

1637 MAIN STREET – COLIN INKSTER’S BLEAK HOUSE
Unknown, 1874



The son of a fur-trader and Selkirk Settler, Colin Inkster was born on his parents' farm in Red River in the year 1843. His father, John Inkster, kept a store and a mill which, together with his farm, produced sufficient income to build a fine large house, now the Seven Oaks Museum. Young Colin followed in his father's footsteps, farming part of the river lot, and becoming involved in the turbulent local politics of 1870. In 1871, Colin was appointed Speaker to the first Manitoba Legislative Council, patterned after the British Upper House. When it was argued that a second House was redundant in 1874, it was his vote that abolished it. Inkster was promptly awarded the position of High Sheriff of Manitoba, a position that he tended with wisdom and honour for 51 years.

Bleak House, as the second-generation Inkster family called their home, was erected in 1874. The farm around the house produced crops as well as purebred cattle and stud horses, as Inkster pursued a “scientific” approach to agriculture. Even when he was 80 years of age, the old sheriff sold chickens in the City Market. Living to be past 90, Colin Inkster was able to pass on vivid memories of the formation of the province in 1870 and his role in the development of the city and province. Inkster died in 1934.

As the city crept out towards the farm, the Inksters sold more of their land, leaving 6.5 acres of grass and trees around the historic house. Employing a method known as “Red River frame”, the house was built of solid squared logs, fitted and mortised, in this case finished with a wood siding for extra warmth. An addition to the rear, and a twentieth-century porch across the front have not modified the house substantially and its early characteristics are still apparent.

The last of the Inkster family to live in the house was Sybil, Colin’s daughter, who died in 1973. Today, the old house has a new vitality and function as Bleak House Centre, a senior citizens’ drop-in facility providing space for activities and hobbies for dozens of seniors.