

Early Traders

By W. HENRY MCKAY, Brooks, Alta.

THE first white people to see the "Red Deer Forks", which are about four miles east of Empress, Alta., were most likely the Frenchmen under De Niverville who built a small Fort at the forks of the Elbow and the Bow rivers in or about 1733 which they called "Fort La Jonquier" in honor of the Governor of New France as our country was called at that time. It was then still in the power of France. It would have been too dangerous to have come so far with horses and carts on account of the many hostile Indians who roamed the plains. So they must have come up the rivers. When the North West Mounted Police built on the same site about one hundred and twenty-two years after (1875) Captain A. E. Brisco says that there were still signs of an old Fort there.

The next brigade would have been the Frenchmen who built "Chesterfield House" in 1791 about six miles below the Forks on the north side of the S. Saskatchewan River, opposite the present site of Estuary, Saskatchewan. It was a North-West Company fort. The man in charge was a Scotsman named MacDonald. A Frenchman by the name of Michel La Fromboise helped to build the Fort. He was my mother's great-grandfather. My maternal grandfather, Francois La Fromboise operated a small trading establishment right between the two rivers from 1872 to 1878. A trader from Winnipeg by the name of James Mulligan also traded there about 1874. A Scotsman by the name of George Gunn also traded at the Forks about 1878 to 1880. He was the father of Mrs. Gabe La Vallie of Maple Creek, Sask. Mr. Gunn was in partnership with my uncle, Colin McKay. I may write more about Mr. Gunn in some future issue of the CANADIAN CATTLEMEN. He had the first garden ever planted in that neighborhood, 1886, right about where the railroad now crosses the river on the south side. Mr. Gunn was a well educated man.

After the Riel Rebellion of 1885, two brothers named Palmer sold their hotel in Regina to start ranching. The hotel went by the name of the "Palmer House". It was later bought by Douglas Peterson and later known as the "Douglas Hotel". Whether it still exists or not, I do not know.

The eldest of the Palmer brothers was the owner of the hotel and his brother

was his clerk and helper. His name was Echabode, the name of the younger being Theodore. We later knew them as Eck and Ted. They brought their cattle to the Red Deer Forks either in the Fall of 1885 or early in 1886. They located about a mile and a half below the Forks on the south side of the river. Soon afterwards they took a trip to Sounding Lake, the Neutral Hills and Nose Hills. Eck liked that district better but Ted was well pleased with the Forks. In later years when I worked with Echabode in Montana he told me that if he had settled at Sounding Lake where there was an abundance of hay it would have changed the course of his life. The winter of 1886, as old timers have told us, was a very severe one with deep snow. The Palmer Bros. only having a small amount of hay for their team and saddle horses and probably a milch cow, lost most of their cattle. As the younger brother, Ted, was only working for his brother he had the remaining cattle seized for his wages. That left Eck with nothing but his team and a few personal effects. In disgust and on very bad terms with his brother he went to Montana where in 1904 I worked with him for Simpson Bros. Theodore sold the cattle to someone in Medicine Hat and met a 16-year-old boy who was willing to work for his board and room while he learned the ranching business. The lad's name was Charlie Montgomery. He may have been a Doctor Barnardo boy sent to Canada from England.

After buying a few provisions such as flour, tea, sugar, beans and salt pork he took the boy down to the old log shack at the Forks to watch the place while he went to Macleod to buy some little pony mares for after such a hard winter he intended to become a horse rancher. That was the Spring of 1887. He left the boy there all alone telling him that he would be back in about 10 days. But 10 days went by and there was no sign of Mr. Palmer, then 20 days, then 30 days, and still he wasn't back on the 40th day. We camped a little below along the river as my father and my uncle, Norbert Poitra, had been hunting below the Forks. After supper my father went off to see his friend Palmer but to his surprise there was only the young lad, who had run out of food and was living mostly on gold eyes and flap jacks. So he brought him

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over to our camp where my mother gave him a good supper. My mother named him the Christ Child when she heard that he had been all alone for forty days. The nearest town was some 80 miles away. He was known by that name ever after by the half-breeds and Indians. The last time I saw Charlie Montgomery was at Bull Spring, 30 miles north of Medicine Hat in March, 1901. He had married and told me that he was going to British Columbia. If anyone can tell me where he or his descendants are I will be very grateful as he was a great friend of ours. Ted Palmer returned a day or so afterwards with a number of cayuse mares which he bought from the Blood Indians south of Macleod. He also brought back a two-year-old Clyde stallion which he called "Jumbo" and which he later sold to Mr. J. H. G. Bray, who in turn sold him to my uncle, William Edward McKay. Mr. Tom Lokier had the same horse when he was about 18 years of age. Palmer sold out to the Shannon Brothers in 1897 for \$6,000, good money to make in 10 or 11 years at that time. His expenses were very small as he lived mostly on antelope meat, jack rabbits and porcupine and in summer—gold eyes for a change. Echabode didn't do well in Montana. He was herding sheep when I knew him. He went to Gull Lake, Sask., in 1908, where I lost track of him. As far as I know neither of the Palmers were ever married. Ted went to Hanley, Sask., and bought a pool room about 1904. From there he went to Tisdale, Sask., to buy furs. He may have died there.

Some time in the Fall of 1887 two more white men came to the Forks bent on horse ranching. The name of one was G. M. Annable and the other was James

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Carr. Mr. Annable came from Moose Jaw, Sask., where he became a Member of the Legislative Assembly some five years afterwards. My father used to say that they brought very good horses to the Forks. Mr. Carr later moved to the head of McKay Creek near Graburn Coulee to farm and ranch. I don't know where he went from there but I believe the next rancher who came to the neighborhood of the Forks was W. T. Smith, who was later known as "Alfalfa" Smith. He was the man who built the big barn about 6 miles below Estuary, Sask. I have never seen Mr. Smith, but from what I have heard of him I think he must have been an eccentric man. Building such an enormous barn out in the wilderness proves that, especially when we now know that he obtained most of the materials on credit. There is a story about him going to a hardware in Swift Current and when the clerk asked him what he wanted he replied: "I want a ton of nails". The clerk looked at him attired in his greasy, ragged clothes and smiled, thinking he was just joking and he walked away. So did Mr. Smith—to another hardware across the street. About half an hour later the clerk, looking across the street, was astounded to see clerks loading a wagon to the top of a single box with kegs of nails and the ragged man holding the team. Here are the dimensions of the barn as are marked on the picture before me—400 feet long, 128 feet wide, 62 feet high. The following material was used: 875,000 feet of lumber, 30,000 sacks of cement, 60,434 square feet of galvan-

ized iron. It was then called the largest barn in the world. I am not sure what year it was built, but I think it was about 1907 or 1908. It was built near Leader, Sask., which was then known as "Happyland". After Mr. W. T. Smith died, the company that had supplied the material had the lumber and galvanized iron taken off as Mr. Smith had not paid them. I think the cement part still must be there.

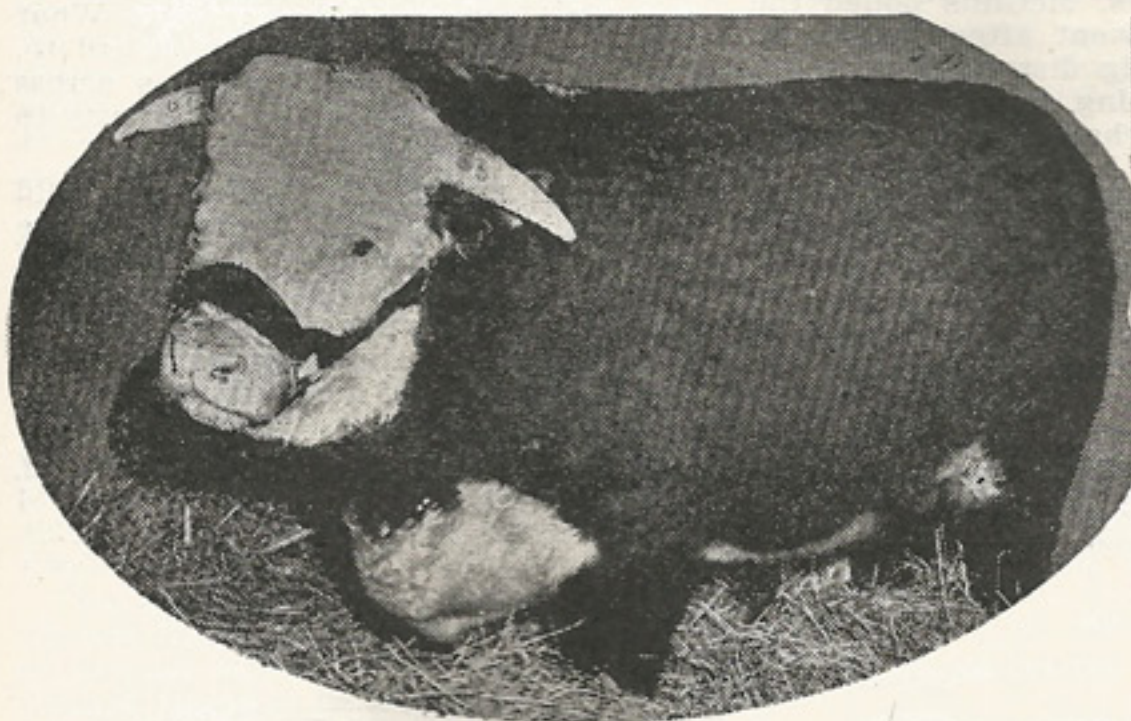
After the Shannons bought out Palmer they moved up the Red Deer a few miles where they had the two rivers to hold their horses. About the same time (1897) a young Frenchman by the name of Hector Prince, located on the south side of the Red Deer very close to where Bindloss stands today. He was a cattle rancher and came from Battleford, Sask. He was a brother to Benjamin Prince who later became M.L.A. of the town. Hector was a fine young man, but I am sorry to say that he was drowned within a half mile of his place in August, 1899. He was helping Mr. Fergus Kennedy cross his cattle. Mr. Kennedy, who hailed from Ontario that same Spring, had located a few miles below on the north side of the river. Then came another Frenchman, named Bourassa, from Battleford, soon after and located also on the north side. Mr. Clint Jarboe also located in that neighborhood soon after. From then on I don't know in what order the ranchers came as I went to Montana for a while. I will name a few ranchers who were west of the Gordon ranch near Majestic. Mr. Nelson and Mr. Bjork located about 7 miles above Mr. Gordon's on the north

side of the river in 1906. One of Mr. Bjork's fine sons is still raising cattle and alfalfa on the old place. His name is Magnus and what a real good fellow he is, just like his father. A horse rancher named George Howe located a couple of miles below Bjork's, also on the north side of the Red Deer River. He had seven fine sons.

In 1900 there was a cattleman named Leon Sparrow, at the mouth of the Blood Indian, about 6 miles above Nelson's and Bjork's. I don't know when he located there, but he later sold out to J. R. Hallam. The Dutch Colonization now owns the place, which is known after its brand as the Vee Bar Vee. They have built it up so that it looks like a little town with fine buildings all painted up. I had supper there in the Spring of 1946 as I was floating down the river to Saskatoon.

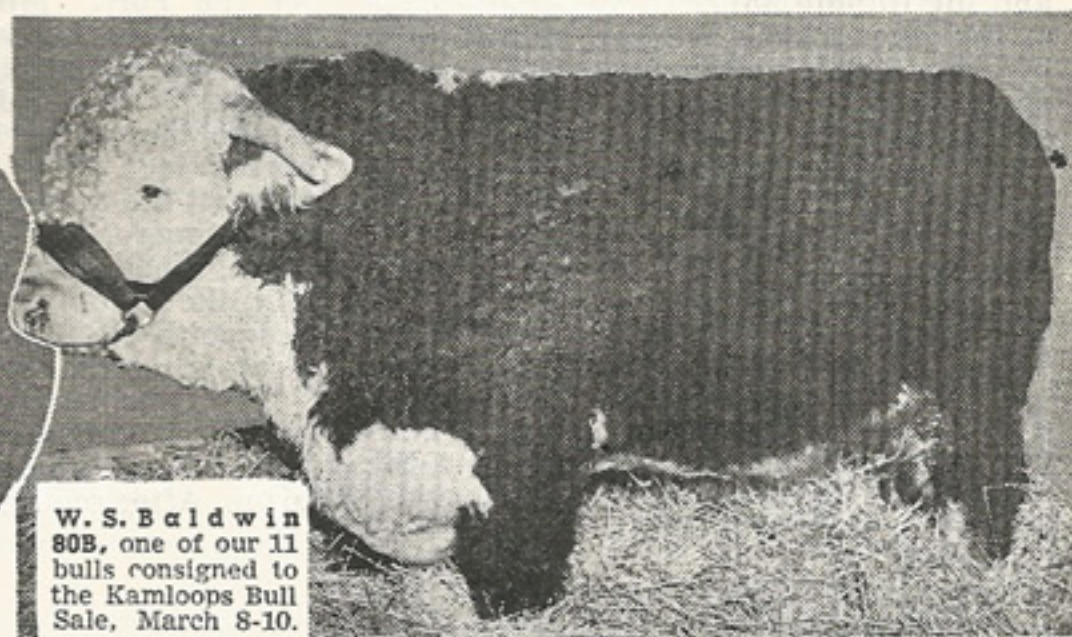
Some 6 miles above on the south side of the river is where Mr. Alex Gordon, old-timer of Jenner, Alta., located his ranch after he terminated his association with the Gordon, Ironsides and Fares ranch, where he was the first manager about 1898. He was succeeded by his cousin Andrew, father of Johnny Gordon who, until recent years, owned the ranch. Another 10 miles above, also on the south side, was a man named Scaillies or Scailles. He sold out to J. J. Quail in 1900. Quail was from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and was the uncle of Johnny Quail who used to be in Medicine Hat. The same ranch was later owned by Mike Stapleton.

(Continued on Page 222)



Advance A.B. Domino 20th, recently purchased from Fred DeBerard, Kremmling, Colorado, at the Denver Show as a potential Willow Springs Herd Sire.

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EARLY TRADERS (Continued from Page 219)

On the opposite side, a couple of miles above, was Tom Owens. He had horses, cattle and sheep. He came quite a while later than Quail. He probably bought the place from the P. K. Ranch of Steeveville. I helped to build the first shack, barn and cattle shed there while working for the P. K. Ranch in 1900. It is now also owned by the Vee Bar Vee. I also had my dinner there while floating down stream nearly two years ago.

A few miles above that on the north side of the river was where Lord Delaval J. Beresford established his ranch about 1900. It was later known as the Mexico Ranch on account of his having come from that country and bringing in what was probably the first Mexican cattle on the Red Deer. Lord Delaval was a brother of the late Lord Charles Beresford of the British Admiralty. He was killed in a train wreck in North Dakota in the winter of 1906 while on his way to Mexico to attend to his other interests in that country. After his death the ranch was owned by Gordon W. Jackson who was better known as "Happy Jack".

Some 10 miles up the river, on the north side, at the mouth of Berry Creek, was the Eau Claire Ranch, so called on account of its owner having come from Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He was Mr. Prince, owner of the Eau Claire Sawmills of Calgary. He was in partnership in the cattle business with a man named Kerr; Prince and Kerr, hence the brand PK. Mr. Prince was the grandfather of John and Chester Eady of Brooks.

"Nigger" John Ware was the next rancher further west on the south bench. The same ranch is now owned by Stringam Brothers. Still further west was Mr. Bray, the father of our splendid game warden of Brooks, George Bray. There were other ranchers further west whom I used to hear of but did not know in what order they located or on what side of the river. There was George Emerson. I believe he was the man who brought the late Sam Howe to the district. There were also Newman, Mr. Hyde, Mr. Trefoil and H. A. Dymont up near Finnegan.

On the South Saskatchewan, on the north side, the first rancher was Tom Tinney, who located about a mile below the real drowning ford some 16 miles below the ranch that bears that name. He raised splendid Galloway cattle. Just below Tom Tinney's ranch also on the north side of the Saskatchewan river was a rancher named Gallup who settled there in 1900. He lost most of his cattle that winter and I believe he went into the horse ranching and trading after that. My uncle, William Edward McKay, also located a ranch some 12 miles east of Tinney's, near Bull Spring Lake in the summer of 1900. He was about 7 miles from the river on Bull Spring Creek. He was working for a man by the name of G. B. Murphy of Carberry, Manitoba. They had some six hundred head of Manitoba cows. Thomas Lokier, who now resides at Medicine Hat, got into partnership with Mr. Murphy about 1902 or 1903. They added 1,000 head of Mexican cattle to their ranch. Mr. Lokier later moved to the river and built his ranch right across from Tom Tinney's where he became the first gas well owner and first man to irrigate his farm. Eight miles above the Tinney Ranch on the same side of the

river was William Winteburne who also raised Galloways. About eight miles above was the Drowning Ford Ranch, on the south side, on the lower end of the Lilly Flat, so named because the Steamer "Lilly" sank there. The ranch was financed by railroad men. The manager was J. H. Spencer, an engineer on the C.P.R. He was no relation to John and Sam Spencer of Milk River. There was a sheep ranch at the Horse Shoe Lake a few miles up on the north side of the river and this was owned by Thin and Hole. It is now owned by Allan Ellis.

In 1894, James Francis Sanderson built a horse and cattle ranch about three miles above the spot where the Drowning Ford Ranch was established some five years afterwards. He sold out to the Drowning Ford Ranching Company in 1900. In 1894, Mr. Samuel Livingstone, old timer of Calgary, in company with Ad. MacPherson located claims on the first flat below the mouth of Sandy Coulee, on the south side of the river, which they worked for a while. Although gold wasn't nearly as high as it is today they averaged about \$2.00 per day for each man. It was good wages for that remote day and was enough to buy three square meals of good substantial food for 75c and a sealed bottle of undiluted whiskey every day for \$1.25. They were the good old days. The flat was known as Livingstone's Flat for many years after. Mr. Thomas Livingstone, who now works for the Great West Saddlery Company, is a son of the old timer I have mentioned above.

In 1900, Owen Sanderson built a ranch on the big flat above Sandy Coulee. It was near the mouth of a coulee running from the east. We used to call it Tex's Coulee because a Texas man built a shack near it at Tex's Spring about 1886. Owen Sanderson raised horses and cattle there until he died in 1907.

A young man named Purday located right across from the Drowning Ford Ranch about 1899. He was a nephew of the two Palmer brothers of the Red Deer Forks. Mr. Meek, who died up at Olds a few years ago, owned the place later on. Mr. Meek came from Rock Spring, Wyoming, but was originally an officer in the British Army. He was a real gentleman in every way. Two of his sons are operating a garage in Olds. The ranch was later owned by a man named Newton, but the last owner was Mr. Harry Minor, father of Perry, a very fine young man now ranching north of Tilley, Alta. The place since 1941 has been part of the



Dicksle Rohrer, of Irma, Alta., on "Hazel Montrose".

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Still further up on the south side of the river was the ranch owned by Mr. Robert Mitchell. I believe he had the first Highland bulls in the neighborhood. He was the father of the late James Mitchell and I believe he was grandfather of R. H. Mitchell of Medicine Hat, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Western Stock Growers' Association last year.

The next man above on the south side was an old hermit who lived in a dugout. His name was Jones. The place is still known as Jones' Point. He had a cart, a horse, cow and a dog. He had a trench six feet deep all around his garden and dugout to keep out livestock and rattlesnakes. In the fall of 1895 Colly Cochrane rode to his place to see how he was getting along but the dog would not let him go in so he rode back to the "Hat" and notified the police. They found the old man's corpse in an advanced stage of decomposition.

The first dryland farmer was Mr. Porter, father of Mr. R. C. Porter. He located about 2½ miles east of Medicine Hat on the flat and about half a mile east of the cutbank. He soon abandoned it when he saw that it would not grow anything without water.

My grandfather, Edward McKay, was the first cattle rancher near Medicine Hat, his ranch being two miles below the town where he located in 1882.

Over the years ownership of many of the ranches along the two rivers leading to the Red Deer Forks has changed, some several times. The traders of the early days no longer pursue their trade. The coming of civilization to Western Canada has already left its mark.



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