

Metis Children's Lands

FRAUDS IN MANITOBA.

WINNIPEG, Manitoba, Nov. 10.—The Provincial Government has appointed a commission to inquire into alleged irregularities in the administration of justice in the province as to infants' lands or estates. The charge is made by Justice Melle, and it is said it will be likely to implicate Chief-Justice Wood, who is accused of issuing irregular orders to parties, who are purchasing the claims of minors at inadequate prices.

New York Times, Nov. 10, 1881.

As noted in newspaper reports Chief Justice Edmund Burke Wood was implicated in this scandal and commentators of the day noted that he “died one step ahead of his removal” from the bench.¹

Frederick McKenzie and Thomas Bernier were appointed as Commissioners by D. M. Walker the Attorney General of Manitoba. The commission was entitled as a Commissions of Inquiry into the Administration of Justice as to Infants Lands and Estates.

In testimony before the Commission, Justice Miller stated that sales of Metis infant's lands had to have a petition (under Order 499) verifying that the sale will provide an allowance for maintenance of the child: “Mr. Leggo, Master in Equity (of the court), informed me that eighteen or twenty orders had been issued — that the papers were very irregular — and that it was a scandal upon justice — and said that it was my duty to take some steps to endeavor to prevent the continuance of these practices; in consequence of that I sent the communication to the Attorney General, which is the ground for this Commission.”

Next, Leggo testified that: “On Monday the 17th of October, you (Justice Miller) asked for the orders of the Court. On the following morning I mentioned to you that the last

¹ In testimony before the Commissioners it was clear that Justice Wood's son, Melville Burke Wood had been paid to act as an intermediary by the land speculators.

batch of orders had been passed.; as Master in Equity, I am quite clear that they were entirely irregular; they are all irregular; there is not one regular from the very first; I thought it a disgrace to the administration of justice that such a thing should be allowed to go on; I told the judges so.”

In the Commissioners report of December 20, 1881 they concluded:

With a view to the prevention hereafter of the monstrous abuses illustrated by these cases, I would very respectfully suggest that an “official guardian” of infants should be appointed in this Province, as there is now one in the Province of Ontario.



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