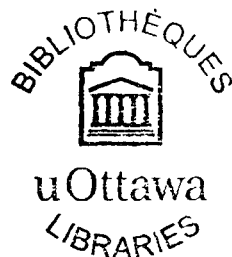


# *Children of the Fur Trade*

**Forgotten Métis of the Pacific Northwest**



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JACCO



**T**he Columbia freemen were a unique body of adventurers intimately associated with the birth of society in a new land. Beyond a few geographical place names and a persistent image of unreliability, few have received the historical recognition they deserve. The name Finlay stands out because it spanned the entire history of the British North American fur trade. It was a lineage that stretched from the St. Lawrence and Saskatchewan rivers to the Columbia drainage.<sup>83</sup>

Jacques (Jacco) Raphael Finlay carried a name that grew from a pent imagination. It was the invention of his Scots father, who wintered in 1768 at block Nipowi on the middle Saskatchewan River. The baby's mother was an Ojibwa girl Finlay probably picked up at Saulte Ste. Marie or Grand Portage as a temporary winter housemate.<sup>84</sup> She was not much of a conversationalist, and James Finlay had time to think up an impressive name for the dark-eyed babe she nursed.

James Finlay was one of those Scots who found expression for their talents in the Northwest fur trade. In 1766 he came to the Saskatchewan River to trade with "Three Canewes" of merchandise, to the disappointment of the rival Hudson's Bay Company inland traveler William Pink.<sup>85</sup>

Finlay bought Montreal respectability with his profits from the fur trade and by 1773 was in partnership with John Gregory, satisfied to let others endure the hard winters in the unforgiving Northwest.<sup>86</sup> On his retirement in 1783, his eighteen-year-old son, James Jr., entered the upper country to continue the family business in the North West Company.

By then Jacques, known as Jacco, the sixteen-year-old country son, had been educated in some downstream school to qualify as a fur trade clerk. Nine years later, James was the partner stationed

at Fort des Isles near the union of the two main branches of the Saskatchewan River. During outfit 1799-1800 Jacco served in the Upper Fort des Prairies Department under tough little John McDonald of Garth. Jacco's salary of £1,200 Grand Portage currency was the same wage received by men like James Hughes, James King, and David Thompson.<sup>87</sup> During the next outfit, the trader Archibald N. McLeod noticed Jacco at the lower Fort des Prairies, apparently well established in the business.<sup>88</sup>

Jacco's education did not qualify him for a higher station in the field management, which made all the difference as the business advanced toward the mountains. In the summer of 1806 at Rocky Mountain House, Jacco was associated with two other Métis clerks, Nicholas Montour and Jacques Quensel. McDonald of Garth selected him to prepare the road across the mountains that David Thompson would use the following year to enter the Kutenai country, "and follow the Columbia River to the Sea."<sup>89</sup>

After slashing a rough trace, Jacco and his family followed the Blacberry River to the Columbia, where they constructed a canoe for Thompson's use. That put them on the Pacific slope in the same year that the American Corps of Discovery was returning from wintering at the mouth of the Columbia River. Primacy should have ensured Jacco's fame and reward, but Thompson was dissatisfied with his performance as a trail builder and administered a humiliating tongue-lashing coupled with a reduction in salary. Finlay's pride could not accept this, and he became one of the first western freemen, stripped of his place in the company that his family helped found.

Seeking a way to support his young family, Jacco turned to the rival Hudson's Bay Company. The Edmonton House master, James Bird, was delighted to include him in a sly industrial espionage system that penetrated the Nor'wester system. Jacco's crudely sketched contribution to the early understanding of western geography was preserved in the Edmonton journals and in the writings of Peter Fidler.

In October 1807 Jacco's Saulteur Indian brother-in-law came to Bird with the complaint that the North West Company would not pay the numerous Canadian freemen on the upper Saskatchewan in money unless they took their outfits from them. In his journal Bird mentioned another Canadian who had previously wintered in the "Cootnais" land. He had taken 600 beaver pelts the previous year, and he wanted to trade them at Edmonton or York Factory for a better price. The unidentified trapper promised to return across the mountains next summer for another

hunt. Bird hoped that the arrangement would set an example for other free hunters.<sup>90</sup>

The identity of the dissident trapper is revealed by Bird's associate, Peter Fidler, who had a map that was "drawn by Jean Findley in 1806."<sup>91</sup> In conjunction with a diagram showing the wandering of two Iroquois free hunters during that year, Finlay described the upper parts of the Columbia River as far south as the Flat Bow Indian country. In addition to cutting the first trail into the upper Columbia drainage, Jacco was the first to map it.

Thompson came to realize his error in alienating Finlay. When the explorer descended the Kootenay River toward Lake Pend Oreille in August 1809, he was accompanied by Jacco, his country family, and his Saulteur kinsmen. At the recently established Salish House on the Clark Fork River in November, the Nor'wester "arranged and paid" Jacco before sending him to return some horses to another freeman. By then Jacco's son was old enough to hunt with his Saulteur uncles. The next February, a Saulteur from the South Saskatchewan passed the North West Company Fort Vermillion on his way to join his brother-in-law, J. F., at Rocky Mountain House.<sup>92</sup>

Jacco and the horseman Martin were camped on Camas Prairie near the Kutenai Indian camp in early March 1810 when Thompson prepared to go east on furlough. Finlay was reengaged in his former capacity as clerk and interpreter, but the big, red-haired clerk, Finan McDonald, was left in charge of Salish House.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps Thompson hoped that an experienced hand would steady the rambunctious young clerk.

McDonald and two of the slain Charles Courtin's former trappers could not resist following the Flathead hunters to the buffalo ranges or taking part in a fight with the Pikuni Blackfeet. The casualties inflicted by thirteen new North West Company trade guns sent the outraged Piegan north to blockade the mountain portage. A small party of Hudson's Bay men were permitted to winter with the Flatheads without being molested but were warned not to return.<sup>94</sup>

The brush with the Pikuni made Salish House dangerous, so McDonald and Finlay retreated beyond Lakes Pend Oreille and Coeur d'Alene. They built Spokane House in the sheltering shadow of the Greenwood Indians. For the next fourteen years, it was the inland supply depot for the Salish, Kutenai, and lakes trade. Few were more closely identified with that place than Jacco Finlay and his lodge of growing children.

Thompson was sent back to claim the Columbia River. "On the 14th [June 1811], we arrived at the Spokane House on the

River of that name, where I left a small assortment of Goods to continue the trade, with Jaco, a half-breed, as clerk." But at the mouth of the Columbia, Thompson found an American party (the Astorians) that had landed two months earlier. The disappointed trader returned to the mouth of the Snake River on 6 August and sent a message to Finlay to meet him with horses. Unfortunately they took different trails and missed each other until reunited at Spokane House on the 13th. Going on to Kullyspell and Salish Houses on 11 November, Thompson noted that he "Left Coxe & Paul the Iroquois with Jacque Finlay."<sup>95</sup>

After two competitive outfits, the Nor'westers swallowed the Astorians. In the list of people employed on the Columbia during winter 1813-14, "Jac Finlay" was listed as clerk and interpreter at Spokane House, assisted by his son Bonhomme, who was receiving the pay of a middleman and interpreter. Two other sons, Raphael Jr. and Thorburn, were serving downstream at Fort George as interpreters and hunters. In an Indian attack in the Cascades in January 1814, when the proprietor Stuart was struck by three arrows, it was young Finlay who shot the assailant.<sup>96</sup>

Jacco's associates were improving their positions in the Columbia drainage, but his dedication to the Nor'westers was still questionable. In November James Hughes flourished a letter from the Columbia that bragged that the Nor'westers were using 100 freeman and Iroquois trappers. If each worked three traps they could produce 600 ninety-pound packs of furs. Things were going so smoothly that Hughes was convinced that the United States would be forced back to the line of 1783 and the North West Company would soon establish trade on the upper Missouri River.<sup>97</sup>

The intended audience for Hughes's bragging was Finlay's HBC confidant, James Bird. Bird took the boasts with a grain of salt because two young Bungees (Ojibwa) had visited him in late October. They came from their brother-in-law, a Frenchman, long in the service of the North West Company but now dissatisfied and living as a freeman. This was Jacco Finlay, who now invited the HBC to cross the mountains. Bird and Joseph Howse considered Finlay a good man who had made sixty packs for the Nor'westers last year.<sup>98</sup> Was there something more than the Spokane House horse meat diet behind Jacco's dissatisfaction?

Jacco may have participated in Donald McKenzie's 1819 Snake country trapping expedition, but by then there were so many of his large family floating around the Oregon country that it is difficult to distinguish the activities of the father from those of the sons.<sup>99</sup>

After the coalition of rival British firms in 1821, Finlay was not listed among the former North West Company employees who were taken over by the Hudson's Bay Company. When the new governor, George Simpson, came to inspect the Columbia District in fall 1824, he was outraged to find Jacco Finlay and some other Columbia freemen hanging around the lower Canoe River. They meant to intercept Suswap Indians bringing their furs to the Company, trade them, and resell the pelts to the HBC for a tidy profit as middlemen. The disgusted Simpson wrote, "These freemen are a pest in this country, having much influence on the natives, which they exert to our disadvantage by inciting them against us." He instructed his officers to stop the nefarious traffic.<sup>100</sup>

When Simpson returned east the following spring, he ordered that Spokane House be replaced by a more convenient depot on the Columbia River. A year later the botanist David Douglas left Fort Colvile near the Kettle Falls, guided by two of Finlay's sons. They rode to the abandoned Spokane House, where Jacco and his family were living on a meager diet of camas and black pine lichen. When he presented his note of introduction from the Colvile trader, John Warren Dease, the botanist was surprised to find that the old man did not speak English.<sup>101</sup>

By August the food situation had improved, and another HBC man "found old Mr. Finlay, who gave us abundance of fine, fresh salmon from his barrior, placed in a small branch of the main river."<sup>102</sup>

William Kittson sent word to Fort Colvile that Jacco died about 20 May 1828. The deceased's Saulteur brother-in-law, Parsin (Pacquin?), carried the news to Edmonton by 8 October 1828.<sup>103</sup> Jacco's passing completed the cycle of exploration that had begun on the Saskatchewan thirty-two years earlier. David Thompson had retired to Canada to hone his reputation as a geographer and western explorer, and his trail builder was forgotten.

But the name Finlay prevailed. As one of the largest Pacific Northwest mixed-blood families, Jacco's sons and daughters were spread through the tribes. They were still active with the hunting brigades and transport system and in post operations. Keyackie Finlay, who hunted from Spokane House with Finan McDonald in spring 1823, accompanied the Snake Brigade of Alexander Ross under the misspelled name "Cadiac," and the four hunters in his lodge were probably his younger brothers. Keyackie was one of the freemen who deserted Peter Skene Ogden's Snake Brigade in May 1825, but Augustin, Miequim, and

Pinesta Finlay were with Ogden again in 1828-29. Augustin continued in the next outfit, and John Work's list of the 1830-31 hunters included Augustin, "Miquam," and Pinesta Finlay. After Snake Brigade operations closed down, the brothers were carried as trappers on the Fort Colville outfit 1833, in association with other notable Westerners, such as Edward Berland, Nicholas Montour, Antoine Plante, and the educated Indian Spokane Garry. Keeping up the tradition, John Finlay rode to the Snake plains with Tom McKay's trading party in 1834, while brothers Augustin, Pinesta, and Miequim stayed around Colville or assisted the Flathead trader Francis Ermatinger.

Settlement scattered the Finlay clan across the Pacific Northwest. The two Catholic missionaries who came west in 1838 baptized several of Jacco's descendants at Jasper's House on the Athabaska portage. Marie was the daughter of James Finlay and his Métisse wife, Bruyere. Sophie, Marie Anne, and possibly Rosalie were daughters of Pichina and his two wives, the Métisse Lisette and Marie Gaspar. Later marriage records show that Rose Finlay, the daughter of Jacques and a Pend d'Oreille woman, became the wife of Antoine Duquet. Josephite Finlay married her brother's Colville associate, Alexander Guerette *dit* Dumond. Emolie became the wife of Pierre Bercier, and after his death married the Cowlitz settler Simon Plamondon. In 1841, after she had given birth to ten children, a visiting American naval officer described her as still "lovely."<sup>104</sup>

As nominal Catholics, the three Finlay brothers who lived along the trail between Colville and old Spokane House (near present Chewelah, Washington) could be lumped as nameless half-breeds by the Tshimakain missionary Elkanah Walker. His description changed to freemen in mid-December 1847, when the Cayuse Indians rose against the Whitman mission and Walker's life depended on the Finlays' assistance.<sup>105</sup>

In the resulting incriminations over the killing of the missionaries, another brother, Nicholas Finlay, fell under suspicion. Nicholas had been living in a lodge a few hundred yards from the mission with a doubtful character named Joe Lewis. Although it was never proven that the Cayuse Indians planned the attack in his tent, Nicholas fled north to join his three brothers and married sister near present-day Chewelah, Washington.

During the hostilities that followed the massacre, the Finlays ranged freely through the Indian country, which created additional suspicion. They provided ready targets for Protestant attempts to fix blame on Catholics. Nicholas and Joe Lewis retreated

to western Montana and settled among the Flatheads.<sup>106</sup> In the 1908 roll of Flathead families, the name Finlay occurred seventy-six times.<sup>107</sup>

The country-born Jacco was unable to match the career accomplishments of his two Montreal half brothers. Hampered by an imperfect education and unable to speak English, Jacco fell outside the British-dominated mainstream. It was bad luck that the 1804 combination of rival Montreal interests created a surplus of clerks and short-circuited his career. Mixed bloods were easiest to eliminate, although still useful as obligated free trappers.

Jacco's command of Indian languages began at the breast of his Ojibwa mother and became a valuable asset when he slipped into the role of interpreter. By taking a Saulteur wife, Jacco established a close and lasting relationship with her tribesmen. When the full span of Jacco's life is considered, his father's fur trade connections and his downstream education were less useful than the Indian advantages of his duality. His children continued those associations among the interior Salish.

Jacques Raphael Finlay was more than a good man buried in the wilderness. In a modest way, he contributed to the geographical understanding of the transmountain West when his sketches of the western country were incorporated into the maps drawn by the London cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith. In the establishment of Spokane House, Jacco located the logical site for a major northwestern city. But only the Jocko River and Jocko Valley of western Montana perpetuate his name.

### Chapter 3—Jacco

83. Bond, *Early Birds of the Northwest*, 13-27. This study includes information on living descendants such as Mrs. Pearl M. Wood and Mr. Walter Goodman of Chewelah, Washington, Mrs. P. H. Shea of Spokane Valley, and Mrs. W. A. Whitford of Spokane. Bond states that Jacco's first wife was Cree and the third Spokane. Among the children named are Francois *dit* Benetsee, who may have been born in Rupert's Land about 1805, Nicolas, Xavier, Patrick, and Augustus *dit* Koostah.
84. James Finlay engraved 1766 on his Beaver Club medal to mark his first winter in the Northwest. That was the same year his Montreal wife gave birth to their first son.
85. Douglas MacKay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the Hudson's Bay Company* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 94-95.
86. Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (1930; reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 189.
87. Charles M. Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest* (1965; reprint, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1971), 136-38, 154, 156.
88. Reminiscences of Roderick McKenzie are found in L. R. Mason, ed., *Les Bourgeois de la Compagne du Nord-Ouest Récits de Voyages et Rapports Indits Relatif au Nord-Ouest Canadian*, 2 vols. (Quebec: A. Cote

- et Compagnie, 1889-90; reprint, New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), 1:63.
89. Edmonton House Journal, HBCA B60/a/6, 6.
  90. *Ibid.*, 22 October 1807, HBCA B60/a/7, 4d.
  91. Irene M. Spry, "Routes Through the Rockies," *Beaver* (Autumn 1963): 29.
  92. Coues, *New Light*, 2:582.
  93. White, *David Thompson's Journals*, 94, 103.
  94. The two experienced western hands who guided the HBC officer Howse appear to have been Joseph and Louis Pacquin, sometimes called the Grand and Petite Nipissing.
  95. Thompson's Narrative in J. A. Meyers, "Jacques Raphael Finlay," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 10 (July 1919): 165.
  96. Spaulding, *Alexander Ross*, 12.
  97. Edmonton House Journal, 1814-15, HBCA B60/a/13, 4d, 7d.
  98. *Ibid.*, October 1814, HBCA B60/a/13, 3.
  99. Eric J. Holmgren, "Jacques-Raphael Finlay," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 6 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 253.
  100. Merk, *Fur Trade and Empire*, 31.
  101. David Lavender, ed., *The Oregon Journals of David Douglas . . . during the years 1825, 1826, and 1827*, vol. 1 (Ashland: Oregon Book Society, 1972), 78-81.
  102. T. C. Elliott, ed., "The Journal of John Work, July 5-September 15, 1826," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 6 (January 1915): 37.
  103. Edmonton House Journal, October 1828, HBCA B60/a/26, 14d.
  104. Warner and Munnick, *CCRPNW: Vancouver*, A. 26.
  105. Clifford M. Drury, *Nine Years with the Spokane Indians: The Diary of Elkanah Walker, 1838-1848* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark, 1976), 429 n. 91.
  106. Clifford M. Drury, *Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and the Opening of Old Oregon* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark, 1973), 201-2.
  107. Flathead Agency Enrollment Correspondence and Downs Index, National Archives, RG 75, boxes 106, 107, FRC, Seattle.