

Sarah Simon

Fort McPherson, NT



- Born:* May 1, 1901
- Birthplace:* Near Fort McPherson
- Parents:* Martha Kay & Charlie Stewart
- Gwich'in:* Teet'it Gwich'in
- Married:* James Simon on July 12, 1920 at St. Matthew's Church, Fort McPherson (d. 1977)
- Children:* Catherine Susie (d), Alfred James Charles (d), Susie, Doris (adopted), Mona (adopted, d), John (adopted), Lawrence (adopted), Paul (adopted)

Sarah was born near Fort McPherson in 1901, and spent most of her young life in the community. After her mother Martha died in 1903, she was raised by her paternal grandmother Catherine Stewart. Her father Charlie Stewart, who worked as a Special Constable and interpreter for many years, became well known as the guide who led Corporal Dempster to find the Lost Patrol - the four Northwest Mounted Police who perished in 1911 trying to make their way to Dawson from Fort McPherson. When Sarah turned 10, her grandmother became blind, and for the next nine years, Sarah looked after her. This was the beginning of Sarah's long career of caring for others. At the request of her grandmother, Sarah did not go away to residential school but was schooled by the local missionary in Fort McPherson. She learned to read both English and Gwich'in by studying her English and Gwich'in Bibles in the evenings, curled up close to the light of the fire.

On July 12, 1920 at the age of 19, Sarah married James Simon of the Yukon, in a marriage arranged by Sarah's father. Their marriage was a strong partnership over the course of 57 years. When they moved to Aklavik, it was through her husband that

Sarah learned how to live in the bush and drive a dog team. From Sarah, James learned to speak English, to read and write in both languages, and developed an interest in the Church when Sarah asked him to lead hymn sings and prayers on Sundays. These services became very popular.

In 1926, Sarah and James moved to Old Crow where James worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. While in Old Crow, the Anglican Archdeacon suggested that James go to school to take bible training courses. For two years, Sarah, James, and their young daughter lived in Hay River while James studied the bible and Sarah studied music and learned to play the organ so that they could both minister to the people. When Sarah and James returned to the Mackenzie Delta in 1928, a major flu epidemic was just beginning and they helped to bring strength through religion. Sarah nursed some people for up to a year. Their dedication was strong, and thirty-one years later, on October 18, 1959, James was ordained as a minister at Christ Church Cathedral in Whitehorse.

Together, Sarah and James worked for the

Anglican Church in Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Old Crow and Whitehorse until James' death in 1977. During these years, they cared for their own three children, two of whom died when young, adopted several children and took in many orphans. No person in need was turned away from their home. Sarah acted as the local midwife, delivering 86 babies both in town and in the bush. She also worked as an interpreter. Her language and culture have always been extremely important to her, and she has spent many hours teaching others, reading and translating the Bible, Prayer Book and Hymn Book and working with local teachers and researchers to promote and preserve the Gwich'in language and culture.

Over the years, Sarah has received many awards recognizing her lifelong contribution to her Church and community including the Order of Canada (April 1991), the Commissioner's Award of the Northwest Territories, and the Independent Order of the Daughters of the Empire. To Sarah, the most meaningful came in 1945, when she became a Life Member of the Women's Auxili-ary in the Anglican Church. She wears this pin every day.