

The Bible
In Canada



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REV. JAMES EVANS TEACHING INDIANS HIS SYSTEM OF CREE SYLLABIC WRITING
Freeing the Book for an Indian Tribe in British North America

CHAPTER 4

The Wonder of The Indian Translations

THE TRANSLATION OF THE SCRIPTURES, IN WHOLE OR in part, has always been one of the main functions of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Canada has the unique distinction of providing the first opportunity to the Society for publishing a translation into a foreign tongue.

In 1784 Governor-General Sir Frederic Haldimand, in the name of the Crown, granted to the Mohawks and some other Six Nation Indians a tract of land "upon the banks of the river Ouise, commonly called the Grand River, running into Lake Erie, of six miles breadth from each side of the river, beginning at Lake Erie and extending in that proportion to the head of the said river; which the Mohawks and others of the Six Nations who had either lost their possessions in the war or wished to retire from them to the British, with their posterity, were to enjoy forever." There is a very interesting story behind this grant.

The Six Nations were traditionally the friends and allies of the British in their long struggle with the

French for the control of the American continent. When the Seven Years' War, which decided the issue, broke out in 1756, there was among these Indians a young man named Thayendanegea, better known as Joseph Brant, who soon became a prominent figure among the Six Nations. Sir William Johnson, the British Agent, recognized his unusual gifts and opened the way for his education. During the course of the war, he rendered the British invaluable service by keeping his restless countrymen loyal to their cause. In the years that followed he visited England, where he was received at Court and met many distinguished English figures, including George Romney who painted his portrait.

During the American Revolutionary War, Brant's own tribe, the Mohawks, loyally supported the British in their struggle with the rebellious colonists. Yet when the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783, there was no mention of the service rendered by Britain's Indian allies. Joseph Brant and the Mohawks felt badly at their treatment. They had lost everything except their honour. The whole land of their tribe was in the hands of their enemies and they found themselves in the same position as the United Empire Loyalists who had given everything rather than be disloyal to the British Crown. The unfairness of their treatment was quickly recognized by Sir Frederic Haldimand, the Governor-General, who made them the grant of land on the Grand River to which reference has already been made.

Joseph Brant settled with his people near the site of

the present city of Brantford and spent his later years in work for the welfare of his fellow tribesmen. He was a staunch Christian and desired above all else that his people should have the Gospel in their own language and be able to worship God intelligently in their own tongue. This led him to translate the Gospel according to St. Mark and the Anglican Prayer Book into the Mohawk language. In 1785, he was active in securing the erection of a small chapel for his people. In the Mohawk Chapel there is an old copy of the Bible with an interesting inscription stating that it is the gift of Queen Anne "to Her Majesty's Church of the Mohawks, 1712." The Queen also gave a Communion Service, suitably inscribed. These gifts were originally made to the Chapel built for the Mohawks by the British Government in their old home in the present State of New York. During the Revolutionary War the Mohawks buried these valued possessions. When the war was over and the majority of the Mohawks had settled along the Grand River, the Bible and four pieces of the Communion Service were dug up and brought to the new Chapel. This was the first house of worship in Upper Canada. In making his translation of the Gospel according to St. Mark, Joseph Brant was helped by the Rev. John Stuart of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The book was printed by C. Buchton, London, in 1787.

In connection with confirmation of the land grant in the Grand River valley, a chief of the Six Nations, called Teyoninhokarawen, whom the British renamed Captain Norton, visited England in 1804 soon after

the British and Foreign Bible Society was established. Meeting with some of the Society's members, he was persuaded that he could not do a better act for the moral welfare of his people than undertake a translation of the Gospel according to St. John to supplement the translation of St. Mark's Gospel which Joseph Brant had prepared.

Captain Norton was qualified for his task as he had an excellent knowledge of the English language as well as his own tongue. He used the English version as the basis of his work. Added to this qualification was his character as an earnest Christian convinced of the value of the task that he had undertaken.

As there was no one in England who could test the accuracy of Captain Norton's translation, the Society followed an ingenuous procedure. With only his translation in hand, Captain Norton was asked to retranslate his work into English before a selected group of scholars. The part chosen was the seventeenth chapter of St. John. The group, after hearing him, expressed itself as completely satisfied with the correctness of the version which was then printed in an edition of two thousand copies.

An interesting incident occurred in connection with this translation which illustrates the determination of the British and Foreign Bible Society to publish the Scriptures only, without note or comment. In order to explain to his fellow tribesmen the rich treasures that they would find in the Bible, Captain Norton wrote a Preface to his translation. Six copies of the translation were printed and submitted to the sub-committee of

the Society that had charge of its production. Although approving the purpose of Captain Norton, the sub-committee decided against the inclusion of the Preface in the bound copies. This decision was embodied in the following words which indicate how early in its history the Society re-affirmed its original intention. "An address to the Six Nations having been written by the translator and printed uniformly with the Gospel, your sub-committee have ordered the same to be wholly separated from the translation of the Gospel and not, in any instance, to be bound up with it; it being incompatible with a fundamental principle of this Institution to attach to the Scriptures any additional matter whatever."

Captain Norton's Preface is cited in part by Mr. Owen in the first history of the Bible Society (1817) and indicates the zeal of the author. Addressing his tribesmen, he says, "Exert yourselves, friends; let us strictly adhere to what our Lord has transmitted to us in the Holy Scriptures, that thereby the unbelievers, in viewing us, may become enamoured of the Gospel and may know that we are truly pious by the love we bear the commandments of God and that we have there placed our minds without guile; and may also see that we are of the company of Christ not only in name and profession, as too many are, but also in our pious demeanour and virtuous lives."

It would appear that there was also a translation into the Mohawk language of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, together with some chapters from the Old Testament and other parts of the New Testament,

made as early as 1715 by three workers of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (Freeman, Andrews and Claesse). It was printed by William Bradford at New York. The publication, however, contained only the Scripture selections, the Gospel according to St. Matthew remaining in manuscript form.

Later translations into the Mohawk language were made as follows: the Gospel according to St. Luke, by a Mohawk, H. A. Hill, published by the American Bible Society in 1827; St. Matthew's Gospel also by H. A. Hill and John A. Wilkes, who also translated other books of the Bible in the years following. By 1836 all the New Testament, except the second epistle to the Corinthians was available in Mohawk.

Nearly one hundred and fifty years have passed since the Society issued its first translation for the Indians of the Mohawk reservation. Late in 1952 the Rev. Canon J. S. Harrington, of the Upper Canada Bible Society, assisted in the formation of a branch of that Auxiliary at Ohsweken and presented a Bible to the little Indian church there. On receiving the book, the Chief said, "We thank you very much. We love the Bible here and have had the old one for a long time. Our church has been here for a long while. Our grandfathers and grandmothers worshipped God in this place. We are now trying to carry on the good work. The Bible which you have given us will be loved and cared for here and in years to come people will still be using it in worshipping God here." Generations come and go but God's Word endureth forever.

In the Journal which he wrote describing his

experiences on his Canadian tour, the Rev. John West states that he had learned that the Episcopal Wesleyan missionaries "are now establishing schools very extensively among Indians who speak the Chippewa language which is considered one of the most copious of North America and is spoken very extensively even by the Indians at the Red River and in other parts of the Hudson's Bay Company's territories. I conversed with some of the Wesleyan missionaries on the subject of translating the Bible or portions of it into this language and they presented me with the translation of several hymns etc., by two half-caste men I know at the River Credit, Upper Canada, which I send to the Committee." The two men mentioned were known as Peter and John Jones. Peter Jones translated the Gospel according to St. Matthew and his brother translated the Gospel according to St. John. The publication of the former was undertaken by the York Bible Society and it was printed by James Baxter, York, 1831. The Gospel of St. John was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1831 and 950 copies were sent to the York Bible Society for distribution.

When the Rev. James Thomson visited Canada in 1830 as an official representative of the Parent Society, he was much interested in the Chippewa translation. He made a special journey to a settlement of these Indians at Rice Lake, about twelve miles from Cobourg. The Wesleyan missionaries had, for some years previously, conducted a very successful work among these Indians and Mr. Thomson was much impressed by what he saw. "It seems very desirable,

indeed, to get the Word of God prepared for this people as there is a cheering hope that it would prove a great blessing to them. It would prove a like blessing to two or three other establishments similar to the one now mentioned, and it would also prove greatly useful in the conversion of the Indians speaking the same language For these reasons I urge upon the missionary the desirableness of getting the Old and New Testaments into their language as soon as possible, and I ventured to add that the British and Foreign Bible Society would gladly assist them in this good work, and that I would recommend the subject to your attention." *Report, 1831.*

As this language was spoken by a considerable number of Indians in the United States, the American missionary organizations were also interested in the Chippewa or Ojibwa translations. The New Testament translated by Edwin James, a United States army surgeon, and John Tanner, an interpreter, was published in Albany in 1833, the fifth New Testament printed in an American language. In 1837 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions published at Boston the Gospel according to St. Luke, translated by Sherman Hall, Henry Blatchford, James Evans and George Conway, an Indian. This was followed by other New Testament books and, in 1844, the American Bible Society brought out the entire New Testament. In 1835 Genesis, translated by Rev. Peter Jones, was published by the Upper Canada Bible Society, which also published Rev. F. A. O'Meara's translation of the Psalms into Ojibwa in 1856.

The mention of Mr. Thomson's visit to Rice Lake brings another very important figure into the story of Bible translations for the Indians in Canada.

James Evans was born in Hull, England, in 1801. The parents were in humble circumstances and the boy grew up with only the simple privileges that they could afford. He had to seek employment early, and after an apprenticeship in Hull, he went to London, where he lived for several years.

Meanwhile his family, finding conditions in Yorkshire very hard, had emigrated to Canada and settled near Lachute in Lower Canada. Not long after their settlement, young James followed and undertook a new kind of work, for he became teacher in a little log schoolhouse near L'Orignal on the Ottawa river. Here he became interested in some of his Indian pupils and decided to spend his life in the work of Indian education and evangelization.

In 1828 James Evans joined the Rice Lake Wesleyan mission as a school teacher. His great objective, however, was to inculcate Christian truth. In December, 1829, he wrote, "The school consists now of fifty scholars. Twenty-two of them are reading the English Reader and the New Testament. We have lately commenced reading the translation of seven chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel in the native tongue. Fourteen are studying arithmetic."

From Rice Lake Mission, James Evans transferred to the St. Clair Mission and was finally sent to Norway House, at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg. Here he was in the country of the Crees and he devoted

himself to a study of their language which had not yet been reduced to writing. James Evans decided to meet this need, recognizing that it was essential to the success of missionary work that the people should have the Bible printed in their own language. The method which he followed in dealing with Cree is worthy of a special reference, as it indicates the kind of procedure which, with some modifications, has been used by other missionaries faced by a similar problem.

When he came to examine the Cree language very carefully, he found that it contained thirty-six principal sounds. He made a table of these sounds, placing them in an order that could be easily remembered from its musical character. The next step was to make a simple sign or figure for each of these sounds. When these signs were placed side by side and the sound for which each stood was uttered, words would be formed which any one who spoke the language would recognize.

James Evans tried out his invention at once by scratching the signs on birchbark and teaching the Crees the sound which each sign represented. Then he wrote verses of the Bible on birchbark and gave them to his Indian friends who took them to their wigwams and were delighted to find that when they used the sound for the sign they were actually repeating the verse in their own language.

But scratching signs on birchbark was a slow way of printing, and James Evans decided to make his signs in type. To do this, he made models of them in clay and then asked the traders to give him the thin sheets

of lead from the inside of tea chests. He melted the lead and poured it into the clay moulds. When the lead cooled, he had the type that he wanted. For ink he used soot from lamp chimneys mixed with sturgeon oil. His press was a jack-screw used by the traders in baling furs. It was in this primitive but very effective way that Cree Syllabic came into use throughout a large area of northern Canada.

Word of James Evans' invention reached England and it was not long before Bibles, Hymn Books and school books were printed in the Cree language and sent to Canada in the vessels that brought supplies to the Hudson's Bay Company's forts and outposts.

There are four varieties of the Cree language. The most widely spoken is the Western or Plains dialect. Evans' work was based on this language. The first publication was the Gospel according to St. John, translated in 1847 by the Rev. William Mason, a Wesleyan missionary, printed at the Rossville Mission Press, Manitoba. The New Testament was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1859, and the entire Bible in 1862.

Coastal Cree is spoken by Indians on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay and James Bay. The Gospel according to St. John, translated by the Rev. and Mrs. W. G. Walton, was published in 1921 by the British and Foreign Bible Society, and was printed in syllabic form.

The Eastern or Swampy dialect of Cree was widely used in the lower valley of the Saskatchewan River. The first publication, in Roman characters, was the

translation of the Gospel according to St. Matthew in 1853. This book had been translated by the Rev. James Hunter of the Church Missionary Society, and was printed on the mission press.

The Moose dialect is spoken by a group of Indians near Moose Fort. In 1859, the Gospels translated by the Rev. John Horden, afterwards Bishop of Moosonee, were published by the Church Missionary Society. The New Testament was issued by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1876 in syllabic characters.

So wide-spread was the use of the western Cree language that it was felt, by 1897, that a revision of the Bible in that tongue should be undertaken. There is an interesting story behind this revision.

Application was made to the Right Reverend Robert Machray, Primate of the Church of England, for advice and assistance regarding the preparation of the revision. He appointed a committee of men conversant with the Cree language, and suggested that the work of revision should be distributed among them. But these men were busy with church and mission affairs and could only turn to translation as time permitted. The work of the Bible thus proceeded very slowly, the parts being printed as they were prepared. A further difficulty was encountered with the proofs, as the printing was done in England and there was no person available there to check them. To send proofs to missionaries working among the Crees in remote parts of Canada was a long and unsatisfactory procedure to the printers. With the co-operation of the Primate, it was finally decided that the Ven. Archdeacon J. A.

Mackay should be relieved as far as possible of other duties to enable him to devote himself to the production of the Cree Bible. For three years, the Archdeacon spent six months each year in the Canadian Northwest, and six months in England doing this work. An entry in the records of the Bible Society tells the story of what happened:

“The revision of the Cree Bible, now completed by the Ven. Archdeacon J. A. Mackay, has amounted practically to a new translation; and, owing in part to the nature of the Cree syllabic character in which the book had to be printed, the total cost to the Bible Society has proved unusually large. To print and bind the first thousand copies of this new Bible—including the expenses of the revision, which occupied three or four years, we find that to produce the edition cost the Society altogether £1,800, or 36 shillings a copy. The book will be sold to their readers at a price almost nominal in comparison, and the Cree Indians, who range over a vast tract of country from the shores of Hudson Bay to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, are said to number today only about fifteen thousand people. Nearly all of them, however, are sincere Christians and earnest readers and lovers of the Scriptures; and we believe that no Christian heart will begrudge the care and cost which have been lavished upon the Bible for a vanishing race, or ask scornfully ‘why was this waste?’”

The gratitude of the northern Indians for the efforts made to supply them with the Bible in their own tongue is touchingly illustrated in the following letter, which is included in the 1863 Report:

Rossville Wesleyan Mission,
Hudson Bay, Dec. 20th, 1862.

To the Chiefs of the Bible Society,

Our missionaries told us to send you on paper our thanks for the Testaments you sent us; but we can only write in the Cree syllabic characters; so we have asked an interpreter to translate this paper. Great fathers! We are very thankful. On Sabbath we listen to this Word in our church and many times we read it to our children. Our hunters carry it with them to the forests. We wish very much to get the old part of the Bible in the characters, if you will be so kind as to let Dr. Hoole, our kind friend, have some to send us; and your Indian children will pray that the Great Spirit may bless you more and more.

Signed for the tribe,
(Nine signatures)

The Bible has been printed in whole or in part for a number of other Indian tribes in Canada. In the far west and north this has been done in Blackfoot for a tribe in Alberta; in Haida, for Indians of the Queen Charlotte Islands; in Chinook Jargon, a west coast trade language; in Tukudh or Loucheux for the Yukon River Indians; in Kwagutl for a tribe on Vancouver Island; in Slave or Timmé, Beaver and Chipewyan for Indians in the Mackenzie River basin.

In 1880 a translation of the Gospels into the Iroquois language spoken by a tribe in Quebec Province

was made by a chief named Onasakenrat, who was educated for the priesthood at a Roman Catholic seminary in Montreal. He later entered the Methodist ministry, and it was while he was in training for this work that he made his translation.

In New Brunswick there is a tribe known as the Maliseet. In 1863 some Scripture extracts for their use, made by the Rev. S. T. Rand, were printed by Isaac Pitman at Bath, England. The British and Foreign Bible Society in 1870 printed an edition of the Gospel according to St. John, translated with the assistance of an Indian named Gabriel Thomas.

The Micmacs, who use an Abenaki dialect, are scattered through New Brunswick, the Gaspé Peninsula, Nova Scotia and the State of Maine. A translation of the Gospel according to St. Mark, made by an Indian evangelist, Pierre Paul Osunkhirine, was published in Montreal about 1844. A translation of the Bible in part, by the Rev. S. T. Rand, appeared in twelve editions between 1853 and 1875. The early editions were printed in phonetic characters, with a key, so simple that even those unacquainted with the language could read from it to the Indians who were altogether illiterate. Since 1894 the Capuchins of the Franciscan Order have conducted a successful mission to the Micmacs in Gaspé, and have done much to further their physical and spiritual welfare. An old member of this mission has made a dictionary of the Micmac language which will facilitate all future translation work.

SCRIPTURES PUBLISHED BY B.F.B.S. FOR CANADIAN INDIANS AND ESKIMOS

<i>Language</i>	<i>First B.F.B.S. Publication</i>		<i>β Script</i>	<i>Translators and Revisers</i>
	<i>Date</i>	<i>Portion</i>		
MOHAWK	1804	John	R	Captain John Norton—Anglican
LABRADOR ESKIMO °§	1810	John †	R	Revs. B. G. Kohlmeister, C. F. Burkhardt, C. T. L. Schreiber, G. Schmidtman, J. L. Morhardt, T. Bourquin, F. C. Fritsche, F. Erdmann, W. W. Perrett, F. W. Peacock, Rt. Rev. A. Martin—Moravian
OJIBWA OF CHIPPEWA °†	1831	John *	R	Rev. Peter Jones and John Jones, Methodist; Rev. F. A. O'Meara and Ven. R. McDonald—Anglican
MICMAC §†	1853	Matthew *	P & R	Rev. Silas Tertius Rand—Baptist
EASTERN OF SWAMPY CREE	1855	Mark	R	Ven. J. Hunter assisted by Mrs. Hunter and Rev. H. Budd—Anglican
WESTERN OF PLAINS CREE °§†	1859 π	N.T. †	S	Rev. W. Mason—Methodist and Anglican and Mrs. Mason; Rev. H. B. Steinhauer, J. Sinclair—Methodist. 1908 revision Ven. J. A. Mackay with Most Revs. R. Machray, J. G. Anderson, Rt. Rev. G. Holmes, Rt. Rev. R. Young, Rev. Canon W. A. Burman—Anglican; Revs. J. McDougall, R. B. Steinhauer, E. B. Glass—Methodist.
SLAVE OF TINNE §	1868	Mark *	R & S	Ven. W. W. Kirby, Rt. Rev. W. C. Bompas, Rt. Rev. W. D. Reeve, Rev. W. Spendlove—Anglican
MALISEET	1870	John	R	Rev. Silas Tertius Rand—Baptist
TUKUDH OF LOUCHEUX	1873	John †	R	Ven. R. McDonald, Rt. Rev. W. D. Reeve, Rev. G. C. Wallis—Anglican
MOOSE CREE °§	1876	N.T.	S	Rt. Rev. J. Horden—Anglican
CHIPPEWYAN	1878	4 gospels *	S	Ven. W. W. Kirkby—Anglican
IROQUOIS †	1880	4 gospels	R	Rev. J. Onasakenrat—Methodist
E. ARCTIC OF BAFFIN LAND ESKIMO °§†	1881	Luke *	S	Rev. E. J. Peck, Rev. J. W. Bilby, Rev. Canon J. H. Turner and other Anglican missionaries
KWAGUTL	1882	Matthew	R	Rev. A. J. Hall—Anglican
BEAVER	1886	Mark	R	Rev. A. C. Carrioch—Anglican
BLACKFOOT	1890	Matthew	R	Ven. J. W. Tims—Anglican
HAIDA	1891	Matthew	R	Revs. C. Harrison and J. H. Keen—Anglican
CHINOOK JARGON	1912	Mark	R	Rev. C. M. Tate—Methodist
MACKENZIE RIVER & COPPER ESKIMO	1920	Mark	R	Rev. H. Cirling—Anglican
COASTAL CREE °	1921	John	S	Rev. and Mrs. W. G. Walton—Anglican
W. ARCTIC ESKIMO °†	1938	Luke	R	Ven. C. E. Whitaker—Anglican

FOOTNOTES TO APPENDIX V

- βR indicates that Scriptures in this language have been printed in roman script. In some cases extra characters and diacritical marks have been added.
- S indicates the syllabic script invented by James Evans and adapted for use in several dialects.
- P indicates a phonetic script adapted from an invention of Isaac Pitman by Rev. S. T. Rand for use in his Indian versions printed prior to 1870.
- ° indicates that scriptures are currently circulated in this dialect.
- § indicates that circulation in this dialect has been over 10,000.
- † indicates that some B.F.B.S. editions in this dialect have been printed in Canada. With the exception of some Labrador Eskimo portions printed in Germany all other editions have been printed in England.
- ‡ indicates the languages into which the complete Bible has been translated.
- * indicates additional languages into which the complete New Testament has been translated.
- π 1857 is sometimes given as the year for the first Bible Society publication in Plains Cree as the Society supplied the paper for an edition printed in that year on the mission press at Rossville.

For many years the Ojibwa New Testament and Gospels used in Canada have been published by the American Bible Society. Scriptures in Cherokee, Choctaw and Dakota have also been obtained from the American Bible Society for groups of these tribes which migrated to Canada.

Appendix VI

LIST OF LANGUAGES IN WHICH THE SCRIPTURES HAVE BEEN CIRCULATED IN DIGLOT FORM WITH ENGLISH BY THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY IN CANADA

Distribution of these diglot editions has been chiefly to New Canadians and to seamen on ships calling at Canadian ports. The list does not include Indian and Eskimo dialects in which diglots have been issued, or Asiatic languages in which only a few bilingual portions have been distributed. While diglot New Testaments have been circulated in some half dozen of the languages listed below most of the two language editions have been gospels. Alternative names under which the languages have sometimes been listed are given in parantheses.

Arabic	Japanese
Armenian	Korean
Bohemian (Czech)	Lithuanian
Bulgarian	Norwegian
Chinese—Cantonese	Polish
Danish	Portuguese
Dutch	Rumanian
Finnish	Russian
French	Serbian
German	Spanish
Greek—Ancient	Swedish
Hebrew	Ukrainian (Ruthenian)
Hungarian (Magyar)	Welsh
Italian	Yiddish (Judæo-German)