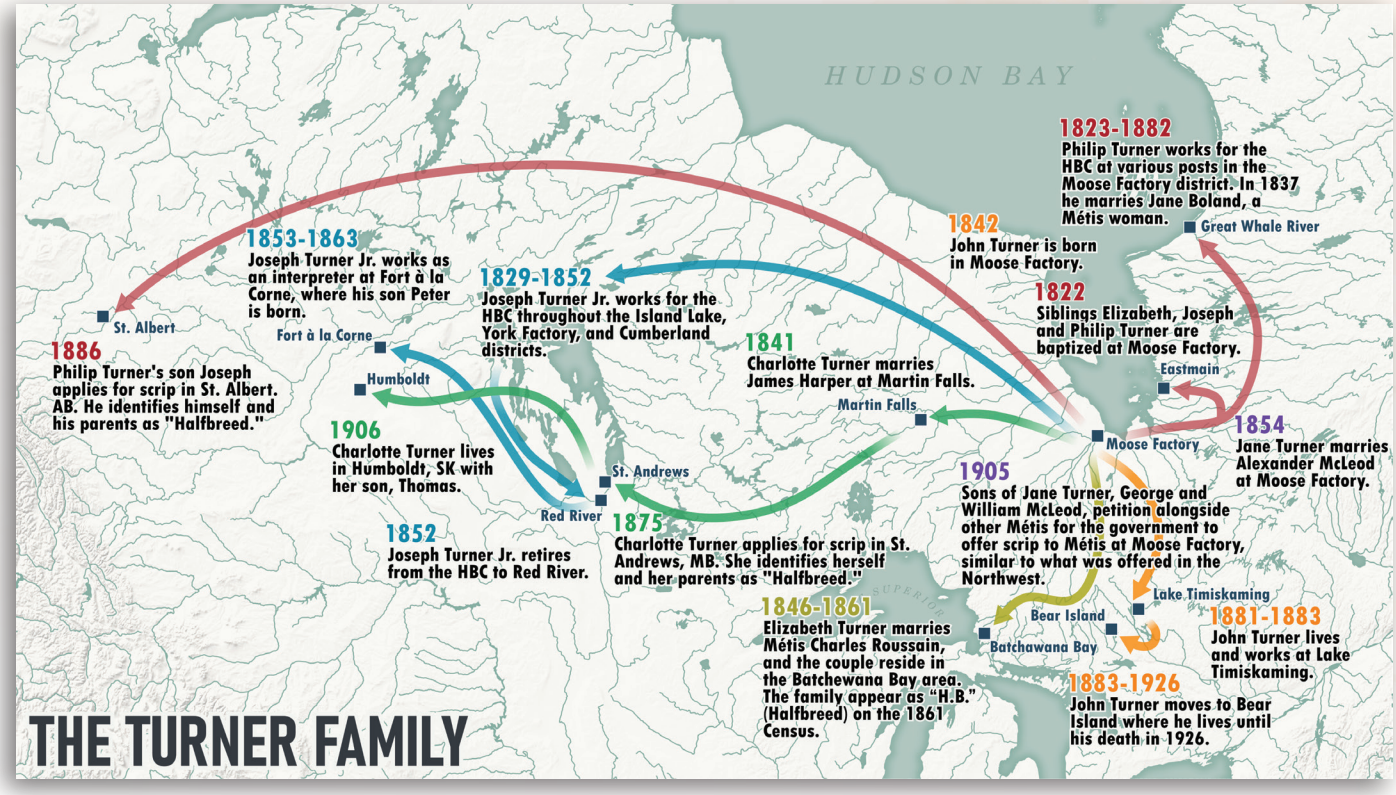
The Turners



On June 30, 1822, Métis siblings Elizabeth, Joseph, and Philip Turner were baptized together at Moose Factory. The children of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) servant Joseph Turner Sr. and his wife, Emma, they were growing up in the Métis world of the coastal and inland fur trade posts of western James Bay. Over the next few decades, these Turner siblings, and their younger brothers and sisters, would travel vast distances. Over time, they would develop family and other kinship networks in important Métis settlements across the Métis Homeland.

Joseph Sr. had worked at the HBC depot at Moose Factory and connected inland posts since 1799. Like many of the Métis "factory boys" who grew up at the fur trade posts of James Bay, Joseph Sr. had a long career with the HBC. He spent the years when his children were youngest in the Kenogamissi District, about 350 km inland from Moose Factory, up the Moose and Mattagami Rivers, in an area where competing traders fought for trading partners and furs in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Joseph Sr. returned to the depot at Moose Factory in 1821 and worked there until he retired in 1863. Little is known about Joseph's halfbreed wife, Emma, but like other Métis women, she fished, hunted, made snowshoes, cooked, and cleaned in and around the fort, all while raising the next generation of Métis.

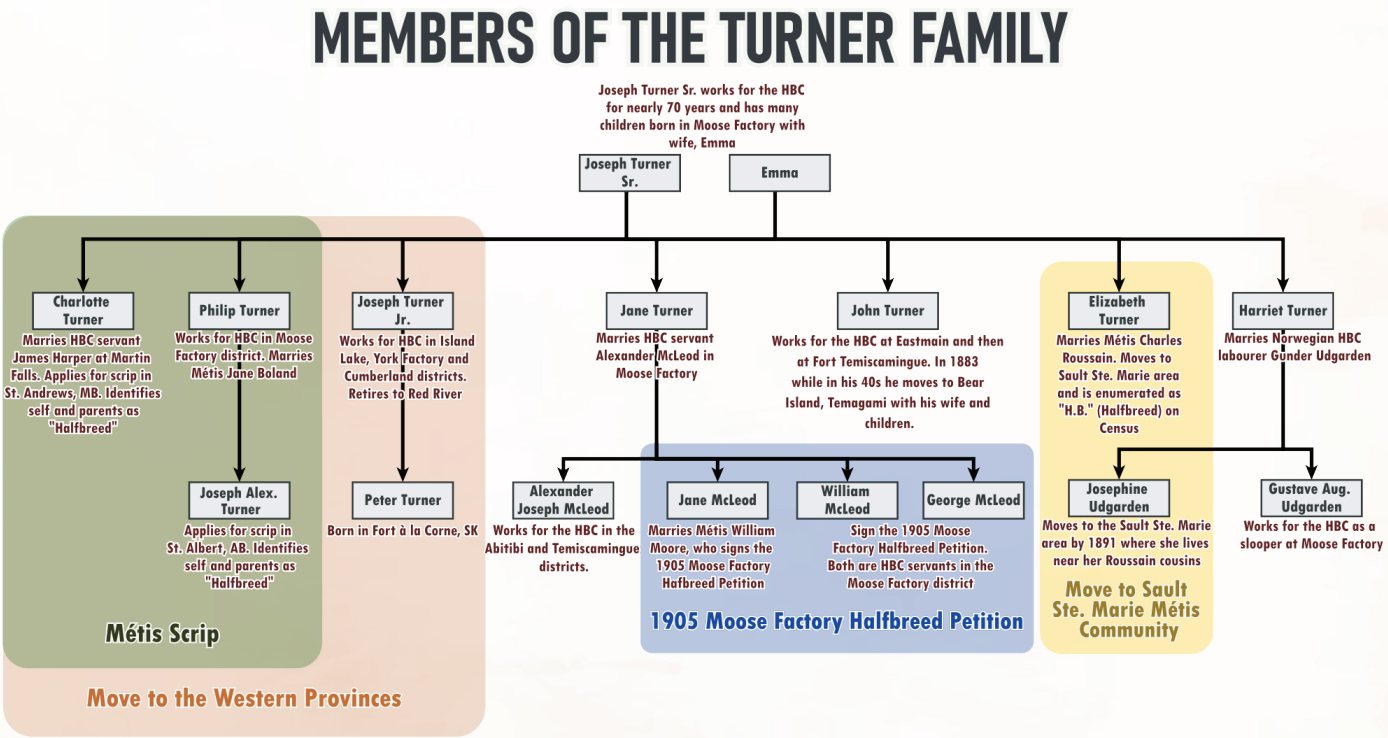
Like many Métis sons, Philip, Joseph Jr., and John Turner followed their father into HBC service. John worked for the HBC as a blacksmith at Temiscamingue. Along with his Métis wife, Mary Mclean and his family, he lived among Métis families at Temiscamingue Lake before moving to Bear Island, Temagami in 1883. Philip worked in the Moose Factory District and was postmaster at Eastmain and Great Whale River on the east coast of James Bay. But Joseph Jr.'s HBC career took him far across the Métis Homeland. In 1829, he left Moose Factory and travelled nearly 1,000 km to the Island Lake District northeast of Lake Winnipeg.

The Island Lake District's headquarters was at Oxford House, which, between 1828 and 1833, was also the headquarters for a winter road connecting York Factory and the Red River settlement. As an apprentice in the district, Joseph Jr. would have crossed paths with many Métis travelling this route, and he likely worked alongside Métis HBC servants George Taylor and Bakie Sinclair,

who also worked in the district. Following his apprenticeship, Joseph Jr. headed east to the coastal port of York Factory before moving west again to the Cumberland District on the Saskatchewan River. The Cumberland District's headquarters, Cumberland House, was a major site of pemmican production and an important stopping point for boats heading to the Athabasca country, placing Joseph at a central point in the vibrant, networked Métis world. In Cumberland District, Joseph may have once again lived and worked alongside Bakie Sinclair, as well as Hector Finlayson, a Métis boat-builder in the district in 1852, whose family had ties within the Lake of the Woods and Northern Lake Superior region.

When Joseph Jr. left the HBC in 1852 at the age of 36, he retired to Red River. By that time, other members of the Turner family had also moved west. For example, his sister Charlotte and her husband, James Harper, moved to Red River from Martin Falls when James retired from the HBC in 1844. They were among the many Métis families from what is now northwestern and northern Ontario—including northern Lake Superior—who congregated in Red River when their contracts expired with the HBC. Many, including James Harper, became farmers. But Joseph Turner Jr. did not stay in Red River for long. The following year, he returned north and worked as a "freeman" at The Pas, just east of Cumberland House, where independent Métis traders siphoned trade away from the HBC post. In 1853, Joseph Jr. then moved to Fort à la Corne, a Métis settlement on the Saskatchewan River, where the HBC had a provisioning post. He raised a family at Fort à la Corne and worked there as an interpreter for the HBC into the 1860s. Subsequent generations of Turners built lives for themselves at Red River, Fort à la Corne, and Métis settlements throughout the Homeland.

Elizabeth Turner's life took a different direction from those of her siblings drawn west by marriage or the fur trade's economic opportunities. Following her marriage to a Métis man named Charles Roussain, Elizabeth and her children spent their lives in the Sault Ste. Marie Historic Métis Community. They later lived in Roussainville, the small Métis fishing village named for Charles' family, where they were joined by Elizabeth's niece, Josephine Undgarden, who grew up at Moose Factory before moving to Roussainville with her husband. Josephine's sister Mary Undgarden also relocated from Moose Factory to Sault Ste. Marie, and likely spent time visiting family at Roussainville.



As Turner siblings made lives for themselves in Métis communities across the Métis Homeland, the family's youngest daughters—Jane and Harriet—remained in Moose Factory, their children growing up in the same community where their parents and grandparents had spent their lives. Yet their connection to relatives right across the Métis Homeland probably influenced the later activities of the Moose Factory Turners. Two of Jane's sons, George and William McLeod, likely knew that their cousin Joseph (Philip Turner's son) had successfully applied for scrip in Alberta in 1886. In 1905, George and William petitioned the government to offer scrip to Métis at Moose Factory too, citing the scrip already granted to their halfbreed friends and family "of the North West Territory."