Mission Life in Cree-Ojibwe Country
The Norway House and Lake Winnipeg region as of the end of 1875, showing the area covered by Treaty 5, signed in late September, and various settlements to which the Youngs refer in their writings. Map by Weldon Hiebert.

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Introduction

In May of 1868, Elizabeth Bingham Young and her new husband, Egerton Ryerson Young, began a long journey from Hamilton, Ontario, to the Methodist mission of Rossville, located near Norway House in the Hudson’s Bay Company territories known until 1870 as Rupert’s Land. Egerton Young had been ordained in Hamilton as a Wesleyan minister in June 1867 and had settled there as pastor of its First Methodist Church, an impressive appointment for the newly minted clergyman. In January 1868, however, much to his surprise, he received a letter from his superiors, Enoch Wood and Lachlan Taylor at the Methodist Mission Rooms, Toronto, telling him that the church missionary committee had “unanimously decided to ask you to go as a missionary to the Indian tribes at Norway House, and in the North-West Territories north of Lake Winnipeg.”

Egerton and Elizabeth had been married less than a month. His pastorate was meeting with great success, and his parishioners very much wanted him and his new wife to stay. The request was disconcerting but strongly worded, and the decision was a difficult one. Twenty-two years later, in his first book (1890), Egerton recalled how Elizabeth and he prayed together for wisdom and guidance in the matter and reached a resolution:

As we arose from our knees, I quietly said to Mrs. Young, “Have you any impression on your mind as to our duty in this matter?”

Her eyes were suffused in tears, but the voice, though low, was firm, as she replied, “The call has come very unexpectedly, but I think it is from God, and we will go.”

1 Egerton R. Young, *By Canoe and Dog-Train Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1890), 27.

2 Ibid., 28. In the language of the time, Young was received “into full connection” in the
The young couple surely assessed the possible costs to Egerton’s career if he declined his superiors' request. But, in her husband's memory, Elizabeth took hold of the issue, relying on her genuine sense of spiritual guidance while providing him with strong support. During the next years, their life and work at the Norway House Methodist mission of Rossville, and then at Berens River, was a collaborative enterprise in which Elizabeth’s ability to take initiatives, to build relationships, and to deal with problems often unexpected and always challenging was critical. The experience changed the family’s lives for good, exerting strong influences on them long after their return to Ontario in 1876. Egerton’s work became well known over the next three decades through his lectures, books, and other writings. The mission memoirs of Elizabeth, however, and of their son, E. Ryerson Young (“Eddie”), add dimensions otherwise lacking. Long hidden away, they provide remarkable insights into the family’s life during and after their mission years, in voices rather different from that of the husband and father. They also shed light on the close relationships that mother and son formed with certain Cree and Ojibwe individuals whom they came to know well and who were instrumental in drawing Eddie deeply into their own social and linguistic universe for as long as the experience lasted.3

Methodist Missions in Upper Canada and Rupert’s Land

Canadian Methodist missionary work began in Upper Canada (later Ontario) in the 1820s and received a strong impulse from the conversion of its first notable Aboriginal adherent and later missionary, Peter Jones. Within a decade, Methodism was spreading among the Ojibwe people of the region “with astonishing rapidity,” encouraged by circuit preachers both white and Native, and its adherents began to look toward new fields to the northwest.4


4 John Webster Grant, Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 75–78. On

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By 1840, the Methodists, through their parent Wesleyan Missionary Society in England, had received an invitation from the Hudson's Bay Company to establish a series of missions in Rupert’s Land—carefully placed at posts where they would not confront Anglican or Roman Catholic clergy, who were being permitted to work in other locales. The English-born Reverend James Evans, who already had substantial experience with Ojibwe missions in Upper Canada, was to be stationed at Norway House. Under his leadership were Robert Rundle (sent to Fort Edmonton), George Barnley (sent to Moose Factory), and William Mason, all English born, and Ojibwe preachers Peter Jacobs and Henry Bird Steinhauer, born in Upper Canada. Evans soon had troubles with the Hudson's Bay Company, exacerbated by accusations about his personal conduct, and left for England in 1846. By 1850, the others had withdrawn for various reasons, except for Steinhauer, who established a mission at Oxford House (Manitoba) in 1851, and Mason, who remained at Rossville until 1854, when he joined the Church of England.

In 1854, the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada was formed from various existing Canadian and British groups. The Canadian Methodists took over the charge of the Indian missions in the northwest and sent out a second contingent to revive the work. Thomas Hurlburt, who had previously worked with James Evans in Upper Canada, became chairman of the Hudson's Bay District missions, based at Rossville. English-born Robert Brooking, who had preached in Africa for six years and then in Upper Canada, went to Oxford House. Ojibwe preacher Allen Salt was sent to

Peter Jones, see Donald B. Smith, Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahke-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa) and the Mississauga Indians (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).
6 Grant, Moon of Wintertime, 101-2.
7 See Semple, The Lord's Dominion, 5, for a chart showing successive Methodist reorganizations in Canada.
8 See the biographies of Hurlburt (by Arthur G. Reynolds) and Brooking (by Anthony J. Hall) in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography online. While the first western Methodists fostered the use of Native languages through support for translating and printing the scriptures and teaching James Evans's Cree syllabics, Hurlburt was the only non-Native Methodist missionary in his times who could preach without an interpreter.
Lac la Pluie (Rainy Lake), while Henry Steinhauer began a new mission at Whitefish Lake, Alberta.\(^9\)

Hurlburt and Salt, however, soon had to leave their postings, for reasons that signalled an issue common for missionary couples of the time. In 1857, Hurlburt was obliged to depart “on account of Mrs. Hurlburt’s precarious health,” and Allen Salt similarly returned to Upper Canada on account of his wife’s ill health.\(^{10}\) Charles Stringfellow and his wife (mentioned in Elizabeth’s memoir), who had lately arrived at Oxford House, were moved to Rossville in the Hurlburts’ stead, but by the time the Youngs replaced them there in 1868, Mrs. Stringfellow was described as an invalid. Other instances of mission wives’ illnesses are not hard to find; indeed, when the Youngs left Berens River for Ontario in 1876, after only two years there, the reason cited was Elizabeth’s poor health. In their case, other factors also influenced their leaving — as may have been true with the other wives; details are often lacking. But mission life and work could take a heavy toll on the women who were “volunteered” into their husbands’ religious vocations. Such assignments required stamina and qualities beyond their undoubted zeal and devotion.

The Youngs in 1868 were part of a third small wave of Methodist missionaries sent to the Northwest from Canada. Their years of service, 1868 to 1876, were among the most eventful of that century — a period of great transitions in the Northwest and of developments that presented challenges for all involved. Married late in the year of Canada’s confederation, 1867, Elizabeth and Egerton were almost immediately called upon to serve at the Rossville mission north of Lake Winnipeg. From May through July of 1868, they journeyed from Hamilton, Ontario, by ship and train to St. Paul, Minnesota Territory, and then by Red River cart to the Red River Settlement in what was still Rupert’s Land of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s territories, in a party led by the experienced western missionary, the Reverend George McDougall. The trip across the American plains, aside from its physical challenges, occasioned anxiety because of hostilities between the Sioux and the American military following the Minnesota Sioux Uprising of 1862; the party made sure to display conspicuously a British Union Jack, useful when


\(^{10}\) “Stations and Missionaries, 1857–58,” in *32nd Annual Report, Canada Conférence* (Methodist), Toronto, 1857.
accosted by some Sioux checking on their identity. They reached Red River just in time for a terrible storm, and to find the settlement much afflicted by a plague of locusts, and then continued their journey north on Lake Winnipeg, by HBC York boat, to the Rossville mission at Norway House. The prairie trip, in particular, was both memorable and not to be replicated, as by 1873, when they travelled on furlough, they could make use of expanded rail and steamship travel in Minnesota and on Lake Superior.

In 1869–70 came the Red River Resistance led by Louis Riel and other Métis greatly concerned about the annexation of Rupert’s Land to Canada and the losses of lands under the new grid survey regime that cut across their old established river lots. Norway House, four hundred miles to the north, was not caught up in the political strife, but the transport of mail and supplies and the prices and availability of goods were all affected. As Red River became Winnipeg, the new postage-stamp province of Manitoba acquired a Canadian-based governing structure. Then the summer of 1870 saw the spread of a serious smallpox epidemic on the western plains. Although Norway House was largely spared, the outbreak caused much anxiety and disruption.

Finally, the years from 1871 to 1875 saw a major shift in Hudson’s Bay Company operations and transport. The dominance of York Factory on Hudson Bay and of Norway House as the nexus of inland travel began to fade, with serious consequences for the Cree who relied on Company employment.11 Across the region, new economic and land pressures impelled the negotiations of the first five numbered Indian treaties in western Canada. Egerton Young, in trying to help secure the future of the Aboriginal communities at Norway House and, later, Berens River, was drawn into advocacy and letter writing on their behalf as plans for Treaty 5 developed in 1874–75. At Berens River, Egerton and Elizabeth Young were both enlisted as witnesses when the treaty was signed there in September 1875.

The Youngs left mission work in the summer of 1876, before the political and social impacts of the new Canadian regime and the new Indian Affairs policies and legislation were fully felt. During their tenure, the region still

lacked residential schools, Indian agents, reserves, government-appointed schoolteachers, medical personnel, resident police forces, a cash economy, and rail and steam transport. They were largely on their own, playing many roles with limited resources, in times of great changes whose consequences and ramifications for Aboriginal people, for the churches and fur traders, and for the land itself, could not yet be seen. They witnessed the foreshadowing of a new era, but they were still living, as it were, in older times — which lends particular interest to their records. They also served in a time when Indian missions in Canada still had a high profile and standing among the public. By the 1880s and 1890s, many believed that Aboriginal peoples were disappearing or would soon be assimilated, and the churches turned their attention increasingly to China and Japan, with their large populations and their promise of growth.

The Youngs also served in an era when there was as yet no place for women in the mission field except as missionary wives, or sometimes schoolteachers. In the late 1870s, efforts to organize women as missionaries began, but only in 1881, with the founding of the Woman’s Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada, did real opportunities open for women to become professional missionaries — that is, until they got married. In the next decades, more than three hundred single women served the WMS in Canada, West China, and Japan until 1925 when the United Church of Canada brought Methodists and other denominations into a new structure.\footnote{12} Many of those women had advanced their education at such institutions as the Hamilton Ladies’ College — an option not open to Elizabeth Young.\footnote{13} Some features of her upbringing and experience in Bradford, Ontario, were, however, probably of more practical use than the colleges as preparation for mission work.

\footnote{12}{Rosemary R. Gagan, \textit{A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881–1925} (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 4–5. Many did not serve long, as marriage (commonly to male missionaries) intervened.}

\footnote{13}{On the mixed record of Methodist women’s education in the late 1800s, see Johanna M. Selles, \textit{Methodists and Women’s Education in Ontario, 1836–1925} (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), chaps. 4 and 5.}
The Father’s Books and the Mother’s and Son’s Recollections

The most visible and best-known outcomes of the Youngs’ mission years are the dozen books that Egerton Young wrote and published from the 1890s until his death in 1909, contributing to an expanding genre of missionary literature. In 1887, a decade after he left the Northwest, he began to realize that the telling and writing of his mission stories could open a new career. In May of that year, Mark Guy Pearse, a distinguished English Methodist on tour to raise funds for missions, paid a visit to Young at his parsonage in Meaford, Ontario. In an introduction to Young’s first book, By Canoe and Dog-Train, Pearse wrote that during his visit, he “sat entranced” by Young’s vivid stories of his mission experiences. He secured from his host “a promise that Mr. Young would come to England and tell the people ‘at home’ the story of his Mission.” Young was already disappointed with the small pastorates that he had been assigned since his return from the field. In March of 1887, he made a short lecturing trip to New York, and, in 1888, he undertook an extended lecture tour in the eastern United States. Its success led him to take up Pearse’s invitation to England, in 1889, and launched his career as a much sought travelling speaker and advocate for missions in North America, England — and, in 1904–5, Australia. His speaking tours not only encouraged him to write but also fostered a demand for his books, some of which went through several editions and were translated into French, Swedish, and German, and he attained some international fame in church circles.

14 See, for example, Myra Rutherdale’s discussion of the genre in Women and the White Man’s God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), xxi.

15 Mark Guy Pearse, “Introduction,” in Young, By Canoe and Dog-Train, 1, 3.

16 Young’s scrapbook and diaries document his lecture travels. On 21 March 1887, his first lecturing venture brought a letter from the Methodist Episcopal Church on Broadway in New York thanking him for “his tender thrilling and evangelical discourse” to the Preachers’ Meeting held there on 7 March. jshb collection.

17 Jennifer S.H. Brown, “Young, Egerton R.,” Dictionary of Canadian Biography online. The full texts of six of Young’s twelve books are available on the University of Alberta’s Peel’s Prairie Provinces site (www.peel.library.ualberta.ca); Google searches locate copies or reprints of most of the other six books.

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The Youngs left as legacies other substantial records besides the books and other writings of the missionary himself. This book sets forth, in Part I, the memoirs that Elizabeth Bingham Young wrote in 1927, and, in Part II, the recollections of her son, Egerton Ryerson Young Jr., born at Norway House in 1869. Part III then presents a number of important and revealing documents that they or others wrote, which add to and complement the two main narratives. Deeply affected by their years among the Cree and Ojibwe (Salteaux in Young’s usage), mother and son both set down vivid memories of those times. Their records are rich in stories and details, some of which were also recounted by their husband and father. But they each retold some stories differently and added others, along with their own vivid personal impressions. Their voices also speak from different angles. Elizabeth went to Norway House as a new wife, aged twenty-four, leaving her family home and a rural small town that stood in great contrast to her northern destination. Her son, E. Ryerson, known in his boyhood as “Eddie,” was born at Norway House and became immersed in Cree and Ojibwe life, culture, and language around his parents’ mission. The young mother and her small son shared their life at Norway House and Berens River, and they later recollected that life powerfully moved by strong impulses to record their memories as best they could. Their respective genders and ages, however, gave a distinctive cast to the writings of each.

The mother’s writings focus mainly on the years from 1868 to 1873 at Norway House, where she had to find her way, learn quickly, and adapt: “culture shock” is a fair description. There she learned Cree, worked closely with the Rossville women and their families, acted as nurse and doctor as best she could, and gave birth to three children. Her memoirs say less about her more difficult years at Berens River, 1874 to 1876. By comparison, Eddie was barely four years old when he left Norway House. He had some distinct memories of it, reinforced by family stories. But his most memorable experiences were at Berens River — and later, as he went through the trials of adapting to rural Ontario school life after the family left Cree and Ojibwe country, when he was seven.

As a missionary’s wife, Elizabeth of course had no salary of her own; the church expected such wives to be immersed in their husbands’ endeavours. In May of 1868, at a valedictory service for Young and two other missionaries who, with their wives, were going off to new postings in the
Northwest, the Reverend W. Morley Punshon — an Englishman and the incoming president of Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church — gave expression to this sentiment while crediting the wives’ sacrifices. The church, he said, was “really sending out six missionaries,” not three, “and these had to be maintained. These are women who hazard their lives as well as the men — women who make our manhood cheap, because they are privileged to go forth without a murmur to the sustentation of those whose name they bear.” All should pray “that they, with frailer organizations, though perhaps a well-knit network of nerves — for there is not so much of the robust muscular strength — may be preserved for the trial. . . . They go out with their lives in their hands and offer up their ease, social status, and all the other comforts of the well-regulated Christian city home; they go out as the heralds.”

Elizabeth, many times, was to draw upon her “well-knit network of nerves” and other qualities as well.

As for Eddie, he began life as the firstborn son of the respected “praying master” of Rossville. He was said to be the first white child born at Norway House, but, more importantly, the Cree people of the mission adopted him as one of their own. They gave him a Cree name, and a Cree woman, Mary Robinson (or “Little Mary,” as the Youngs knew her), became his nurse for his entire time at Norway House and Berens River. His relations with her and the other Aboriginal people whom he got to know in those years stayed in his mind and shaped his outlook and interests for the rest of his long life.

Elizabeth Bingham and Egerton Ryerson Young: Early Lives

Elizabeth Bingham was born in Bradford, Canada West (later Ontario), on 10 April 1843. Her father, Joseph Bingham, born in 1819 in Somerset, England, came to Canada with his parents and younger siblings in about 1830. When his father died soon thereafter, Joseph was apprenticed to a tanner and took up that trade and boot making in Bradford. He married Clarissa Vanderburgh on Christmas Day, 1841. Clarissa’s maternal grandfather, Peter Vanderburgh, was a loyalist from New York. In 1816, Peter’s

18 Punshon’s remarks, originally reported in the Globe, are quoted in George Young, *Manitoba Memories: Leaves from My Life in the Prairie Province, 1868–1884* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1897), 45.
son Richard Vanderburgh, a farmer, married Elizabeth Fulton, daughter of Captain James Fulton, also a loyalist. Clarissa, born in 1819, was their eldest daughter. We know little about her early life, but Clarissa’s granddaughter, Winnifred Young Watson, later recalled hearing that, before her marriage to Joseph, Clarissa “as a girl used to drive her pony and small rig to Toronto Market,” from the Vanderburgh farm near Richmond Hill, north of Toronto. Later, from her home in Bradford, she reportedly would “drive her cart or wagon into Toronto to attend the market.”

Clarissa’s husband, Joseph, died in August 1867, four months before her eldest daughter, Elizabeth, married Egerton Young. A widow for nearly forty years, Clarissa died in 1906. A number of her letters to Elizabeth and Egerton survive, written to their distant mission post of Rossville in 1868–69. (See Part III, sec. 4, for excerpts.) They reflect her enterprise and her trials, supporting her younger children and trying to keep them in school while running a boarding house with seven or eight boarders who needed meals served, washing done, and fires kept burning in the cold winters of that epoch — and wishing and hoping that her daughter and son-in-law would come home sometime soon.

Joseph and Clarissa Bingham had eight children, six daughters and two sons. Elizabeth’s position as the first born made a difference. In her 1927 reminiscences, she recalled that “being the eldest the right to superintend was hers and she took the position.” It proved good training for the large responsibilities she was to assume at the Methodist missions at Rossville and Berens River.

Elizabeth attended the Bradford grammar school and then “a private school for ladies” (unidentified) in Barrie, some miles to the north. Bradford, she later recalled, was a growing centre in her youth. She saw her


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first train at the age of ten, when the railway arrived there, and hotels, banks, trades, and churches were flourishing. Her father was a trustee of the town’s Methodist church and held an important role as leader of two class meetings — an institution central to early Canadian Methodism. Class leaders were, as Neil Semple explains, “sub-pastors,” who recommended people for membership, promoted the faith, helped with administration, and made pastoral visits. Respected and trusted, they were expected to hold “spotless reputations, practical intelligence, and an abiding devotion to the task.”

Elizabeth sang in the choir; the Bradford church choirs, she remembered in a *Globe* interview, “were noted for their excellent music.”

In the years 1853 to 1855, Elizabeth formed an acquaintance that proved significant. During those years, the Reverend William Young served a three-year term as itinerant minister at the Bradford Methodist church and brought his family to live nearby. His third son, born in 1840, was Egerton Ryerson Young, and he and Elizabeth met both at church and probably in

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21 Semple, *The Lord’s Dominion*, 228. Classes ideally had about twelve members and met once a week, attendance being required. Elizabeth’s memoir records the honour and affection accorded to her father on his death.


23 E. Ryerson Young, “Elizabeth Bingham Young,” obituary, *Missionary Monthly*, August 1934, 340–43. The “organ” was probably the melodeon that Elizabeth managed to take to Rossville; it appears from a letter that Egerton wrote to Elizabeth on 8 September 1873 (see Part iii, sec. 11) that the melodeon remained there when the Youngs left in 1873.

24 Semple, in *The Lord’s Dominion*, 63, observed of hymns, “It is difficult to exaggerate their importance in the spiritual lives of Methodists.” In his mother’s obituary for *The Missionary Monthly*, E. Ryerson Young wrote that, when possible, “Mrs. Young accompanied Mr. Young on his lecture tours and added not a little to the attractiveness of his lectures by singing a song or two in Cree” (“Elizabeth Bingham Young,” 342).

25 George H. Cornish, *Handbook of Canadian Methodism* (Toronto: Wesleyan Printing Establishment, 1867), 70. Three-year assignments to serve in specific places were typical of Methodist practice through most of the 1800s.
school until Egerton began to attend high school in Bond Head, the town just to the north. In a letter to her nephew Harcourt Brown, written in 1958, the Youngs’ youngest daughter, Winnifred Watson, recounted her parents’ early mutual attraction: “Talk about children going together early. Father left Bond Head high school when he was fifteen and Mother was 12 and they waited all that 15 years for each other. The kids nowadays have nothing on that!!”

Egerton’s father, William, was born in 1808 in the township of Murray, on the Bay of Quinte, which lies on the northern shore of Lake Ontario. His father was Stephen Young, who migrated from Vermont in about 1801. In Vermont, Stephen had married Lucy, daughter of Matthias Marsh, who, with his father (Colonel William Marsh) and siblings, had sided with the British in the American Revolution and had acquired loyalist land grants in the Quinte area. William began his Wesleyan Methodist ministry in 1835, serving a dozen circuits and church charges over the next decades. In 1834, he married Amanda Waldron (1812–42), daughter of New York–born Philip Schuyler Waldron, who had settled at the Bay of Quinte with his family in about 1790. Amanda’s older brother, Solomon (1795–1878), became a respected Methodist preacher — one of the first to be born in Canada — in the 1820s and surely influenced the path of William Young’s career. In the early 1830s, Solomon and his family were living at his mission posting at Muncey, on the Thames River, Upper Canada, as was his sister Amanda, who taught at the mission school for a couple of years before her marriage.

These interconnected families reveal a pattern shared by many in the period. Coming from New York and Vermont, some were loyalists, while...
others arrived after the American Revolution, attracted by the liberal land-granting policies that the otherwise arch-conservative lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, instituted to attract American settlers and build the population of the region. While the newcomers welcomed access to inexpensive land, they did not share Simcoe’s allegiance to the Church of England as it became entrenched under his regime, nor were they sympathetic to the elitism and the hierarchical social order that he fostered. Some were already Methodists; others were drawn to Methodism after they moved north. In 1790, the New York Methodist Conference appointed William Losee as the first preacher to establish circuits, form classes, and found Methodist meeting houses in the Bay of Quinte region. He “effectively laid the groundwork” for Methodism in Canada and set the stage, so to speak, for denominational rivalry in Upper Canada. Tensions between the Methodists and the Anglicans under their respective advocates, the Reverend Egerton Ryerson (Egerton Young’s namesake and himself of a loyalist family) and Bishop John Strachan, were endemic from the 1820s onward in the region that became Ontario.

Egerton Young was born in Crosby, Upper Canada, on 7 April 1840. His mother, Amanda Waldron, died on 5 April 1842. Six months later, William Young, left with four children under the age of ten, married again. His second wife, Maria Theresa Farley, became the only mother Egerton knew. A former teacher, she emphasized Egerton’s education “especially in Scriptural knowledge, helping him to memorise large sections of the Bible.” When he finished school at Bond Head, he was one of eight siblings and needed a livelihood. At the age of sixteen he received a teacher’s certificate from the Bond Head Grammar School and began teaching in Emily Township, west of Peterborough. In June 1860, the Board of Public

28 For in-depth discussion of these issues, see Alan Taylor, “The Late Loyalists: Northern Reflections of the Early American Republic.” Journal of the Early Republic 27 (2007): 1–34.
30 Methodism, as Neil Semple observes in The Lord’s Dominion, 62, “was founded on a deep personal knowledge of the Bible. Its members were enjoined to read parts of the Bible daily and to ponder and discuss its important message.”
Instruction examined him in “the several branches of study” required to teach grammar school and issued him a certificate of qualification. The next year, he applied his teacher’s salary to a strenuous teacher training program at the Toronto Normal School, during which time he became acquainted with his namesake, Egerton Ryerson, by then both a pillar of the church and a leading educator.

In 1861, aged twenty-one, Egerton was appointed to the school at Madoc, a town to the north of Trenton, where, as sole teacher, he had charge of 105 students. The huge workload took away his pleasure in teaching, and as he wrote to his parents in March 1863, “I care not how soon a change is made for something else.” The change came when, in May of that year, he was received on probation in the Wesleyan Methodist Church; taking up his father’s calling, he became a circuit-riding preacher. His evident success led to his ordination on 9 June 1867 and to his appointment as pastor to the First Methodist Church in Hamilton, Ontario — an advancement that made it possible for him to contemplate marriage, although his resources were still slim. On 26 August, he wrote to his older brother James,

What do you think of the step I am taking? Can you blame me for it? I think it is the right course I am pursuing. I have a pleasant parlor and another nice large room here and I think we can be as happy as it is right for mortals to be. . . . If you have a hundred dollars or so for which you want good interest for a year or two I wish you would lend it to me. I had some cash on hand but have been paying off my liabilities at the Book Room, and elsewhere and now I am about ashore. We expect to have a very quiet wedding owing to their late afflictions: but I should like to be able to appear well and to have some funds on hand. . . . When the time for our marriage is arranged I will send you word. We hope to have Dr Ryerson to perform the ceremony.

32 Young’s letters are in the United Church of Canada Archives (UCCA), Toronto, Young fonds, series 1, box 1, file 2. The letter to his parents is dated 9 March.
34 UCCA, Young fonds, series 1, box 1, file 2, Young to James Young, 26 August 1867. Here and throughout, ellipses in quotations from primary sources were not present in the original but indicate omissions on my part.

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The “late afflictions” were the deaths, earlier in August, of both Elizabeth Bingham’s father, Joseph, and her brother John. Despite her family’s recent bereavement, the marriage took place on Christmas Day, 1867, but it was indeed a quiet ceremony: Egerton’s parents could not be there, nor was there time for a honeymoon. As Egerton wrote to his stepmother five days before the wedding,

Dear Ma, I think you will have to wait a few weeks longer ere you see us in Trenton. There are so many barriers in the way that we have given up the idea of being with you during the holidays. . . . We have a great many sick just now. I dare not leave them. The scarlet and typhoid fevers are hard at work. . . . I would feel anxious if away from the sick ones; so we have decided to return to Hamilton the day after Christmas.”

He wrote with great pleasure, however, of his new personal circumstances:

“I have a very cosy home here, and with the lady of my own heart, expect to be very happy and contented. My people are very kind and will welcome my help-meet very warmly. . . . Lizzie sends her love to you and wishes much to see you all, a wish which I hope will soon be gratified.35

Egerton and Elizabeth could not have anticipated the new direction that their lives would take within the next month, on receiving their church’s request for distant mission service.

Setting Down Memories: Elizabeth Bingham Young’s Writings

Egerton R. Young died in 1909 in Bradford, Ontario, at the age of sixty-nine. Elizabeth, aged sixty-six, was to survive him as a widow for twenty-five years. His loss brought major change to her life. From the 1890s onward, Young

35 UCCA, Young fonds, series 1, box 1, file 2, Young to Maria Farley Young, 20 December 1867. In writing “help-meet,” Young used the biblical term from Genesis 2:18, in which God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” Eugene Ehrlich and David H. Scott note in Mene, Mene, Tekel: A Lively Lexicon of Words and Phrases from the Bible (New York: HarperCollins, 1990) that during in the 1600s a hyphen crept into the term (104).

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had travelled widely on his lecture tours, often with Elizabeth; in 1904–5, they voyaged around the world, making an extended stay in Australia. In about 1904, Young acquired, with the help of his daughter Lillian’s prosperous English husband, Robert Helme, a fine large house in Bradford, the town where Elizabeth had grown up, and “Algonquin Lodge,” as the Youngs named it, became the much loved centre of family life. When Egerton died, the house had to be sold, and Elizabeth subsequently lived in various places, spending time with her daughter in England and with her children and grandchildren in the Toronto area. For most of her last decade, she resided with her youngest daughter and husband, Winnifred and Herbert Watson, and it was there, after almost twenty years of widowhood, that she evidently found the peace and felt the urgency to begin, in her mid-eighties, to record her recollections of her mission life.

Elizabeth Young set down her reminiscences in two sets of handwritten texts. She began writing the first and more organized memoir, which is presented here, in 1927. It fills about sixty lined pages (119 and 122–80) of a daybook printed for the year 1909 but put to different uses later. An entry on page 118, just before the text begins, dates the start of the memoir and also explains why Elizabeth began to compose it at this point in time: “July 3 [1927] Sunday we spent in Hamilton, at the First United Church. Having accepted an Invitation to the Diamond Jubilee Service . . . to be there as their guest as the Wife of their Pastor of sixty years ago that was there in 1867.” On 27 June 1927, the Reverend J. E. Hughson had written from Hamilton expressing “great pleasure” that she had consented to come: “no words that I can write will express to you the appreciation of our people that, at your advanced age, you should undertake this journey, in your love for the old church where you began your life in the parsonage.” Elizabeth was introduced at the Sunday morning “Double Diamond Jubilee Communion Service,” as the pastor told of Egerton Young’s service in 1867–68 and gave recognition to elderly church members “who are still

36 Harcourt Brown (b. 1900) described his memories of Algonquin Lodge in a letter of 21 June 1986 to his brother, Egerton Brown. Debbie Blair described the house in “The Grand Old Dame of Bradford,” Topix (Newmarket-Aurora), 21 May 1986, A5. The house was demolished not long after.

37 The original document is in the ucca, Young fonds, series 5, box 11, file 1. The pages in the daybook were numbered by the printer, and earlier pages had at some point been removed, whether by Elizabeth or someone else.
with us to greet Mrs. Young today with the same affection.” The power
of the occasion must have moved her to start writing, probably soon after
Herbert and Winnifred Watson drove her back to their home.

These untitled reminiscences were not Elizabeth’s only efforts to create
records of her mission life. From March to November 1868, she had kept a
diary describing life in Hamilton and during the journey to Norway House,
with occasional entries thereafter. A good many days were left blank, how-
ever, and some pencilled entries are almost illegible. More substantial is
a group of thirty-three pages in the Egerton Ryerson Young fonds in the
United Church of Canada Archives, filed under the title that appears on the
first page: “The Bride of 1868.” These pages are largely unnumbered and
not in chronological order, sometimes repeating descriptions of events cov-
ered elsewhere and sometimes including new details. Elizabeth also penned
a set of twelve pages of memories, some of which appear in Part i11, and
added details on a few other single pages of text. Her son, E. Ryerson Young,
also recorded on several loose pages various stories and memories that he
heard from her, and these are cited on occasion.

Elizabeth Young in Print and in Private

A few notes suggest that Elizabeth sometimes gave talks to church groups;
her papers also include a fifteen-page text titled, “Reminiscences of My
Missionary Life,” promotional in tone and perhaps written for some pub-
lic presentation. Her only known publication is “The Transformed Indian
Woman,” a short article, in two parts, that appeared in The Indian’s
Friend, the organ of the Women’s National Indian Association, based
in Philadelphia. The association, founded in 1879, campaigned for the
honouring of Indian treaties and for Native rights, while supporting mis-
sions, assimilation, and the implementing of the 1887 Dawes (or General

38 Copies of Hughson’s letter and the church’s diamond jubilee program of 3 July 1927
are in the jshb collection.
39 ucca, Young fonds, series 5, box 10, file 8.
40 Mrs. Egerton R. Young, “The Transformed Indian Woman,” The Indian’s Friend,
vol. 10, no. 6 (February 1898), 9–10, and no. 7 (March 1898), 9–10.

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Allotment) Act, which was intended to foster individual ownership of land on reservations. Elizabeth’s article was suited to their readership, laying out a simple dichotomy between the deplorable lot of Native women, oppressed and abused by tyrannical men before the Gospel came, and the wonderful transformations wrought in the men’s behaviour and attitudes and in women’s situations once Christianity took root. But its prose did not resemble her usual voice — except in her telling of a Berens River story from her own experience (which is included here in the Berens River section of her narrative, under the heading “A Mother’s Crisis”).

As Myra Rutherdale points out, “Public missionary accounts and actual experiences in the mission field were often disparate. . . . It is precisely because the published letters and texts were designed to capture the attention of British and southern Canadian audiences that they presented the most extreme discourse of colonization generated by missionaries in northern Canada.” Mission women’s (and men’s) personal letters and memoirs, in contrast, convey direct observations and perceptions not written for public, promotional purposes. Taken together, the sources cast light on “the ambiguities of the mission experience.” Mission service brought new personal ties, learning, and perspectives. Mission women’s daily work, more than men’s, entailed “intimate relations, especially with Aboriginal women.” The result, however, was “closeness but not equality” as mission women began “to define themselves in relation to others. They did not recognize that both the others and their White selves were being changed by cultural interaction. Rather there was a tendency to reify moral and cultural differences.”

The writings of both missionary women and men show, unsurprisingly, that they were not versed in Boasian anthropology, discourse analysis, or postcolonial critique. The value of their personal, private writings lies in their immediacy and their empathy with their subject matter (although, in fact, such empathy often shows through in Egerton Young’s published


42 Rutherdale, Women and the White Man’s God, xxii.

43 Ibid., 154, 155.
books even though he was writing for the consumption of broad church audiences in Canada and England, with all their stereotypes and imperial and ethnocentric assumptions). The lesson that Myra Rutherford draws from her studies of Anglican mission women in western Canada is the need to listen closely to all the available sources, to tolerate ambiguity, and attend to the ways in which the women themselves were changed and to varying degrees lived the rest of their lives between cultures, even after leaving the mission field.

**Preserving the Documents**

After Egerton Young died in October 1909, his wife Elizabeth and her daughter Lillian Helme, visiting from England, immediately faced difficult decisions about his papers. Elizabeth kept many of them but passed much of the collection to her son, E. Ryerson Young. The other eventual recipient was Harcourt Brown, eldest son of her daughter Grace Amanda Young Brown and nephew to E. Ryerson, or “Uncle Ed,” as he knew him. Brown, although never a church-goer himself, had respect and affection for his grandmother (see Part i, sec. 16, for his memories of her) and was embarking on a professorial career that involved using documents and libraries. The family knew that he appreciated the importance of the papers, and, around the time of Elizabeth’s death in May of 1934, he received a substantial collection kept in a small pine trunk — a “cassette” made for Egerton Young by a Hudson’s Bay Company carpenter. In mid-1934, he brought a large collection of Young’s books, periodicals, and pamphlets to

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44 Among various examples, see his discussion in *By Canoe and Dog-Train*, 223–29, regarding his Christian obligation to end polygamy. He and Elizabeth dealt together with some difficult cases, trying to work out which wife might best remain and how the others could be supported, and by whom.


46 On 17 October 1909, Lillian wrote to her son, Egerton Helme, “We are having a very trying time now looking through father’s letters of 1867 & up. Dear grandma finds it very hard to destroy them but there are boxes accumulated for years. We are having sad hours. They are splendid letters full of vim [?] all the way through.” *JSHB* collection.
Victoria College Library in Toronto — works largely focused on missions and church histories but also including publications of the Bureau of American Ethnology and other documents.\(^{47}\)

In the 1970s, Harcourt Brown (my father) became concerned about the disposition of the papers and engaged in correspondence and conversations with the Reverend H. Egerton Young, the son of E. Ryerson, and with other grandchildren of the Youngs. As they were all ageing and now somewhat scattered, they reached a consensus about preserving the papers and finding them a safe home. The Archives of Ontario staff expressed much interest in acquiring the collection, and Harcourt Brown and H. Egerton Young agreed in the late 1970s to deposit at the archives the papers that they had located by that time, along with a few further items contributed by cousins. Some materials were retained for Brown’s and my study and research, and some were found later. The archives also provided us with photocopies of the documents of most interest to us. After the death of Harcourt Brown in 1990, H. Egerton Young facilitated and encouraged my study of the family papers, entrusting to me his father’s remarkable memoir, “A Missionary and His Son,” recalling his boyhood at Norway House and Berens River, and other writings. In the early 1990s, he and I agreed that the United Church of Canada Archives (ucca) in Toronto would be a more suitable repository, and in 1994 the collection was transferred there where it resides as the Egerton Ryerson Young Fonds (no. 3607, accession no. 94.030C).\(^{48}\)

Those of Harcourt Brown’s and H. Egerton Young’s holdings that are now in my hands will eventually join the Young fonds. Further information on E. Ryerson Young and his writings is provided in the introduction to Part II of this volume.

\(^{47}\) On HBC cassettes, see www.furtradestories.ca/details.cfm?content_id=273&cat_id=3&sub_cat_id=1. The Youngs’ cassette, painted black, has the typical dovetailing but its lid is slightly curved rather than flat, an unusual feature. Norway House HBC journals of the time mention cassettes being made there. The Egerton Ryerson Young book collection was donated in the name of “Mrs. Young and family” (inventory list in the JSHB collection). In 1969, Harcourt Brown visited to see whether the collection still survived and was referred to the theological library; the contents had evidently been dispersed (Brown to Jennifer S. H. Brown, 13 December 1969).

Introduction

The originals of several documents published here are housed in the UCCA, and they or excerpts from them are published here by permission. Their archival references are listed below.

Series 1: Correspondence. Box 1, file 9: Correspondence from the Bingham family, 1868–69. Excerpts of letters from Clarissa and Sarah Bingham.


Series 5: Records of Elizabeth Bingham Young. Box 10, file 3: “Daily Reminiscences of Norway House’s Living” (manuscript), excerpts. (Moved from series 4 when her authorship was discovered.) Box 10, files 5 to 7: Correspondence. Letters from Egerton R. Young to Elizabeth Young from Norway House and Berens River, 1873, 1874. Box 10, file 8: “The Bride of 1868,” by Elizabeth Young, ca. 1930–32 (miscellaneous manuscript pages, most unnumbered), excerpts. Box 10, file 10: Diary, 1868, excerpts. Box 11, file 1: Notebook/Diary, reminiscences 1850s on, untitled. Pages 119 and 122–80 are published here.

Series 6: Records of Egerton Ryerson Young Jr. Box 11, file 6: Reminiscences of his life and times. This memoir (untitled) was composed in 1962. The portion beginning with the Young family’s departure from Berens River, in 1876, and extending through to the end of the narrative (Young’s outline of his church career) is published here, along with a few earlier excerpts recounting childhood memories that supplement his first memoir.

A Note on Memory

Elizabeth and E. Ryerson Young wrote their memoirs from six to more than eight decades after the events and circumstances that they record, and their accuracy and reliability call for some comment. Their texts effectively “speak for themselves,” but contextual research has also helped me to situate them and to evaluate their contents. Substantial church, mission, and fur trade records, along with contemporaneous family correspondence and other writings and documentary sources, are available from the period. They have

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served to confirm a great deal of the substance of these texts, indicating that Elizabeth and her son had, on the whole, remarkable powers of recall. Occasional slippages of names, dates, and sequences occur as indicated in the footnotes, but a great many memories and details are clear and sharp.

Some recent studies of memory help us to understand certain factors that may have aided the Youngs’ powers of recollection. Valerie Raleigh Yow cites psychologists’ findings that older people retain more memories from childhood and young adulthood than from recent years. Such autobiographical memory is “personal, long-lasting, and (usually) of significance to the self-system.” She adds that “we also remember as a group; that is, we listen to people who have shared the same experience with us, and we gain a feeling of identity with them.”

Elizabeth and Eddie were both young in their mission years, and were part of a family that talked about and reinforced their northern experiences as significant and life-changing. Yow writes that “people choose memories important to them; they repeat them over the years as they seek to reinforce meanings in their lives.” As she notes, some research points to gender differences in memory: “Women tend to remember details of personal experience more often than men,” and their “memories of feelings surrounding events are articulated in more detail.” But, for both genders, “events in which there were high levels of mental activity and emotional involvement will be remembered.”

These features were certainly present in the Youngs’ mission life at both Norway House and Berens River. They had strong reasons for remembering, both orally and when they took up pen or typewriter. Elizabeth (d. 1934) never got to read Eddie’s memoirs, and we can’t tell to what extent her son read her various writings as his eyesight failed in the 1930s (although he wrote down a few of her memories and stories). But their accounts dovetail in many respects. Together they provide an enormously rich and detailed portrait of their mission experiences — and also of the Youngs’ lives as a returned missionary family after 1876. They and the contextual sources around them also make possible a kind of triangulation in situating their histories; we are able to envisage their lives and listen to their stories from various angles without having to rely on a sole text or a single voice in isolation.


50 Ibid., 50–51.
Terms and Editorial Practices

The Youngs’ writings used ethnic and other terms of reference that were commonplace in eastern Canada in the mid-1800s. “Indian” was standard at the time; modern Canadian terms such as “Aboriginal” and “First Nations” were, of course, not in their vocabulary. As Elizabeth recalled her interactions with the Cree women and children around her, she also drew upon terms that English-speakers in eastern North America had begun using two centuries earlier. In 1643, in New England, Roger Williams recorded from the Narragansett language the words “squaw” (woman) and “papoose” (a child), and both began turning up in dictionaries without the derogatory connotations that “squaw,” in particular, acquired in the past century. Context is critical in assessing terminology and its baggage. Elizabeth certainly thought of the “Indians” as other, as different. But she wrote of them with sympathy and an effort at understanding, and not to denigrate them, looking, within her frame of reference, for means of helping them and improving their circumstances.

As she learned Cree, the words she was hearing probably reinforced her use of “squaw” and “papoose.” The Cree word for woman, *iskewew*, is related to the root word that Roger Williams originally recorded and is not greatly different in sound. As for “papoose,” fluent Cree speaker Keith Goulet, of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan, points out that a Cree term for baby, *bebeesis*, is a “Creecized English word” that is still in use; if the *b* is unvoiced, the word becomes *peepeesis*, “a form of endearment.” Elizabeth, finding these words somewhat familiar, would naturally have kept using the terms that she knew.

A number of Cree words and expressions recur in Elizabeth’s memoir and occasionally in her husband’s writings (his efforts at Cree occur mainly in one notebook of Cree word lists and phrases that he and others at Rossville compiled). It is striking that five decades after she left the

51 Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (London, 1643; reprinted Providence, r1, 1827), 44. Thanks to Keith Goulet for providing this reference.
52 Keith Goulet, e-mail of 25 February 2013.
53 On this document, housed in the University of Manitoba Archives, see David H. Pentland, “The Rossville Mission Dialect of Cree: Egerton Ryerson Young’s 1872 Vocabulary,” in *Essays in Algonquian Bibliography in Honour of V. M. Dechene*, ed. H. C. Wolfart (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1984), 23–45. This vocabulary and
Northwest, she could still transcribe from memory numbers of Cree words well enough that they can readily be identified. In the text published here, her Cree terms are glossed (inside square brackets) with orthography provided by linguist Jeffrey Muehlbauer. He and Keith Goulet have been unfailingly helpful in assisting with the transcription and interpretation of her words and also with some terms occurring in Egerton’s writings. One example from Egerton’s book, *By Canoe and Dog-Train*, documents how his efforts to use Cree terms posed challenges for him, his interpreters, and his audiences as they sought mutual understanding. In September 1869, he was preaching to Cree speakers at Nelson River, north of Norway House. He was trying to convey the Christian concept of God as “our Father,” with “our” in the inclusive sense of “everyone’s.” However, not knowing the nuances of Cree, he quoted himself as using the term “Notawen’ (*our* Father).” As Muehlbauer explains, Young erred in employing the exclusive *nohtâwinân*, ‘Our father [not yours],’ when his intended meaning was the inclusive *kohtâwinaw*, ‘Our father [including yours].’ An old man asked him for clarification, wondering, was God then the missionary’s Father? Young answered yes. The man then asked, “Does it mean He is my Father [Muehlbauer: *nohtâwiy*] — poor Indian’s Father?” (He seemed to realize that Young had used the wrong term for what he meant.) Young assured him that was so. “Then we are brothers?” he almost shouted out. “Yes, we are brothers,” I replied.”

Apart from borrowings from Cree, several other English words merit comment. Although the Youngs often mention deer, there were no deer as such at Norway House. When Anglophone traders and missionaries spoke of deer (or what they sometimes called reindeer) and of deerskin, they were referring to caribou, a term that was still working its way into English from French Canadian usage in those times. The Youngs did not, however, use the Scottish term “bannock,” which was to become a common name for the unleavened bread cooked on the trail. Instead, they occasionally refer to

Elizabeth’s texts made no use of the (Plains) Cree syllabic system that James Evans had developed for scriptural translations, but they do document some features of the local dialect.

54 Young, *By Canoe and Dog-Train*, 121. The assertion stirred a “wonderful” audience response but also a reproof, as the man then asked why his white brother had been so long in coming to tell the wonderful story of the “great Book” to “your red brothers in the woods.”
“dough dogs” or “beavers’ tails” (described by E. Ryerson as “hard as ship’s bannocks”).

The personal names used for family members in the records vary somewhat and require some comment. As this volume refers to several Youngs, first names are used to identify them wherever use of the surname could cause ambiguity. Elizabeth was addressed by her mother and siblings and by Egerton as “Libbie” or, more rarely, “Lizzie,” but in later life she signed herself as Elizabeth — the name chosen here. Her son wrote and published under the name E. Ryerson Young to distinguish himself from his father; “Jr.” was almost never used. As a child, he was “Eddie,” and that name is used here in reference to his youth. Although no one ever seemed to call him “Ryerson,” in his adult years he was best known by the name E. Ryerson Young, which has been adopted here. The spellings of two of his sisters’ names varied over time but are standardized in these texts. Lillian, the eldest daughter, was sometimes known as “Lilian,” but the former spelling was more commonly used. The name of a younger daughter, Winnifred, usually carried the double n, which is preserved here although it is a less standard spelling than “Winifred.”

The texts have been lightly edited. Commas and other punctuation, as well as the occasional word missing in the original, have been supplied, and some paragraph breaks added to aid readability. Subheads have also been supplied to orient readers. Spelling errors, which were few in the Youngs’ writings, have been silently corrected unless they indicate idiosyncratic usages of possible interest; the use of [sic] is avoided. Obscure names and terms are footnoted. Some of Elizabeth’s writings from the pages collectively titled “The Bride of 1868,” as well as certain entries from Elizabeth’s and Egerton’s 1868 diaries, provide added information. Quotations from these sources, if brief, have been inserted in square brackets within the text. The diary texts are identified as such, with dates; bracketed insertions not otherwise identified are from the pages collected under the heading “The Bride of 1868.” In addition, longer extracts from these sources have occasionally been included under subheads of their own, with the source clearly indicated. Complementary information from Egerton R. Young’s books and letters and from the writings of others is provided in footnotes, along with other source materials.