

MOOSE FACTORY DOCTOR

Dr. William Bell Malloch (1845-1881)

William Bell Malloch, born on March 1, 1845, was the offspring of two of Perth's most prominent families. A son of wealth and privilege, a future of ease, comfort, and status seemed his natural inheritance but, instead, he chose life on a remote Hudson Bay Company (HBC) fur trading post.

The Malloch family's connection with Perth began in 1817 when Edward Cruickshank Malloch Sr. (1773-1859), a shoemaker by trade, emigrated from Scotland with his wife, Ann Barland (1774-1840), and three teenage sons, George Stewart (1797-1870), Edward Cruickshank Jr. (1801-1867) and John Glass (1806-1873), and established a homestead at Drummond Center (Drummond Township C-7/L-15(SW)).

In 1839 the family moved to Brockville, and, in time, eldest son George became a schoolteacher, a lawyer, and finally a judge. From 1836 through 1841, while Bathurst was still attached to Johnstown District, he conducted quarterly court sessions at Perth as the visiting Justice. Son Edward Jr. went into business at Brockville, Richmond, and Ottawa, served as the first sheriff for Carleton County, and represented Carleton in the Parliaments of Upper Canada and the United Province of Canada.



Victoria Hall, Perth, boyhood home of William Bell Malloch
(Courtesy of LAC)

Youngest son John Glass Malloch returned to Perth as a young lawyer in 1834 and established his practice at #9 Mill Street¹. Less than a year later, on August 19, 1835, he married Isabella Margaret Bell (1812-1847), the only daughter of Reverend William Bell (1780-1857) and Mary Black (1773-1861). Bell, Presbyterian preacher and school-teacher, was already an institution at the Perth Military Settlement and would remain a leading figure for the next two decades. From the moment of his arrival from Scotland in 1817, over a ministry lasting 40 years, equally respected and reviled, he was a force to be reckoned with as he endeavored (with some

success) to impose Calvinist morals and Presbyterian modes of behaviour on local politicians, businessmen and a population heavily leavened with former soldiers and sailors.

In 1842 John Glass Malloch was appointed to the Bathurst District bench, a post formerly held by his elder brother, George, who had been named judge for Leeds & Grenville County the previous year.²

¹ He later moved his law office to #6 Gore Street East.

² During an interim of a few months the Bathurst District Judge had been Christopher Armstrong (1801-1874).

Malloch had purchased his father-in-law's park lot, 'Sweetbank', in 1840, a property now bordered on the west and south by Drummond and Isabella Street, and in 1858 built a palatial family home on the property. Considered one of the finest private residences of its day he named the edifice 'Victoria Hall' in honor of the reigning monarch. Constructed of dressed limestone, the 17 room mansion boasted plate glass windows, solid walnut staircases, marble mantel pieces and a paneled library. Outbuildings, including the carriage house, stables and woodshed were built of the same materials as the house. The home was surrounded by a garden, containing an orchard, shade trees, flower beds and shrubbery, all enclosed by a buckthorn hedge.³

William Bell Malloch, youngest son of John Glass Malloch, grew up at Perth, partly at Victoria Hall. His mother died in 1847, when he was just two years of age, leaving his widower father with six children under the age of 11. A year later, in 1848, his father traveled to Scotland where he married Mary Stewart (1810-1851). However, having added another child to the family, she also died in 1851.⁴ William was raised by aunts and nannies with considerable involvement of his Bell grandparents. When he was 19, his father was married for the third and last time to Margaret Gillies Wylie (1823-1893) of Ramsay Township. John Glass Malloch served as judge at Perth until his death in 1873.

William attended the local public school and Perth Grammar School. In 1863, at age 18, he registered as a student in the Faculty of Medicine at McGill University, Montreal. When received his M.D., C.M. degree⁵ in 1867, Malloch undertook to establish a practice at Sand Point, north of Ottawa, but soon found his plans considerably altered. In September 1869, James Anderson (1814-1874), Chief Factor at the Moose Factory Hudson Bay Company (HBC) post, had written to the Company Secretary in London requesting a medical doctor. Canada's northland had proven too much of a challenge for the Doctor appointed that spring. He had cut-and-run, returning to England on the same vessel that had brought him to James Bay.



Dr. William Bell Malloch (1845-1881)
(Courtesy Bruce Gordon, FindaGrave)

Exactly how the position came to be offered to Dr. William Bell Malloch is uncertain. As the offer arrived via the HBC Canadian Headquarters at Montreal, it may have involved a recommendation from McGill University. More likely it came about through the Malloch family's long connection to Brockville, a popular retirement spot for former HBC men. In William Bell Malloch's lifetime former Chief Factors William Sinclair (1794-1868)⁶, Robert Seaborn Miles⁷

³ Victoria Hall became the Perth & District Memorial Hospital in 1922.

⁴ William Bell Malloch's siblings were Mary Anne (1836-1916), Edward George (1838-1915), Isabella Maria (b.1839), Infant (1841-1915), Emeline (1843-1858), Isabella Margaret (1846-1928), Alexander Stewart (1849-1882).

⁵ Medicinæ Doctorem et Chirurgiæ Magistrum (Doctor of Medicine and Master of Surgery).

⁶ Sinclair was born in Scotland and served the company 1808-1863. In 1823 he married Mary Wadin McKay (1804-1893). He retired to Brockville in 1863 and died there in 1868.

⁷ A native of England, Miles served the HBC 1818-1861. In 1822 he married Elizabeth Sinclair (1804-1878), the daughter of HBC Chief Factor William Sinclair (1794-1868). Miles retired to Brockville in 1861 and died there in 1870.

(1795-1870), James Hargrave (1798-1865)⁸, William Joseph Parish Christie (1824-1899)⁹ and Robert Crawford (1834-1897)¹⁰, as well as many HBC men of lesser rank, had all chosen Brockville for their retirement years. Inspired, perhaps, by tales of adventure in the northern wilderness as related by such men, his father Judge John Glass Malloch, had visited Moose Factory in 1845, travelling by canoe down the Abitibi River.¹¹ For the younger Malloch, the idea of going north would not have been a leap into the complete unknown. However it came about, he jumped at the chance. His cable accepting a three-year contract as 'Surgeon & Clerk' at £120 per annum went off to Montreal immediately and on January 7, 1870, he set out overland for James Bay.

In 1870 railway travel was still confined to the extreme south of Canada. The Northern Pacific¹², advancing from the south, did not meet the east-west Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) at Callandar, on Lake Nipissing, until 1887. It was not until 1913 that the National Transcontinental Railway (NTR)¹³ was completed across the expanse of northern Ontario and Quebec, and the Canadian Northern, operating east-west from Pembroke to Capreol (north of Sudbury), did not pass through North Bay until 1915. A rail line from Cochrane only reached Moosonee on James Bay in 1932. The HBC's new recruit made his way from Ottawa to Mattawa¹⁴ over punishing wagon roads by stagecoach. At Mattawa he and his dog Busco were taken in hand by Indian guides and packers Jean Baptiste and Cannanassay, and a Metis cook-servant named Thomas, and the party set off on snowshoes. Following the same route trade canoes took each summer, they travelled up the Ottawa River to the HBC post on Lake Temiskaming, over the Laurentian Divide¹⁵ to the HBC's 'Abitibi House'¹⁶, and then down the Abitibi and Moose Rivers, to James Bay.



Dr. William Bell Malloch c1875
(Courtesy of McCord Museum)

⁸ Born in Scotland, Hargrave served the HBC 1820-1859. He married (1840) Letitia Lockhart MacTavish (1813-1854) and (1859) Margaret Alcock (1815-1899). He retired to Brockville in 1861 and died there in 1865.

⁹ Christie was born at Fort Albany on James Bay and served the HBC 1843-1873. He married (1859) Mary Sinclair (1833-1902), and retired to Brockville in 1873, where he died in 1899.

¹⁰ A native of Scotland, Crawford served the HBC 1854-1877. In 1863 he married Elizabeth Miles (1837-1922), the daughter of Chief Factor Robert Seaborn Miles (1795-1870) and Elizabeth Sinclair (1804-1878). His wife's mother was the former country wife of HBC Governor in Chief Sir George Simpson (c1792-1860). Crawford retired to Brockville in 1877, moved to Indian Head, Saskatchewan, in 1882, but returned to Brockville where he died in 1897.

¹¹ *Moose Factory Historical and Archaeological Assessment* (2005) – Moose Factory Island Chronology - 1845 – “John Glass Malloch, lawyer, judge and farmer of Perth, Ontario, travels to Moose Factory via the Abitibi River”.

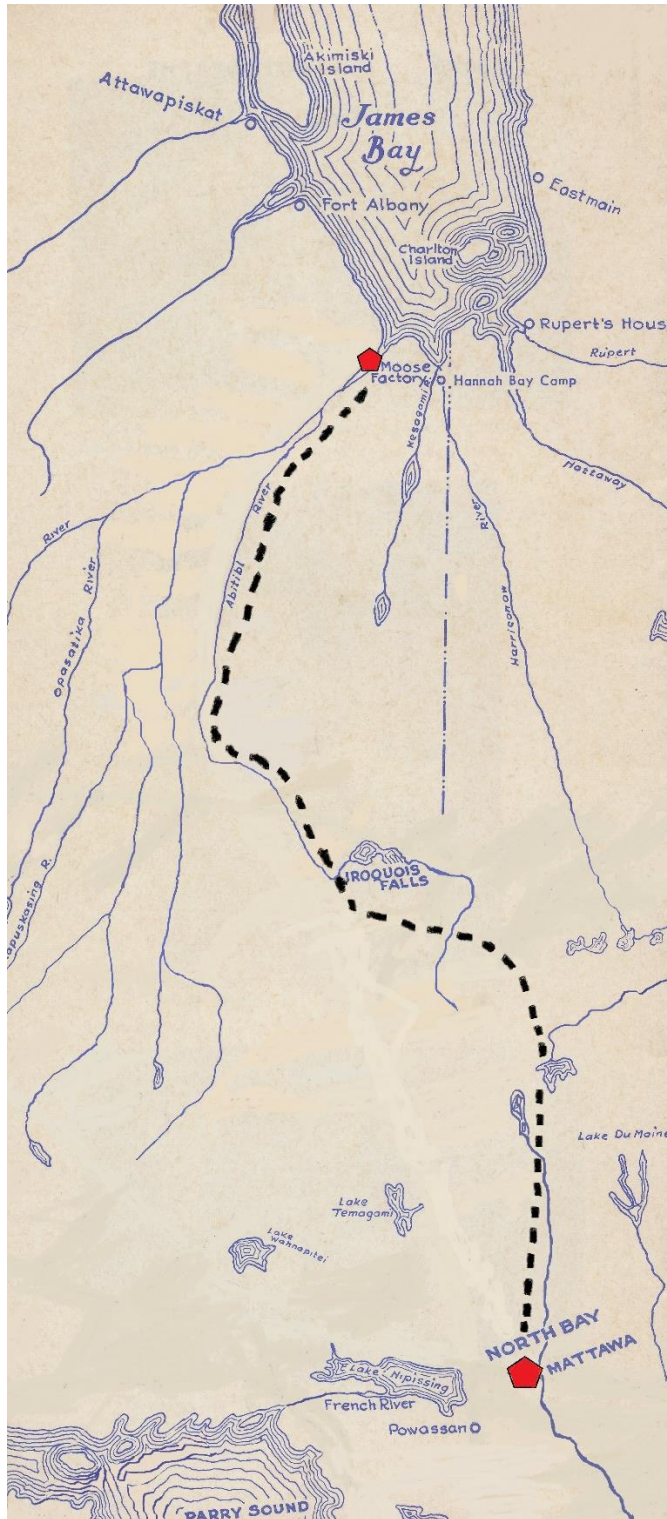
¹² Later the Grand Trunk and later still the Canadian National Railway (CNR).

¹³ Later taken over by Canadian National Railways (CNR).

¹⁴ HBC's 'Mattawa House' trading post was established in 1837 and closed in 1908.

¹⁵ Height of Land or Northern Divide separating the Hudson Bay watershed from the Gulf of Mexico watershed.

¹⁶ Established in 1794 on Lake Abitibi at the mouth of the Duparquet River.



For nearly 600 miles (965 kilometers), from Mattawa to Moose Factory, the party slogged through heavy snow in bitterly cold temperatures. Malloch later wrote that the cold was so intense that, *"If we put down our tin basin of boiling tea for a moment it was frozen into solid ice. Between every bite I had to put my fork in the fire, as it would stick to my mouth ... we dared not sleep as we knew it would have been the sleep of death."*¹⁷

The journey was delayed when one of the Indian guides had to be replaced, causing rations to run so low that they had to steep their flour bag, turn it inside out, scrape edible flour from the cloth, and drink the broth. At an Indian village a woman produced some boiled fish roe *"in a dirty tin dish [that he] ate with a dirty iron spoon [and], never enjoyed anything more in my life."*¹⁸ Fortunately they encountered a band of Indian hunters who supplied them with frozen moose meat, but, like starving men so many times before, they gorged themselves and fell ill. Driving winds froze Malloch's nose, cheek, and ear. The dog Busco nearly starved to death. After 22 days on snowshoes, they reached Moose Factory on February 22, 1870.

When he reached Moose Factory, in the winter of 1870, it had a population of about 150, but that number would more than double during the summer months. About 60 of the men were HBC employees – traders, clerks, blacksmiths, carpenters, joiners, shipwrights, coopers, bakers, laborers, etc. All of them answered to Chief Factor James Anderson. Writing home, Malloch called the HBC outpost the *"metropolis of this vast wooded country"*.¹⁹

¹⁷ William Bell Malloch, Letters, McCord Archives MI 8604.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Moose Factory, located on the largest of several islands in the mouth of the Moose River, was the second oldest HBC post (after Fort Rupert) in what is now Canada, and had been an important company asset for 140 years before Malloch's arrival. The HBC first built a fort on the site in 1670s. It changed hands several times during the wars between France and England and in 1696 was totally destroyed. In 1730 the company built the trading post close to the ruins and it remained in continuous operation until 1987.²⁰



c1854
(Courtesy HBC History Foundation)



c1905
(Courtesy LAC)

In 1870 the 'factory' (i.e., the trading post proper) centered the HBC site. The Chief Factor had his own house, with the officers' mess room attached. Next door was a tall building divided into three sections housing offices at one end, the home of the Chief Trader in the center, and officers' quarters and a guard room at the other end. Malloch's quarters and surgery, which he dubbed 'Aesculapian Hall' for the Roman god of healing, opened off the guard room. Nearby were St. Thomas' Anglican Church, the schoolhouse, and quarters for the unmarried men, attached to the bakehouse and storehouses. There were separate brightly painted houses, surrounded by gardens in summer, for the married men. The upstream end of Moose Island hosted log cabins housing the resident Indian population in a grove of poplars and spruce. The stables and barnyard accommodated about 70 head of cattle. A sawpit served the workshops and shipyard. Malloch thought it a "quite pretty little town".²¹

During his first year at Moose Factory, Malloch recorded a winter low of -48°F (-44.4°C) and a summer high of +100°F (37.8°C) in the shade.

In one sense 1870 marked the end of an era at Moose Factory. That year a new Factory was under construction and during Malloch's tour of duty the old factory, with its lead roof, battlements, and brass cannon, once essential to defend against French attack, was demolished.

Life at Moose Factory did not offer Malloch the sort of intellectual and cultural stimulation he had enjoyed at McGill and in the museums, libraries, and concert halls of Montreal. He was also separated by many wilderness miles from his family at Perth, Brockville, and Ottawa, but he seems to have been naturally blessed with the coping and adaptation mechanisms necessary for

²⁰ In 1987 HBC operations at Moose Factory were sold to the North West Company. Today the North West Company runs a grocery and general merchandise store located near the surviving buildings of the old trading post site, now partly preserved as a National Historic Site. The North West Company of today has its roots in the North West Company that amalgamated with the HBC in 1821.

²¹ The modern town of Moosonee, terminus of the Northland Railway, lies on the northern bank of the river, opposite Moose Island.

life on the northern frontier. He had a love of scientific pursuits, in particular related to horticulture (both food crops and flowers) and for geology. Photography became an almost immediate passion, and he soon developed a high degree of proficiency. As there was a perennial shortage of commercially-prepared photographic paper he often printed his photos on ordinary notepaper which he 'albuminized' himself and produced a "*large collection of photographs in the Indian and Esquimaux country*".²² For recreation Malloch took up crafting on a lathe, turning out both useful and ornamental items, the latter mostly in ivory. He was a man of physical energy and an enthusiastic hunter and sport fisherman, pursuits of almost unlimited possibilities around James Bay.



Wedding Photo 1872 - William B. Malloch & Mary S. Malloch
(Courtesy of McCord Museum)

In the early months of 1872, Malloch repeated his overland winter trek of 1870, this time north to south. Shortly after reaching Ottawa he married his first cousin, Mary Stewart Malloch (1848-1928), on April 25, 1872. She was the youngest daughter of his uncle Edward Malloch. That spring, the newly weds returned to Moose Factory by stagecoach to Mattawa and by canoe along the Ottawa, Temiskaming, Abitibi, and Moose Rivers.

The doctor's new wife adjusted quickly to life at an HBC trading post but suffered a painful setback when their first child, Margaret, born in November 1871, lived less than a day. A son, Stewart Earnest, followed in 1874 and another daughter, Alice Muriel, was born in 1875.

What passed for social life at Moose Factory tended to involve cigars and pipes smoked over card games, or week-long

hunting and fishing trips, for the men. More inclusive were occasions such as weddings, birthdays, and baptisms, whist parties, boarding the visiting ships, assembling natural history collections, meteorological observation and reading books from the James Bay Library. These occasions and pastimes were augmented by invented 'celebrations' created around seasonal 'firsts' – "*first goose of the season; first eggs; first tea without having to use a lamp; first peas for dinner; first strawberries; first tomatoes; first ship arrival; and so on*".²³

²² Letter to Robert Bell.

²³ Fontanus – McGill University Collections - *The Legacy of William Bell Malloch, M.D.: The McGill, Moose Factory and McCord Connection* - By Cath Oberholtzer



St. Thomas Anglican Church, Moose Factory
(Photo by William Bell Malloch, Courtesy of McCord Museum)

More often than not the locus of these events, religious and secular, was Reverend John Horden's (1828-1893) St. Thomas' Anglican Church, a "... neat little church with its shining tin spire ... which boasts of a harmonium, and a stained glass window".²⁴ Dr. Malloch and his wife became so attached to Horden and his little church that in July 1873 they abandoned their staunch Presbyterian upbringing to be confirmed as Anglicans. If ever someone 'rolled over in their grave' it would have been Malloch's grandfather, Reverend William Bell, lying in Elmwood Cemetery back at Perth.

In the 1870s, Moose Factory was the only HBC post with a Medical Officer on its staff, but care would still have been only on a par with, and perhaps not as good as, that found elsewhere in Canada. Medical practice during the 1870s was supported by no modern equipment, had few pharmaceuticals to rely upon, and saw surgeons operate without gloves and perhaps unwashed hands. Dr. Malloch's ministrations would have been conducted according to the rather primitive standards of the day.

In the summer of 1869, the year before Malloch's arrival, a typhus epidemic at the HBC Lake Abitibi post, had killed 60 Indians. Moose Factory escaped that epidemic, although it recorded an unusually high number of 19 deaths that year. That total was never repeated during Malloch's time at the post. With the arrival of a post doctor, Reverend Holden could report to mission headquarters that in 1872-1873 there had been few deaths and the community had "to a wonderful degree"²⁵ been free of disease (although Holden's report credited God not Malloch).

In all, there were 70 deaths during Malloch's tour of duty (1870-1878), an average of less than nine per year. Tuberculosis was the prevalent cause of death, with slightly more than 50% of all deaths being attributed to TB. The remainder were mostly the result of non-specific fevers, accident, drowning and old age. The most prominent death on Malloch's watch was that of Moose Factory's Chief Factor Alexander MacDonald²⁶, who died in 1875, aged 45 years, of "softening of the brain".²⁷

²⁴ Malloch's 1870 manuscript letters, McCord Archives, MI 8604.

²⁵ Letter from Holden to Church Missionary Society – LAC. See *Fontanus – McGill University Collections - The Legacy of William Bell Malloch, M.D.: The McGill, Moose Factory and McCord Connection* - By Cath Oberholtzer

²⁶ During Malloch's eight years at Moose Factory he served under five Chief Factors: 1862-1870 James Anderson (1814-1872), 1870-1873 James Stewart Clouston (c1824-1876), 1873-1874 George Simpson McTavish (1843-c1893), 1874-1875 Alexander McDonald (1831-1875), 1875-1880 Samuel Kent Parson (1843-1914)

²⁷ Perhaps encephalomalacia, a localized softening of the substance of the brain due to bleeding or inflammation.

Although it was against HBC policy for him to treat Indians who were not employees of the company, Malloch seems to have frequently provided such treatment as the state of medicine in the 1870s could offer. Most often he dealt with various respiratory diseases such as pleuro-pneumonia and bronchitis. Whooping Cough was common and especially fatal to the Indian children. On one occasion he performed an amputation on an Indian who had been accidentally shot just above the elbow. Travelling 25 miles by dog team he collected the injured man and brought him back to Moose Factory where, with the assistance of several volunteers, he removed his lower arm. Malloch often travelled considerable distances from Moose Factory in the course of discharging his duties, on foot or by canoe or dog sled.



Cree Group at Rupert House



Abitibi River



Dog Team, Petite riviere de la Baleine



Moose Factory Encampment

(Photos by Dr. William Bell Malloch, c1875, Courtesy of McCord Museum, Montreal.)

In addition to his medical duties, Malloch also worked as a clerk in the trading operation, where he proved himself a *"very efficient officer, [with] sound judgement and regular business habits"*²⁸. Shortly before he died of 'softening of the brain' in 1875, Chief Factor Alexander Macdonald curiously noted that *"Doctor Malloch is peculiarly qualified to fill the post he holds at this place - that of clerk & surgeon - he caring little for his professional duties and having a decided taste for store work"*.

²⁸ Quoted in *The Legacy of William Bell Malloch, M.D.: The McGill, Moose Factory and McCord Connection*, by Cath Oberholtzer (2003), as cited in an account from the search file of the HBC Archives as compiled by Judith Hudson Beattie, Keeper of the HBC Archives.

Despite the physical strength and endurance demonstrated by his 1870 snowshoe trek, after eight years at Moose Factory Malloch's health began to falter. When his second contract expired in 1878, he chose to resign and return south. He travelled by canoe, with his wife, four-year old son, and three-year-old daughter, up the Missinaibi River to the HBC post at Michipicoten (Wawa) on Lake Superior, and then by steamboat down the Great Lakes. They first made their new home at Victoria Hall in Perth, "a beautiful country residence belonging to our family"²⁹, then took up residence in Ottawa. They later moved to Smiths Falls and finally settled in that colony of superannuated HBC servants at Brockville, "with Mr. Christie³⁰ on one side and Mr. Crawford³¹ at a little distance on the other side".³²



Nine members of the Malloch family are buried in the family plot in Elmwood Cemetery.

Malloch had been a popular member of the Moose Factory community and found his time there both rewarding and enjoyable. Writing from Perth to his cousin, Robert Bell (1841-1917)³³ in 1879 he said he "... had the warmest feelings of kindness from all, and I flatter myself that all, from the officer in charge to the poorest Indian, would be glad to see me back once more".³⁴



Cree Cradle Board
(McCord Collection)

Although still a young man when he left Moose Factory, Dr. William Bell Malloch had no second career. On March 13, 1881, just three years after leaving Moose Factory, he died at Brockville. At the age of 36 years he succumbed to tuberculosis, very likely contracted while treating patients at the HBC post. His body was returned to Perth and buried in the family plot at Elmwood Cemetery (Plot E2-132).

His widow, Mary Stewart Malloch, born a Malloch, married another Malloch, her cousin Francis Stewart Malloch (1838-1894), and moved to Hamilton, Ontario. His son, Stewart Ernest Malloch (1874-1905), died even younger than his father, at age 31.

²⁹ Letter from William Bell Malloch to James Bissett, 24 November 1879, HBCA B.134/c/142. Malloch's father, John Glass Malloch, had died in 1873 and his third wife Margaret Gillies Wylie-Malloch had moved to Hamilton, thereafter Victoria Hall was only periodically occupied for brief periods by Malloch family members.

³⁰ See Footnote-9

³¹ See Footnote-10

³² Letter from William Bell Malloch to James Bissett, 24 November 1879, HBCA B.134/c/142.

³³ Robert Bell (1841-1917) was the son of son of Reverend Andrew Bell (1803-1856) and Elizabeth Notman (1816-1839) and, like William Bell Malloch, a grandson of Reverend William Bell (-1857). A graduate of McGill University, with degrees in applied science (1861) and medicine (1878), Bell was a renowned geographer and a physician. He worked with the Geological Survey of Canada from 1856 to 1908, becoming Assistant Director (1877), Chief Geologist (1890), and Acting Director (1901). He is best remembered for his extensive explorations in present-day northern Quebec, Ontario, and Manitoba in the 1870s and 1880s, during which time he mapped the rivers between Hudson Bay and Lake Superior and reconnoitred part of the route that would later be adopted for the National Transcontinental Railway. He visited Moose Factory several times in the 1880s, after his cousin, Dr. Malloch, had returned south. He was elected a fellow of the Geological Society of London (1865) made a charter-member of the Royal Society of Canada (1882), a fellow of the Royal Society of London (1897), a companion of the Imperial Service Order (1903), awarded the Patron's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society of London (1906) and the Cullum Geographical Medal of the American Geographical Society of New York (1906).

³⁴ Letter from Malloch to Robert Bell, 19 April 1879, LAC, MC 29,815, vol. 26 Correspondence to Robert Bell: Malloch W.B. [Moose Factory] 1875-79.

His daughter, Alice Muriel Malloch (1875-1941)³⁵, inherited her father's papers and Indian artifacts and donated them to the ethnographic collection at the McCord Museum, Montreal. The donation included more than 50 high quality handmade items crafted at Moose Factory by Cree women and men during the 1870s, representing a unique collection of James Bay Cree material. The William Bell Malloch fonds at the McCord also contain documents on the Canadian North and on the lifestyles of Canada's northern peoples, including his photographs of landscapes, whale and seal hunting, Inuit lifestyles and scenes of family life. Its textual materials include two copies of a typescript entitled *Six Hundred Miles on Snowshoes* describing Malloch's trek to Moose Factory in the winter of 1870.

This account of Dr. William Bell Malloch draws upon numerous sources including *The Legacy of William Bell Malloch, M.D.: The McGill, Moose Factory and McCord Connection*, by Cath Oberholtzer (2003), published in the McGill University Journal, *Fontanus* Vol. 11, January 2003.

- **Ron W. Shaw (2022)**

³⁵ Son of George Stewart Malloch (1797-1870), brother of William Bell Malloch's father, John Glass Malloch.