

Macleod Marks Milestone

FREDA SMITH MUDIMAN, R.C.M. Police Barracks, Lethbridge, Alta.

ALL trails in Southern Alberta will lead to Macleod this summer when that town celebrates the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding by the North West Mounted Police. For it was at Macleod that the Police established their first post after marching across the plains in the summer of 1874 to bring law and order to Western Canada.

The great expanse of land watered by streams draining into Hudson Bay had been granted by the King of England to Prince Rupert and his Company of Gentlemen Adventurers away back in 1670. Neither King Charles, nor the Gentlemen, had any idea how vast it was, nor was anything done to develop it for the next two hundred years.

In 1870 the new Dominion of Canada purchased it from the Mother Country. Up until then the southern part of the Canadian prairies was but a huge buffalo pasture, the grass brought the buffalo and the buffalo brought Indians—among whom were 10,000 Blackfeet, the Terror of the Plains.

The buffalo and the Indians brought traders — mainly in the ten years prior to 1874 and principally from the south. Three to four hundred of them swarmed onto the Canadian prairies during this period to purchase buffalo hides and wolf skins for shipment down the Missouri to St. Louis.

Some of these traders were men who had lost all their possessions in the war between the States and now sought their fortune further west. They made their home where they made their camp and exchanged calico and tea for furs. Others, also ex-soldiers, mixed a bit of weak whiskey into their system of trade and barter, but with the coming of the Police settled down to be solid citizens.

It was the third group who gave a bad name to all the traders. These were men who made a straight trade — whiskey for fur — the whiskey traders. Footloose brigands, fresh from the carnage of the Civil War, they respected neither life nor property. They wanted excitement and they wanted money. Wealth came easily when \$25.00 worth of poor liquor bought \$1,500.00 worth of prime fur; while excitement was always just around the corner in a country where life was short and death sudden.

They were a rough lot, but it was a rough time in a rough land — and they had courage. Hundreds of miles from other white people, surrounded by drink-crazed savages, they banded together and put up palisaded posts that they called forts, and carried on a brisk business.

They wore fringed leather jackets, trousers of hide or thick woollen cloth, fur caps, moccasins and carried rifles. Their supplies, and the small wooden kegs in which the whiskey arrived, came from the south by ox-cart, but for a quick get-away each of the wary traders had his own swift saddle pony. They were expert marksmen, hard fighters, hard drinkers,

good horsemen. Those who operated along the Highwood River, which the Indians called the Spitzee, dubbed themselves the Spitzee Cavalry. Occasionally the prairies echoed to the Rebel yell and, on at least one occasion, witnessed a duel.

This event was conducted throughout in the approved Cavalier manner. A trader and a young brave had quarrelled over an Indian beauty. The trader "called out" the Indian. Time, place, weapons were chosen and the seconds appointed. As the prairie sunrise faded into day, the duellists stood eighty paces apart, their backs to each other. At the word "Fire" they whirled and shot; the trader lost an ear.

The influence of the whiskey trade on the Indians was disastrous. Even diluted liquor inflamed them to such an extent that they stole, killed and broke every law of God and man. Explorers, missionaries and even their own Chiefs became so alarmed that they appealed to the Government for help. The climax was reached when a whole band of Indians was massacred in the Cypress Hills.

Coming of the Mounties

So the North West Mounted Police was organized and dispatched to the Canadian West. The Force was commanded

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by Commissioner French, a British officer on loan to the Canadian Government. Second in command was Assistant Commissioner James Macleod, who had come to Canada from Scotland when a small boy. Besides his military experience, Colonel Macleod was also a graduate in Law.

Many of the other officers had belonged to crack British regiments, so the men were well drilled before they started westward. Of the rank and file, some were from the Old Country, but most of them were from the towns and villages, lumber camps and farms of Eastern Canada. They were three hundred young, strong, active, keen men — all eager for adventure.

They left Fort Dufferin, Manitoba, on the morning of July 9th and the thousand-mile trek across the plains was accomplished in four months, record time, considering the incompetency of the guides



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and the amount of material transported—cattle, mowing machines, cumbersome cannon—everything necessary for peace or war.

The cavalcade was plagued by grasshoppers and sudden severe storms. The buffalo had eaten off the grass and water was scarce. The horses weakened and the men walked.

But they were free of Indian attack. Word of their coming spread like a prairie fire and invisible scouts continually sent reports of their progress to Chief Crowfoot at Blackfoot Crossing. The Chief counselled, "Wait and see", the wisdom of which was borne out when he and Colonel Macleod became fast friends.

At Roche Percee two troops broke off and turning northward went by way of Forts Ellice, Carlton and Pitt to Fort Edmonton on the North Saskatchewan River. The rest continued westward until they reached the place where the Bow River enters the South Saskatchewan. Still there were no fur forts.

Some snow had already fallen and the guides had no idea where they were, so the party turned southward to the Sweet Grass Hills, just across the International Boundary, in Montana. These three buttes rise several hundred feet from the floor of the prairie, are well watered and well grassed.

A camp was made at their base, the horses rested; clothes were washed, buffalo shot and eaten.

Colonel French and Colonel Macleod made a side trip to Fort Benton, a fur post at the head of navigation on the Missouri, to advise Ottawa of their position and ask for further instructions. It was decided that Colonel French with two

troops should return to Manitoba while Colonel Macleod and the rest of the men should spend the winter in the West.

Justice Tempered With Mercy.

At this time was formulated the policy to be followed in handling the Plains Indians. In brief this was to temper justice with mercy and to place emphasis on honesty, equality, integrity. This policy resulted in an avoidance of the period of bloody warfare that had formerly preceded the plow.

While still encamped, the Police were joined by the returning party of the Boundary Survey who had worked all summer from Red River to the mountains. This was the first large gathering of white people in that part of the world and surveyors, scientists, soldiers from the United States and Canada, exchanged news of their experiences.

Late in September the gathering disbanded and the men who were to remain on the plains set their faces toward the Rockies which now cut the western skyline. The guide who had been engaged in Fort Benton, Jerry Potts, led them unerringly along the Boundary line to the one highway in the West.

This ran north and south and because it came up from Fort Benton was called the Benton Trail. In reality it was part of the Great North Trail which had been beaten out by moccasined feet through the centuries as Indians travelled in the lee of the Rockies from Mexico to the Mackenzie.

Soon the Trail led the Police to Fort Whoop Up. The owners had left but a caretaker to welcome the visitors. Colonel

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Macleod offered him \$10,000 for the installation, but was told the price was \$25,000, so the Police had to move again.

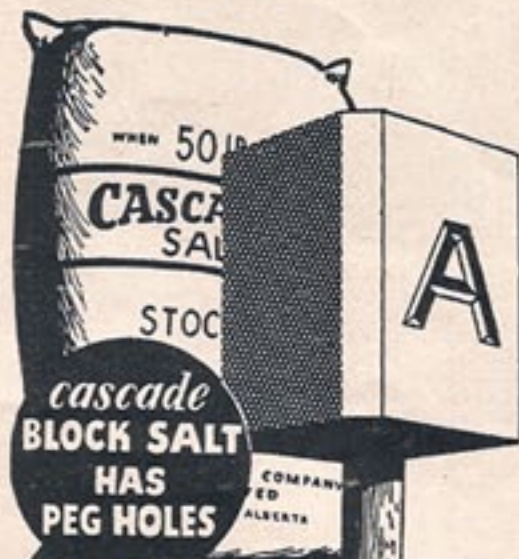
Jerry Potts said he knew of a favorite Indian campsite a few miles further along, the name of which was The-Place-Where-The-Trail-Crosses-Oldman River. In mid-October the party reached this ford and decided that a flat along the river there would be suitable for a Police post. Buildings were hastily erected and at Christmas the few whites in the area came for a feast, the menu featuring bear and buffalo.

Unanimous choice of name for the post was Fort Macleod. The Indians called Colonel Macleod "Stamaxotokan" and renamed the ford The-Place-Where-Stamaxotokan-Stays. Indian Chiefs arrived to smoke the pipe of peace with the men who had come so far to protect them, as Chief Crowfoot of the Blackfeet said,

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MACLEOD

(Continued from Page 5)

"To protect us as the feathers protect the birds from the frosts of winter".

Indians of the Blood, Peigan and Black-foot tribes compose the Blackfoot Confederacy and to their leaders Colonel Macleod explained his reasons for coming, his purpose in remaining, and the plans he hoped to put into operation to ensure peace and prosperity. The Chiefs were immensely pleased and promised full co-operation—a promise which has been kept for three score and fifteen years.

Not all the whiskey traders had left the country and these had to be arrested and punished. Business places were opened near the new fort and to this far frontier came all kinds and conditions of men, among them a number of greedy gamblers whose activities had to be curtailed.

Work among the Indians went on continually. In 1877 a Treaty was signed with the Blackfeet and the tribesmen went to live on Reservations. Some of them became successful farmers and ranchers for it was found that wheat would grow in the Northwest and that cattle thrived on the succulent native grasses.

Flash floods, a characteristic of mountain streams, began to wear away the flat beside the Oldman River, so a new site was chosen for Fort Macleod, up on prairie level and two miles nearer the mountains. Frame buildings were erected this time and through the years sheltered many hundreds of men. It was a world in itself, this self-contained Fort, with dormitories, mess hall, stables, workshops, guard room, recreation hall.

A town grew up east of the barracks as, with settled conditions, covered wagons of pioneers creaked up the Benton Trail. Up the Trail also came herds of bawling cattle, thousands of them, that spread out over the hundreds of thousands of acres of good grass and thus laid the foundation of Southern Alberta's successful ranching industry.

The cycle was now complete, grass-buffalo - Indian - trader - Police-rancher-cattle-grass.

In 1881 the Governor-General of Canada, the Marquis of Lorne, visited Fort Macleod. A celebration was arranged in his honor and people came in from the outlying farms and ranches. They came on horseback, by stage-coach, or in their light driving wagons called buckboards and democrats. To them Macleod was the centre of civilization.

As the sound of festivities went out over the prairie night, it was echoed by Indian tom-toms from an encampment down by the river. But in 1885 the drums took on a menacing note as the Crees along the North Saskatchewan rose in rebellion.

Due to the influence of the Police, missionaries and their own Chiefs, the Black-foot Confederacy remained loyal. However, many of the farmers and ranchers brought their families into Fort Macleod and formed a home defence unit they called the Rocky Mountain Rangers.

This danger over, there came a period of rapid development. With the increase of settlement, the scope of Police work changed and much was done to assist the newcomers, to fight prairie fires, to check smuggling and cattle rustling.

Men, and horses, from Macleod were on the veldt during the South African War and in the Low Countries 1914-18. Soon

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after the outbreak of World War Two, bulldozers levelled the prairie south of the town to build landing-strips for an airport that formed an important link in the Empire Air Training Plan.

The Police headquarters have been moved elsewhere, the buildings of Fort Macleod have been taken away or fallen into disrepair, but the town does not forget. A cairn on the Town Square com-

memorates the arrival of the Force, while hand-wrought iron gates leading into a park honor the memory of Colonel James Macleod.

At mid-summer this year the farmers, ranchers and Indians of Southern Alberta will take the trails leading to Macleod, to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding by the North West Mounted Police.