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REMINISCENCES OF A PIONEER

In that familiar oration of Brutus in the third act of Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar the conspirator gains their attention of his audience with the challenge 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears'. I beg your indulgence, my Brethren, with the exhortation, 'Friends, Brethren, Freemasons, lend me your imaginations!'

Envisage standing before you, if you will, a man of stature smaller than today's average, perhaps no more than five foot four or five inches. His head is crowned with a thatch of once redish-brown hair now tinged with grey, its thickness only marred by a gradual broadening of forehead, the lower limit of which is sharply punctuated by a pair of thick, bushy eyebrows. Almost hidden beneath these one sees two eyes, the apparent blackness of which gives them a penetrating nature. They are, in fact, not black but a brown, the depth of which adds a pensive quality to the face. The line of the nose is all but straight, broken only by a barely perceptible hook which, rather than marring it, adds a suggestion of strength and determination. The mouth, framed by full lips, when open, reveals even but distinctly spaced teeth and a square jaw angling to a narrow but unpointed chin which lends a touch of stubbornness to the perceived character.

Beneath the short neck the man's body, topped by broad shoulders made solid by an ancestral heritage of toil, tapers to narrow hips. One's eyes are drawn immediately to the arms hanging loosely at his sides and to his hands, strong and wide. The fingers are short, stubby and possessed of great strength. Both fingers and palms are calloused and scarred giving mute testimony to the fact that in spite of the man's early designation as a clerk he was no stranger to strenuous physical effort. Feet set casually spread, he stands solidly motionless conveying an undeniable sense of athletic poise in spite of his three score years.

When he speaks his voice is deep, rich and resonant, bearing only a slight nasal quality. It is that kind of voice which carries well without being forced.

Listen! He speaks.

"The early days, you ask? Where shall I begin! Well, my friend, that first year was a veritable kaleidoscope of joy and sorrow, of excitement and boredom, of elation and depression. To start with there was the excitement of knowing that I was going to the New World to be a part of a new settlement that His Lordship, the Earl of Selkirk, was establishing on the Red River. Furthermore I was going as a clerk rather than as a common labourer. The knowledge too, that I was to earn the magnificent sum of fifty pounds per year for the term of my contract was exciting in itself. Then when I arrived at Sligo and saw that huge ship, the Robert Taylor, which would carry me across the ocean to America I was so excited I was about ready to explode. That excitement, however, was short-lived after we got under way and we found out how small and crowded the cabins were. This was no great problem initially as we were all young and intent on putting up a great front of bravado in order to conceal our own personal feelings whether they were of shyness or uncertainty or, for most of us, just plain homesickness. The necessity of playing that game lasted only until everybody realized that all were playing the same game.

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We then settled down to the business of being ourselves and getting to really know each other. Eventually conversation subsided and the boredom which set in was punctuated only by the stuffiness of our airless cabin, our occasional exercise periods on deck and the constant creaking and groaning of the ships timbers. Finally on August 25, after weeks at sea, we were informed that York Factory was in sight and that we would be disembarking within a day or two.

YORK FACTORY

"Again the excitement mounted. We were now at the doorstep of what was, for us, the promised land. Heaven only knows how long we had waited to see it and what a disappointment it turned out to be! The factory was 'built at the distance of one hundred years from the north bank of the Hayes River in low, miry ground without a ditch'[2]. Built on land only a few feet above sea level the building was poorly planned with rooms connected by cold, narrow passageways. The nondescript structure, built of wood and set on a wooden foundation was in a constant state of decay during the summer months and was draughty and almost impossible to heat during the winter. The wooden stockade which surrounded it would have provided at best only a token obstacle to any hostile force that wished to attack the factory. Outside the stockade and at the waters edge was a building called the 'launch house' to which the bales and cases of trade goods and supplies for the settlement and trading posts were taken from the ships and in which the bales of furs were stored before loading. Because of the low altitude of the site the buildings were constantly damp and always in danger of being flooded during the spring breakup. The location was poor because of the bad drainage and obviously selected without consideration for the health or comfort of any who had to live there.

"Due to the lateness of our arrival during the 1812 season we were obliged to spend the winter at this desolate place rather than in Red River as we had expected. Although none of us new hands had any experience with the type of weather we were about to face the prospect of wintering there did not exactly bring joy to our hearts. After we landed and the cargo and baggage had been unloaded we had some opportunity to talk to the factory hands who seemed to do 'their utmost to prejudice the newcomers against the company's service and the country altogether'[3]. I tell you, my friends, all the adventure and excitement of being in the advance guard opening up a new country went out of the game during those months at York Factory. From the time we landed on August 26 until winter set in in earnest with the first heavy snowfall on October 09 seemed to be just a few days. Much of that time we spent either in hunting for game to help provision us over the winter or in cutting and hauling wood both for the construction of the boats which would take us up to the settlement the next spring and to feed those ravenous stoves which were used to heat the factory building. The temperature through that winter often reached minus forty degrees Fahrenheit. Because of the effort required and the distances involved in hauling wood some of us were even assigned to live in tents in the woods away from the factory. On Friday morning November 06 Mr. Hollingsworth, the surgeon, Mr. Spencer and I left for Ten Shilling Creek where we were to spend the winter. This creek flowed into the Hayes River on the opposite side

[2]Selkirk Papers - Vol. 2 - Letter - Miles MacDonnell to the Earl of Selkirk dated Nelson Encampment 29 May 1812 pp369 - copyright Public Archives of Canada

[3]Selkirk Papers - ibid. pp 374.

from the factory. We were accompanied by Messrs. Foley and Lisk along with Simpson, their attendant. Our task there was to shoot partridges to supplement factory provisions for the coming months. The routine of this existence was broken only by occasional trips back to the factory to take in the game which we had shot or to fetch supplies.
"By January 22 the snow was so deep that the men using dogs to haul supplies could go nowhere. For the same reason we were unable to accomplish much either so after waiting more than a week in hopes of some improvement and none coming we packed up our gear on February 03 and headed back to the factory.

"By the end of January the food situation had become a matter of concern; supplies were running so short that we had to be very careful. By now, too, Indians were coming to the fort complaining of hunger and bringing stories of starvation among their people. The Indians were looking to our people for assistance. We learned of one case, for example, where an infant nursing at it's mother's breast had starved to death because the mother could not provide enough nourishment and it was only a matter of time until she too was dead. At the time I wondered if their sad plight was a direct result of the pressure which Mr. Auld, the governor of York Factory and the others responsible had earlier put on the Indians to find provisions for our tables. I am now convinced that it was.

"We received our first positive signal of the approaching end of winter on March 26 when a sudden thaw set in. By April 01 the three horses were no longer able to haul wood because of the poor footing. For this reason the daily factory routine had to be changed. Instead of working in the daytime the people employed in hauling home firewood and boards now worked chiefly at night in order to take advantage of better footing.

"Then came the long awaited spring thaw.

"From the time the river began to break up during the evening of May 07 until the end of June the factory was a beehive of activity with preparations going forward toward our departure and that of the people who were to carry supplies to the trading posts in the interior. The four boats which had been under construction at the 'wooders' tent and the four from Ten Shilling Creek had to be brought down and all the remaining work on them completed. All the supplies, both trade goods and provisions, for the posts in the Red River, Saskatchewan and Athabaska districts had to be apportioned out, sorted and packed ready for shipment before the boats could leave. Everything was arranged in bundles called packs, each pack weighing about ninety pounds. All of Lord Selkirk's equipment and supplies for the Red River Settlement had to be loaded as well. In addition during the early part of April Mr. McVicar and I worked many long hours each day distilling spirits for the trade.

"By the end of June all preparations for our departure had been completed. With river conditions also being agreeable we were ready to leave for the interior. On July 27 the first party, which was destined for the colony, set off in several boats amidst a feeling of excitement and anticipation. This feeling was shared only partially by the factory hands who were relieved to see us going and not at all be the boat crews; for them it would be just another backbreaking trip. Four more boats for Saskatchewan and one for the colony left on the third. On July 05 eight men and I in one boat accompanied by four other boats bearing twenty men for the colony and Jack River set off and the following day another group of four boats loaded with company goods and five or six men each made their departure[4]. The reason for the

[4]York Factory Journal - 1812 - 1813 - Hudson's Bay Archives - Winnipeg.

phased departures was not to be apparent to me until our flotilla reached the first portage and I saw the congestion caused by five boats unloading at one small landing place at once.

"As with our departure the previous summer from Sligo there was a great feeling of excitement. The 'York Boats' as they were called because of their unique design and also because of their being constructed in the area of York Factory were usually manned by nine men, and carried from three to four tons of freight'[5]. I will not trouble you with all the details of that journey other than to say that before reaching Lake Oninipique, four hundred thirty miles from the ocean we were required to make thirty seven portages. At each the boats had to be offloaded, the cargo carried forward, the boats dragged up, launched and reloaded. The goods were carried by means of a leather strap four inches wide and twenty or so inches long. Smaller straps were attached to each end of this and to the pack. The center of the wide strap was laid across the carrier's forehead with the pack resting against his back or shoulders' A second pack was set on top of the first and leaning against the carrier's head. With this load the carrier would move up hills, through underbrush and over or around rocks and roots at a trot the full length of the portage whether it was one hundred years of three miles. Each pack, remember, weighed about ninety pounds and numerous trips by every man would be required before the full load had been carried forward. The first one or two portages were covered in a light-hearted manner by us new men but the routine quickly became deadly monotonous and utterly exhausting. I am told that the crews who did the trip regularly made the round trip from the Red River settlement to York Factory and back in about sixty days, but they would be a hard sixty days. In spite of the shortness of the season the rigors of this work were such that these men were old and worn out well before they were fifty years of age. For each round trip steersmen were paid $40.00, bowsmen $35.00 and middlemen or rowers $30.00.

THE PROMISED LAND

'Our arrival at the red River Settlement was heralded by a perceptible quickening of the pace by the rowers. Tiny log cottages could be seen at intervals along the river bank between the Stone Fort which you now know by the name of Lower Fort Garry and that point where the river called the 'Osiniboine' flows into the Red River. The colonists had 'chosen to settle along the banks of the Red River on narrow farms (the general width being ten chains or approximately six hundred sixty feet frontage on the river, running back at right angles from it on the prairie. These farms extended back two miles, as a freehold, with an additional two miles as a hay privilege.'[6] There were several reasons for the cottages all being close to the river. The first and foremost was that the river was usually the primary source of water both for drinking and washing; our people were not aware of the concept of pollution nor were we ready to despoil resources, as your people are today, on which we were so dependent. Secondly close proximity to neighbours was absolutely essential for social support, worship and education and for mutual defense in the event of attack by the natives. The third and most obvious reason, of course, was that the river was

[5]Echoes of the Red - Gunn, John J. - pub The MacMillan Co. Copyright 1930.

[6]The Selkirk Settlers in Real Life - MacBeth, R.G. pp 33.

and would continue to be for some time our chief means of transportation. The rivers were also an important source of food; "...large numbers of fish, from the 'gold-eye' to the sturgeon, offered provision by no means to be despised"[7]. A few days after (our) arrival... (we) were put in possession of land, but there were neither implements to till the soil nor a sufficiency of food to be had."[8]

[7]MacBeth, R.G. - ibid. pp 34.

[8]MacBeth, R.G. - ibid. pp 19-20.

"The garden produce added much needed variety to a monotonous diet consisting almost entirely of meat and fish, and helped to reduce the distress occasioned by any failure of the hunt. The husbandry carried on by these fur trade employees was not field agriculture conducted with a plough and draught animals but a form of gardening - small, roughly cleared plots carved out of the prairie or stream-side woods and worked by rudimentary hand tools. Potatoes were... the main crop but a variety of vegetables and a little grain (Indian corn and oats) were also grown."[9]

"Chronic from the outset of tillage in the autumn of 1812 was the lack of suitable implements for the cultivation of the soil. The available hand tools, hoes and spades, were inadequate for turning the tough prairie sod or for deep cultivation. Like the sickle and the scythe, such tools by their very nature...tended to keep the cultivated acreage of even the most ambitious colonist to a small size. With the single exception of an ill-made plough first used on Point Douglas in 1813, the colony was without animal drawn implements, either ploughs or harrows, for the first ten years of its existence.[10]

THE NOR'WESTERS

"Life was not easy but it was good except when the Nor'Westers and the Metis tried to drive us out. The partners of the North West Company were vehemently opposed to the establishment of the settlement; they believed that the growing population would drive the fur bearing animals away and thus complicate the business of the fur trade. For this reason they incited the Canadians and the Bois-Brules or Metis, those people of mixed French-Indian blood, to make life as difficult as possible for both the Hudson's Bay Company's and Lord Selkirk's people. Buffalo herds were driven away from the settlement, settlers were shot at, crops were burned, cattle were stolen or killed and houses were destroyed. We found it necessary to be constantly on the watch in case of a surprise attack. Their fort, Fort Gibraltar, located about a mile downstream from Fort Douglas, was their base of operations for these acts of annoyance. The colony was destroyed in June of 1815 and by the end of that year tempers had worn very thin. Early in 1816 we received word that the colony was to be attacked again that summer. In March Governor Semple decided that one way in which he could offer some protection to the people under his care would be to removed the threat posed by Fort Gibraltar. He believed, as I did, that an impassive attitude to these harassments on the part of the colony would only prolong the situation and ultimately lead to the failure of Lord Selkirk's endeavour in this area. Colin Robertson, on the other hand was against any substantial defensive effort being mounted. This led to a severe clash between Robertson and me. Governor Semple was resolute in his purpose and an opportunity to seize Fort Gibraltar arose during the same month. I believe it was on the 17th, when only five men occupied the fort, the remainder being away for the purpose of procuring provisions. Colin Robertson and about twelve men took part in the seizure but I was not included in their number. The fort was held under guard until June 12 when Governor Semple ordered it's destruction. This work took about six days. Again, I did not take part in the work because of my own responsibilities as storekeeper working on the accounts which kept me busy from six o'clock in the morning until sunset each day.

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[9]Some Aspects of the Historical Geography of the Red River Settlement from 1812 - 1870 - Kaye, Barry - pp 20.

[10]Kaye, Barry - ibid. pp 72.

"The North West Company's response to the destruction of Fort Gibraltar was quick. On June 19 at about five o'clock in the afternoon a number of horsemen with two carts were sighted moving in an easterly direction north of the settlement. When he was notified of this Governor Semple ordered about twenty of the men to get their arms. About twenty eight appeared but not all were allowed to go. When we were about a mile from the fort I was sent back to fetch the cannon. "As I was returning, I saw the half-breeds coming up towards the Governor's party in a straight line. Presently after they made a half circle, and nearly surrounded them; I saw a flash of a gun, and immediately after another, and shortly after I saw a general firing along the whole line of horsemen.. The firing ceasing some time after, and seeing none of our party, I was afraid that I might be intercepted with the cannon. I therefore returned with it, but did not go back to the fort myself, as after we had gone a little way, I determined to go and see what had become of Governor Semple, being joined at this time by some men who had come after me from the fort. I therefore sent the man who had come with the cannon back with it, through the bushes to the fort, and we went to where we expected to find Governor Semple; when we had nearly got to where we supposed he might be, we saw some men in the bushes, and also farther on some men taking care of the people's horses, who were now dismounted and spread over the ground, but I did not see any of our people. I at first thought that these men in the bushes were some of our people who had made their escape. They called out to us, saying they wanted us and called to me that the Governor was there and wanted me. I stood a little time not knowing whether to go or not, when they called out again, "Come on, come on, here is your Governor, and he wants you, won't you come and obey him?" They were concealed in the bushes and brushwood. But I saw presently afterwards that they were half-breeds, and I perceived one of them in a sort of shirt, with a large bunch of feathers in his hat, resting his gun on a stump and leveling at me. I and those that were with me immediately turned back, and as we were making our escape, we were fired at, and I was wounded, and one of the men who was with me was killed by another shot."[11] Fortunately I was able to return to our fort in spite of my wound in the thigh but Governor Semple, five officers and fourteen of our men had been killed. "The half-breed force had consisted of four Indians, six Canadians and fifty-two hybrids."[12]

A GUEST OF THE NOR'WESTERS

[11]Trials in the Courts of Canada Relative to the Destruction of the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement on the Red River with Observations - Amos, A., M.A. - pp 57.

[12]Cornerstone Colony - MacEwan, John Walter Grant - pp 39.

"The next day Cuthbert Grant and , I believe it was Simon Fraser, along with a party of between sixteen and twenty men came to the fort. They demanded that all the settlers should leave and that the fort be turned over to them.. "Upon these conditions we were permitted to go, and Cuthbert Grant promised to furnish a guard to protect us from other parties of Bois-Brules who were expected."[13] I believe it was on June 23 that we left the settlement. Before we reached Netley Creek on the second day we were intercepted by a number of North West partners and men including Sir Alexander McKenzie. They forced us to land and searched all our baggage. They took what they wanted of our belongings including many of mine. We were taken to Netley and kept there until the next morning. Mr. Pritchard who had been wounded on the sixteenth, Michael Heden, Daniel McKay, Patt Corcoran and I were all arrested. I was not allowed to speak to any of the rest of our party. They gave me no treatment for my wound which was bothering me greatly and treated us very badly indeed. We were afterwards taken to Fort William. Before we went to Fort William I was put in irons, irons were put on my hands and all my clothes, a case of instruments, and my watch, were taken from me."[14]

"Our route took us down the Red River, across the south end of Lake Winnipeg and up the east shore to the Winnipeg River, up that river system to the Lake of the Woods, through Riviere la Pluie and Lac la Pluie and then down the Pigeon River to Fort William. This part of the journey I made 'in irons, on top of a large quantity of baggage and on my arriving at Fort William, I was put into a place that had been used as a necessary, and into which no light came, except through the crevices between the logs of the building, and I was kept there twenty days."[15] The canoe used in this region was the canot du nord or northern canoe which weighed about three hundred pounds and carried twenty five packs and a crew of four or five. [16]

"All the time we were enroute from Netley I was terrified for my life. The North West Company people as well and the Bois-Brules had already proven themselves to be totally ruthless; this was common knowledge. In addition I had heard tales of men being taken as, shall I use the term 'guest' of the Nor'Westers on the route to Montreal and never being seen again. Each morning as we progressed I wondered if I would ever see the next.

"After the seemingly endless wait at Fort William we set out for Montreal in a canot du maitre or Montreal canoe. These vessels were approximately fifty feet long, six feet wide, weighed five hundred pounds and carried sixty packs. In spite of their great size a good crew could propel them fully loaded at a pace of forty strokes per minute from dawn to dusk with stops only for breakfast and lunch and the occasional smoke."[17]

"Our course from Fort William took us past the Sleeping Giant, out of Thunder Bay and into the broad expanse of Lake Superior where we followed the northern and eastern shores as far as Sault Ste. Marie.

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[13]Amos, A. - ibid. pp 212.

[14]Amos, A. - ibid. pp 214.

[15]Amos, A. ibid. pp 227.

[16]The Nor'Westers, The Fight for the Fur Trade - Campbell, Marjorie Wilkins.

[17]Campbell, Marjorie Wilkins - ibid.

During this part of the journey it was essential to keep one eye constantly on the weather as this great inland sea is subject to sudden and deadly squalls. Of the four hundred fifty odd miles from Fort William to the Sault more than one hundred miles of our route was sheltered to a greater or lesser extent but care was still necessary. In addition in order to take advantage of calmer conditions we were usually under way by three o'clock in the morning.

"From Sault Ste Marie we moved down Georgian Bay to the French River, up its seventy mile length to Lake Nipissing which, being quite shallow, can be dangerously choppy in a high wind. We then crossed over a height of land into Trout Lake at the head of the Mattawa River. The hard work of the journey was now past; from here on it was downstream all the way. Ahead lay the mighty Ottawa River with its multitude of rapids and waterfalls and the portages which most necessitated.[18] Finally we arrived in Montreal where I made a deposition before Mr. Thomas McCord on Sept. 16, 1816. Following this preliminary hearing I left Montreal but returned on August 19, 1817 in the company of Mr. Angus Shaw and Messrs. Fraser and McDonald of the North West Company. The details of that trip are another story altogether.

THE TRIALS

The usual records one will find nowadays state that I was taken to Montreal for trial. While there I actually appeared in three trials. In the first of these, heard on Friday May 15, 1818 before the Hon. Mr. James Monk and the Hon. Mr. Justice Rowen, Colin Robertson, Michael Heden, Louis Nolin, Martin Jordan and I were tried for 'the riotously destroying certain premises composing a fort of the North West Company'.[19] In this trial the jury, after deliberating for only a few minutes brought in a verdict of 'not guilty', the main thrust of our defense having been that the destruction of Fort Gibraltar was a matter of self-defense and justified in view of the depredations instigated by the North West Company people and perpetrated on the settlement by the Bois-Brules during the preceding years. Then on Thursday, October 22, 1818 Cuthbert Grant and a number of others were tried for the murder of Governor Semple and on October 30, 1818 six others including Sir Alexander McKenzie and Simon Fraser were tried as accessories after the fact. In both of these trials I appeared as a witness for the prosecution.

"With these trials having been completed I was now free to return to the Red River Settlement but one of the most important events of my life was to take place before I did. During the next few weeks I took the oaths of the Freemasons and became a member of Wellington Persevering Lodge #20 on the Register of Lower Canada. This lodge, I am happy to say, was chartered under the Irish Constitution. Having taken the degrees I received my Master Mason's certificate which is dated the third day of December 1818. This certificate is signed by George Stanley, W.M., Edward Jones, S.W., Samuel Webster, J.W., and John Norrie, Secretary. My demit , issued on the same day and signed by the same worthy officers is also in the possession of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba having been presented to that jurisdiction in 1960 by two of my Masonic descendants.

RETURN TO RED RIVER

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[18]Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada / Then and Now - Morse, Eric W.

[19]Amos, A. - ibid. pp 3.

"Following my return to the settlement in 1819 life took on a somewhat more ordered pace. Before the incident at Seven Oaks we had lived under the constant threat of attacks by the Nor'Westers and the Metis. This danger was now past and fortunately I was able to return to my employment with the Hudson's Bay Company. I was sent, almost immediately, to take charge of the post at Lac Traverse in the upper Red River or Sioux district. While there one of my responsibilities was to trade with the Sioux for buffalo meat and horses to supply the Red River Settlement.[20] There I remained until 1821 and it was there that I married my beloved Nancy Campbell in 1821.[21] She was a wonderful wife and during our years together she presented me with a family of five sons and three daughters. Prior to the outfit of 1821-22 I was sent as a clerk to the Lower Red River district and then returned to Upper Red River in 1822-23. Following this I retired from the service of the Hudson's Bay Company in order to establish my own business as an independent trader but there were still adventures to look forward to..

TO BUY A SHEEP

"From the time of the establishment of the colony there had always been a great interest in growing sheep but either because of poor management or bad luck all attempts were frustrated. Heavily financed projects planned to bring stock in from the United States ended in disaster in 1826 thanks to a flood and in 1828 courtesy of the Indians. George Simpson lost heavily as a result of these failures but was soon busy promoting another scheme. This time the plan was to send men from the colony to move the sheep up rather than having American contractors bring them. There was already one experimental farm in the settlement and before the latest sheep herding plan had evolved too far the establishment of a second had been authorized. This second farm, to be known as Hay Field Farm, was located about three miles or a little better west of the mouth of the Osiniboine River and would be the ultimate destination for the sheep when they were delivered.

"The prerequisites for the people selected to form the expedition were firstly some years of youthful experience with sheep and secondly some degree of contempt for danger. The man selected as leader of the expedition was William Glen Rae, a Hudson's Bay Company clerk. He was to be assisted by Robert Campbell, a Perthshire lad who had grown up on a sheep farm. In addition there were seven other men and myself chosen to complete the crew.

"We set out from the settlement on November 08, 1832 with eight saddle horses and two carts loaded with supplies. We were probably foolhardy leaving so late in the season because of the possibility of winter arriving at any time but off we went with the good wishes and tearful farewells of many friends and relatives.

"The journey as far as Pembina was pretty routine; we simply followed the river trail. That was no problem but from there on, I'll tell you, we had to be careful. You see we were getting into Sioux country. The Sioux were a bad bunch. They were about as unpredictable as the weather and as mean as a bull with a sore tooth. In order to get through their part of the country as quickly as possible we would be on the trail at three in the morning and ride until about eight before stopping for breakfast. We changed

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[20]The Red River Trails - Oxcart Routes Between St. Paul and the Selkirk Settlement 1820 - 1870 - Gilman, Rhoda R.;Gilman, Carolyn; and Stutz, Deborah M. - pub. Minnesota Historical Society 1979 - pp 4.

[21]Robertson's Letters - Rich, E.E. - pub. The Hudson's Bay Records Society, pp 206 - 207.

direction frequently in order to be as evasive as possible. We traveled until sundown before stopping for supper and then went on for another couple of hours after that. The reason we did that was so that the smoke from our supper fire would not give away our night time location. Actually a Sioux war party did trail us for three days but finally gave up. I guess we either moved out of their part of the country or they got tired of following us.,

"One of the reasons we pushed along so hard was that we hoped to reach Fort Snelling on the Mississippi in time to catch one of the last river boats heading south before freeze-up but we were just a couple of days too late. As a result we had to continue on horse back. By the time was reached Prairie du Chiene the weather was so bad we had to leave the horses behind. The last stage of that part of the trip we made on foot arriving in St. Louis on January 03, 1833.

"After several weeks of what you might call shopping we were completely unable to buy any sheep at the prices we were prepared to pay. Finally somebody suggested that we should try the market in Kentucky. That was a fine idea if it would lead us to sheep at our price but there was one slight problem. We didn't know where Kentucky was.
"Well, with a little bit of luck and some help we eventually arrived in Versailles Kentucky and soon found ourselves to be the proud owners of eleven hundred ewes and lambs and a few rams. Fortunately the cost was, as I recall, in the order of five to seven shillings per head which we felt was reasonable. All that remained now was to get that unruly mob home.

The drive began on May 02, 1833. At first the sheep seemed reluctant to move and progress was slow. As we moved along William Rae and Robert Campbell were able to buy even more sheep bringing the total of our flock to 1370 head. After a few days on the trail the pace improved and we were able to average about ten miles per day.

"It seemed that one problem after another arose as we moved along. In the southern areas rattlesnakes accounted for as many a five sheep per day but then after we got into Illinois spear-grass took its toll. It was bad! The spears caught on the fleece, broke off the stem and then penetrated into and through the skin. Flies and maggots did the rest from there. One attempt at shearing proved to be no solution to that problem. By July 07 the flock had been reduced to 675 sheep and by August 25 it was down to 295 head. The hazards of the trail had taken a dreadful toll and we were now back to the country of the Sioux. Fortunately they were in what was for them an almost jovial mood when they confronted us. They paid absolutely no attention to us and just starred in fascination at the sheep which they had never seen before.

"The final problem encountered was that we ourselves ran out of food. We did give some thought to slaughtering sheep but this was unnecessary as supplies from the settlement reached us at Grand Point. Finally on September 16, 1833 we drove the remaining 251 head into the settlement. It had been a long, hard drive. Certainly there had been mistakes made but at least there was a good breeding flock in the settlement and it would and did grow.[22]

"I find it rather amusing now that after that long trek and all the problems that we ran into first in getting those sheep and then in getting them back to the settlement that they should be assigned to Hay Field Farm. In 1836 I learned that the farm was to be put up for sale. I knew that it was good land. I also knew that Robert Campbell had played an important part in the initial development of the property and

[22]MacEwan, J.W.G. - ibid. pp 193 - 197.

from my association with him on the sheep buying trip believed him top be a competent individual. I was therefore very pleased when the opportunity to buy the farm came my way. Where was it situated you ask? The land consisted of between three and four hundred acres located roughly between St. James and Berry Streets on the eastern edge of the St. James area of Winnipeg. In selling the land for the thirty seven pounds which I paid for it I understand that the company absorbed a net loss of about three thousand five hundred pounds. From my point of view it was not a bad deal.

"It was a good farm. It meant a lot of hard work for my Nan and the children and I but it did provide a good living for us. There I stayed right through to the end except for one other little jaunt.

"In 1846 we received word that a large contingent of British troops was being sent to the colony via Hudson Bay. There was not sufficient time before their arrival to order from Britain the extra provisions which would be needed for their maintenance. It was therefore necessary to obtain the extra supplies from elsewhere. The nearest and most accessible distribution center to us was St. Louis. For this reason Robert Clouston, a young company clerk, and I were sent to buy sugar, tea and the other necessities. "From the settlement we followed the usual route to Pembina and then took what was known as the Woods Trail over to St. Paul. That was as far as I got. I caught something there that took the wind out of my sails. I don't know what it was but I do know that while I had to stay under doctor's orders at Fort Snelling, Clouston went on to St. Louis on his own.[23] Following my recovery from that illness I returned to my Nan, our farm and the settlement."

The old man grows silent. There is a far-off look in his eyes. Slowly a smile of pride spreads across his face.

"My claim to fame you ask? Well it is a fact of which I am justly proud. You see, I was the first Freemason to be a permanent resident of the Red River Settlement. In this same connection my greatest regret is that there was no lodge in the settlement in which I could enjoy the fellowship of the Craft during my lifetime. Who am I? Please permit me to introduce myself. My name is John Palmer Bourke."

Footnote

John Palmer Bourke was born about 1791, the son of William and Ailsha Bourke of Lightfoot, near Castlebar, Sligo Ireland.[24] He died in the Red River Settlement in 1851. He is supposed to have been buried in St. Boniface Cemetery although no trace of his grave has been located there.

The events recorded in this paper are based entirely on sources which I believe to be absolutely unquestionable. For this reason there is only passing reference to the period between September 16, 1816 and August 19, 1817, which I believe to have been an extremely interesting period in the life of John Palmer Bourke. Bearing this in mind the paper must, nevertheless, be described as a work of fiction simply because of the manner in which the material is presented. The description of the subject is pure speculation but is based on the physical attributes of one direct descendant with whom I am personally acquainted.

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[23]Gilman, Rhoda R., Gilman, Carolyn and Stutz, Deborah M. - ibid. pp 13.

[24]Rich, E.E. - ibid. pp 206.

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