

# Forty Years in Canada: Reminiscences of the Great North-West with some account of his service in South Africa

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Forty Years in Canada:

Reminiscences of the Great North-West

with some account of his Service in South Africa

by Sir Samuel Benfield Steele

and

A Legend In His Lifetime

The Last Twelve Years of the Life of

Sir Samuel Benfield Steele

in Canada and England

by Duncan Robinson

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I. Forty Years in Canada

Introduction

Written at the special request of the late Lord Strathcona GCMG<sup>[1]</sup>

The late Lord Strathcona promised to write a foreword for Colonel Steele's projected book, but his lamented death intervened. Although not able to carry out his intention, he did not forget the promise; and among his last words was a request to me to undertake the duty for him and in his name. Lord Strathcona had a sincere regard for Colonel Steele, and never forgot the services rendered by him as commanding officer of "Strathcona's Horse" during the South African war. When his name was mentioned for that position, Lord Strathcona at once accepted the nomination, as he recognised that Colonel Steele was one of the most suitable men for the command, in view of his long experience in that famous force the Royal North West Mounted Police. I write with some knowledge of the subject, as it was my privilege to assist Lord Strathcona in the organisation of his distinguished regiment; and, besides, I can look back on twenty years or more of personal acquaintance with the author of this volume. In this connection, I may say in passing that it was a gracious act on the part of the Canadian Government to perpetuate the name of "Strathcona's Horse" by the formation of the permanent western regiment which now bears that honoured name. Lord Strathcona was much gratified by this mark of consideration, and it was especially pleasing to him that Colonel Steele was selected for its command.

The reader of Colonel Steele's book will be impressed with the simplicity and vigour of the man. His life during the last forty years, except for the time he was in South Africa, is synonymous with the progress and development of the western territories of the Dominion of Canada, now one of the leading agricultural countries of the world. He was there in the early days before there were railroads or settlements or wheat fields — when the country was largely in possession of the Indian and the trapper, and covered by herds of hundreds of thousands of the buffalo. What a change these forty years, or thirty years, or even a lesser period has brought about! In the decade from 1870 to 1880, and even up to 1890, it was possible to travel over many parts of this vast area without seeing a house from morning till evening; while at the present time passengers on the thousands of miles of railway that now intersect the western provinces in every direction are hardly ever out of sight of cities, towns and villages, huge grain elevators, and thriving homesteads.

It is impossible to give too much credit to successive governments, to the Hudson's Bay Company, and to the Royal North West Mounted Police for what they have done to assist in the peaceful and wonderful development of what was once the red-man's country, and described, later on, by Lord Beaconsfield as "an illimitable wilderness." It is true that there were some troubles in 1869-70, when the country was transferred from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion Government, and again in 1885; but these arose rather from the misdirected ambition of a few prominent men among the half-breeds and Indians than from any really deep-rooted grievances. The Hudson's Bay Company had always instilled into the native mind that fair treatment would be extended to them, that the word of the Great White Company and its officers could always be relied upon and kept. The Government continued this policy, and it soon became known that justice was being administered equally to the red man and to the white. Herein lies the explanation of the excellent relations it has always succeeded in maintaining with the red population — which enabled the country to be opened up for settlement and cultivation with so little friction and difficulty. The North West Mounted Police was the channel through which this wise policy was carried out, and the tact and discretion it has always shown in keeping law and order within so immense a territory, and the confidence felt in the force both by the Indians and the settlers, afford ample evidence of the manner in which such duties have been carried out.

Few are aware of the part played by the Mounted Police in connection with the construction of railways in, and the immigration movement to, Manitoba and the other western provinces since the early seventies. The men employed on the construction work, especially in the earlier days, were not exactly angels, and a good deal of tact, good temper and determination had to be shown in handling them. And further, immigrants of all races have been pouring into the country in their thousands and tens of thousands, and many of these settlers must be grateful to the Mounted

Police for timely help and counsel. The force has also been of much use to the Indian Department in its successful efforts to transform the red man into a useful citizen and a worker. My experience — and I have travelled over a good deal of the country — is that the officers and troopers of the North West Mounted Police are welcomed wherever they go. Their work has not been confined to the settled districts, or districts in course of settlement; they have done splendid pioneer work in the Yukon, and are still similarly engaged round the shores of Hudson's Bay, and in the far northern boundaries of the country.

Colonel Steele has taken no small part in the course of events to which reference has been made, and has a record of which most men would be proud. His life has been full of incident, but he is a modest man, never accustomed to blow his own trumpet, preferring the more sterling satisfaction of doing well whatever duty was entrusted to him. He is a splendid example of the man who puts deeds before words, and this is shown not only in his record in Canada, but while in command of Strathcona's Horse, and in his subsequent work in the South African Constabulary. For all these reasons I have no doubt that this volume of reminiscences will have a wide circle of readers in the many parts of the Empire in which the name and sterling qualities of Colonel Sam Steele are well known and appreciated.

J G Colmer

Dominion Day,

1st July, 1914.

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## 1: Birth, Family Early Life

I was born on 5th January 1849,<sup>[2]</sup> at Purbrook, township of Medonte, county of Simcoe, province of Ontario. I was the fourth son of Captain Elmes Steele of the Royal Navy, by his second wife, Anne, the youngest daughter of Neil MacIan Macdonald, of the Ardnamurchan branch of the Macdonalds, who was a native of Islay, Argyllshire, Scotland, and was a grandson of Captain Godfrey MacNeil of Barra, and nephew of Colonel Donald MacNeil of the British Army.

My grandfather was Dr Elmes Steele of Coleford, whose brother, Colonel Samuel Steele, served at the capture of Quebec. My father was one of seven sons, three of whom served in the navy and three in the army during the great war,<sup>[3]</sup> and one, William, adopted his father's profession and practised in Abergavenny, where his descendants are still residing.

My father served in the navy during the days of Nelson and later, and was present at many engagements on board some of the most famous ships. He entered the service in the last decade of the eighteenth century as a midshipman on board the Triton, thirty-two guns, in March, 1798. In 1800 he was transferred to the Cambridge, seventy-four guns, the flagship of Sir Thomas Pasley, and then to the Atlas, ninety-eight guns. In November 1802 he was nominated master's mate of the Caroline, thirty-six guns. During the passage of the Caroline to the East Indies a prize was taken, and my father was placed on board with, very naturally, the worst of the crew, to take her home, his only assistant being a young midshipman of sixteen years, named Curran, a nephew of the great Irish lawyer, John Philpot Curran. On their way to Cork the British crew broke into the spirit-room one night and got drunk. In the midst of their disorder the ship was retaken by the enemy, but she did not remain in their hands for many days. They had lost their reckoning, and my father was called upon deck to assist them in working it out, and as a reward was permitted to

walk the deck. Curran was also allowed to come up to keep him company. Finally, when in sight of the Scilly Isles, the ship was retaken by a ruse and her course changed to Cork. For this service my father was made a freeman of the city of Gloucester.

Early in 1805 he was nominated lieutenant of L'Aimable, and between August following and December 1812 he was employed on the coast of North America and in European waters. He was on the Leopard at the time of the famous "incident" with the Chesapeake, when they enforced the right to search foreign ships for British deserters, and commanded a broadside in the encounter. This extraordinary action was brought about by the direct orders of the British government through the admiral commanding the North American squadron, but the powers that controlled the navy at that time went back on their officers, and meted out some punishment to all, including my father, although he was only acting under the orders of Captain Humphries, whom if he had not obeyed, he would no doubt have been tried by court-martial and shot.

His hottest time was in the Basque Roads under Cochrane, and he commanded a forced landing and destruction of guns and signal-stations at Baignio, on the coast of France. He continued on the active list for some years after Waterloo, but Europe was tired of war, the navy was reduced, and, as there was little to do, he took to the land and interested himself in civil affairs. After his marriage with Miss Coucher of Bath, and for several years, he lived in Paris and Coutances and Normandy. There were six children of the marriage, who were given every advantage in France until the Revolution of 1830, when he and his family returned to England.

In 1832 my father and many other British officers of the army and navy were induced by Lieutenant-General Sir John Colborne, at that time governor of Upper Canada, to emigrate with a large number of soldiers and sailors to that province and settle on the vacant Crown Lands. He proceeded there with his second son, John, and took up 1,000 acres of land in the picturesque county of Simcoe, cleared off the forest, built at his own expense the first Anglican Church in the township, and eventually became the first member of parliament for the county, his election being one of the most hotly contested in the records of the county. During the remainder of his long life, he devoted himself enthusiastically to everything that would benefit his adopted country, and became a magistrate and colonel of the militia. The old soldiers and sailors who had emigrated had commuted their pensions to realise sufficient money to make a start in the new land, and at one time they, like many others, were in sore straits to make ends meet. While my father was in parliament he took the lead in inducing the home government to restore their pensions.

The year after he had settled at Purbrook, Mrs Steele and all but one of the family, his eldest son, Elmes, afterwards a doctor in Abergavenny, joined my father, the sailing ship which brought them to New York taking two and a half months to cross the Atlantic. They then came by the Erie Canal to Rochester, whence the only railroad in America, the short line from that place to Oswega, took them to the only steamboat on the Great Lakes. My father met them at Little York, now the fine city of Toronto, and they crossed Lake Simcoe on the sloop which carried passengers to the little Indian village of Orillia. They went cheerfully through the inconveniences of pioneer life in the backwoods, and no doubt enjoyed a great deal of it.

Mrs Steele, a much beloved lady, died in the forties, when her family were well settled in life, the girls in Toronto, and in 1848 my father married again. At the early age of twenty-nine my mother died, leaving six children, the eldest myself, only eleven years old. Our years were very happy before that, but there came afterwards much sorrow and a great deal of unhappiness, brightened, of course, at times by the kindly sympathy of our relations. Previous to our sad bereavement we had moved into Orillia, which was no longer the red man's home, and there the older ones of the family were sent to school. My brother Dick and I went to one kept by a talented old English gentleman, Mr Edwin Slee, whose wife taught French, but before I went there I had the benefit of my father's excellent teaching and a large stock of books, and was in consequence able to slip into

the top class with the older boys.

In those days every man and boy, and many girls and women, could shoot, swim, and find their way through the forests, which were then a trackless wilderness, and all men and boys could ride well. I had the benefit of all this, and in winter could skate, play any game, wrestle and box; our bouts at school were without gloves, as all boys could not afford to purchase any, and we had to do without.

My riding and shooting I learned under the auspices of my cousins in the township of Oro, Captain Hugh Clarke, then only a lad, being my preceptor, assisted by my cousins of the MacIan clan, who were kind comrades and teachers. With my cousin, JB Clarke, now KC of Toronto, I roamed the woods during the holidays, built boats and rafts, assisted Hugh to make gunpowder and ball, using the heavy rifle or fowling-piece as soon as we could carry them. There was nothing in the life of the backwoods pioneer that we did not know and desire to learn.

I was thirteen years old when my father moved into the country again, and in 1865 he died full of years, and I lived for a short time with my half-brother, John, who had a leading place in the country, and was thirty years or more my senior. An association with him was a great advantage to any lad, for he was kind and cultured, a true gentleman, admired by all who knew him. He was one of the best shots that I have known, and a good sportsman, who could shoot, run or ride, and he joined the young men and boys in their games. He used the heavy octagon barrelled rifles, with their weighty iron ramrod, and I have often known him shoot the heads off two partridges at once. On such an occasion his Highland Scotch companion used to suggest sagely to his neighbours that the Evil One must have loaded John Steele's rifle! In those days the farmers would assemble at some "corners" and shoot for geese, turkeys, and even horses and cows, at so much per shot, and if the Council were sitting in the neighbourhood he would sometimes have to adjourn to shoot for some old gentlemen who had been bred under different conditions.

As a boy I shared in that sort of life, and when the Fenians<sup>[4]</sup> began to threaten Canada, and made raids on our honest, loyal people, I joined the militia at about sixteen years of age. As I had been given a commission in Number 6 Company of the 35th Regiment, I had to qualify for the highest rank, and did so with the 2nd battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, taking the best certificate going, and making one hundred per cent of marks on drills and discipline. I did not remain long with that company, however, as circumstances compelled me to do better for myself, and I got employment as a clerk in the business of a Mr Turnbull of Clarksburg, co. Grey.<sup>[5]</sup> While there I raised and trained the Clarksburg company of the 31st Regiment, and was asked by the leading people to take command, but I felt that I was too young and not prominent enough to take a company when there were fine men there to undertake it. I left there after putting the company in good order and well organised, parting from them with much regret. I was still interested in the force, however, and made a close study of all military matters, at the same time looking well after the interests of my employers, until the disturbances of the Red River Métis under Louis Riel changed the course of my life.

\* \* \* \* \* 2: The Red River Rebellion

During the autumn of 1869 and for many months of 1870 the Red River Settlement of the North West or Hudson's Bay Territory<sup>[6]</sup> was in the throes of rebellion. This then remote colony was situated in what is now the fertile province of Manitoba, and extended for a considerable distance along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. Its inhabitants were the descendants of Scotch settlers, who had been placed there by the famous Earl of Selkirk, and French Métis, descendants of half-breeds, the renowned "coureurs de bois" of Canada, who had been in the employ of the North West Fur Company of Montreal. The settlement had at different times been reinforced by retired Hudson's Bay Company's officers and other employees. At Portage la Prairie, about 60

miles up the Assiniboine from the Red River, there had settled in the early sixties a considerable number of British Canadians from Ontario. Fort Garry, near the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, was the principal post of the "Great Company," and the residence of its governor.

Shortly after the confederation of the provinces in 1867,<sup>[7]</sup> an arrangement was made for the transfer of the North West Territory to the Dominion of Canada. The Hudson's Bay Company, which had held sway over it for nearly 200 years, agreed to annul their charter for a consideration, and the transfer was fixed for 1st December, 1869. The Hon. William McDougall was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the vast country, and on 1st September he left Ottawa for the settlement to assist in the transfer.

Survey parties had been sent by the Canadian government to Fort Garry, and were already laying out the lands in sections and townships. This greatly offended the French Métis, and on 10th October a party of them, under the leadership of Louis Riel, stopped the work of the surveyors. The chief of the survey party appealed to Governor McTavish of the Hudson's Bay Company, but without effect. Riel flatly refused to allow the work to proceed, and the surveyors were withdrawn.

The French Métis then formed a provisional government, with a man named John Bruce as president and Louis Riel as secretary. The latter, being the stronger head and the better educated of the two, soon assumed the leadership, and was elected president. Soon after this government was formed an armed force was sent to Scratching River, about 15 miles south of Fort Garry, where a barricade was erected to oppose the entrance of Mr McDougall by the Pembina trail. The following letter was sent forbidding him to enter.

Le Comité National des Métis de la Rivière Rouge intime a M. Wm McDougall l'ordre de ne pas entrer sur le territoire de Nord Ouest sans une permission speciale de ce comité.<sup>[8]</sup>

Disregarding the letter, Mr McDougall kept on his way to the Hudson's Bay post at Fort Pembina, inside the North West Territory. Three days later an armed party of mounted men arrived from Fort Garry, and sent into the post two of their number to inform Mr McDougall that by order of the Métis' provisional government he must leave the North West Territory by 9 o'clock the next morning. This was enforced, and the Lieutenant-Governor took up his residence in the village of Pembina, on the American side of the border. On 24th November Riel took forcible possession of Fort Garry with its stores, food supplies, arms, ammunition and money. He made the post the base of operations, and fed and paid himself and his men at the expense of the Hudson's Bay Company.

On 1st December Mr McDougall took formal possession of the North West Territory in the name of the Canadian government, and issued proclamations to the people. The first was to the effect that he had been appointed Lieutenant-Governor, and the second confirmed all public officers in their appointments, except Governor McTavish. He gave Colonel Dennis, chief surveyor, authority to raise a force to put down the rebellion. This Colonel Dennis proceeded to do, taking possession of the Stone Fort, 20 miles north of Fort Garry, and placing some men there; but at the solicitation of some of the leading persons of the settlement, he caused his men to lay down their arms so that unnecessary bloodshed might be avoided. Soon after this, Riel increased his force to about 500 men, and had the promise of many more if required. To maintain them he continued to draw on the provisions and funds of the Company.

With affairs at this pass, Mr McDougall deemed it useless to remain in the north west, and returned to Canada. In the meantime two delegates were sent from Ottawa to conciliate the rebels. A few days later, Mr Donald A. Smith,<sup>[9]</sup> better known as Lord Strathcona, chief officer of

the Hudson's Bay Company in eastern Canada, followed as special commissioner to inquire into and report upon the causes of the disturbances, and to assist Governor McTavish. He arrived in the settlement on 27th December and, gaining admission to Fort Garry, met Riel and his councillors, and was soon, to all intents and purposes, a prisoner. He found the British flag hauled down, and the fleur de lys and shamrocks floating over Fort Garry. He learned that the desire of several of the rebel leaders was to bring about the annexation of the country by the United States. However, he took the people of the settlement into his confidence and succeeded in convening a mass meeting of the settlers, where he explained to them the views of the government. About 1,000 men were present, and the convention lasted for two days, 19th and 20th January. It was held in the open air, with the temperature about 25 below zero, and resulted in 40 delegates being chosen. On 10th February it was decided to send three of their number to the government at Ottawa with a bill of rights. These persons were Father Richot, Judge Black and Alfred Scott, men whose names are intimately connected with the history of the Red River Settlement.

Riel burst into violence while the delegates were in session, and placed a guard over Governor McTavish, who was confined to his bed by a serious illness, threatening to have him shot before midnight. He also arrested Dr Cowan, chief officer of the Hudson's Bay Company in the district, and placed him in the fort with 60 prisoners whom he had confined some days previously. He threatened to shoot Dr Cowan if he did not take the oath of allegiance to the provisional government. A few days later he calmed down, and on 20th February, the last day that the 40 delegates were in session, he set the Governor and Dr Cowan at liberty, and on 11th and 12th February released a few more of the prisoners, promising to set free the remainder in a few days.

Before Riel had an opportunity to do so, however, the people of the British Canadian settlement at Portage la Prairie assembled and were joined by some hundreds of the old settlers under Major Boulton, an ex-officer of the 100th Royal Canadian Regiment of the British Army. These men were determined to take Fort Garry by assault. Major Boulton endeavoured to dissuade them from the enterprise, as they were very inferior in numbers to the rebels, and were not well supplied with arms or ammunition. Seeing, however, that the people were determined to make the attempt to release the prisoners, he decided to try to surprise Riel in the night, the only plan which could have the slightest hope of success. The enterprise was frustrated, however, by a blizzard which sprang up on the night on which the attempt was to be made, and they were unable, owing to the storm and deep snow, to reach Fort Garry before daylight. Finding that they could not surprise the place, and being short of food, they departed for their homes on 17th February, but on their way to Portage la Prairie, Major Boulton, Thomas Scott and 45 others passed too near the fort, and were captured by Riel and placed in confinement in the post.

Major Boulton was tried by court-martial on the 18th and was sentenced to be shot at noon on the same day, but, on the petition of some friends, the execution was postponed until the 19th. Poor Boulton was kept in suspense. He was given the last rites of the church, and was fully prepared to die when at the last moment Riel yielded to the earnest solicitations of Mr Donald Smith and pardoned him.

The elections in the Scotch and English parishes were held on 26th February and on the 28th Riel promised to release the prisoners who were captured with Major Boulton; but on 4th March he ordered the trial of Thomas Scott. The court-martial was presided over by Ambrose Lepine, and Scott was condemned to be shot on the same day. He was accused of being unruly and insolent to the guards who were placed over him, and Riel stated that an example must be made of him. Mr Donald Smith did all that a human being could do to turn the rebel leader from his purpose, but without success. In his report he wrote: "It was now within a few minutes of 1 o'clock and on entering the Governor's house the Rev. Mr Young joined me and said, 'It is now considerably past the hour, I trust that you have succeeded.' 'No,' I said. 'For God's sake go back to the poor man, for

I fear the worst'." He left immediately and a few minutes after he had entered the room in which the prisoner was confined, some guards marched in and told Scott that his hour had come.

His dreadful position now for the first time flashed upon him. Poor Scott turned to his fellow-prisoners and said good-bye to them, and was led out accompanied by his faithful and kind pastor, Mr Young. His eyes were bandaged, and when he was outside the gate on the east side of the fort near the north west bastion, he asked Mr Young where he should place himself, and then knelt down on the snow, facing north, the firing party of six facing south. At the signal they fired, and three bullets passed through poor Scott's body. He fell, but as he still showed signs of life, the commander of the firing party drew his revolver and fired a shot into his head, the bullet entering the eye and passing round the skull. Mr Young then asked for the remains, so that they could be interred in the Presbyterian burying-ground, but he was refused. The Anglican Bishop also asked, with the same result. The body was taken into the fort, confined in a rough pine-box, and left for the night in one of the bastions. Before daylight, it is said, the murdered man was heard to groan, and a guard was sent in to finish the bloody work. It was supposed then that the remains of poor Scott were buried within the walls of the fort, but it has since been clearly proved that this is not so.

On the way to his execution Scott prayed fervently and continued to do so until he was unconscious, and he said, as he was led down the steps, "This is a cold-blooded murder." The news of this atrocious crime produced a great sensation in eastern Canada, particularly in the province of Ontario. Public meetings were held all over the province, and the government was urged to send an expedition to restore the authority of the Queen and punish Riel and his companions in crime. As soon as the three delegates from Fort Garry arrived in Ottawa, two of them were arrested as accessories before the fact to the murder of Thomas Scott, but as nothing could be proved against them they were released.

At this crisis, Mr Donald Smith recommended that a military expedition should be sent as soon as possible in the spring. His suggestion was approved, and it was decided to dispatch a force of regulars and Canadian militia under the command of Colonel (afterwards Field-Marshal Viscount) Wolseley,<sup>[10]</sup> who had served many years in Canada. His appointment was very popular with the Canadian people, and as he had commanded large camps at Thorold on the Niagara frontier and at La Prairie near Montreal, he was well known to the Canadian militia and thoroughly understood conditions in the country.

The route chosen for the expedition was that formerly used by the Great North West Fur Company before its amalgamation with the Hudson's Bay Company; but nothing larger than a birch-bark canoe had been employed for the first 200 miles westward from Lake Superior. The route had been considered impracticable for boats. Troops had previously been sent to Fort Garry by Hudson's Bay, the Nelson River and Lake Winnipeg.

On 1st May I received a message from Lt-Col Alexander Mackenzie of the 35th Regiment to the effect that Captain DH McMillan would be at Barrie, co. Simcoe, at 4 o'clock, and that if I cared to go to Red River he would give me a place. I had previously held a commission in the 35th, had organized and drilled a company of the 31st Grey Regiment, and had obtained from the Military School field officers' certificates of qualification for cavalry and infantry, but I had resigned my commission.

Accordingly I joined, and was pleased to find myself a member of No. 4 Company 1st Ontario Rifles,<sup>[\*]</sup> under the command of Captain McMillan, with Lieutenant N Kennedy and Ensign Stewart Mulvey as the subalterns. We were already well drilled, but as yet the NCO's were only "acting," and as it was necessary that all should have officers' certificates, the order came out one afternoon for all men with Military School certificates to fall out to the right, but I did not do so, as I had

made up my mind to serve as a private. The men were very kind and cheerful companions, always ready to do a good turn for a comrade, so that as far as experience went I was better off without chevrons and learned how to appreciate the trials of other men to an extent that I should never have been able to do had I been promoted.

On 16th May my company arrived at Sault St Marie, and marched over to the camp ground near the old Hudson's Bay Company's quarters. This place was directly opposite Fort Brady on the United States side of the river, and as at first all the troops and supplies had to be brought over the Sault portage, we were stationed there to prevent any interruption by the Fenians who were then active in the United States.

At this time, through a foolish misunderstanding, none of our vessels were allowed to pass through the canal on the American side of the river, but later on this was settled amicably on the protest of the Governor-General through the British ambassador at Washington. The ships were then permitted to go through with ordinary supplies, the troops and contraband of war going across the Canadian portage. Since then a splendid canal, far superior to those opposite, has been constructed over the portage road, and a well-built, bustling town of many thousands of inhabitants, with fine factories and other works, has taken the place of the village which at that date compared very unfavourably with the pretty and clean American town opposite. We did not realise then that we were the pioneers of the Western Canada of to-day.

On 23rd May Colonel Wolseley arrived at the Sault. The troops and military stores were landed at the wharf and the Chicora passed up, the first to get through the canal after consent had been given, although she had brought the horses, boats and ordinary stores with her. The screw steamer Shickaluna also arrived, accompanied by the schooners Pandora and Orion. Colonel Wolseley and the troops embarked on the Chicora and with the fleet left for Thunder Bay, but, much to our disappointment, we were left behind. [†]

The American troops at Fort Brady consisted of two companies of infantry, and I am pleased to say that the greatest harmony existed between us, the American soldiers often coming to see us after our work was lightened by the ships being allowed to pass the canal.

We were at the Sault longer than any company in the expedition, and were glad to join the others. We arrived at Thunder Bay on 13th June. The place where the troops disembarked had been named "Prince Arthur's Landing" by Colonel Wolseley when he arrived, in honour of Prince Arthur [‡] who was then serving in the Rifle Brigade at Montreal. On our way up Lake Superior we had a very narrow escape from shipwreck. We were saved by the presence of mind of Harry Stavelly, one of our privates, who had served in the navy for a number of years. He was sentry on the fore-part of the upper deck in front of the wheel house, when, in the midst of the dense fog through which the Chicora was ploughing at an early hour of the morning, he saw a large rocky island looming up before the vessel and only a short distance ahead, whereupon he gave the word "Hard a port!" The helmsman obeyed, and the Chicora passed the rock, missing it by only a few feet. If a landsman had been on sentry we should most likely have been wrecked and all hands lost.

The day after our arrival we were set to work on a stockade fort which had been under construction for some weeks. It consisted of a strong palisade with a ditch, and a magazine was built inside with small bastions at the corners. Employment on this was the only task which seemed to be distasteful to the men. Canadians dislike the pick and shovel, and if they can get anyone else to use them, they are never to be found digging; any other occupation, no matter how severe, seems to be preferable.

Sometimes in the evening, when the day's work was done, Colonel Wolseley provided a few boats, and encouraged races, and generally acted as starter on these occasions. In addition to the

rowing there were competitions in hornpipes and fancy dancing on a platform erected in the vicinity of the canteen of the 60th. Foot-races and other sports were also indulged in after a hard day's work, but, as a rule, the majority were quite content to be spectators of the various events.

The appearance of the country in the vicinity of Prince Arthur's Landing, now Port Arthur, was most forbidding. For some time before the troops landed and probably several years previously, the forest for many miles had been swept by fire. Enormous quantities of fine timber had been destroyed, and thousands of acres were covered by the blackened trunks of trees. Several stretches were still burning when the rain began in June. These fires had destroyed many of the culverts and bridges over the small creeks on the Dawson Road, as the road to Shebandowan Lake had been named.

More than 700 voyageurs, whites and Indians, had been hired in different parts of Ontario and Quebec, selected on account of their great skill in handling boats, canoes and rafts of timber in the great rapids of the St Lawrence, Ottawa, St Maurice, Saguenay and other rivers. These men were accustomed to bush work; their winter employment being cutting, sawing and hewing timber for the English and home markets. There was no work in the woods to which they could not turn their hands, and as they landed they were sent up the road, and were soon hard at work. A few of them, but very few, gave trouble because of their objection to work on Sundays, but when matters were explained to them they accepted the situation and laboured with a will, and a better lot of men it would be impossible to find. They were a motley crowd; and more than half were Indians, or had Indian blood in their veins; the whites were Scotch or French Canadians. The Iroquois took first place for skill in navigating boats and canoes in surf waters. It was thought at first that the voyageurs and soldiers would not understand one another, and consequently not work well together, that the officers, especially those of the regulars, would not know how to handle men unaccustomed to unquestioning obedience, but as a matter of fact the officers got on admirably with them, and the men anticipated every wish and combined with the soldiers to make a success of the expedition.

On the day the headquarters of the Ontario Rifles disembarked at Prince Arthur's Landing, Colonel Wolseley, dissatisfied with the progress being made by the land transport in hauling the boats by road, made up his mind to try the water route to Shebandowan, and detailed Captain Young, of the 60th Rifles, with his company and the proper complement of voyageurs and Indians to make the attempt. Six boats were taken with two voyageurs to each, to steer and guide, and a crew of soldiers to track or tow them along the rivers.

From the mouth of the Kaministiquia to the Matawin bridge are 12 miles of quiet water and 33 miles of rapids, with now and then short navigable sections. Boulders of all shapes and sizes and sharp rocks set on edge were encountered along that part of the stream, which could be traversed with little or no risk to men, but which was very dangerous for boats. Great care had to be taken to prevent damage to keels and bottoms, and the labour of getting the boats safely over the portages and tracking them up the stream was exceedingly trying. None but men of strong physique were of use here.

From the Matawin bridge to the Oskondagee Creek by land was 12 miles. To a point known as Young's Landing it was navigable, but from here on there was a succession of rapids, the most difficult on the route, and a deep canyon with perpendicular walls, through which the current dashed at a great speed. The boats had to be taken up this part of the river for 8 miles. These rapids end at Calderon's Landing, and this place was connected with the main road by a bush trail two miles long, called Browne's Lane, after an officer of the corps. By this trail supplies were hauled from the Matawin bridge to the Landing and transported by boats to Ward's Landing.

From Calderon's Landing to the Oskondagee the river was navigable for lightly laden boats, but the current was swift and the work severe, the men having to track along the high rocks, sometimes poling or wading in the swift and shallow water up to the armpits. From the Oskondagee to Ward's Landing, over 4 miles, the boats and supplies had to be taken by waggon. The total distance by water from Fort William to the Oskondagee is about 70 miles, and prior to this expedition no boats had ever passed up. The bark canoe was the only craft considered suitable by the Great Fur Company's voyageurs, and with good reason. Mr Dawson reported unfavourably of the route on account of the danger of damaging the clinker-built boats, but Mr MacIntyre, of the Hudson's Bay Company, was of the opinion that we could make use of the route, though with difficulty. The torrents of rain which fell during the time the expedition was bringing up the boats certainly made it much easier, for, although the river was swifter on that account, the boats avoided many rocks which in ordinary seasons were uncovered, and would have damaged them. Even so the difficulties of that trip up the Matawin were stupendous. It was hard enough on the soldiers, but it was still worse for the voyageurs, who were kept continually coming and going until the last boat had passed up.

When Captain Young started up the Kaministiquia on 3rd June rain was falling daily and the rivers were rapidly becoming torrents. The Kaministiquia, fed by smaller streams, rose 6 feet in one night. There were seven portages to pass as far as the Matawin, one of them, at the Kakabeka Falls, being nearly a mile long and the fall 110 feet. The heavy boats had to be dragged up the hill at an angle of 45 degrees, and the load carried upon the men's backs over the portage. The rain fell continuously, while the black flies worried the men during the day and the sand flies and mosquitoes at night.

The method of bringing the boats across the portages was by skids (short poles), cut and laid across the track at intervals of a few feet. When the boats were ready the long towline was secured to the forefoot or stem and passed over double to a ring bolt on the keelson, back again to the forefoot and there secured. Then a man would take the end of the towline over his shoulder to lead in the right direction; two of the most powerful of the crew, generally voyageurs, placed themselves at the bow with their backs against the side of the boat, seizing the towline where it passed above the stem, and braced themselves, while two more of the strongest men were at the stern. The rest strung themselves along the towline or supported the sides of the boat by holding the gunwales. Those on the towline placed themselves in pairs or half sections, dividing the distance to the end of the line, fastening their tumplines (portage straps) to the rope, passing the flat part over the outward shoulder, and hauled on the rope, bearing outwards a little. As the boat went along the men at the bows lifted the stem over obstacles, such as stumps, stones or high skids, and in this manner they crossed the portage.

This was hard work, but drawing the boats across was mere child's play compared to the labour of carrying the stores and tracking or poling up the torrent. Even on the few navigable stretches the current was often much too swift to admit of rowing or even poling; consequently tracking had to be resorted to in many places. When at this work the voyageurs were in the bow and stern of the boat, each with a pole to keep it out from the rocky shore or to steer clear of boulders. The remainder of the men took hold of the line, one of them leading it the best way over land or along the shore, while the rest passed the line over their shoulders. Often when the water was too deep near the shore they ascended the bank, the leader passing the rope in front of the trees while the others hauled on the line as was most convenient, running along and passing one another when necessary. As a rule wading was preferred to taking to the high banks. Frequently, owing to the swiftness and depth of the water, one would miss his footing and would have to hang on to the towline whilst the other men steadied themselves until he had regained his feet.

Captain Young and his party reached the Matawin bridge in seven days from Fort William. The voyageurs reported that they had agreed to go as far as, but no farther than, the Matawin, and

were sent back by road and tug boat to Fort William. They stated before leaving that it was impossible to take the boats higher up the river, but a few days later Captain Young made the attempt without voyageurs. He took only one boat, and after great difficulty reached the gorge on the canyon already described. He returned, convinced that it was useless to try to bring the boats up further by water. It has been stated by Captain Huyshe that no boats were taken up that part of the river, but this is an error difficult to account for, as all were brought up the bad stretch and on to the Oskondagee Creek. Mr Dawson, who was in charge of the transport, etc, was much annoyed when he was informed that they could not be taken up, but took immediate steps to prove that with voyageurs it could be done.

There is no doubt, however, that the difficulty was such that not one man in a hundred could have succeeded. It was left to Mr Donald McKellar, a Highland Scotch Canadian, and now a leading citizen of Fort William, Ontario, to prove that it could be done. There were several brothers McKellar living at Thunder Bay, all experienced in the rivers and forests, with a thorough knowledge of the capabilities of the Indian voyageurs. Mr Dawson knew them well and sent a messenger for Mr John McKellar, and when he got a reply that John was not at home, he sent back the messenger to get any McKellar to come to him without delay, as he had very important business under consideration. Mr Donald McKellar, at the time the only one at home, went in to see him and was told how things were at the Matawin. Mr Dawson said: "I want you to go up to the Matawin station and get the boats up the Matawin and Shebandowan rivers to the Oskondagee. Take with you a crew of local Indians from the mission at Fort William. Here is a letter to the foremen along the line, authorising them to give you any men, boats or supplies you may want; see that you get the best, so that you will be sure to open up this route." Mr McKellar suggested taking Iroquois and Sault St Marie Indians along with the local Indians, and selected ten Fort William Indians, ten Iroquois and ten Sault St Marie Indians. When they arrived at the Matawin he chose three boats. While he was fitting them up for the trip, Captain Young, who was encamped on the opposite bank of the river, came across to where they were working and said to him: "You can save yourself all this trouble, for there are not men enough in the expedition to take the boats up this river."

At 4 o'clock next morning Mr McKellar started with ten men to each boat, he taking the lead with the Fort William Indians. Mr TAP Towers followed with the Sault St Marie Indians and Captain Pritchard with the Iroquois brought up the rear. At 9 o'clock in the evening they arrived at Ward's Landing on the Oskondagee, which was their destination. Captain Ward, of the 60th Rifles, was encamped there and rushed down to meet McKellar and his party. He was delighted and surprised, thinking it impossible to get the boats up the river so far. The feasibility of the route from the Matawin bridge was now assured, and it proved a great success. The news soon spread, and there was great rejoicing along the line, for the success of the trip removed a load from the minds of all concerned.

When, on 20th June, Colonel Wolseley inspected our regiment he expressed himself very much pleased with the way we turned out. It looked odd on these parades to see our officers armed with rifles, but they are certainly a more useful weapon than the sword. A few hours after the parade the Arctic came in with the last of the detachment which had been at the Sault St Marie. These were the last troops to land, and they came at a time when the thunder had for many weeks rolled round the vast solitudes where the white man was practically unknown. The rain was almost incessant, and the road was in constant need of repair. Bridges were swept away and transport trains cut off, so that they could neither advance nor retire. The ingenuity of everyone was taxed to meet the situation. The boats were going up the Kaministiquia, and large parties of men were posted at intervals to repair damages to the road. When they had finished one tedious job, knapsacks were strapped on, rifles grasped, and the company moved on to the next place needing repair. This road work was the hardest task in my experience in this land of severe trials and strenuous pioneering, but it was carried out under the direction of one of the most capable of

commanders, whose example and tactful treatment of his troops inspired them to face cheerfully and remove every difficulty in their way.

One of the brigades of boats sent up the Kaministiquia left on 14th June under the command of Captain (afterwards Sir) Redvers Buller,<sup>[11]</sup> who was soldiering for the love of it, and setting his men an example of self-denial not often seen. He was a great favourite in Canada and the Old Country to the day of his death. On arriving he reported:

The boats, nine in number, are arranged according to merit and capacity, durability, and speed; 2 white clinker-built boats marked R. Abbott, 2 large carvel-built, 2 small grey ditto; 2 marked T.S., painted grey inside, and one clinker-built from a maker in Barrie. The carvel-built are undoubtedly the strongest, but their weight renders them liable to rough treatment in portaging. They have no well holes, and therefore carry a large quantity of water, which it is impossible to bale out. A large quantity of the cargo consisted of flour in barrels, the hoops of which not being nailed on, came off during the rough usages which they received in portaging. The axes supplied as camp equipage were so blunt that they were worse than useless.

The felling axes to which Captain Buller alluded were the old army ordnance pattern, and were served out to us although quite useless. As it was impossible to do any work with them, they were condemned and the excellent Canadian felling axe was supplied instead.

The Algoma arrived at Prince Arthur's Landing on the night of 29th June with Lt-Gen Sir James Lindsay<sup>[&sect;]</sup> on board. He landed at once, and went over to Fort William,<sup>[\*\*]</sup> the solitary Hudson's Bay post under the direction of Mr MacIntyre. A tremendous storm arose which forced the general and his staff to return to the Landing. It was the worst we had yet experienced; the thunder and lightning were incessant; the road and every hollow were rivers of muddy water rushing down to the lake, and all work at the Landing had to cease for the day. Everything seemed to have conspired against us to cause our discomfiture; but nothing disturbed the troops, officers and men were united to push on to the great west "On to Fort Garry!" was the word. We left Prince Arthur's Landing on 30th June.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 3: The Success of the Expedition

From the day of his arrival, Colonel Wolseley had been incessantly on the move. Had the men required it they could not have had a better example. When the first brigade of boats started for McNeil's Landing on Shebandowan Lake, Colonel Wolseley was there to see that all went well. The 18th found us still at Calderon's Landing with little to do. The next day we prepared to make a final start and loaded our boats that we might be off early in the morning.

The boats moved in regular order, Captain McMillan in front, then Lieutenant Kennedy, Ensign Mulvey, Sergeant Doidge and Major Macleod,<sup>[12]</sup> The Flying Dutchman bringing up the rear. This was the worst boat in the lot, two feet shorter than any, and at least a foot wider in the beam. I was one of her crew, and had something to do with suggesting her name, which was received with derision, as it required nearly twice as much effort to move her through the water as any other boat in our brigade, except, perhaps, La Belle Manitoba, an immense boat navigated by Major Macleod, which gave him much trouble on all the portages, and in rapids was very clumsy and difficult to steer.

Our voyageurs were white men. The bowman did not last long, but the steersman, Big Neil McArthur from near Owen Sound, was a success; he was a splendid man, tall, strong, good-tempered and all that we could desire. None of us were novices at handling boats under any

circumstances, which was fortunate. By the time we reached Kasheboiwe portage we had developed splendid appetites for our dinners, and eagerly disposed of our rations of pork, beans, hard tack and strong black tea, of which Colonel Wolseley saw that there was an unlimited quantity, a very good substitute for beer or spirits, of which there were none. There were many of Mr Dawson's voyageurs, boatmen and axemen busy on the portage, and four carts had been provided to assist in transporting the loads, but they proved to be of little service to us after all.

The work of portaging was done with a rush, the officers and men running back after depositing their loads, all working alike. Major Macleod, a tall, graceful man, was the first of all of us to shoulder a barrel of pork, a heavy load, each barrel weighing 200 lbs. The flour and biscuit barrels weighed 200 lbs., the arm-chests 200 lbs., and the beans 100 lbs., the lightest loads being the boxes of ammunition, 500 rounds in each, which weighed 64 lbs. The arm-chests were the most awkward burdens. [††]

On 29th July we reached Baril portage. We found it very rough, with a high hill in the centre like a hog's back or barrel, but it did not get its name from that. It is derived from an incident which occurred in the early days of the fur trade. Two brigades owned by rival traders or corporations were on their way west in bark canoes laden with goods. One brigade was a few days ahead of the other and had on board of one of the canoes a barrel of rum, which the leader feared might be taken from them by the rear brigade if it caught up, as it was stronger in numbers. He therefore caused a grave to be dug and the barrel of rum carefully and decently interred, and a hewn headboard placed, on which was inscribed, *À la mémoire de Monsieur Baril*. The rear brigade saw the grave and thought that some good voyageur had been buried there, and as they were pious fellows after all, some of them offered prayers for the repose of the soul of Monsieur Baril. On the return trip of their rivals his remains were exhumed and his health drunk with many a laugh at the success of the trick.

The Deux Rivières portage was one of the worst on the route. It was 750 yards in length, and there was a large hollow in the centre which had been bridged by Ignace, Colonel Wolseley's favourite voyageur, and some of his men. Two tall pines had been thrown across the hollow and skids laid on notches to enable the boats to be dragged up the slope over the ravine. This was nicknamed "Jacob's Ladder."

The advance of the expedition arrived at Fort Frances on 4th August and the last of the brigades of the 60th passed on the 7th. Lieutenant (afterwards Sir William) Butler, who had gone incognito to Fort Garry via the United States to find out how matters stood in that settlement, met the commander of the expedition at the outlet of Rainy Lake, three miles above the fort. He had seen Riel and had the latest news from Fort Garry. It was far from reassuring to those who desired peace; both parties were at daggers drawn and afraid of the Indians, who at that time were very powerful, but always loyal and peaceful if justly treated.

After we arrived at Fort Frances, the crew of *The Flying Dutchman* exchanged her for a slightly damaged but much lighter boat, which was soon repaired, and this addition to our fleet we named *The Girl of the Period*. On Saturday, the 13th, we loaded our boats with frenzied eagerness, lest on the arrival of our colonel next day we might be ordered to remain behind. We received no orders, but there seemed to be something in the wind, and as soon as each boat was loaded it departed with all speed and was quickly beyond recall.

When we reached Rat Portage we found orders for us regarding the navigation of the Winnipeg River, which we were now to descend, and here we had news of the leading brigades and heard that Colonel Wolseley in crossing the lake without a guide had missed his way in the maze of many thousands of lovely islands. It was a difficult task to undertake, and it was indeed fortunate that he happened to meet some Indians, who guided him to Rat Portage. He had sailed round the lake for

two days, had waited for us the same length of time, and, hurrying on to overtake the leading brigades, had been gone only two hours when we arrived.

The navigation of the Winnipeg River by boat or canoe is one of the most difficult in the world. In its course to Lake Winnipeg it falls many hundreds of feet by a succession of cataracts, most of which are of a very difficult and dangerous character. The portages on the route enabled the force to pass a number of those places, but many rapids had to be run and many risks taken before we arrived at Lake Winnipeg.

On approaching a rapid which has to be run, the bowman always stands up in his place and steers, long paddle in hand, braced against the stem, his keen and practised eye on the rushing water. The voyageur in the stern, who has shipped a long oar in the stern-rowlock, a ring securely fastened so that it cannot jump out, keeps the boat from swinging in the current. Down the torrent the craft rushes, propelled by the desperate efforts of the six oarsmen. They row as for their lives so that there may be steerage way for the bowman who, by skilful use of his paddle, brings the vessel safely through the rocks and whirlpools of the passage. The boat seems to spring beneath its crew, the speed being so great that the oars seem like feathers in their hands, no pressure of the water being felt on the blades as the boat careers down the incline. At a very early hour the next morning we were at work and had our boats and their cargoes across before breakfast. The ground was rough and stony but level, and on this portage we saw the heaviest load carried. One of the Company's guides, a tall, dark, and powerful-looking voyageur, with a full black beard and moustache, hearing of the exploits of the Iroquois and others in our brigades, was anxious to show what he could do, so he carried two barrels of pork and 1000 rounds of ammunition across. The load had to be carefully secured and placed so that he could stand well under it. the weight was 528 lbs, but the burden was an awkward one and nothing to be gained by it except to show the man's great strength, which was patent to everyone as he moved quickly under the load without any apparent distress. Many heavy burdens were carried by the officers and men; nearly every boat had several who carried their barrel of pork or arm-chest of 200 lbs without any difficulty. Many conveyed a barrel of pork and a sack of beans on their backs as one load. I always carried my share of pork with either my knapsack or another pack, of equal weight added. One of the officers of the 60th Ensign St Maur (now the Duke of Somerset), a tall, handsome young man, nicknamed "Anak," because of his great strength, frequently packed two barrels of pork on his back, 400 lbs, and Captain Redvers Buller always took at least 200 lbs and sometimes 300 lbs at a trip. Everyone of us, on account of the training given by the heavy work, became much stronger than when he started, although he was then in good condition.

At the rapid called Le Grand Descharge we met with what at one time promised to be a serious mishap. Big Mike, the powerful and skilful Iroquois, although of Major Macleod's boat, took the bow of ours also, and Captain McMillan, who had remained at the summit to see his boats safely through, came in our craft, which was the last, and sat in the stern sheets near Big Neil McArthur. I had the stroke oar (we took turns at it), and, as we approached the crest, set the pace, but just as we passed over it, rowing our best, Neil's oar snapped like a pipe stem and the boat swung into the tremendous waves on our right, rolling and pitching over them, and hurling several of the crew from their oars into the bottom of the boat. Captain McMillan tried to hold my oar down in the rowlock to enable me to row, but it was impossible; we were quite helpless, and death stared us in the face as we surged past the rocks and whirlpools at a great speed, while Big Mike stood towering in the bow wielding a heavy oar as if it were a light paddle. His long hair streamed in the wind, his coal black eyes glared at the angry waters, and he handled his oar with such effect that the boat came safely through, landing us far below, and his compatriots on both sides of the Descharge, who, with our comrades of the brigade, were watching the outcome with great anxiety, joined him in wild whoops and shrieks of triumphant laughter.

At Fort Alexander, which we reached at sundown on the 25th, we found Mr Donald Smith with

news of the Red River Settlement. Colonel Wolseley and staff had arrived on the 20th and were met by Mr Donald Smith, who had come there for the purpose. Lt-Col Feilden and the whole of the regular troops had reached there on the 18th, and on Sunday, the 21st, they had left for Fort Garry in 50 boats via Lake Winnipeg.

We were off early on the morning of the 27th and the next day, as we ploughed our way up the Red River, numbers of the Scotch settlers and Indians came to the bank to welcome us to the "Great Lone Land" and the church bells rang merrily as we passed on.

The brigades arrived at Lower Fort Garry, "The Stone Fort," early in the afternoon. Colonel Wolseley, Mr Donald Smith and Lieutenant Heneage, RE, had been there that day to inspect the fort and arrange for the accommodation of the 2nd Quebec Rifles for the coming winter. Major Wainwright and his two brigades of the Ontario Rifles had passed up at noon on the 26th. We left Lower Fort Garry early next morning and tracked up the St Andrew's rapids. Numbers of people came, as on the previous day, to welcome us as we rowed along. We arrived at Fort Garry at sunset on 29th August, just 38 days from Shebandowan, and encamped on the level, grassy stretch of plain between the mouth of the Assiniboine and the fort.

When we arrived Colonel Wolseley and staff were busy making arrangements for the return of the regular troops and the retention of the Canadians as a garrison until the following spring. The Ontario Rifles were to be quartered at Fort Garry and the Quebec Rifles in the Stone Fort. The colonel and his officers were the guests of Mr Donald Smith in his commodious quarters at Fort Garry.

The advanced troops had landed on the 23rd on the left bank of the Red River, six miles by land and nine by the river from Fort Garry, with the intention of moving upon the fort the next morning. But a violent gale sprang up, accompanied by torrents of rain, which continued all night, making the roads nearly impassable, and the commander was obliged to change his plans and take to the boats. The scouts sent into Winnipeg during the night brought the information that the rebel flag still floated over Fort Garry that evening and that Riel evidently meant to fight.

Early the next morning the force landed about two miles north of Winnipeg and advanced on Fort Garry, going round the west side of the village, but although guns were seen protruding from the embrasures in the bastions and the gate on the north side was shut, there were no signs of life, and the rebel flag had been hauled down. Scouts were sent round the fort at a gallop and found the south gate open; Riel, Lepine and O'Donoghue were seen escaping over the bridge of boats in front of the fort. We then took possession of the place, hoisted the Union Jack, fired a salute and gave three cheers for the Queen.

Fort Garry, which has taken such a prominent place in the history of the west, was originally given the proud name of Fort Gibraltar. It was erected in 1806, and destroyed in 1816. In 1822, when the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies were amalgamated it was rebuilt and named Fort Garry.<sup>[13]</sup> In 1835 it was rebuilt in stone, running 280 feet east and west and 240 feet north and south. There were circular bastions at each corner with embrasures for guns and loopholes for muskets. The walls were about 12 feet in height and had a wooden banquette round the inside to enable the defenders to fire over them.

In 1850 a second part was extended 300 feet north with double walls of oak bolted together about two feet apart, filled in with broken stone, mixed with earth. The foundation of the new addition was of stone, the banquette was continued, and a north gateway of stone was built with a platform and embrasures for guns. This was no doubt the gateway on the north side of the stone portion of the fort, and was shifted when the addition was constructed. I have no authority for this, but it seems to me that there must have been such a gateway for the stone fort, and that it is only

natural that the same material should be used. The south gateway of the fort was but a short distance from the Assiniboine and had no gun platforms; the gates were of heavy oak timber, clamped with spikes. The buildings inside the fort consisted of a store, or sales-shop, on the east close to the south-east bastion. A large house, two stories in height with a stoep, or platform, along the front of it, and used as officers' quarters, stood in the centre of the older part of the fort.

The residence of the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company faced the north gate, a short distance from it. At the west side of the fort, not far from the wall, there stood four long buildings, each two stories in height and large enough to accommodate 100 soldiers. Three of these were handed over to the Ontario Rifles as soon as they were put in order, and behind the doors of each room the roll-boards of the last troops who had come in by Hudson's Bay were still hanging. On one of them was entered the name of Bugler Coyne, our sergeant-major!

The south-east bastion was now in use as a guard-room and the others were filled with military stores left by the former occupants of the fort; these were Brown Bess muskets, bayonets, kegs of bullets, powder and shot. Other buildings were on the north-east side of the fort, and during our stay were used as commissary stores. There were a few small buildings in secluded nooks. As soon as the public works department officers arrived a large building was erected between the front gate and the south-east bastion, and contained the orderly-room, sergeants' mess, library, etc.

Outside the fort communication with the south was by means of a bridge of scows and a ferry over the Assiniboine; both were in constant use until winter set in. Large numbers of creaking Red River carts, without a particle of iron in their construction or grease for their axles, came in every day from St Cloud, Minnesota, the nearest rail point in the United States, laden with merchandise for the Hudson's Bay Company and the merchants of Winnipeg. The United States points were reached by the steamer International, a flat-bottomed river boat propelled by a stern wheel, which went to the highest point navigable on the Red River. Running in opposition to her were flat boats, which brought in flour, butter and eggs; when their loads were discharged they were broken up and sold, the lumber bringing good prices.

The Winnipeg of that day was situated about half a mile north of Fort Garry and consisted of about forty houses of every shape and size lining the Stone Fort trail for about half a mile. That old road is now the beautiful main street of the city of Winnipeg. The first house from the fort was that of the Rev. Dr Young, the truly Christian pastor of the little Methodist church. There was one fairly good hotel kept by a Mr Davis, who was, later on, premier of the new province of Manitoba. Nine stores, three chemist shops, one saddlery, one hardware store, and, of course, several saloons, with such names as "Hell's Gates," "The Red Saloon," etc, were situated in the village.

The village of St Boniface lay on the right bank of the Red River, and was the residence of Bishop Taché, a prelate of the Oblate order; his residence and the cathedral were for that time very fine buildings, and there were several comfortable houses and a convent. The cathedral was well attended by the Métis, large numbers of whom could be seen going to and from it every Sunday. Each would be respectably dressed in the costume of the country, the men in long blue coats with bright brass buttons, gay sashes, and fur caps, which would now be worth \$1,000, corduroy or mole-skin trousers, leggings and moccasins beautifully ornamented with beads or worked in silk. The women wore, as a rule, dark-coloured skirts of silk, beaded or silk worked moccasins, and they had dark-coloured shawls over their heads instead of hats or bonnets.

North of Winnipeg, St John's Anglican Cathedral was the principal church of that denomination, and there was a Presbyterian church in the Scotch settlement of Kildonan, some miles further. The clergy of the settlement were broadminded and on excellent terms with everyone, and the people,

when we got to know them, were kind and true friends.

For several days after the leading troops reached Fort Garry, the main street, which was a trail from the fort to the lower settlements through the little village of Winnipeg, was a sea of black mud, caused by the recent rains. In it voyageurs, whites, half-breeds and Indians fought, wallowed and slept in all stages of drunkenness, induced by the poison dispensed over the bars of the vile saloons of the place. They made the day and night hideous with their yells, shrieks and curses, and it became necessary to detail strong pickets to patrol the village, and Mr Donald Smith posted at various spots special constables to maintain the law. Happily these precautions had the desired effect, order was restored and the victims of the debauch returned to work.

On 31st August the last of the corps arrived under Lt-Col Jarvis, and Captain Buller left with his company for the north-west angle of the Lake of the Woods. On 1st September the last of the 60th Rifles departed for the east, followed two days later by the detachments of Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers. Mr Dawson, the indefatigable, brought our first letters from the east. Mr Archibald, the newly-appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba and the North West Territories, arrived at the Indian settlement at the mouth of the Red River in his huge bark canoe manned by Indians. From there he sent on in advance a letter to the commander of the expedition, congratulating him on its "magnificent success," and saying that it was "impossible not to feel that the men who have so triumphed over such difficulties must not only themselves have worked wonders, but also must have been well led."

Mr Archibald was a Nova Scotian, a clever lawyer, handsome and benevolent in appearance. He was installed in his office of Lieutenant-Governor on 6th September. Mr Donald Smith, who had carried on the civil government of the North West until Mr Archibald's arrival, Colonel Wolseley and staff, and a large number of the leading people of the settlement were present. Lieutenant Butler and Dr Schultz arrived together, both remarkable for their magnificent physique and almost gigantic stature as well as for the contrast they afforded, Butler being dark-haired and bearded, Schultz golden-haired like a Viking of old. When the governor appeared a large band of Saulteaux and Cree Indians appeared to do honour to the occasion. They were on foot, decorated, feathered and painted, and the chief was mounted on a pony and painted white from head to foot.

Among the amusing incidents that occurred before Colonel Wolseley and his staff left Fort Garry was one which took place when I was on sentry early in the morning at the rear gate of the Government House. I had only just been posted when a colonel on the staff, noted for his kindness of heart, capability as a soldier, hot temper and lurid language, appeared unshaven and in his shirt sleeves, carrying in his hand a letter. He addressed me with, "Sentry, have you seen my orderly?" I replied, "No, sir, not yet!" upon which he broke into his favourite style of conversation when disturbed, saying, "Blank the blank to h—l and d—n!" I acquiesced as a good soldier should, and he returned to his quarters, but soon reappeared just as Stavelly, his orderly, who was an ex-naval man, came swaggering along the walk, spick and span, as if he owned the country and there was nobody like him. When the colonel sighted him he said pleasantly, "Ah, Stavelly! Take this letter to —, and here's 50 cents to drink my health!"

During his stay at Fort Garry, Colonel Wolseley promulgated a farewell order to each contingent of troops. The regulars he thanked for enabling him to carry out the Lieutenant General's orders so successfully. After referring to the "excessive fatigue in the performance of a service that for its arduous nature can bear comparison with any previous military expedition," to the 600 miles traversed, to the road-making, to the forty-seven portages, "entailing the unparalleled exertion of carrying the boats, guns, ammunition, stores and provisions," he went on:

The whole journey has been made through a wilderness, where, as there were no supplies of any sort whatever to be had, everything had to be taken with you in the boats. I have throughout

viewed with pleasure the manner in which officers have vied with their men in carrying heavy loads. It has rained 45 days out of the 94 that have passed by since we landed at Thunder Bay, and upon many occasions every man has been wet through for days together. There has not been the slightest murmur of discontent heard from anyone. It may confidently be asserted that no force has had to endure more continuous labour, and it may be truthfully said that no men on service have been better behaved or more cheerful under the trials arising from exposure to inclement weather, excessive fatigue and the annoyance by flies.

To the militia he addressed a separate farewell in which he paid them a compliment that must awaken a thrill of pride in every Canadian's heart.

I can say without flattery that, although I have served with many armies in the field, I have never been associated with a better set of men... You have only to attend as carefully to the orders of the officer to whose command I now hand you over, as you have done to mine, to become shortly a force second to no corps in Her Majesty's service... I bid you all good-bye with no feigned regret. I shall ever look back with pleasure and pride to having commanded you, and although separated from you by thousands of miles, I shall never cease to take an earnest interest in your welfare.

In his *Story of a Soldier's Life*, Field-Marshal Viscount Wolseley says:

I can draw no distinction between the relative merits of the military value of the regular soldier and the Canadian militia man who went with me to Red River; each had arrived at Prince Arthur's Landing with special attributes peculiarly their own, but by the time Fort Garry had been occupied each had acquired the military virtues of the other. What it is that a large army of such men under some great leader could not achieve, I, for one, know not.

Colonel Wolseley left Fort Garry on 10th September, but before his departure a banquet was given in his honour at Government House.

Arrangements were made for the two battalions of militia to garrison the Red River Settlement for the winter of 1870-71. The 1st Ontario Rifles were stationed in Fort Garry, with No 1 Company under Captain Cook at Fort Pembina on the border, the 2nd Quebec Rifles in the Stone Fort, and in the short space of seventeen days from the date of the arrival of the troops everything had been put right, the Lieutenant-Governor had been duly installed, the garrison settled down and the regulars despatched to eastern Canada.

Soon after Colonel Jarvis took over the command an incident occurred which disturbed the community and caused bad blood in the settlement for some time, in fact the feeling did not die out for more than a year. The Ontario Rifles were out on fatigue, taking the boats out of the Assiniboine where they had been moored, and placing them on skids near the camp. Suddenly two travel-stained horsemen, one on a black horse the other on a grey, rode up to us and asked if we had seen a man named Elzear Goulet who, one of them stated, had commanded the firing party which shot Thomas Scott. As we could give no information they wheeled quickly and rode off at full speed towards Winnipeg. The same night it was reported in camp that they had found Goulet seated on a bench at the Davis House, a hotel in the village, and when they had accosted him he had taken flight towards the Red River, pursued by his accusers. When he arrived at the bank he turned and threatened to shoot, but they called to him "Fire away!" Seeing that they would not be denied, he jumped into the river, and when he attempted to swim across, shots were fired and he sank. The horsemen had been followed by a crowd of people, amongst whom were two of our buglers, mere lads. No other soldiers were present, and neither of these took part in the chase, nor is it likely that any of our men would have taken part in the pursuit of the unfortunate man, even had they known that he was one of the murderers of Scott. We had amongst us about a dozen very wild spirits, but they were kept in control by the strict discipline

maintained in the regiment, and, what is sometimes better, the fear of the displeasure of their comrades, who in ways which soldiers have, could make their lives intolerable. At the time of this occurrence a strong party of military police was in the town night and day, and as they were remarkable for their attention to duty, it is a certainty that they would be aware of any part taken by soldiers and would have arrested the delinquents on the spot.

The next day our commanding officer, misled by reports made to him by interested parties who wished to put the blame on the military to save others, paraded us in camp and fiercely attacked us, accusing us of being a lot of hot-headed fanatics who had aided and abetted the death of Goulet. No doubt he believed the report, for it came to him from persons in high places, but they were persons who would not hesitate to make political capital out of the circumstance, and, able staff officer though he was, he took no steps to inquire into the charge which, had he done so, could easily have been disproved. He believed the words of enemies in disguise, and the evilly-disposed persons, to whom Colonel Wolseley had referred in his farewell order to us, were thus fortunate enough to have the blame shifted from their shoulders to ours. Thus, for party reasons, we were branded throughout the eastern provinces as a band of murderers, and when the papers from Ontario and Quebec arrived and were read in barracks, there was a strong feeling of indignation which it required a steady hand and tactful mind to keep within bounds. As a matter of fact it never died out so long as the regiment lasted, and was carried into civil life.

It was supposed up to this time that the body of poor Scott was buried within the walls of Fort Garry, but this was disproved one morning before we had gone into barracks. I was present when an officer of the public works department with a fatigue party opened the grave which was situated between the officers' quarters and the south gate. An oblong, pine box was found, but there was no body in it; the box was empty, and had no doubt been buried in the fort to deceive people as to the true disposal of the remains of the murdered man. After this discovery there was a strong impression that his body had been taken away during the night after the murder, weighted with chains and forced through a hole in the ice of the Red River, but the mystery has never been cleared up.

For several months before the advent of the troops to Fort Garry smallpox had been raging on the plains of the far west from the Missouri to the North Saskatchewan. This scourge, so fatal to the red man, was brought into the country on a Missouri steamboat plying from St Louis to Benton, Montana. A white man, who had the disease, left a blanket behind him on the steamboat. This was stolen by an Indian of the Gros Ventre tribe and started the contagion. He caught it and gave it to his people, amongst whom it spread until many camps were depopulated, and a war party of the Bloods, a tribe of the Blackfeet nation, who had gone south to steal horses, found in one camp nothing alive but the ponies grazing round the tents. The dead lay as they had fallen.

The Blood warriors, knowing nothing about the disease, appropriated as many of the ponies and buffalo robes as they could take, and returned 'with their spoil to the north, no doubt well pleased with the results of their foray. It proved, however, to be a fatal one to them, and to the majority of the dusky inhabitants of the great plains. By the time they got back to their people, the infected robes had given them the disease and it spread through their tribe, depopulating their camps and sending destruction through the Peigans, Blackfeet, Crees and Stonies; in fact through all our Indian tribes. From them it spread to the plain hunters, Company's employees and the families of the missionaries. Many of the latter did their best to induce the Indians and half-breeds to scatter so as to escape the dread germs, and all who obeyed them succeeded, but unhappily there were many who paid no attention to the advice, and suffered the consequences. Some of the missionaries, well-meaning but unpractical men, encouraged their flocks to keep together in large numbers, and they were soon surrounded by sick and dying people. To make matters worse there were neither doctors nor medicines, and this state of affairs continued until enormous numbers of Indians had died. Every important chief of the Blackfeet nation had gone, leaving few fit to lead

the people. One tribe which, a few years previously, had 2,000 lodges in their principal camp, each lodge averaging at least eight persons, was reduced to one-tenth of its number. It was particularly virulent amongst the Crees, who were said to have contracted it from the Blackfeet in the same way that the latter had caught it from the Gros Ventres.

A Company's officer at Edmonton reported the circumstance to his chief, with the result that Lieutenant Butler was despatched west with a stock of medicines and directions for their use, these to be given to the officers of the Company, missionaries and other persons of intelligence. He had also orders from Lieutenant-Governor Archibald to report upon the extent of the scourge and its origin, as well as upon all matters about which it was necessary for the government to be informed.

The whisky trader had already penetrated the southern and western portions of the North West Territory, and his pernicious influence was already felt amongst the tribes in those regions; he had to be dealt with, and Lieutenant Butler was expected to devise means to teach him that British law was supreme. He performed his task with great skill and sound judgment, returning to Fort Garry on 18th February 1871, having travelled on horseback and by dog train 2,700 miles and endured many severe hardships, sleeping under the sky with the thermometer indicating many degrees below zero. His book, *The Great Lone Land*, gives a clear account of his journey and work.

Soon after Goulet's death Colonel Jarvis went on leave, and until his return to Fort Garry in the winter, Lt-Col Casault took over the command of the 2nd Quebec Rifles, whilst that of the Ontarios fell to Major Wainwright. The quarters were being put in order for our occupation when Captain McMillan sent for Private Grady and myself, and gave us a page of a novel to write from dictation. When we had finished, he looked over our work with the remark, "That is very nice," and dismissed us. A few days later, when the regiment had moved into barracks, both of us were in orders for promotion to corporal.

I reported for duty to Sergeant R——, a kindly man and an able civil engineer and land surveyor, but too good for some of those with whom he had to deal. The majority of the company were very fine men, but there were several as bad as I have met, and strange to say they were located in one room in charge of Corporal A——, who seemed to have been selected for the job of keeping them in order as much on account of his physical as his mental powers. The men were afraid of him. The élite of the company, with few exceptions, had been able to induce their kindly Sergeant R—— to permit them to be together in the other room, and to that I was posted. I was young in comparison to the majority of the men in the lower room where the wild spirits were quartered, and I went to Number 7 with some misgivings. As I expected, I was not well received by the rough element. The men of the upper room were comrades from the first, and the officers treated me kindly, but the "toughs" regarded me as an interloper who should not have been promoted from another company. One of them, who had been drinking when I reported to the senior sergeant, made no bones about telling me so and a great deal more. He was one of the greatest ruffians that I have ever seen out of gaol, but our mild senior NCO let him rave away in his drunkenness, instead of letting him see the inside of the guardroom.

I was not pleased with my reception, but bided my time. For the first month the bad lot in the company left nothing undone to compel me to commit myself and be paraded "on the carpet." Their attempts were useless, however, and I took my own way, making them toe the mark. Some of them, when warned for duty, would object that it was not their turn, but they were made to find that such conduct was useless. I was firm, laughing off much of their nonsense, with the result that in less than a month they ceased their stupid manœuvres and showed signs that I had at least gained their respect. But it did not cure them of acts of insubordination for which they were noted, and one morning a strong, stalwart fellow of the group had a narrow escape from being charged with murder.

I had just come off guard and was resting on my cot, and Jack Kerr, a favourite in the company, was busy polishing the huge Carron stove when this fellow came upstairs, dressed in review order without his rifle, conversing with some of the men. There was a long table beside him on which lay several sheath knives which had just been cleaned. The cook, nicknamed "Rattledy W——," came in and began skylarking with Kerr, who made a black streak across his nose with the brush he was using on the stove. W—— laughed at this and the other man smiled, but with a sinister look said to Kerr, "You could not do that to me." "Oh, yes, I could!" replied Kerr, and sprang at him with the brush, making a motion about a foot from his face, but without touching him, nor did he mean to do so, as the fellow was in review kit. But this was no safeguard; the other seized one of the long sheath knives and, rushing at Kerr, drove it into his thigh. Before I could get round the stove to interfere, he made another rush at Kerr, knife in hand, but the latter was too quick for him; he seized the huge tongs, used for the big stove, and brought them down with full force on his assailant's head, felling him insensible to the ground with such force that the building shook.

His comrades in the room below, hearing the noise, dashed up the outside stairway, the only entrance to the room, and seeing Kerr seated on a cot holding his bleeding thigh, and their comrade lying senseless on the floor, they made for Kerr like madmen. On hearing them coming up the stairs I had armed myself with a rifle, and when they charged, met them with it clubbed, and drove them out of the room and downstairs by sheer force. I then sent for the surgeon's assistant, in the meantime doing my best for both. When Dr Codd arrived he sent them to hospital, where both spent some time. This scrimmage seemed to clear the air, and we had no more trouble in barracks.

Soon after the regiment had settled down, and the Indian summer with its delightful sunshine was at its height, our commanding officer began our annual training. Being young and strong with good appetites, we found our rations insufficient, and when we could afford it we turned to Devlin's prolific bakery, not far from the barracks. We paraded for drill two or three times a day, once in the early morning under the adjutant, again in review order until noon, and in marching order at half-past two with our 70 lb packs and ammunition. This would have been a severe enough test, but, owing to our work on the portages, we had a contempt for any load less than the weight of a barrel of pork. In the afternoon, as in the morning, the drills were those of a rifle regiment of that time, every movement had to be done very smartly, double time was the rule, and from extended order we occasionally made rushes of 1,000 yards or more to assemble on the reserve. After about 2½ hours of this amusement the proceedings wound up with a march-past at all the paces, to the music of the regimental band and the intense satisfaction of a bevy of fair damsels and their mothers who sat on the balcony on the north side of the parade ground. Fortunately we were in good trim for the work, and none showed any signs of fatigue, but it was not encouraging to our ravenous appetites to return to a cheerless barrack-room and make our evening meal off a bucket of cold tea and the attenuated remains of the morning loaf of bread.

These manœuvres did us a great deal of good, brushed us up until we were well nigh perfect, and taught us how little food a healthy Anglo-Saxon really requires. The afternoon drills in marching order were in fun styled "Ladies' Parades," on account of the interest that the fair sex took in our movements, particularly the pretty wheels on and off the passing line. One of the young ladies remarked to an officer, "It is charming to see the regiment out in the afternoons; the men look so nice with the little boxes on their backs!"

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#### 4: The Inception of the North West Mounted Police

The Red River Settlement[[††](#)] in 1870 consisted of parishes which were subdivided into narrow farms about four miles in length, the rear half of which was held as a hay privilege. The houses

being close together gave the settlers the advantages of a water front and easy communication for social intercourse. The rivers during the summer were the highways for their boats, and those of the Great Company, and during the winter became a sheltered road for their sleighs and dog trains. The houses were chiefly of squared logs let into a frame, and were roofed heavily with thatch; the farms were fenced with rails and posts as far back as required for agriculture. Near each house were the outbuildings and sheds, whilst huge piles of poplar poles stood on and in the vicinity of the clay-oven, almost invariably to be seen near the house.

The chief social events in the life of the settlers were dances, weddings and funerals, whilst church-going was a duty never neglected, the people being in the habit of walking five or six miles to service, or riding or driving twice that distance. Weddings were as important then as now, and were one of the occasions on which wines and liquors were drunk. They took place during the winter months, as the long nights were conducive to the proper execution of the Red River Jig, the Scotch Reel and other dances requiring vigour.

To be a good jig dancer required much speed and endurance. When the first surveyors arrived a dispute arose as to the distance to Sturgeon Creek, about six miles west of Winnipeg. In order to settle it they agreed to send one of their dog drivers to the creek and back with a pedometer in his pocket. This was at night, and before he had come back the surveyors had gone to bed. Next morning their dog driver produced the pedometer and to their astonishment the instrument indicated 60 miles! He was at once questioned as to where he had been, and his reply was that he did not go farther than Sturgeon Creek, but finally he admitted that when he arrived there a dance was going on, to which he was invited, and he had danced all night, walking home in the morning.

Weddings generally took place on a Thursday; the father of the bride or some person representing him went from house to house, inviting friends and neighbours on a day prior to the wedding, not later than the Monday. It was short notice, but such was the custom. On these occasions it was not unusual for the guests coming from a distance to arrive the night before, and have a sort of preliminary canter for the following day. The bridal party drove in carioles, another reason for not celebrating weddings in the summer months, as it would not be becoming to see twenty or thirty well-dressed couples going to church in squeaking Red River carts. The horses were decorated with coloured ribbons, and when the party arrived at the bride's house they were received with a salute of firearms. The men then put away the horses, and the ladies doffed their French merinos and substituted muslin gowns. Dancing then commenced and was kept up all night. The music was supplied by relays of fiddlers, and the only interruptions were for meals. These consisted of roast beef, roast mutton, buffalo tongues, plum puddings, mince pies, etc, and as one house was too small for the entertainment of such a large party, two were generally brought into use, one for dancing and the other for feasting. The following week the groom would take his bride to his father's house, and a repetition of the festivities ensued, called the "home wedding." \*

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Sam Steele was a legend in his own lifetime. This book demonstrates his personal qualities of honesty, straight-forwardness and courage, as it details his part in the Canadian rebellions, the founding of the NWMP, opening up Western Canada, the Yukon Gold Rush, as well as his part in the South African war and in establishing the South African Constabulary.

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