

West to the Setting Sun

Doughty Nor'Westers gird loins for transcontinental marathon to beat American-owned Astor Fur Company to possession of lucrative fur trade of the West.

In Two Installments by

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Noted Fur Trader and Arctic Traveller. Author of *Arctic Trader*.

The Vanishing Frontier, Romance of the Alaska Highway, etc.

WHILE the sprightly cities of Calgary, Vancouver and Victoria continue to grow and prosper there lies, nestled in the quiet seclusion of the wooded shores of beautiful Stuart Lake in northern British Columbia the little trading post of Fort St. James, one-time capital of New Caledonia, the nucleus wherein was cradled and fostered British influences and British liberties upon the western slopes of the Rockies. And, around this tranquil little settlement is woven a glamorous page in the history of the Northwest — a page that adds further lustre to the annals of the dynamic North-West Company, and tells a stirring story of a transcontinental marathon of contending trading companies to obtain control of the prairies and mountains by gaining possession of the Pacific coast.

In the halcyon days of fur trade enterprise and exploration Fort St. James was wont to ring with the boisterous mirth of roistering traders when the vigorous, hard-drinking Nor-Westerns gathered within wooden walls and stockades hewn from the forest, alternately holding high carnival and laying plans for the mastery of the Northwest and the Pacific slope in advance of John Jacob Astor and the Americans.

Here, in the heart of the rugged and mountainous wilderness with its brutish rivers, its rock-walled gorges and its turbulent cascades, fluttered the first Union Jack on the Pacific watershed west of Fort Macleod. And here, among the motley Carrier Indians, were established British traditions and customs; the basis for Anglo-Saxon solidarity over a vast and untamed wilderness. In this feudal fort ruled intrepid Nor-Westerns with all the pomp of medieval Barons. As despotic as any European monarchs they forged a system of government that, for absolutism, would have mocked the courts of Europe.

It was on a fresh, windy day — July 26th, 1806 — that thick-set Simon Fraser, pursuing Mackenzie's trail across the Divide from Rocky Mountain House on the Upper Peace River, beheld the blue, island-dotted waters of Stuart Lake. Careening over the white-crested rollers in their tossing bark canoes, the unfamiliar sight was observed with grave alarm by a motley band of Carrier Indians who, with their squaws, were gathering their harvest of soap berries about the mouth of Beaver Creek. Abandoning their berry-picking with frightened cries and screams of terror women and children fled for the shelter of the forest while the copper-skinned warriors flourished their spears and bent their bows in preparation for attack. Then, like the reverberations of thunder, the roar of musketry came booming over the waves. For a moment even the warriors were petrified with fear.

But not so old Toeyan, the medicine man. Already he had met the advance guard of the white invasion. Earlier that

year he had met James McDougall, one of Simon Fraser's scouts and pathfinders, who had presented him with a piece of scarlet cloth, then blazed a tree and casually taken possession of the Pacific slope in the name of Britain's sovereign. Waving the red cloth above his head, Toeyan leapt into a flimsy bark canoe and sent it careening over the whitecaps. At last the Carriers upon the beach saw the apparently tenantless canoe bobbing up and down beside the larger craft of the strangers.

"Wah! Wah! They have killed Toeyan!" they howled, and furiously bent their bows. But as the painted birchbarks swept closer to the shore Toeyan's voice was carried on the wings of the wind, almost drowned out by the crashing of the rollers. These white men were his friends, he cried. Let the Takulli emerge from the woods and put down their arms since all was well.

Having run their canoes upon the shore and disembarked, Fraser's crews proceeded to impress the natives by firing a volley into the air. But the thundering reverberations struck terror to their hearts, causing them to fall, prostrate, upon the ground. To allay their fears Fraser offered them tobacco and, rising to their feet, they advanced towards the strangers. Tobacco being strange to their palates, they spat it out disgustedly upon the ground, so the *voyageurs* lighted up their pipes to show them how the weed was used. But the effect was different to that anticipated. To the Carriers, whose practise it was to cremate the dead, these strangers seemed like the reincarnation of disembodied spirits, full of the fire with which they'd been cremated. A gift of soap to the squaws proved equally unsatisfactory as a means of establishing mutual trust and confidence, for they merely chewed it and stood, rooted in embarrassment, as froth and bubbles



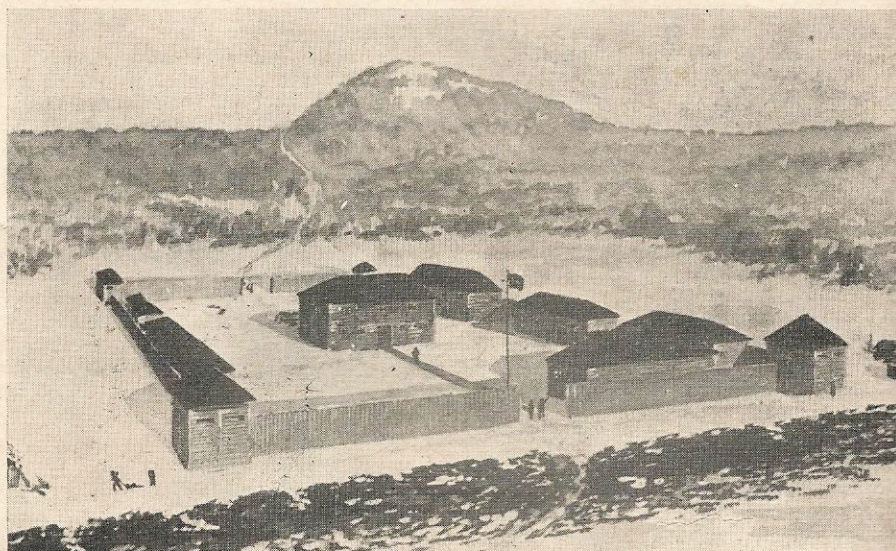
The Author.

came oozing from their lips.

With the keen eye of the trader, Fraser had observed the Carriers closely and noticed that many of them were wrapped in robes of beaver skins. "They are," he wrote of the tawny horde, with whom he now commenced to barter, "a large, indolent, thievish set of vagabonds of a mild disposition. They are amazingly fond of goods, which circumstances might lead one to imagine that they would work well to get what they seem to be so fond of; but they are independent of us as they get their necessities from their neighbors, who trade with the natives of the sea coast."

At the exact spot where McDougall had formerly blazed the tree and taken possession of the land, the youthful founder of New Caledonia now set his men to work with axes, clearing the ground for a new fort, whipsawing lumber and cutting logs for palisades. Even as he was laying the foundations for Fort St. James, which was to have such a mighty influence on the future of the Northwest, Fraser had seen but a handful of the thousand barbarous natives who made their homes adjacent to Stuart Lake.

While the axes were still ringing through the forest aisles, and the measured rasp of whipsaws echoed over the waters; while the log walls of the future capital of New Caledonia were slowly



Fort St. James, one-time capital of New Caledonia.

—Photo courtesy Hudson's Bay Company.

rising and the air was filled with the piney tang of fresh-sawed lumber, James Stuart departed on an exploratory journey which culminated in the erection of Fort Fraser upon the shores of Fraser Lake. Ere the snows of winter blanketed the land three small squares of buildings dotted the wilds of New Caledonia: Fort Macleod, in charge of James McDougall; Fort St. James, in charge of Simon Fraser, and Fort Fraser in which Blais reigned as factor. The North-West Company had won the first lap in the rapidly developing race between American and British traders for the rich fruits of the Northwest. The seeds of populous British Columbia had been sown!

* * *

One has to go far afield to ascertain the influence leading to the creation of these small forts which were to have such a tremendous influence in moulding the future destinies of nations, an influence entirely disproportionate to the puny squares of log huts with their feeble palisades and their handfuls of lonely and isolated occupants. York Factory, capital of Rupert's Land, owed its existence to the dishonest treatment of two despised bushrangers at Montreal by plutocratic politicians. Norway House, hub of the inland transport of the Hudson's Bay Company, owed its importance to troubles arising in the Red River settlement and to the subsequent seizure of the Nor'-Wester's stronghold at Fort William, while Fort Edmonton can trace its beginnings to the fall of Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham.

And, if the true source of its origin be looked for, Fort St. James, like Fort St. John, can trace its beginnings to the American Revolution. While France was locked in combat with England what deadlier blow could Napoleon deal Britain than to turn over Louisiana, with its million square miles and eighty thousand inhabitants to the American Republic? The Lewis and Clarke expedition across the Rockies and down the Columbia was a natural sequel to the Louisiana Purchase, and proved that Uncle Sam had acquired good value for his fifteen million dollars. Long since vague rumors had drifted east to New England of vast riches to the westward. The Russian Government, with Baranoff in charge, had organized a strong company to trade for furs with the warlike tribes of the Pacific coast. Furthermore, Captain Vancouver's report of the northwest coast was borne out by Captain Grey, who had stumbled into the mouth of the Columbia, while prior to 1800, nearly thirty Boston vessels sailed yearly to the northern Pacific to engage in a lucrative trade in furs.

At Michilimackinac, one of the most lawless and roistering fur depots east of Fort William, the port of entry to the plains, was an organization known as the Mackinaw Company, comprised of old French hunters under English control, trading westward from Lake Michigan towards the Mississippi and the western prairies. Daily, Hudson's Bay men, Nor'-Wester and Mackinaw were pressing closer and closer to that vast, unoccupied Eldorado, future domain of the cattleman and rancher — the fur country between the Missouri and the Saskatchewan, thence westward to the Pacific coast. Possession, in those days, was nine points of the law. The question was — who would be the first to gain possession? Great Britain or Uncle Sam?



The dynamic Nor'Westers organized a transcontinental canoe transport from Montreal to the Pacific. Halfbreed paddlers negotiating a rapid with a large North canoe of birch-bark.

If only one company had attempted to acquire these vast fur preserves and Indian hunting grounds the fur trade would not have become international history. In New York John Jacob Astor was making plans to add to his fur empire the territory west of the Mississippi. At St. Louis, the jumping-off place for the Rocky Mountain trappers, Manuel Lisa, the Spanish fur trader to the Osage tribe, was also reaching out for the fur trade of the Missouri. From Fort William the Nor'Westers were pushing further and further to the westward each year and now, at last, the least energetic of these

fur trading organizations, the Hudson's Bay Company, was lazily blinking its frost-rimmed eyes and awakening to the realization that the Charter granted by King Charles II in far-off England would be but a scrap of worthless paper if it did not soon rise up and take a hand in this international fur fight. Fully alive to the meaning of all these movements, the North-West Company, at their annual council at Fort William, in the summer of 1805, had taken the first decisive step towards anticipating the Americans in obtaining possession of the prairies and the

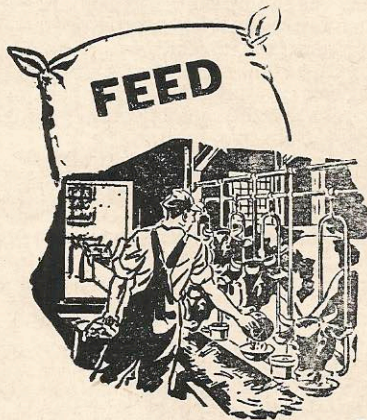
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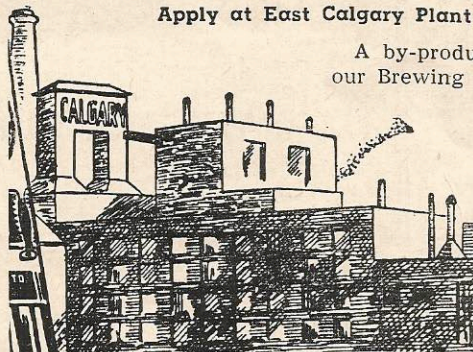


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WEST TO THE SETTING SUN

(Continued from Page 13)

country beyond the Rockies when they ordered Simon Fraser to establish posts on the Upper Peace. And it was these orders that caused him to establish Rocky Mountain House, or Cust's House, across Rocky Mountain Portage from the modern Hudson's Hope and then push westward till he'd raised the stockades of Fort St. James on the wooded shores of Stuart Lake.

But Mr. Astor did not long remain idle. And neither did the energetic Manuel Lisa. Forming a partnership with Morrison and Minard of Kaskakia, and engaging one of Lewis and Clark's men, Drouillard, as interpreter, Lisa departed from St. Louis in a heavily laden model boat in the spring of 1807. Fighting the turbulent brown flood of the Missouri, twenty brawny *voyageurs* tracked the unwieldy craft against the current. Sometimes they used the pole and, in calmer waters, resorted to the oars. As they passed the mouth of the Platte, after executing poor Bissonette who, fearful of hostile Indians, had tried to run away, they encountered John Colter, the trapper who was to be immortalized by Irving.

Under Colter's guidance they pushed westward beyond the grave of Chief Blackbird of the Omahas, buried astride his war-horse upon the crest of a lofty hill so that his spirit might forever watch over the land; past the dome-shaped dirt lodges of fierce Minatarees; past the wild, vermilion-daubed Aricaras who fired volley after volley across the boats from muskets obtained from rival traders. Past blue-eyed Mandans, and five thousand befeathered Assiniboines lining the banks with bent bows, into the very heart of the hunting grounds of those pirates and marauders of the plains, the long-haired Blackfeet and the Crows, where a stockaded fort with bastions was hurriedly thrown up.

Next summer the boat returned to St. Louis, laden to the gunwales with furs, Manuel Lisa incorporated the Missouri Fur Company, sending annual expeditions to the Big Horn, the forks of the Missouri, and to the land of the predatory Blackfeet. Fifty trained, buckskin-clad riflemen protected the two hundred trappers as they set their beaver traps for the Missouri Company, yet over thirty of them fell victims to hostile arrows and sacrificed their scalps within the first two years.

The same year that the Missouri Company was organized Astor obtained a charter for the American Fur Company and bought out the posts of the Mackinaw Company situated within American territory, the Canadian posts being absorbed by the Nor'Westers. Prepared now to push westward Astor suggested, to avoid rivalry, that he'd give the Nor'Westers a third interest in his plans to capture the trade of the Northwest.

But these lords of the wilderness were not disposed to give to others that which they could take for themselves. The proposal was cast aside with scorn, and both girded themselves for the race from the Great Lakes to take possession of the Pacific coast. Astor's first action was to engage the best of the dissatisfied Nor'Westers, among them the bumptious and peppery Duncan McDougall who was to represent Astor aboard the ship he proposed sending around the Horn, and was

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to take charge of the proposed fort on the Pacific.

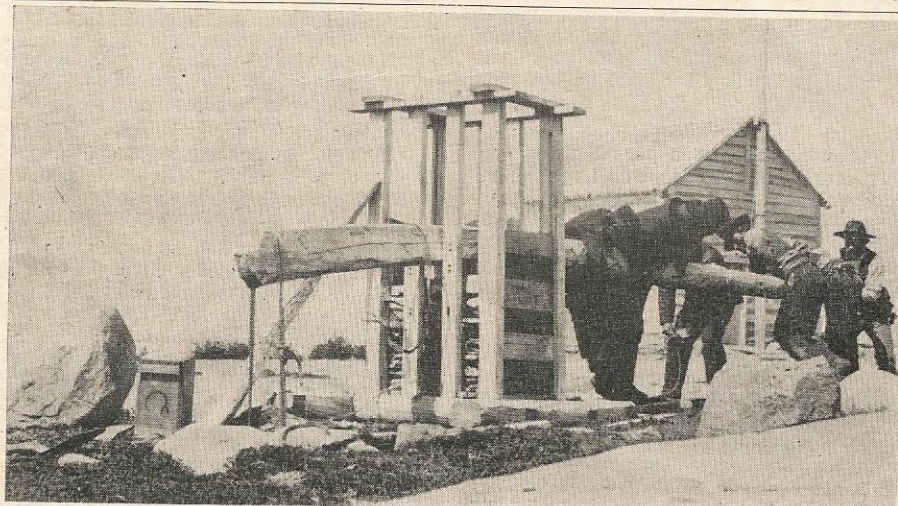
Washington Irving has told the story of the *Tonquin's* voyage around the Horn with its crew of twenty under the choleric Captain Thorn, the land-lubber traders, headed by the fussy little Duncan McDougall, rebelling against the Captain's unnecessarily harsh discipline and domineering attitude. Sailing from New York on September 6th, 1810, the *Tonquin* rounded Cape Horn on Christmas Day; sighted Hawaii in February; took aboard thirty Sandwich Islanders for service with the American Fur Company and entered the mouth of the Columbia in March. Five lives were lost in trying to run boats across the bar while, aboard, recriminations became the order of the day. The place to land; the site upon which to build, even the details of the new fort, Astoria, became the subject for continual jangling between McDougall and the Captain. All, at last, was settled and on June 1st the *Tonquin* set sail on a trading expedition to the northward accompanied by one partner, a fellow traveller of Mackenzie's — Alexander McKay and his clerk, James Lewis.

The pig-headed obstinacy that had dominated Captain Thorn continued to mar the enterprise. McKay had warned him to keep the Indians off the ship as the Nootkas were both bloodthirsty and treacherous, yet they were permitted to swarm around the decks and the rigging without the slightest precautions being taken. Then, during the course of trading,

Thorn committed the unforgivable sin of slapping an Indian's face. McKay, when he heard of the incident, urged the Captain to leave the harbor but the skipper scorned all advice and warnings of Indian vengeance. Again he welcomed the Indians aboard, and, pointing to their apparent servility, maintained he had taught a lesson to the Chief.

A few days later, while Captain Thorn and McKay were still sleeping, a painted war canoe surged alongside, the twenty warriors shaking aloft their furs. Being unarmed they were permitted to come aboard. One by one other high-prowed cedar canoes approached till the vessel was surrounded, the warriors climbing aboard with their furs while squaws remained chattering and laughing in the craft. Trading proceeded smoothly, then some of the *Tonquin's* crew noticed with alarm that the Indians were buying nothing but knives and arms and were assembling in threatening groups at positions of vantage about the deck.

McKay and Thorn were called. In one swift glance McKay sensed the impending danger and called a warning to the Captain. Slowly the anchor was hoisted, the Indians thronging still closer till, with a sudden realization of the menace, Thorn ordered the decks cleared. The wild ululations of the Indian war-cry were his answer. Knives and hatchets glinted in the sunlight. Lewis fell, bending over a bale of goods, and rolled down the companionway, a scalping-knife stuck to the hilt between his shoulders. Knocked from



Baling the fur wealth of the Northwest. Skins of fox, marten and beaver are folded and pressed in this primitive press before being baled and shipped to the markets of Europe by canoe and dog-team.

the taffrail with a war-club, McKay was pitched overboard and was received by the squaws on the up-ended points of wicked knives. Thorn, fighting desperately with a clasp-knife, was clubbed and tossed to the tender mercies of the squaws.

Sandwich Islanders and crew were fighting the savages with the fury of desperation. Scrambling down the rigging a few were successful in forcing their way through the melee and letting fly with muskets from the cabin. In a moment the savage pack had broken and taken to their heels, only to be mowed down with terrific slaughter as the bleeding survivors touched off the cannon and sent charge after charge amongst them.

Next morning the **Tonquin** lay tranquilly off-shore, her sails flapping lazily to the slight wind, apparently deserted. The temptation was too great. By ones and twos Indian canoes drew closer. A white man staggered to the side and, with a wave of the hand, invited the savages aboard. Eager for plunder, they now beset the ship in scores. But, hardly had they reached the deck ere air and sea were rent with a deafening explosion. The ship had burst asunder and sky and sea were littered with torn limbs, broken bodies and the bloody remnants of what had been, but a second before, living men. Mortally wounded Lewis, the clerk, had exacted his terrible vengeance. Unable to escape with the other four survivors in the night he had put a match to four tons of gunpowder in the hold. Nearly thirty lives had thus been sacrificed to the American Fur Company through the wrongheadedness of Captain Thorn.

(To Be Continued)

Range Reports

Water Requirements of Livestock —

The water requirements of livestock depend upon (a) the kind of stock, (b) the nature of the forage, and (c) the climate.

During the winter months the requirements are similar to that during the summer except as controlled by climate. The average water requirements per day are as follows: horses 10 to 12 gallons, cattle $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 10 gallons, and sheep $\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ gallons. Some research workers have found that water consumption of range animals is closely related with the air temperature and evaporation. In the winter time consumption is also affected by the temperature of the water.

It is a well known fact that an abundant supply of water is necessary for all the vital processes of the body, such as digestion and absorption of food nutrients and the removal of waste from the body. All water that is drank must be raised to the temperature of the body, thus

requiring heat. In the winter time animals that are required to drink very cold water must have to use some of the feed consumed simply to supply energy in the form of heat to bring the temperature of the water up to body temperature. Hence, feed may be saved by allowing animals that are exposed to the cold and those fed scanty rations to have frequent access to warm water.

The warming of the water can be done in several ways. The "submarine" water heater using coal and wood is quite popular, also the oil heaters. If someone is looking after the fires regularly an ordinary laundry type or jacket heater may be used. The disadvantage of this is that if the fire is neglected the water will freeze in the jacket and break it. There is now available a propane heater which appears to be very good providing the cost of propane is not too high.

In any case if it is feasible the water should be warmed for stock during the very cold periods of the winter.

Bowvalley Dispersal

A chill wind whipped through the Bow Valley, and the Burn's Ranch of the same name for the dispersal sale on November 30th of the herd of Purebred Herefords, started by the West's pioneer packer and rancher, the late Senator Patrick Burns. But even ten below weather did little to curb the enthusiasm of buyers from all four Western provinces and some from south of the border and they jammed the sale ring and barn for the day long sale.

Few could stay out in the bitter wind for more than a few minutes, but the constantly moving crowd bid strongly for the top herd animals improved down the years by Manager T. Farrell. One of four herd sires, imported **Dandy Domino 14th**, rising four-year-old from J. F. Miller of Hayden, Colo., topped the sale at \$3,600. J. H. Hehr of Crossfield was the buyer.

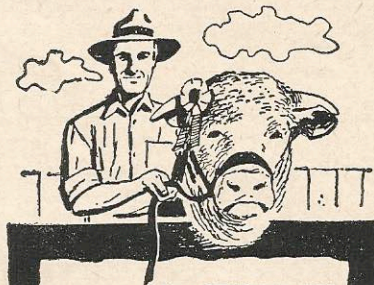
A Crawford-Frost bred bull, **Caeleon Standard 7th**, a seven-year-old, sold at \$2,050 to M. Taylor of Eastend, Sask. The other two herd sires, both imported, **B.B. Super Domino** and **T.T. Reality 20th**, brought \$1,100 and \$1,000, respectively, selling to H. Campbell of Clandonald and L. E. Serbier of Big Valley, Alberta.

Top of the Bull calves was **Bowvalley Dandy Lad** at \$1,350, with S. E. Jones of Prince Albert the buyer, but all 29 sold in keen demand, at an average of \$540. Yearling bulls averaged \$913 selling steadily, with \$1,200 the highest price paid for **Bowvalley Reality Lad 79th**. He was bought by C. J. Bennett of Lacombe.

Yearling heifers led the female section of the Burns sale, with a **Caeleon** line April 1949 heifer, **Bowvalley Standard Lass** selling at \$1,400 to H. Thacker of Bow Island. The cows kept the crowds outside in large numbers, and sold briskly with Harry Cosgrove of Whitewood, Saskatchewan, paying an even one thousand dollars for a three-year-old, **Bowvalley Reality Lass 36th**.

In all, 213 head of Herefords were sold, bringing a total of \$137,000, and a sale average of \$645 per head.

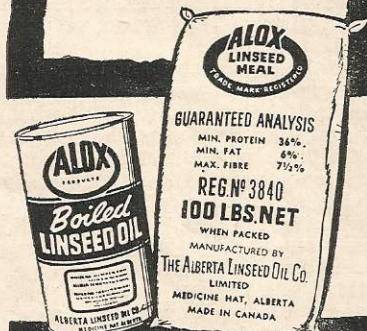
Maintained primarily to furnish breeding stock for other extensive Burn's ranches and commercial production, the Bow Valley Ranch Herefords were among the best in Canada, and their dispersal among many breeders will strengthen as many herds. Buyers took animals to all four Western provinces and the state of Washington. — L.S.



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