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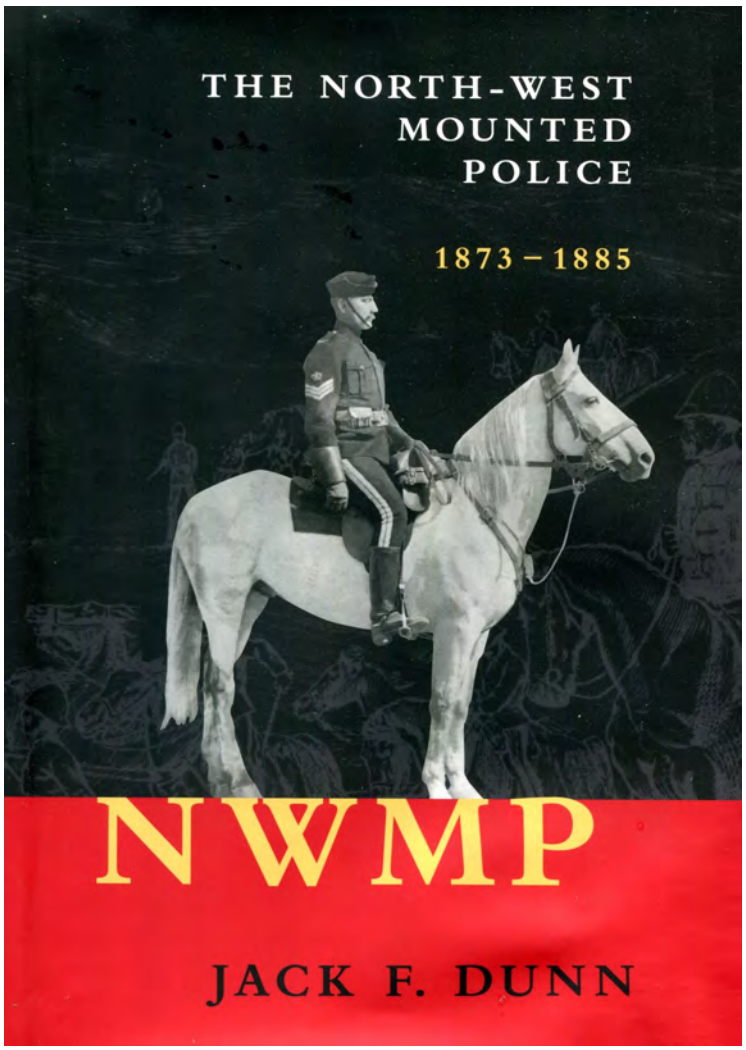
THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.cmhs.ca

December Extra # 2 2020



THE DAYS ARE LONG AND YOU CAN GET THROUGH THEM.

What has been a great help is what many of us are doing. "Reading" of course. At minimum 2 to 3 hours every day is my preference. To break it up, I have found that splitting the time up between "**Fiction**" and **History**" is a good way to go.

My history books have included "Dam Busters" by Ted Barris, "The Canadians In Italy", " Welcome to Flanders Fields" by Daniel Dancocks, "Battalion of Heroes" by David Bercuson, to name a few.

I have now started on the book **"THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE 1873 – 1885"** by **Member Jack E Dunn.** I'm only part way through it but enjoying it immensely. It's a look at the good and the bad of these historical figures.

The first Christmas at Fort Macleod and Fort Edmonton.

Excerpts from Jack Dunn's book Page 2, 3, and 4

FROM THE BOOK JACKET

***The North-West Mounted Police: 1873-85* outlines the formative years of the Force in certainly the most historic twelve-year period in Canadian prairie history.**

The arrival of the North-West Mounted Police in 1874 brought law and order to the western plains, preparing the land for white settlers. Pivotal economic development then followed. A continental railway revolutionized transportation. Telegraph service, mail delivery, and a dozen regional newspapers transformed communication. Towns appeared overnight and nascent industry emerged. Areas of agriculture and ranching underwent enormous growth. A regional land survey conducted was the largest in history. The 1885 census listed a population of 50,000, with Whites dominant. **Continued Page 4**

Celebrating Success

The first Christmas at Fort Macleod was momentous. Only six months earlier, the men were camped at Dufferin and anticipating a great adventure. Since then, the troop had crossed the great Canadian plains and built a base in the West. It had been a difficult, but enriching experience. And now, far from their families and fiends, it was a day to celebrate.

The police were eager to display their weaponry—to convince the Indians that these red-coated men had formidable, almost supernatural power. Colonel Macleod sent Jerry Potts to invite the nearby Indians to the post for the purpose of an artillery demonstration.

In the morning. Captain Thomas Jackson positioned a field piece before a large group of curious Indians. Sargeant Frank Fitzpatrick described the spectacular results.

Sergeant Spicer, Sergeant O'Connor and myself were to shoot three or four rounds each, and we tossed a penny to see who would have the first shot. Spicer won. Right across the valley stood a lone, dead tree, midway up the bank. The tree had a large trunk, and Spicer decided that it would be an excellent target for a common shell which would explode on contact—as, in the case of a miss, it would in any event raise an immense cloud of earth, and would carry the same mental effect with it. He aimed carefully and fired. It was one shot in a hundred. He had cut the fork branch, and raised an enormous amount of earth ... The strongest impression had been made, and we would not spoil it with a second shot

The shot stunned the Indians. They sent several men to confirm if what they had seen was true. They returned to affirm the unbelievable. Later, at two o'clock, the main body of Indians arrived. The Mounties showed the effect of the earlier artillery shot which greatly impressed them. Everyone then entered the fort where the Indian visitors were fed biscuits (with molasses), rice, and coffee while Colonel Macleod met with the prominent leaders. He told them that stealing horses was forbidden and all offenders would be punished. Second, a regulation would prohibit firearms. This declaration alarmed the Indians considerably until it was explained hat a firearm ban only applied to anyone against the government.

That evening, the police had their own dinner. The hall was blazoned with banners painted in vermilion on white cloth: "Law and Order is Peace and Prosperity"; "Our Absent Friends—God Bless 'em"; and, most prominent, "Pioneers of a Glorious Future." And for the men who months earlier had survived on half rations, the meal was a feast: buffalo, venison, antelope, canned fruit, plum pudding, and tea. The l.G. Baker Trading Company even provided a turkey to somehow be shared amongst the 150 men. Sub-Constable John Stuttaford remembered this first Christmas dinner as the best ever.

Colonel James Macleod

At dinner, with no alcohol available (or present). Colonel James Macleod used a glass of cold water to toast "absent friends." He then lauded the detachment's achievements, but also reminded everyone of their precarious situation. It was obvious, too, that many men were dissatisfied with their spartan and isolated life: to date, they had not received mail or pay, the weather was extremely cold, and their clothing in tatters. Men could be seen doing "sentry go," with a blanket wrapped around their body for warmth and raw buffalo hide substituting for shoes. The Colonel's speech, however proved effective in "winning back hearts of the refractory o n e s . " T he Assistant Commissioner, observed one Sub-Constable, "was one of the boys that night, as he joined the holiday spirit."

What should they name their post? While the column had camped in the Sweet Grass Hills, Macleod had suggested to French that the western post should be named after the Commissioner. French rejected this idea and proposed instead that the forts take the name of their builder. A vote by the men unanimously "officially" chose the name Fort Macleod.

The officers, who later ate separately, had a small jar of whiskey (a present from Fort Benton merchants) to drink to their absent friends. It was also a time to reflect. Surgeon Barrie Nevitt wrote that they "sat and smoked and talked of Christmases gone by, of friends and home." About eleven o'clock, the firing of the two 9-pr. M . L . R . guns signaled everyone to "B"Troop barracks for a concert and a dance. At midnight, the detachment went to " F " barracks for supper and a dessert of oysters, canned fruit, pie, plum and rice pudding. But the evening was not over. At 2 a.m., an interpreter went to the Indian camp to invite the "squaws" to lively dancing (along with songs by Skiff Thompson) that lasted until 4 a.m. It was a great time, even though Constable William Grain observed, "a dirt surface isn't exactly an ideal dancing floor."-- Nevitt commented:

9-pounder 8-cwt Muzzle loading Rifles, (NWMP) Artillery Detachment, Fort MacLeod, Alberta, 17 Dec 1890.

I guarantee that such a Christmas had never been seen in the Nor'West. Everyone expected to have a gloomy sad time but the united efforts of men and officers managed to dispel the gloom, and i f Christmas was not exactly merry, it was at all events pleasant.

Four hundred kilometres to the north, the twenty-two policemen at Fort Edmonton likewise celebrated Christmas with fervour. Inspector William Jarvis organized a dinner dance to repay the area hospitality his troop had received. In an exacting undertaking, the policemen delivered invitations to every settlement and hunter's camp within 150 km of the post. The men voted to contribute one month's salary (which they had not received) to defray the evening's expenses. Game birds and stacks of buffalo meat were purchased for the dinner and, for dessert, Sub-Constable S. Tabor headed a squad that made plum puddings and mince pies.

The Edmonton community shared in the festivities. Richard Hardisty, the Hudson's Bay Factor, arranged a large storehouse (with a fireplace) for the dance and provided tables, chairs, and eating utensils for the dinner. Townspeople offered overnight accommodation to distant arrivals. The celebrations began with supper, followed by a dance that lasted until morning. After breakfast, there was a church service and another meal served by Superintendent W. Jarvis and Sub-Inspector Severe Gagnon. The Queen's health was toasted with tea and dancing resumed to lively music. The favourite dance tunes were: " T h e R e d River Jig," "Lord John Macdonald's R e e l " and " T h e Eight Hand Reel." The dancing continued until yet another meal concluded the Christmas festivities.

Fort Edmonton old illustration

At the N W M P headquarters at Swan River, Christmas featured a "grand dinner" and a dance that lasted three days and nights, except for brief intervals for refreshments. The post invited Hudson's Bay employees from nearby Fort Pelly and every Metis family living within 80 km. For this occasion, the detested "rattlesnake pork" from Montana was replaced with food purchased at Fort Pelly. Pemmican was available and, for venturesome souls, there was some tough bear meat that needed buffalo tallow to soften before chewing.

Conspicuous on the dance floor were Metis "dandies" dressed in coats of the finest blue broadcloth with highly polished buttons down the front and a rainbow sash around the waist from which hung a beaded "fire bag" containing kinnikinick (tobacco), flints, and steel. Moccasins and leggings were lavishly decorated and head gear was a round cap trimmed with fur, the flat top embroidered blue broadcloth, and set so high on the head it had to be secured by broad, black ribbons tied under the chin. The long-haired dancers, bobbing through reels and jigs and the floor-thumping fiddlers were, in young Bagley's words, "a sight never to be forgotten."

Two tragic deaths marred the Fort Macleod celebrations for the New Year. O n December 31, Acting Constable Frank Baxter and Sub-Constable T D . Wilson, posted at Fort Kipp, a small outpost occupying a former whiskey post, were caught in a blizzard while returning after sundown from Fort Macleod.

In the morning, a Native youth reported seeing two Indian horses with police saddles. Guided by two Indians, a search party under Captain Ephrem Brisebois found Wilson crawling on his hands and knees in a coulee about 3 km from Fort Kipp. He was taken to the post, but the young Mountie soon died. Baxter was not found until the next day. His body was located about halfway between Fort Macleod and Fort Kipp, but 5 km from the trail. Nearby was a rubber bag with three quarts of whiskey. This explained the purpose of the two men's 50 km round trip to Fort Macleod.

The bodies were taken to Fort Macleod for burial. However, the corpses, frozen into unwieldy positions, would not fit into a coffin and had to be placed in a zinc-lined water trough to thaw out. In the afternoon, they were buried in wooden coffins beside the grave of Constable G. Parks, who had died of typhoid fever two months earlier. It was, a letter to the *Ottawa Citizen* related, "a sorry sight to see the military funeral, with the boys filing out of the square, on a bitter cold day, bearing the remains of their late comrades." One companion wrote: "Poor fellows! So far from home, and after having gone through so much, to die in the wilderness."

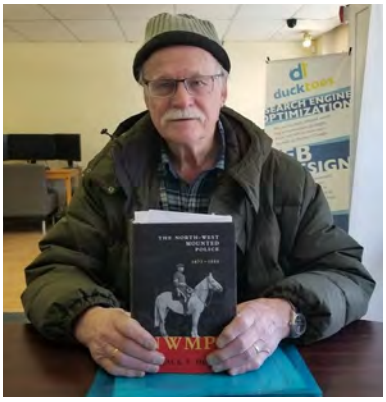
Their deaths were also a warning: the two men had not worn proper winter clothing. One policeman recorded: " I t was a bitter lesson, and taught us never to go any distance without overcoats in spite of the promise of fair weather." Sub-Inspector Cecil Denny remembered that, "These three deaths cast a gloom over us all, and our first New Year in the West."

FROM THE BOOK JACKET Settlement introduced political and social features. The territorial government and elected municipal councils made laws, imposed taxes and fines. Local courts upheld the laws. Newly constructed schools and hospitals provided both literacy and healthcare while the religious organizations continued a foremost influence. Sporting events were a prominent part in daily life. Official holidays were celebrated. Travelers could find hotel accommodation and competing merchants provided a variety of goods. In little more than a decade, it was a changed land.

Meanwhile, the aboriginal nomadic lifestyle deteriorated. Treaty agreements dispossessed the Indians of their land. Teton Sioux under Sitting Bull and the battle-scarred Nez Perce brought an unwanted intrusion into Canada. Starvation soon overwhelmed the tribes after the seemingly overnight disappearance of the buffalo. In despair, Canadian Indians left to hunt in Montana Territory. Within two years they returned with no alternative other than accepting a confined reserve and reliance on government rations. Another aboriginal group, Metis settlers from Manitoba, continued to pursue grievances over land and linguistic rights. Their discontent erupted in armed conflict in 1885 that ended with a government victory.

Three to five hundred Mounties policed this vast region. It was an exacting task, buffeted by a challenging environment, often severe weather, isolation and the lack of amenities. Most men made a commendable contribution to their chosen employment but there were, too, those who abandoned their wives, consumed excessive alcohol, and abused the native women. A high desertion rate was troubling

Understanding of the time and events is enhanced immeasurably through the depth of information provided, the analysis of frontier development, and the detailed survey of the policing and the lifestyle of the "Guardians of the Land." In all, the research contributes to an engaging account of Western Canadian history.



J A C K F. D U N N , a native of Turner Valley, received his BEd , B A , and MA (major: Western Canadian History) from the University of Calgary. Dunn is a long-time member of the Canadian Historical Association, the Historical Society of Alberta and the Champlain Society. Dunn has published *The Alberta Field Force of 1885* as well as a number of articles in historical magazines. Jack Dunn lives in Calgary with his wife, Maureen.

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The SOCIETY
is a non-profit registered society which fosters the study of the military and the police, and the heritage of Canada, the British Empire, and the world as well as the preservation of military artifacts and records. The CMHS meets once every calendar month at:
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