

Sam Livingston

“For the present, I defend my claim as my neighbours do, behind my Winchester.”

Sam Livingston's farm, one of the oldest homesteads in southern Alberta, now sleeps, covered by the waters of the Glenmore Dam in Calgary.

Livingston hated rules and did what he could to avoid them. After fleeing the empty belly of the Irish Potato Famine, he ended up near Fort Edmonton, working in the buffalo robe trade. Noticing that buffalo were still plentiful around the Bow River, he decided to move south.

Although he grazed 300 head of cattle and grew a good crop of oats, Livingston was legally more squatter than settler. The Mounties claimed use of all the wood and grass on his land, and Livingston felt that the police defended the ranchers against the farmers. He swore that “between government reserves, leases, school lands, Hudson Bay lands,” a man couldn't settle. He had led the fight for settlers' rights, a “battle between cattle and men.”



Sam Livingston, Calgary, Alberta's First Settler
Glenbow Archives NA-152-1

In 1885, Livingston's fee to buy the land he had lived on for almost a decade was finally accepted.

Settlers' Rights

By April of 1885, long-time settlers of southern Alberta were out of patience. The federal government would not acknowledge settlers' land applications, instead making large tracts of

land available to rich, often absentee owners. But when long-time settlers were run off their homesteads by new wealthy leaseholders, the settlers' anger boiled over.

Sam Livingston, president of the Alberta Settlers' Rights Association, sent a nine-page telegram outlining settlers' grievances to Sir John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister of Canada. The missive was perfectly timed – it was sent two weeks after federal forces were defeated in the North-West Resistance.

Macdonald responded quickly to the disgruntled settlers and opened some townships for settlement. Within the next ten years, many of the settlers' other concerns were also addressed.

Sam's Elk-Hide Jacket

By wearing his elk-hide jacket, Sam embraced and honoured the traditions and skills of its maker – his Métis wife Jane Howse Livingston. Like other Métis women, Jane used her talents to enhance her husband's stature.



Sam Livingston's House
Glenbow Archives NA-126-1

The Sam's elk-hide jacket was styled in the traditional Métis way. The gold wire buttons have a military look, but the colourful floral embroidery on the pockets, cuffs, front plackets, and back yoke are pure Métis. The silk floss has faded with time, but the wild roses, forget-me-nots and tulip-shaped flowers reflect the Canadian prairies from spring through fall.

Full Name: Samuel Henry Harkwood Livingston

Born: February 4, 1831 – Died: October 4, 1897

Additional Resources

- **Alberta Champions Society**
<https://albertachampions.org/Champions/sam-livingston-1831-1897/>
- **Dictionary of Canadian Biography**
http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/livingston_samuel_henry_harkwood_12E.html



Our Collections

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