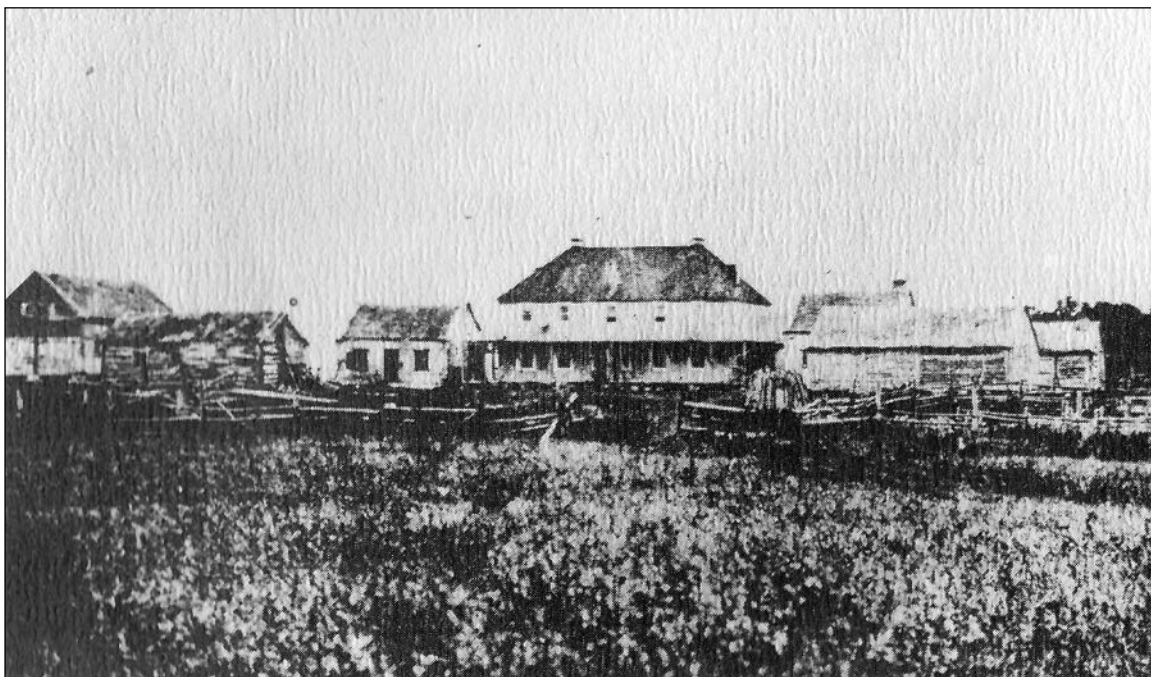


Plate 4 – John and Mary Inkster House and outbuildings, Lot 6, Parish of Kildonan, ca.1858.  
The original house is immediately left of the main house, as it is today. (Archives of  
Manitoba.)

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Plate 5 – Grey Nuns' Convent (St. Boniface Museum), front (west) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



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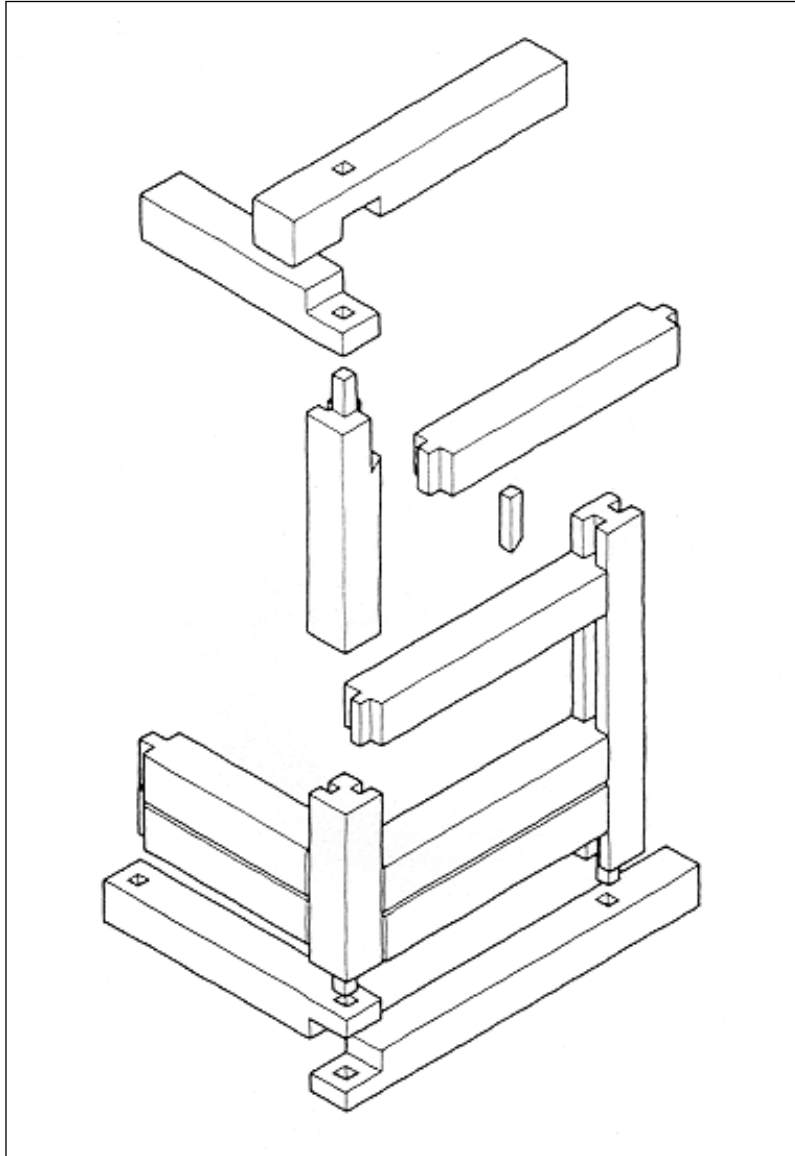


Plate 6 – Red River frame construction. (Reproduced from Historic Resources Branch, Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation, Archway Warehouse, Jail and Powder Magazine, Norway House, p. 7.)

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Plate 7 – First John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, northeast corner, Red River frame construction, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)

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Plate 8 –John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, north end kitchen, Red River frame construction, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



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Plate 9 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, southwest corner, showing dovetail joints, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)

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Plate 10 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, cellar laid by John Inkster, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



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Plate 11 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street d, front (east) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



Plate 12 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, rear (west) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



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Plate 13 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, front (east) and north façades, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



Plate 14 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, rear (west) and south façades, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



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Plate 15 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, Post Office/Store, front (east) and south façades, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



Plate 16 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, Post Office/Store, rear (west) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



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Plate 17 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, kitchen, front (east) and north façades, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



Plate 18 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, kitchen, rear (west) and north façades, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)

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Plate 19 – Undated photograph of the front (east) façade of the John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, with the reduced porch. (Archives of Manitoba, “Winnipeg- Homes- Inkster, John 26,” N10604.)

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Plate 20 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, entrance hall, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



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Plate 21 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, original Inkster family dining table, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



Plate 22 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, stairs from the second floor, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)

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Plate 23 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, kitchen, 2020.  
(M. Peterson, 2020.)

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Plate 24 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, 50 Mac Street, Post Office/Store building, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



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Plate 25 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House looking west from Mac Street, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)



Plate 26 – Seven Oaks Museum, John and Mary Inkster House, looking east from Jones Street, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)

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Plate 27 –John Inkster, 1799-1874, no date. ([Archives of Manitoba, “Inkster, John- 1,” Personalities, N12663.](#))



Plate 28 – Mary (nee Sinclair) Inkster, 1805-1892, no date. ([Reproduced from Red River Ancestry website, www.redriverancestry.ca/INKSTER-JOHN-1799.php.](#))



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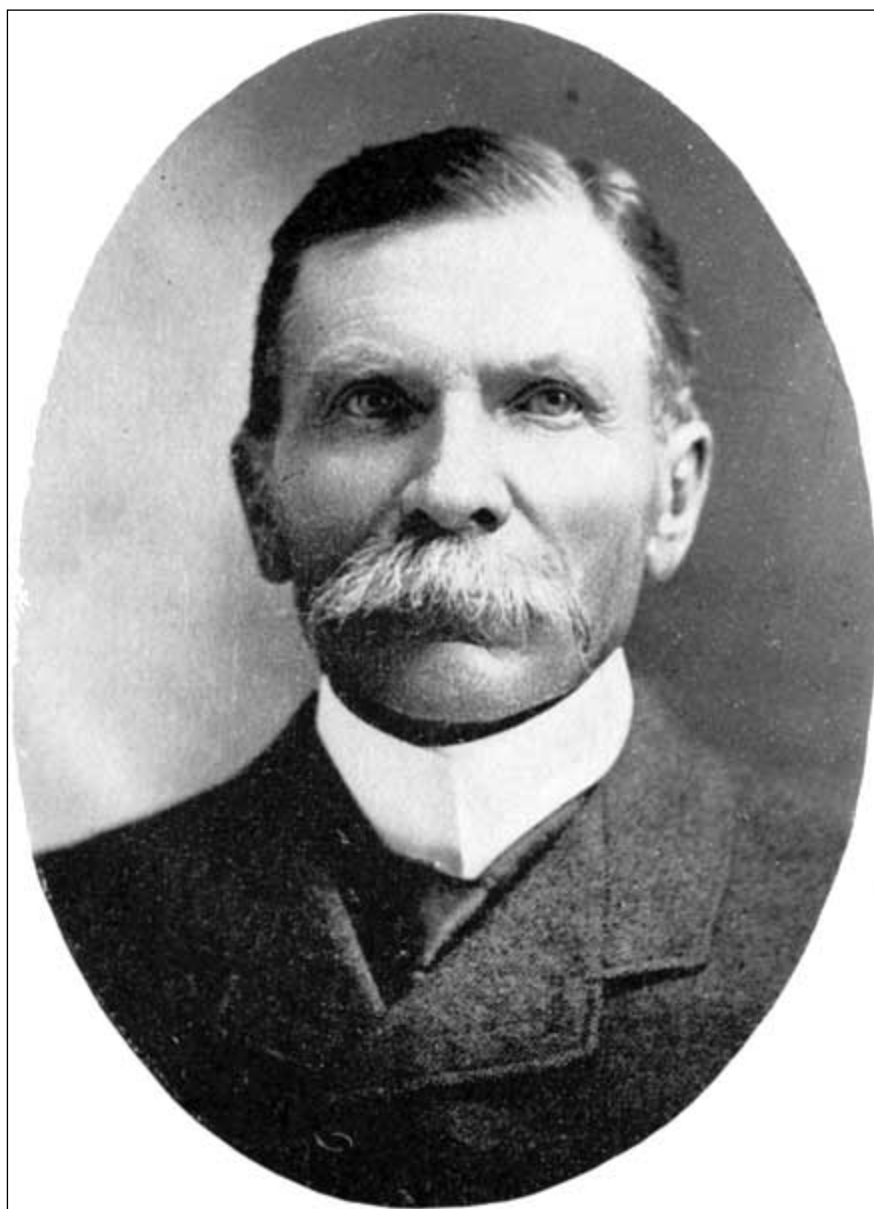


Plate 29 – Colin Inkster (1843-1934), ca. 1902. (Reproduced from Representative Men of Manitoba, 1902 [Winnipeg, MB: Tribune Publishing Company, 1902].)

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Plate 30 – Colin Inkster on the steps of Bleak House, 1637 Main Street, ca.1930. ([Archives of Manitoba](#).)